

Classification of the human senses



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Abstract

All known human senses are of extreme importance and relevance during employee selection.

In this paper, a brief depiction of each sense is presented; the importance, relevance and influence of the sense of sight and hearing in employee recruitment is addressed, specifically in correlation to the screening of cabin crew for a major international airline.

Introduction

A wide body aircraft flies across the large projector screen followed by images of well known landscapes, happy passengers and smiling crew members. The music is soft but with a contagious upbeat. The room is bright with chairs neatly arranged in auditorium format, ready to receive the entering candidates. Excitement, anticipation and expectation fill the air. Greeting them, two recruiters in their business attire and attitude have already started their task: a recruitment day is about to begin.

Everyone, throughout the course of their professional lives, has experienced some type of employee screening or recruitment process. Being an informal one-on-one interview or a highly complex assessment centre; in today's marketplace, selection of candidates and competition for the best positions are everyday occurrences.

All of our everyday tasks, from the simplest to the most technically demanding requires using our senses; and translating, analysing the information to attain the desired results. The interpretation of our senses is a detrimental component of our perception (Gerow, 1994).

Making sense of the senses

Since Aristotle's *De Anima* and his attempted definition of the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) great developments in research have shed needed light in the functionality and interrelation of our senses (Boernstein, 1955; Gerow, 1997; Orlady & Orlady, 1999). Currently, some authors consider the existence of other senses such as kinaesthetic, acceleration, pain and balance within the five senses mentioned above (Gerow, 1997; Orlady & Orlady, 1999).

In brief words, our senses are:

Sight

Light rays enter the cornea making its way into the retina where conversion of physical energy into neural impulses occurs. These impulses are then sent to the brain for decoding and analysis. The perception of colour, brightness, form and depth is done by specialized cells (Gerow, 1997).

Hearing

Vibration creates waves and those waves travel into the ear where they set the tympanic membrane in motion, passing through various inner areas until reaching tiny hair cells where hearing takes place (Gerow, 1997, p. 91). Our sense of balance is directly related to our inner ears (Orlady & Orlady, 1999).

Touch

Identifiable as anything that triggers sensation on the skin, mucosa or tongue. One can categorize different sensations such as tingles, tickles, itches as well as differences in pressure, temperature, and the sensation of pain (Gerow, 1997).

Smell

It is a chemical sense. The odours molecules when in contact with the tiny hairs in our noses cause them to send impulses to our brain that interprets smells. Some studies suggest it to be the closest linked to memory (White & Treisman, 1997).

Taste

A chemical sense that uses a combination of taste receptors capable of identifying four different states: sweet, sour, salt and bitter (Gerow, 1997).

Although all senses are somewhat implicated in employee recruitment, perhaps the most intensely involved ones are sight and hearing.

Sight and screening

When you meet a candidate, sight is the first sense involved, followed by hearing, touch (shaking hands), and even smell (noticeable body odour).

In cabin crew recruitment the first analyses done by the recruiters is a visual one. The recruiters visually analyse the candidate's suitability according to the pre-established requirements and criterion: candidates are expected to be physically fit to best perform on board of an airliner; candidates must have a certain arm reach, which translates into a minimum height; and why not to mention that their overall displayed behaviour must entail a strong team work capability. In other words, the way that a candidate walks, talks, relates to others, his/her facial expressions and body language (non-verbal communication) are all taken into consideration.

During this first visual analysis of the candidate's suitability, recruiters must quickly forecast his/her adjustability to the job per say. The cabin crew job requires a combination of physical and mental tasks to be accomplished daily. Physical tasks are directly related to in-flight service and overall wellbeing of passengers and other crew members, in addition to performing optimally should an emergency occur. Cabin crew's mental tasks are directly related to their capability of learning across several areas. From service delivery to (most importantly) safety and the use of safety equipment if needed. It is required of them to visually check emergency equipments in the assigned station, and these checks include continuous use of the human senses such as sight, hearing, touch and even smell. In addition, cabin crew must maintain alertness and situational awareness during the entire flight to ensure safety compliance (Helmreich & Merritt, 1998).

From the candidate's perspective, sight is also the first sense used as they come into the venue, meet the recruiters and gather information about the company by printed material and/or video presentation. Their first impressions of the corporate image are created at this moment arousing or diminishing the interest for the position offered.

Sound and screening

Hearing follows the visual contact. Through hearing is when another crucial part of the recruitment process takes place: the evaluation of the candidate's potential in verbal communication, and the interaction with his/her peers during all the presented group or individual exercises and personal interview.

The candidate's ability to understand speech and coordinate it with proper physical response and verbal communication are imperative for his/her continuance in the recruitment process. Since communication is a key element of aviation safety (Kanki & Palmer, 1993), the candidate's ability to properly communicate even at this early stage is essential.

The evaluation (visual and verbal) of group interaction and aspects of decision making are another decisive aspect to look into during employee selection. In aviation, being in the cockpit or in the passenger cabin, positive group interaction that facilitates the assessment of a given situation followed by proper decision is essential to ensure safety is achieved (Oranasu, 1993).

Others senses and screening

Present at a much smaller scale are the senses of smell and touch.

Physical touch during screening is limited to handshakes. In such brief contact however, recruiters can only guess how affected by the process a candidate is. If candidates display sweaty or trembling hands, it might signal them as nervous and tense (rather normal under the circumstances).

The sense of smell is an interesting one; it ranges from identifying the presence or not of a pleasant or unpleasant odour to interpreting and reacting to it. In employee selection, only cases of offensive body odour are of concern as it has been widely suggested that odour can affect performance in the workplace (Kroemer & Kroemer, 2001).

Perception and screening

Perception is broadly defined as the interpretation of the several stimuli that we are exposed by at any given time. Perception in itself is selective and

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directly linked to the intensity of a given stimuli, and its importance to the receiver of these stimuli (Gerow, 1994).

Every recruitment campaign is unique and so must be the perceptive approach of the recruiters to avoid biased decisions. Purkiss, Perrewee, Gillespie, Mayes and Gerrald (2003) suggest that the evaluation of candidate's performance as being related to positive or negative stereotyping, cultural misunderstanding or even inadequate application of recruitment techniques. All of these elements are primarily understood and processed as part of one's perception. Further discussing bias in recruitment and its implications is far beyond the scope of this paper.

Playing an important role in the recruitment process is the venue in which it occurs. Our senses are stimulated and influenced by the surroundings, and so is our perception or understanding of the messages that our senses send to us (Gerow, 1994). External factors such as noise, temperature, lighting, smell among others; and, internal factors such as fatigue, stress, culture, and mental state (of candidate and recruiters) should be factored in for optimal performance (Orlady & Orlady, 1999).

Conclusion

Although all senses are involved in everyday activities, when it comes to employee recruitment and selection process of any company, mostly sight and hearing are engaged. Sight is the first sense to be used followed closely by hearing.

Perception and understanding of all received information during the recruitment process is greatly influenced by internal and external factors

such as cultural traits; physical and mental state of the recruiters (stress, fatigue); and personal (or bias) understanding of the given criterion. In addition, perception from the candidate's point of view also affects the outcome of any screening.

Lastly, recruitment officers do not only rely in their senses or their perception to form a final decision on a candidate's application. There are written tests; psychometric and aptitude tests; and even medical tests performed that help create a more accurate picture of every applicant before a final decision is reached.

Further investigations into the interplay of senses within human resources, specifically its influence during employee selection are needed to enhance understanding on both sides.

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