

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EXPLORATION OF THE SELECTION TOOLS IN LARGE
LEBANESE ORGANIZATION IN BEIRUT

by
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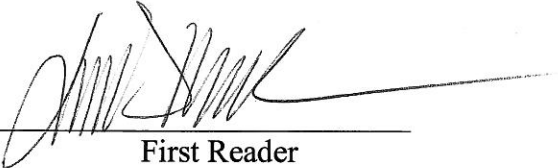
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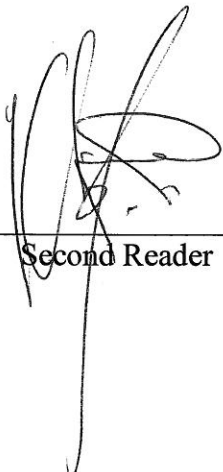
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Yasmine Mohamad Itani for Master of Human Resources Management
Major: Human Resources Management

Title: Exploration of the Selection Tools in Large Lebanese Organization in Beirut.

The aim of this study is to explore the selection tools used in large Lebanese organizations located in Beirut. Nevertheless, the study is also interested in discovering the structure and role of the HR department in large Lebanese organizations located in Beirut. The study was based on a qualitative methodology whereby the researcher designed a questionnaire and interviewed HR professionals who were involved in the selection process of their respective companies. Results found that most of the companies had unevenly distributed functions and the role of the HR department leader was inclined towards administration and personnel. As for selection tools, job interviews were the most frequent, tests followed. Results show that large Lebanese organizations in Beirut are not fully applying strategic HR programs; however, few companies are trying to keep up with trends in the US.

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To
My Beloved Family

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With a decreasing number of talents and an increasing demand in the job market, companies in the US, Europe and Oceania are facing serious challenges in their recruitment process (SHRM, 2016; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). The competition between qualified candidates has reached its peak and companies are battling to hire the best recruit in order to maintain a competitive advantage. Thus, Human Resources (HR) Practitioners should create HR departments able to design strategies aligned with the business goals that will recruit, train and retain top talents (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). In fact, organizations that effectively manage their human resources can secure many benefits. Successful HR management programs result in increased effectiveness of their businesses as a result of improved employee engagement, productivity and retention rates (Cajigas & McGarth, 2015)

HR practitioners are continuously trying to implement recruitment and selection programs that can better attract top-notch candidates. This field, which is one of the main branches in the Human Resources Management, is wrapped up by different themes, including: job analysis, generation of competencies, CVs sifting, selection tools (interviews, tests, work samples etc...), recruiter bias, etc... (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). According to Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni (2015), companies who seek success should implement a robust recruitment and selection process since the latter will have a negative impact on other HR functions (including training, learning, performance evaluation etc...).

In the Middle East and specifically in Lebanon, the situation is twisted around.

With fewer job opportunities and a mature pool of talents, the region and the country are suffering from high unemployment rates (Baker, 2013). The competition between shortlisted candidates is tight, organizations often find themselves short-listing several candidates and not able to decide who is better than the other (Baker, 2013). In this case, organizations are advised to carefully design their HR strategies, and specifically their selection tools, in order to hire the best talent and to limit time consumption (Fahed-Sreih, 2012). Nevertheless, studies regarding the selection tools used in the ME region are limited (Fahed-Sreih, 2012; El-Jardali, Tchaghchagian & Jamal, 2009).

Since there is a lack of scientific research regarding the selection tools used in Lebanese organization, this study aims to explore the selection tools used in Lebanese organizations. It will also explore the structure and role of HR departments in large Lebanese organizations located in Beirut. The results of this study will open doors for future research opportunities in the region.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the success factors of organizations management is developing strategies that aim to achieve the mission and vision of organizations. Strategy building starts on an organizational level, and then moves to more specific levels, like businesses, trades, departments, units and finally individuals. The essential element in strategy development is its alignment with the vision and goals of the organization (Myler, 2012). Research showed that there is a positive correlation of strategy alignment and success of organizations (Schiemann, 2012). This study is interested if Large Lebanese organizations build their HR departments according to a strategy aligned with the mission and vision of the company. Hence, the below section will present the ideal structure and role of an HR department in an organization in order to achieve strategic alignment.

A. Structure of HR department

Historically, HR departments were embedded within administrative, finance or accounting departments. Globalization, the rise of technology and the recurrent financial crises have catalyzed the transformation of the HR department from a cost support function into a “value-creating” department. According to Ulrich, Younger & Brockbank (2008), HR departments should have their own structure and hierarchy, and even be the business within the business. In fact, research already suggested different structure models for the different types of organizations. In an article that examines the evolution of the HR department structure. Ulrich *et al.* (2008) identified three types of

organizations: the single/functional business, the holding company and the allied/diversified organization.

A single/functional HR business is an organization that possesses one corporate HR department responsible for hiring, training and rewarding the employees in all the organization. A small sized organization can hire an HR Professional who will handle all the functions. HR is centralized and flexible. However, as the organization grows in size, HR tasks become more complicated. One HR generalist will not be able to update policies and make sure that the new policies are being executed. Thus, the HR department, still located in the head office, will employ HR specialists who will develop policies that can be put into practice in all the offices (even it is abroad). The single/functional business is a suitable for one-line organizations, like McDonald's (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008). The fast-food chain has a strong corporate HR that ensures similar policies are applied throughout all offices through local operating HR units. One of the benefits of the single/functional HR department is that it allows managers who travel on site to expect similar policies and conditions, thus making the trip easier and more successful. Nevertheless, a single/functional business can fall into lack of flexibility (since HR operations are standardized on corporate conditions), financial burden (since having a corporate HR and an operating-unit HR will lead to proliferation and redundancy of practices), isolation of HR staff in the corporate office (which limits the development of modern trendy strategies) and disintegration (a specialization produces a set of policies that often oppose another specialization's policy, thus the corporate HR department will have different goals to reach).

A holding company is formed of multiple businesses that are independently managed (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008). They are all related on a treasury basis for investment purposes; however, there is no corporate HR. Each business will have its own

embedded HR department that will serve and support the operations as per the goals and objective of each organization. HR is decentralized and standardized. Creating a successful HR function in a holding company only requires the corporate company to specify the needs of each business, ensure that the HR departments are well embedded in the business and are well led. Such organizations should recognize challenges such as: corporate intervention, lack of sharing, the “not-invented here” syndrome and linearity. Corporate intervention is defined when corporations intervene in the development of policies and procedures, while they are only expected to set the philosophy and general goals of the company. Lack of sharing refers to when HR leaders in different businesses refrain from sharing their strategies and methods with each other. The “not-invented here” syndrome, or “repatenting the wheel”, refers to when HR leaders open up communication channels between each other but do not apply each other’s strategy. Finally, linearity means that HR leaders often design build their departments according to short-term needs and to increase the share value, disregarding long-term goals and general directions (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008).

Most large companies come in the form of allied/shared businesses. They are not single businesses or holding companies, they are in between. These kinds of organizations align the best of their practices on a corporate level, while catering unique HR policies on business/units level. Companies like IBM set a similar talent and performance management approach for all its businesses, while designing tailor-made compensation strategies for each business. HR departments built on shared services basis are more efficient in companies operating in different markets and in different industries (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008).

Structure of the HR department is related to the size and scope of the organization, as well as its objectives and general directions. The next section will

describe the role the HR department should take in a successful organization.

B. Role of HR department

For businesses to receive full value from HR, it is very important to upgrade the quality of HR departments (Ingham & Ulrich, 2016). According to Ingham & Ulrich (2016), developing HR departments require the upgrade of different factors, including HR professionals themselves. As per the Ulrich's (2007) HR Business Partner model, HR professionals are expected to participate in board meetings, take role in developing the strategies of the company, lead the change and build positively strong teams while also managing the routinely HR functions. Research has shown that companies who adopt the HR Business Partner model are dynamic organizations who occupy a leading position in their market and industry (Střiteský & Quigley, 2014).

According to Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank & Ulrich (2012), HR Business Partner model should exhibit four dimensions if they want to improve business performance.

- The first role is Strategic Partner. HR professionals should be aware of the external factors that affect the company as much as they know the internal factors of the company. They should have access to crucial information and be able to design organizational strategies that lead to efficient and effective business operations.
- The second dimension is the Employee Champion. HR Professionals should build trustful personal relationships and meet commitments. They should be reliable and develop clear, consistent and influential communication channels. HR Professionals should gain the trust of both the management and the employees in order to be credible activists.

- The third competency is Administrative Expert. An HR Professional should be able to design cost-efficient and time-saving methods to manage routine administrative operations (i.e. recruitment and selection, training and development and rewards). HR professionals should use digital software efficiently to facilitate the administrative services (payroll, benefits costs and issuing reports).
- The fourth dimension is Change Agent. As the external business factors change, HR professional should consider internal change. Companies who fail to renovate their strategies will be left back and loose the competition. It is up to the HR practitioners to initiate change, deal with change resistance, engage key stakeholders to adopt the change and finally sustain the change. HR professionals should be aware of the new HR trends and be able to integrate relevant “new practices” to their routinely job. Talent and performance management, as well as organizational design and communication should be upgraded as per new research findings in order to efficiently improve business results.

Thus, successful HR professionals should demonstrate skills and abilities on different levels to make an impact on business performance. On another hand, this study also seeks to explore the selection tools used in Lebanese organizations. According to Schiemann (2012), growing organizations face challenges when acquiring talents. One of the recommendations presented in his ACE book, Schiemann (2012) talks about the importance of developing talent acquisition strategies that are aligned with the company’s directions and its impact on the success of the company. The next section will present the current selection practices used by successful organizations and will show the elements that should be considered when developing selection tools.

C. Workforce planning

Before deciding on a certain selection tool, companies should plan their workforce needs. Immediately after identifying the need of a new employee, the recruiter should conduct a Job Analysis (JA), which, according to the Handbook of Strategic Recruitment and Selection (2013), summarizes all the aspects of the job including the duties and responsibilities, the requirements needed to fulfill the job and its contribution to the organization's success. The JA is the foundation of the Job Description (JD), Job or Person Specification (J/PS), and later on the employee assessment and the training and development (O'Meara & Petzall, 2013; Patterson, Ferguson & Thomas, 2008). Thus, recruiters need to analyze carefully the vacant position in order to establish a reliable selection process. O'Meara & Petzall (2013) suggests that in order to generate a strong JA, the process should involve a combination of data collection methods such as observing the employee working, interviewing the employee or line manager, distributing descriptive surveys or asking to fill out work diaries.

As a next step, the recruiter can generate the JD which is the purpose, the scope and duties and responsibilities related to the vacant position. In addition, from the JA the recruiter can easily identify the required knowledge, skills and abilities (also known as KSAs) that the employee needs in order to perform the job adequately (O'Meara & Petzall, 2013) which is the J/PS. Finally, with the JA, JD and J/PS, the recruiter can now decide what are the time and cost effective tools to be used in order to select the best candidate. This is one model of developing the pre-selection process.

Another model adopted by companies is the Competency Model. The Competency Model is also generated from the JA. However, and unlike the J/PS model, this model targets the strategy of the company and is usually customized to the

company's vision, mission, culture or objectives (Noonan, 2012). For example, if a company has an innovative strategy, one competency can be creativity; whether the job itself requires this competency or not - if the candidate wants to succeed at the job and wants to "fit in" - he/she has to have goals similar to the company's.

D. Selection tools

Research on recruitment and selection started in the early 1920's when the US Army worked with psychologists on developing tests that will predict the psychological readiness of potential militants (Peterson, Park & Castro, 2011). Since then, organizations started to consider different tools in their personnel selection processes. Through the years, they observed that these tools are not predicting similar performance; thus, corporates resorted to the academic community to investigate on the validity of selection tools (Schmidt, Le, Oh & Shaffer, 2007). Nowadays, the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) runs a survey, each few years in North America that aims to reveal the trends used by HR practitioners in the region in order to direct the academic society to new research opportunities.

The most recent survey done by SHRM was in 2016. It included HR professionals who were members of the SHRM and worked in the United States of America. The survey is divided in two parts. The first part discusses the current challenges in recruitment. The second part, which is more relevant to this study, presents the mostly used selection techniques in American organizations. According to SHRM (2016) report, structured interviews are the mostly used selection technique, on all positions' levels, in the US. Structured interviews are a form of interviews whereby the interviewer has a set of questions that he/she will read to the candidate and they are usually classified in a certain order (Barclay, 1999).

The second rank differs from one level to another. For example, for executive level positions, references are considered as a selection tool. Though references are known for their low validity, but comparative research has shown that references' criterion-related validity, which is the extent to which a measure is related to an outcome, in predicting job performance is higher than self-report measures of five of the Big Five personality traits (Taylor, Pajo, Cheung & Stringfield, 2004). For middle management positions, knowledge tests take the second rank. O'Meara & Petzall (2013) stated that Resumes and Interviews enclose errors, biases and misinterpretation of information thus a test can give better insights on the match between the organization and the candidate. For non-managerial positions, phone screenings were in the second place. Pre-screening candidates over the phone help HR professional develop a rapport before the in-person interview and also minimize visual biases (Tyler, 2014).

As for the third most used selection tools, for the executive, mid-managerial and non-managerial levels, they're one-on-one interviews, phone screening and references respectively (SHRM, 2016).

The main purpose in selecting candidates is predicting future performance. Thus, regardless of the selection tools used, and regardless of its frequency, the crucial factor in selection tools is its development process. A job interview can have the highest predictive validity of job performance if the interview was well prepared for. For example, a well-structured interview that includes behavioral and hypothetical questions that are developed based on a competency will have a higher predictive validity than unstructured interviews (Murchese & Muchinsky, 1993). Psychometrics is also applied on tests. Whether the test targets cognitive ability, is based on knowledge capabilities or checks personality traits, it should be valid, consistent and reliable. Companies who fail to implement valid tests will have negative consequences in job performance and

employee retention in the future (O'Meara & Petzall, 2013).

To rap it all up, in order to achieve strategic alignment organizations should build HR strategies that lead to the achievement of the company's goals, mission and vision. The process starts with building a well-structured HR department with clear and specific roles to each HR member. This will result in increased employee engagement, since each employee will know his/her strategic contribution towards the company.

One of the HR functions that can be developed according to a strategic alignment is personnel selection. Since in the Middle East, research remains minimal in this field, this study aims to explore the selection tools used in Large Lebanese organizations. It will also address if companies are aware of aligning strategically their HR procedures. The next section will list the research questions of the study.

E. Research questions

The general aim of this research is to explore the distribution of roles in HR departments of large companies in Lebanon, in addition to studying the selection tools used by Lebanese organizations. In this study, we aim to examine, the rationale behind using these selection tools, the attitudes of HR practitioners towards their efficiency, the scope of their awareness on interview and selection bias in addition to their general attitude towards selection tools used by other, rival companies.

Thus, this study will be answering the following questions:

1. How is distribution of roles and responsibilities assigned in HR departments of large organizations in Lebanon? Do they fall in a certain strategic alignment model?
2. What are the selection tools used in large Lebanese companies?

Knowing that most of companies use interviews, the study expects that all participants will mention the interview when answering this question, hence, the study

will also explore:

3. How do Lebanese organizations develop interview questions? Are they aware of potential biases and how to minimize the limitations of the job interview?
4. What is the opinion of HR practitioners regarding the validity and success rate of current recruitment/selection practices?

The next section will present the methodology by which this study progressed in order to confirm the above hypotheses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Since this study is exploratory and focuses particularly on the selection tools used in large Lebanese organizations, the research team has decided that a qualitative research can better find answers for the research question.

A. Participants

One of the characteristics of the sample studied is the size of the company. According to Ulrich & Ingham (2016), larger organizations have more complex HR functions and responsibilities, hence larger and separate HR departments. By definition, a large organization is a company that employs more than 250 employees (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013). All the large companies, in total 153, in Beirut were retrieved from www.lb.kompass.com, an online directory that provides companies' contact information. Due to time constraints, a sample of 30 HR Practitioners (approximately 20% of the total number) was selected from this database through stratified sampling. While it was easy to contact the practitioners through phone, the investigator failed to hear back from them after the invitation email was sent (Appendix I). Thus, the study interviewed 17 participants only (approximately 56% of the sample size).

The pool of participants was formed as per the below demographics:

Table 3.1. Demographics

Demographics		Percentage, N
Education	High School Graduate	6%, 1
	Bachelor's Degree	59%, 10
	Master's Degree	35%, 6
	SHRM Members	12%, 2
Job Titles	HR Assistant	12%, 2
	HR Manager	29%, 5
	HR & Administration Manager	6%, 1
	Senior HR Officer	6%, 1
	Assistant Recruitment & Selection Manager	6%, 1
	Recruitment & Selection Specialist	23%, 4
	Assistant Director of HR for Recruitment & Customer Service	6%, 1
	HR Director	12%, 2

The sample consisted of companies coming from 12 different industries ((N=2)12% banking, (N=1) 6% education, (N=1) 6% information technology, (N=2) 12% industrial manufacturing, (N=1) 6% logistics, (N=1) 6% hospitality, (N=1) 6% transportation, (N=1) 6% retail, (N=4) 23% food and beverages production, (N=1) 6% non-profit, (N=1) 6% telecommunications, (N=1) 6% holding) including 6 multinationals, 5 family businesses, 2 local, 2 regional and 1 offshore.

B. Design

This study is a qualitative research method that focuses on the selection tools used in large organizations in Beirut. A qualitative study focuses on exploring one key concept or phenomena (Jessiman, 2013). It also allows the analysis of the opinions of the participants and thus helps researchers understand the current situation. In addition, the findings of a qualitative research usually open up doors for more investigative research (Jessiman, 2013).

1. Questionnaire

The investigator built a questionnaire divided into four parts. The first part aimed to collect the demographics of participants.

The second part aimed to explore the structure and function of the HR department and the role of the participant beside his/her recruitment duties.

The third part sought to list the selection tools used by the participants and the reasons of their use. Also, the investigator was interested in knowing if participants are familiar with other selection tools not currently in practice and their views on the practices of other rival companies.

The fourth part aimed at understanding the process of the job interview. The investigator was interested to know how the participants prepared for a job interview that is responsible for conducting the interview and if participants are aware of the benefits and weaknesses of the job interview.

The last question of the questionnaire aimed to check how much the participant's rate the success of their selection practices.

2. Recruitment of participants and interview

After calling the selected companies and asking for approval from authorized administrative manager for conducting the research, participants were contacted through email (Appendix I). The participants are all involved directly in the selection process. The study targeted different industries and includes demographics such as years of experience and highest education level. Seven interviews were scheduled face-to-face and ten interviews were conducted over the phone. The investigator has written a certain scenario to follow in order to keep a semi-structured and consistent interview process during all interviews. The investigator also prepared a consent form for conducting and

recording the interview. However, all of the participants rejected to be recorded. During the interview, the investigator was taking verbatim notes of the participants' answers. After finishing the interview, the investigator made sure to send a thank you email to the participant for their contribution and time. As for the answers, the investigator transcribed them on the computer during the twenty-four hours that followed the interview.

C. Analysis

As stated, the study is expected to qualitatively analyze the participants' responses through identifying themes and grouping them. While this study has a small number of participants and the questionnaire is formed majorly of open-ended questions, the investigator expects similar answers across the participants, thus it will be relevant to check the frequencies of the themes generated from the participants' responses. A thematic analysis will be developed at the beginning of the analysis in order to list the different themes. A thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data, where concepts or categories are derived from the data in an inductive or deductive manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, a qualitative analysis will present the two themes regarding the role and structure of the HR department, as well as the responsibilities of the participants. Second, the analysis of the selection tools will also have a qualitative methodology. After listing the selection tools mentioned in both the first and second questions of the third part of the questionnaire, the study will also address the frequencies of the prevalent sub-themes. As for participants' awareness of rival companies' selection practices, it will be analyzed qualitatively.

Third, another qualitative analysis will address the job interview exploration. It

will describe the pre-interview and interview process. It will also address the participant's awareness of the benefits and weaknesses of the job interview.

Fourth, a quantitative analysis will present the number of participants rating their practices as very successful.

The next section will list the results of the study based on the above analyses approaches.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Since this study is qualitative and will adopt the thematic analysis, results will be presented per theme.

A. Theme 1: Role and structure of HR divisions

The companies have different approaches in managing their HR departments. The study identified three types of departments: HR Department with overlapping functions, HR department with divided roles, multi-units HR Department.

1. HR Department with overlapping roles

Companies who have an HR department with unified functions and headed by an HR Manager have a disorganized distribution of functions. 52% (N=9) of the participants work in an HR department with a unified role. Staffs are responsible for different HR functions; they find themselves preparing for a training, at the same time they are scheduling a job interview and preparing reports for their bosses. Professionals share similar tasks and their responsibilities overlap often. For example:

“The 4 of us do everything, our functions overlap”, Participant 1

Participants who work in such departments said that as the tasks gets more complex; it becomes the responsibility of higher level employees. For example:

“The complexity of tasks depends on the level of the employee whether junior, mid or senior.” Participant 14

This type of department is small in size as they have low number of employees.

The average is 3 employees in these departments is; for example:

“We are 2 employees, the HR Manager and the Assistant HR Manager”,

Participant 12

2. Multi-units HR department

Other participants said that their HR department is divided into units. 24% (N=4) of the participants' companies have an HR department divided into different units with each unit having its own head and function. Companies who have different units of HR or employ specific employees for certain functions exhibit a more organized distribution of functions in their HR department. For example:

“My job is limited to recruitment and selection, no additional HR functions”,

Participant 5

Companies with a divided HR department tend to have a larger number of employees in their HR department with an average of 32 employees in the department. For example:

“In Lebanon, it [HR Department] is made up of 50 employees divided between 6 units”, Participant 6

The complexity of the role is divided as per the level of each employee (i.e. junior, mid or senior). For example:

“Every unit has a head and officers within different levels (Junior, Mid-, and Senior) and of course the [complexity of the] function itself is divided on the level of the staff.” Participant 9

3. HR department with divided roles

24% (N=4) of participants said that their HR department is comprised of

specialists, whereby each staff is responsible for certain HR function. For example:

“We have one Learning & Development officer [...] we have a Senior and Junior planning recruitment officers [...] but they all report to me, so we are one department but each employee has a certain function”, Participant 8

The average number of employee is 6, which is a small number compared to the average of multi-units HR department.

4. Role of the head of department

One common factor between 47% (N=8) of the companies who participated in this study is that the leader of the department has a “strategic role”. Definitions of the term, according to these participants, is setting the objectives and goals of the department, advising the senior management on the current situation of resources and being responsible for the change management. For example:

“My role is strategic, when I joined the organization my aim was to turn the HR from a cost center to improved capital investment”, Participant 8

Although, the word HR Business Partner was not mentioned by any of the participants but the role descriptions given by the HR professionals interviewed formed pieces of the characteristics of the HR Business Partner model. One of the participants talked about how she lead the change of the HR department from a cost center to a capital investment (Change Agent), another participant said that one of her main tasks is to develop communication channels between the different business units and the top management (Employee Champion), three of the participants said that their role at their organization includes advising the top management on the current HR situation and developing the department’s plans and budgets according to the vision and strategies of the organization (Strategic Partner), and all of the participants who have a leading HR

role said their job is to overview the administrative and operational part of the HR department (Administrative Expert).

The table below summarizes the above findings.

Table 4.2. Role and structure of HR divisions

Themes 1	Broad Codes	Criteria
HR Dep. Structure	HR Dep. Overlapping functions (N=9)	Small Number of Employees
		Functions are fulfilled by all employees
		Complexity of the job is divided through the levels of position (junior, mid-, senior)
	HR Dep. Multi- Units (N=4)	Large Number of Employees
		HR Functions are distributed among structured units
		Complexity of function is distributed through the levels of position (junior, mid-, senior)
HR Dep. Divided Roles (N=4)	Small Number of Employees	
	Each employee is responsible for a certain function (specialists)	
HR Leader's Role	HR Business Partner Model?	Change Agent (Transforming the HR department only) N=1
		Developing communication channels between business units and top management (Employee Champion) N=1
		Defining the plans and budget of the department according to the larger goals of the organization (Strategic Partner) N=8
		Overviewing the operational and administrative part of HR, making sure they are working efficiently (Administrative Expert) N=17

The next section will present the selection tools used in Lebanese organization.

B. Theme 2: Tests

88% (N=15) of the participants said that they use tests as a selection tool and only two participants did not list the test as a tool they always use during their selection process. The type of tests used differed from one participant to another. In total, 53% (N= 9) of participants are interested to assess the linguistics skills of the candidates, 35% (N=6) of companies require candidates to complete an aptitude/IQ/reasoning test and 29% (N=5) of participants generated a technical test that usually includes tasks similar to the job. A technical test measures the familiarity of a candidate with a certain software tool/s. For example:

“Most of the jobs require technical abilities because our companies deal with computers, software, networks security etc... So we do technical tests depending on the position”, Participant 9

Additionally, 12% (N=2) of companies have created a General Knowledge test so they can use it in their selection process, while one company created a theoretical engineering exam. Finally, 12% (N=2) of the professionals have included psychometric tests during the selection process of senior positions.

73% (N=12) of companies who use tests develop them in-house. 20% (N=4) of participants who said that they use a test also said that the test was developed by a consultant or external stakeholder. Only one participant said that the test they implement is designed by the headquarters which is located in Switzerland.

Participants who talked about the tests said that it is a great selection tool, and it adds value to the process especially when the pool of candidates is large. It is a consistent and unbiased way to check if the candidates have the basic/technical skills required to do the job. As for the limitations, participants said that some tests are time-consuming, irrelevant to the Lebanese culture or simply not relevant to the position.

Table 4.3. Tests

Theme 2	Broad Codes	Codes
Tests	Type of tests (N=15)	Linguistic Test (Mainly English and Arabic)
		Aptitude/IQ/Reasoning Test
		Technical Test
		General Knowledge
		Theoretical Test
		Personality Test
	Source of tests	Developed in-house
		Developed by an external consultant/stakeholder
		Developed by the mother company abroad
	Benefits	Consistent
		Unbiased
	Limitations	Time-Consuming
		Irrelevant to Lebanese Culture (if psychometric)
		Irrelevant to the position

C. Theme 3: Interviews

All participants have mentioned the interview as a selection tool. The study has differentiated between two types of interview: the semi-structured and the unstructured. The semi-structured interview is an interview in which the interviewer has a prepared set of questions and start asking them one by one while writing the answers of the interviewee. The set of questions is usually consistent during all interviews and they examine behavioral competencies in hypothetical situation. The interviewer can probe during this interview which makes semi-structured. An unstructured interview is a type of interview where the questions asked by the interviewer has no specific flow, they are not consistent through all interviews and they can be related or unrelated to the job, department or company. 59% (N=10) of the participants have mentioned that the interviews they conduct are semi-structured, meaning that they have a certain set of

questions asked to all candidates, and these questions are based on the requirements of the job, whether competency-based or skill-based. Only 12% (N=2) of participants have a panel interviewing the candidate. While the rest use a one-on-one structured interview. 41% (N=7) conduct an unstructured interview, and only one participant has mentioned that a panel conducts the interview.

Additionally, the study looked more closely at the process of the interview. Since all the participants are involved in the selection process, all of them confirmed that they are personally involved whether individually or with a team in developing or putting the questions of the interview. Answers varied between three means: generating the questions on the spot during the interview, picking the questions from a certain question-bank whereby questions are classified according to each competency, and finally teaming up with the manager of the concerned position and agreeing on certain questions -related to the job responsibilities and skills required- to be asked during the interview. Moreover, all the participants are responsible for contacting and inviting the candidate to the first interview (whether over the phone or face-to-face). 54% (N=8) of the participants said that they do not have any trainings regarding developing the questions of the interview, assessing the candidate's answers and overcoming the biases that comes with the interview. 17% (N=3) of participants have mentioned that they passed through a training for the interview only during their probation period. 29% (N=5) of participants said that only the HR have the privilege to pass through trainings regarding the interview. One of the participants said that non-HR professionals ask technical questions in an interview and thus it is not necessary for them to pass by a training. Another participant said that training non-HR professionals is time consuming, costly and, compared to the number of vacancies the company has over the year, it is impractical.

1. Benefits

All participants believe that the job interview is an essential and crucial tool when it comes to selection. It is a chance for the company to get to meet and assess the candidate. Some have stressed on the communication skills, other focused on the background and culture of the candidate. Other participants have mentioned the intentions of the candidates, the reasons for applying to the position/organization and the behavior of candidates under the stress. One participant has answered that hiring cannot be done without a job interview and another participant said that the information collected from an interview has a great influence on the hiring decision.

2. Weaknesses

42% (N=7) of participants believe that a job interview has no weakness. 17% (N=3) of participants said that the interview is not error free and they run a performance evaluation after the probation period that result in keeping the newly employed or dismissing him/her from the job. 12% (N=2) of participants pointed out that an interview is stressful for a candidate and this results in candidates missing the opportunity to present themselves properly. Three other participants mentioned the bias of the feedback of interviewers. One of them said that they frequently have different opinions regarding one candidate and most of the time the views are based on the physical or superficial characteristics of the candidate and not the skills themselves. 12% of participants said that interviews cannot guarantee the future performance of candidates since they can lie in an interview.

Table 4.4. Interviews

Theme 3	Broad Codes	Codes	Specific Codes
Interviews	Style	Semi-Structured	One-on-One
			Panel Interview
		Unstructured	One-on-One
			Panel Interview
	Source of the Questions	Internal	Based on the flow of the interview
			Based on a Bank of Competencies provided by the headquarters (abroad)
			Based on the skills required with the help of the manager of position
		External	Based on a Bank of Competencies provided by an external consultant
	Training Interviewers	HR	No training for the process of interviews
			Training only during probation period
			Continuous training to keep up with trends
		Non-HR	No training, since they are managers and they have the experience
			Time Consuming
			Costly
			Impractical
	Facilitators	Get to know the candidate in person	
		Results highly influence hiring decision	
		Communication Skills	
		Behavior of Candidate under stress	
	Barriers	No weakness	
Not Error free		Assess candidates during/after probation period	
		Bias in assessing the candidate	
		Candidates can still lie	

D. Theme 4: Other selection tools

35% (N=6) of companies have mentioned additional selection tools that they implement in their recruitment process. 23% (N=4) of participants have mentioned the recommendation letter or reference checks as a selection tool. Two participants have mentioned the role play; one company have mentioned filling an application. Two

companies have mentioned work sample. One company have mentioned the presentation of a case study for business students and another company have mentioned that the assessment of the candidate’s performance after the training/probation period is the most effective selection tool they use.

The table below summarizes the selection tools used by the participants.

Table 4.5. Other selection tools

Theme 4	Broad Codes
Other Selection Tools	Letter of Recommendation
	Role Play
	Presentations (case study)
	Reference Checks
	Assessment after training/probation period
	Fill an application
	Work sample

1. Additional selection tools

In addition to the tools currently used, this study inquired if participants were aware of selection tools other than the currently used. The participants have mentioned different types of selection tools, like: group presentations, Personality and psychometric tests, panel interviews, assessment center (although they referred to it as “bring all the candidates in one day and we apply a mix of the exercises we have”), case study preparation and presentation and digital interview (“hirevue tool to record interviews and run it to the different candidates”). The main reported reasons for not using these tools are mainly for irrelevancy to the company, irrelevancy to the culture (i.e. personality test made in Europe/US is not relevant to Lebanon), not enough budget, the tools can be time consuming and a participant answered that the tools currently used are enough to select the best candidate.

2. Other companies' selection tools

The study also questioned the opinion of the participants regarding the selection practices of other Lebanese companies. Only three participants gave their opinion about other companies' selection tools and the rest of participants declared that they have the best selection tools in town and some said that they do not have any idea how other companies select their candidates. One of the participants suggested that multinational companies have certain guidelines to follow and thus have a well-designed selection process that is audited by the mother company outside Lebanon; which make these kind of company's selection process more effective, less time consuming and fair. In contrast, other participant believes that all Lebanese organizations have similar selection tools. The third participant said that as an organization, operating in Lebanon, they try to represent their values through their practices while other companies advertise their "shallow" practices but on the inside, their selection tools are biased, unethical and based on nepotism.

E. Theme 5: Rating the success of selection tools

When asked to rate the success of their selection process on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being not successful at all and 5 being perfectly successful, sixteen out of seventeen scored 4 and above, while one participant scored a 3.5. This particular participant said that multinationals have better selection tools since they're developed in the abroad in the headquarters.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

A. Structure of the HR department

The thematic analysis generated five themes that answer the research questions. First, the study found that the structure of the HR department in Lebanese organization differ from one organization to another. Different structures were divided in three forms: the HR department with overlapping functions, the HR department with multi-units and the HR department with divided roles. Each type has certain characteristics, however only the HR department with multi-units fits the strategic model of an HR department since the role of each professional will be limited to the function of the unit within the organization. The results showed that more than half of the participants have overlapping functions, which means that more than half of the HR practitioners involved in this study perform tasks that do not fit a strategic model. In comparison to large companies in the western region of the world who have structured departments with strategically-fit goals and roles, the majority of large Lebanese companies still consider the HR department as an administrative department with no strategic aim to the organization.

B. Role of the HR department leader

Another interesting result is the role of HR manger or director. According to the HR business model, an HR practitioner should engage in four roles in order to turn the department from an administration unit to a key support office. Based on the results, none of the participant mentioned all the roles together, but they hinted to one of the

four roles. For example, two candidates said they plan and manage change at their organization, another participant mentioned designing strategical plans for the department and organization, additional participants talked about their role in building communication channels between the different units and the top management and lastly, most of the participants talked about their role in overseeing the HR staff. The alarming point was the use of the term “strategic” to describe their role as leader of the department. This finding shows that Lebanese HR practitioners are not aware of the definition of the strategic role and they confuse it with the HR Business Partner model.

C. Tests

As for the selection tools, most of the participants said they test their candidates on one of the skills required. The results presented six types of tests including languages, reasoning/IQ/aptitude, general knowledge, technical/computer, personality and theoretical. The participants showed an understanding of the impact of the tests’ results as they usually implement it before the interview, thus qualifying only skilled candidates to the interview. However, most of participants missed the validation point of tests. Whether the test is developed in-house or through an external consultant none of the participants mentioned that their tests are standardized, valid or reliable. In other words, the participants of the study, whose majority have at least a bachelor’s degree, are not aware of the importance of test validation on the selection process.

D. Job interviews

Job interviews results were similar to those of tests. While all participants said they use job interviews, almost half of them conduct unstructured interviews, whereby questions are generated during the interview. Unstructured interviews are known for

their lack of validity, consistency and reliability. More than half of the participants mentioned semi-structured interviews, which is good news since it translates into a better way to assess candidates however, validity is still minimized. Again, most of the participants have high degrees and some are members of SHRM, it is peculiar to note that they lack the knowledge of the importance of validity in selection tools. The study suggests that participants might be ignoring the validity of selection tools since they consider implementing selection tools an achievement, as senior management already treats HR departments as cost centers.

On the other hand, the study showed that only less than half of the companies train their employees on conducting interviews. Participants who said that they train their employees were divided in two: the ones who are trained during the probation period only, and the HR practitioners who pass through training on conducting job interviews continuously. Participants who do not train their staff, whether HR or non-HR, on job interviews, said that the interview with the non-HR is usually technical and most of the questions will be related to the job itself, hence training is unnecessary. Also, a participant said that interviewers' experience qualifies them to be good interviewers and thus training will be a waste of time and money. The latter results suggest that the majority of HR practitioners in Lebanese organization are not covering all the aspects of the job interview, nor the selection process. It's probably not a matter of awareness; but laziness and staying within the budget. Although the subject was not brought up, but one reason could be showing the top management that participants can work effectively and efficiently with a minimum cost, even if their procedures aren't completely valid.

In addition, almost half of the participants do not find the interviews a perfect selection tool, with no barriers at all. This result also raises a question on the credibility

of the participants since the barriers of interviews are one of the basic topics in job interviews and numerous studies were conducted just to find ways to minimize those limitations. As for the strengths, most of participants said that the interview allows the potential manager to build a rapport with the potential candidate, but none of the participants mentioned on of the key purpose of the interview which is predicting job performance.

1. Observations/Predictions

Unfortunately, the study has limited evidence to draw valid relationships between the different themes. However, the investigator suggests that a relationship between the structure of the department and the type of job interview shows can be extracted from the results. As more than half of the participants (N=5) who said they have an HR department with overlapping roles conduct an unstructured interview. In addition, most of the participants (N=3) who said that their HR departments are divided into units conduct a semi-structured interview and at least one participant conduct a panel interview. The above analysis suggests that when organizations tend to build strategic HR departments, their procedures will be inclined towards “valid” selection tools. This observation, however, is not for generalization since the sample size is small. Additionally, many relationships can be drawn from the paper, for example: the structure of department and number of tools listed, the structure of department and role of the HR Leader, the structure of department and training on selection tools etc...

2. Additional selection tools

As for listing other selection tools, participants of this study showed that it's not the lack of knowledge that prevents from using additional selection tools, but cost,

culture relevancy and in some cases irrelevancy to the job. These results suggest that the participants are not aware that using multiple tools will make the hiring decision easier since it will reveal in a fair competition who is the best candidate. Another reason can be the fact they base their decisions on intuition and experience, at the same time.

E. Research limitations

Some challenges of doing research in the middle east are the difficulty gaining access to company data, the lack of interest of employees to participate in HR research studies, and the general reluctance participants have sharing information with the researcher (Shaker, 2011). Unfortunately, the study only 17 participants who is not a representative sample. The data given by the participants was very shallow as some participants did not want to reveal their actual practices.

Another limitation is that the companies selected are from various industries, thus they have different selection tools that depends on the nature of the organization. For example, banks have certain requirements that their employees should have and thus require from candidates to pass this test. The question raised here will be: if Banque du Liban hasn't imposed these requirements, would the HR department be still including this particular selection tool? Another example can be multinational companies who have their HR procedures designed by the headquarters. If it weren't for the certification and the multinational reputation, would they still be using the selection tools?

F. Future research directions

First, one of the limitations of this study is the small sample size. A future research material can be a replication of this study on a larger scale, maybe a

quantitative study that will reveal what are the mostly used selection tools used in Lebanese organizations, and trace their relationship between different aspects of organizations in Lebanon (i.e. size, industry or type).

Second, future research can focus on the views of Lebanese HR practitioners on selection tools. The research question can be: What is the purpose of a job interview/tests/other selection tools? Although this study covered a superficial part of this topic, but an interesting answer from one of the participants who believes that the purpose of a job interview is the anticipation of the employee-manager relationship.

Third, participants showed a lack of knowledge regarding the validation of selection tools. Is it a lack of knowledge? or are they intentionally ignoring the validation part of selection tools for costs reasons? As previously said, validating a test or a set of questions of an interview can be costly and time consuming but it is the only way to guarantee the nearly perfect hiring decision.

Fourth, since the study has limited evidence to draw relationships, a future quantitative research paper can investigate on the relationship between the different themes of this study. Also a quantitative study will be one of the first explorations done in the country regarding selection tools and its result can be generalized.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to explore the selection tools used in large Lebanese organizations located in Beirut. Nevertheless, the study is also interested in discovering the structure and role of the HR department in large Lebanese organizations located in Beirut. The study was based on a qualitative methodology whereby the researcher designed a questionnaire and interviewed HR professionals who were involved in the selection process of their respective companies. Results found that most of the companies had unevenly distributed functions and the role of the HR department leader was inclined towards administration and personnel. Strategic alignment in the structure and role of the HR department was almost absent. Few organizations had a well-structured department with clear and specific roles. As for selection tools, job interviews were the most frequent, tests followed. While most of the organization used multiple tools during their selection, none of them checked the validity and reliability of the tools used. As for the development of the pre-interview and interview, almost half of the participants conduct an unstructured interview while more than half use semi-structured based on the Job description or on a competency model developed by consultants. Less than half of the companies train their employees on conducting an interview and all of them never mentioned the main purpose of selection tools, which is predicting job performance. Thus, the conclusion that can be made is that although large Lebanese organizations are not fully applying strategic HR programs, however, few companies are trying to keep up with trends in the US.

Research on this topic is very limited. The study cannot tell whether the results

are expected or valid. However, the only surely element that this study can anticipate is the potential topics that academia can investigate.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to take part in a research study that aims to explore the selection strategies of Lebanese organizations. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to find out what selection tools are employed by Lebanese companies. You must be involved in recruitment and selection at your company.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview. Otherwise, we will take note of your answers.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. There are no benefits to you.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. In addition, the records will be monitored and maybe audited by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) while assuring confidentiality. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time. Withdrawal from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to you, will not affect your relationship with your institution and it will neither affect your relationship with AUB/AUBMC.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Yasmine Itani who is being supervised by Dr. Lina Daouk (Associate Professor at AUB). Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Yasmine Itani at yimi01@mail.aub.edu or at 70-757197. You can reach Dr. Daouk at ld15@mail.aub.edu or 101-375000, ext. 3777.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at the American University of Beirut:

Institutional Review Board

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Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions

- Job Title:

- Highest Education Level:

- High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD
- Certification, *please write down the name*

- Industry of your current company (Pharmaceutical, Manufacturing, Banking etc...)

- Profile of your company

- Family Business
- Local
- Regional
- Offshore
- Multinational

General HR Questions

- Can you please tell me more about your HR department and its role in the company? (Probing: If not mentioned, who is responsible for the training and development of employees? Who handles the compensation and benefits? How many employees does the department have?)
- Can you please tell me more about your job as an HR Professional in your company? (Probing: what type of tasks (other than recruitment and selection) do you handle?)

Overview on Selection Tools

- Please tell me more about the different positions you may have, and how you assess the candidate's qualifications for each position. (Probing: (a) why do you use this method for this position? (b) How do you know if it works? (c) Can you give me more examples? (d) If HR Practitioner mentions a certain test, what kind of test is it? (e) How does it add value to the selection process?)

- Do you know of other effective selection methods that you are not currently using? Why is it effective? Why aren't you using it?
- If we think about other companies in Lebanon, in your opinion which has the best selection method? Why?

Focus on Interviews

- So you have mentioned interviews, so we're going to focus on that now:
 - a- Who develop the questions?
 - b- How do they develop them?
 - c- Who conducts the interview? (Probing: how do you differentiate between a good interviewer and a bad interviewer?)
 - d- How do you make sure that the questions are assessing the candidate?
 - e- What are the benefits of the interview?
 - f- What are the challenges you face with this selection method?

- On a scale to 1 to 5, 1 being Not Successful and 5 being Very Successful, how much (average wise) do you rate it?

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