Chapter 2

Executive Selection Process
Chapter - 2

EXECUTIVE SELECTION PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

The field of human resource management changed dramatically in recent years. Today's human resource problems are enormous and appear to be ever expanding. Among the most serious of the human resource challenges in the global job market is the growing mismatch between emerging jobs requiring higher level knowledge and skills and the knowledge and skill levels of the people available to fill them (Mondy & Noe, 1996 : 11)

Although the field of human resource management is becoming global and human resource specialists need to be more aware of international human resource issues, their focus is usually domestic.

Human resources are an organisation's greatest competitive weapon and the quality of people is the main source of sustainable, competitive advantage of the firm (Caudron, 1994 : 54). All these reflect the significance of selection for an organisation. Most managers admit that selection is one of their most difficult and most important business decisions. These decisions have long lasting consequences.

Trends like globalisation and technological innovation are changing the ways firms are being managed. In the companies that have successfully responded to these challenges, new modes of organising and managing have emerged. The bases of power are changing. Management theorist Kanter (1989 : 88) says, in the new organisation, position, title and authority are no longer adequate tools for managers to rely on to get their jobs done. Instead success depends increasingly on tapping into sources of good ideas, on figuring out whose collaboration is needed to act on these ideas and on working with both to produce results.

Strategic planning experts Prahalad and Hamel (1990 : 82) say that competitive advantage lies not just in differentiating a product or service or in becoming the low-cost leader but also in being able to tap the company's special skills or core competencies and rapidly respond to customer's needs and competitors' moves.
As a result, competent and committed employees help to distinguish between those firms that succeed and those that don't (Dessler, 1997 : 21).

2.2 Changing Horizons of Executive Selection

While HRM executives and managers are relatively more educated and professional these days, the level of knowledge and sophistication in actual HRM is another story. Many HRM managers either ignore relevant academic research or are unaware of it while making decisions regarding HRM systems and practices. Companies that use particular executive selection methods instead of methods that actually work ultimately ends up with less effective executives. The task here is to find out and emphasise the most glaring discrepancies between the way HRM (in particular executive selection) is being practised and what academic researches has to say about those particular practices.

Management selection in many firms pay little heed to research reports and recommendations in personnel selection literature, and relies extensively on assessment methods that have doubtful predictive validity and low reliability (Stone, 1995 : 139). Many HR specialists today operate with a "best practices" perspective based on 'benchmarking' the way the best companies do things. While this is helpful, the effectiveness depends upon the extent to which the measurement processes are aligned to business objectives.

Beaumont (1993 : 83) notes the role of strategic selection wherein the design of the selection system supports the overall organisational strategy. So there is a need to match key executives to business strategies.

A structured selection system with rigour and consistency is highly desirable, but the selection decision remains a matter of human judgment. So the selection process inevitably remains subjective. However, selection should be based on criteria which are valid and related to the requirements of the job (Corbridge & Pilbeam, 1998 : 98).

The first step in achieving excellence in human resource management is to hire the right person for the right job, that is matching the person's capabilities, abilities, motivations, interests and skills with the demands of the job and the "personality" or climate of the work group and company. This 'matching process' is not as easy as it sounds and a mistake at this stage is costly. For selecting executives, interview is essential. Interview is an art, not a science. Getting past the 'Social mask' into the real person is the objective of the interviewing process and is the most difficult task an
interviewer has. Ninety-five percent of job failures are not due to lack of ability but due to personality differences (Berger, 1989: 175-181).

The trend of executive selection process changed a lot during the last eight decades. Development of new management ideas, technological innovation, social and cultural changes, globalisation and cross-cultural encounters resulted in a shift of emphasis of executive selection process from an isolated one to a strategic one. The approaches towards and techniques of executive selection process had undergone a change. The task in the new millennium is to make executive selection process more sophisticated by minimising or eliminating the limitations of the existing practices. With respect to quality (in case of executive search), top management must continuously weigh professional managerial skills and technical competence against contextual or environmental adaptiveness.

2.3 Objective of Executive Selection Process

Human resources working for an organisation, particularly the executives are strategic resource of the future. Executive selection is a complex area. Recent researches suggest that a "good fit" is more than a question of proven knowledge, skill and experience in the job. It is also a question of "emotional match". People who fit well with jobs enjoy the type of activity and perform well. Good fit is also a question of values (Evans, 1992: 1-5). Till date only knowledge, skill and experience matches were considered and not emotional match. But in the new perspective culture, value, attitude and belief are crucial factors which need to be considered in the executive selection process so that current practices can be improved (Robbins, 1988: 97-99).

Proper executive selection process not only ensures leadership position of the company by means of superior performance of its executives but also ensures satisfaction of the executives because of the cultural match of the individual employees with that of the organisation. This is a two-way process which is beneficial to the organisation as well as executives working for it.

Keeping in mind the title of the present dissertation and the main issues, the following three major dimensions of executive selection process need to be considered in order to arrive at an integrative framework.

A) Identification of Major Types of Approaches towards Executive Selection Presently Followed

B) Executive Selection Process in Western Countries; and

C) Changes in the Western Executive Selection Methods.
A) Identification of Major Types of Approaches towards Executive Selection Presently Followed

Successful selection is like a successful marriage – it is planned, not made in heaven. Although marriages and hiring decisions are supposed to involve some rationality, mismatches are sometimes attributed to too much trust placed in the "heart" (for marriage) or to "gut feeling" (for hiring) (Smart, 1983: 1-2).

The process of selecting executives is complex and also of paramount importance for any organisation. Clearly, there are multiple approaches to executive selection. The approach to selection an individual uses is a function of many different considerations. An extensive review of relevant literature reveals the following approaches.

**Systematic Approach**

Fraser (1954: 228) advocates a systematic approach to selection which is likely to avoid serious mistakes. Mandell (1956: 115) says that one must adopt systematic approach for the selection of managers. People differ from each other and these differences are measured and taken into account in personnel selection. Individual diagnosis, therefore, must always be the crucial first step. So selection should involve systematic approach (French, 1978: 250; Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 237; Leap & Crino, 1989: 220).

West (1983: 67) argues that good selection is above all a methodical approach to the problem of finding the best matched person for the job.

Eder & Ferris (1989) emphasise that practitioners need a systematic and an integrated approach to employment interviewing for selecting executives. Koontz and Weihrich (1994: 370) also consider a systematic approach essential to managerial selection, because qualified managers are critical to the success of an enterprise.

**Scientific Approach**

Anstey and Mercer (1956) are of the opinion that selection involves a scientific approach. The interest in a construct approach to selection is augmented by both practical and scientific considerations (Klimoski, 1993: 100). Cascio (1998: 202) considers traditional or classical validity approach to personnel selection.
Careful Approach

A selection programme is more than casual interviews. It has many parts which must be articulated. So a careful approach is required (Mandell, 1964). One has to take up an exacting approach to selection. Chruden and Sherman (1963: 153) point out that a careful approach or a casual approach may be taken during selection with definite emphasis on the former. Cherrington (1995: 225) contends that selection is so important to organisational effectiveness that organisations ought to make careful, informed choices.

Negative Approach

In many companies the approach to selection is usually negative involving progressive elimination of applicants during different stages of selection. However positive approach to selection utilises every available means to ensure that the full range of an individual's potentialities are considered (Stone & Kendall, 1956: 15-16).

Personnel selectors often see their task as avoiding mistakes, minimising errors. They bring in psychologists as the final check that the candidate is 'safe'. This is a negative approach. Cook (1988: 237) considers this approach as wrong.

Beach (1985: 137) also considers selection as a negative approach, because it rejects a good portion of those who apply.

Successive Hurdles Approach, Compensatory Approach & Combined Approach

There are two general selection and assessment philosophies in existence today. (Carrell et al. 1995: 333). These are successive hurdles and the compensatory approach. The majority of the selection programmes are based on the successive hurdles concept. This means that to be hired the applicant must successfully pass every screening device. That is he must meet or exceed the requirements of each hurdle. The compensatory approach which is less commonly used is based on the assumption that a deficiency in one factor can be counter balanced by an excess amount of another factor.

Sikula and McKenna (1984: 182) report that both these approaches/methods are advantageous under differing circumstances. Beach (1985: 131-140) considers selection
a screening or elimination approach. The vast majority of selection programmes are based on the successive hurdles approach. Another selection approach, called the multiple – correlation approach, is less commonly used. It is nothing but a compensatory approach.

Livy et. al. (1988 : 108 & Gomez Mejia et. al. (1998 : 169) think of selection as a progressive elimination approach which rejects candidates who do not measure up to the specification. Henemen et. al. (1989 : 354-55) emphasise a combined approach using both multiple hurdles and compensatory approaches. In this case, first, a particular ability or motivation characteristic which is essential for success is assessed in the selection process. If deficient on the characteristic, the applicant is rejected. If not deficient, the applicant continues through the rest of the selection process. In short the combined approach starts with multiple hurdles and ends with a compensatory approach.

**Statistical Approach / Clinical Approach**

Psychologists involved with selection in industry tend to fall in one of two camps – those advocating a 'statistical' approach and those who feel that a 'clinical' approach is more fully justified. (Gomez – Mejia et. al. 1998 : 169; Cascio, 1998 : 225) The statistical approach is that selection should be viewed as a process of evaluating the extent to which a candidate will resemble currently successful employees in terms of characteristics which research has shown to be related to success in an organisation. Clinically oriented psychologists view each selection decision as an individual case. They use knowledge about people and their experience to arrive at a decision about hiring each individual candidate. Although they may evaluate the same data that are used in the statistical approach, they may interpret them intuitively rather than comparing the candidate against statistical norms. Hinrichs (1966 : 87-89) argues that selection of highcaliber talent is as much an art as it is a science and thus should draw on both the statistical and clinical approach.

Strauss and Sayles (1972 : 430) argues that selection involves clinical vs mechanical approach. Clinical approach is subjective in nature, often it is pure hunch. Mechanical approach attempts to reduce this subjectivity by quantifying data gathered through interviews and application blanks.

Link (1928 : 293-97) advocates a judgmental approach to selection, because success of selection depends on the judgment of the selector.
Reciprocal Approach

During selection the employment manager establishes rapport with the candidate. Beach (1985: 139; Anderson, 1992: 169) consider selection as a two-way process. Torrington and Hall (1987: 230) support this viewpoint and adds that as a result, a more reciprocal approach to employment decision making is increasingly being accepted.

Ferris et. al. (1990: 122) stress on the mutual decision making approach involved in selection. The decisions of both the individual candidate and employment manager are influenced by a number of factors.

Strategic Approach

With globalisation and cut throat competition the business scenario has changed drastically. So executives have become the most important source of sustainable competitive advantage of the firms. Earlier executive selection was an isolated exercise. But Gerstein & Reisman (1987: 118-129) conclude that for these reasons, executive selection should be linked to strategy. The overall process is matching executive requirements to strategic needs of the organisation, that is selection involves a strategic approach. Cascio (1989: 262) comments that there are the constant needs to align management selection with business strategy. Beaumont (1993: 57) discusses the notion of strategic selection approach which involves the need to match key executives to business strategies.

In addition to these main approaches, there are other approaches that are not very popular and not used by large number of organisations.

The approaches discussed above have undergone an evolutionary process. In pre-industrialised societies there was no explicit notion of staffing. Work was performed in family units and craft guilds, neither of which relied on the hiring of employees. Selection became important only when organisations became large and complex that jobs had to be clearly defined and employees hired to fill the jobs.

In selection, the goal is to choose individuals who are likely to work well at their jobs. From its origin in early industrial organisations, the focus in traditional selection research is on the match between the person and the job. (Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997: 10; Snow & Snell, 1993: 450-451; Schmitt & Chan, 1998: 240) Conventional selection
systems have focused on facilitating or optimising the match between the skills and abilities of individuals and the skills and abilities required by the tasks and duties of the job (i.e. job requirements) i.e. the person-job fit. This is termed Model-I. This selection model is based on job analysis and relies on a closed system perspective. It is assumed that organisations and jobs can be separated into individual components.

Although person-job fit may benefit selection decision in predictable organisational environment with stable definable jobs, where reliable and valid criteria to measure employee performance can be identified, the static person-job match approach becomes inadequate in many dynamic environments where jobs change because of technological advances and organisational innovations.

However as organisations change and people therein themselves change, it is very difficult to specify valid and reliable performance criteria. Moreover executive jobs are more dynamic and multidimensional which make a stable person-job fit unlikely.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that this ability-task match is too narrow and that other work context issues are important. 'Doing well' has been traditionally defined as job-based performance. But now organisational behaviour researchers expand selection criteria and consider performance as the aggregate of behaviours which must take into account group and organisational characteristics in addition to individual traits. As these limitations of Model-I became apparent, researchers began to develop based on Model-I an alternate framework for making selection decisions.

This has led to a shift from a narrow skill-job match (individual level) to match people, first to the group and then to the organisational context, that is person-group and person-organisation fit. This is Model-II of selection.

The use of teams to accomplish work in organisations has implications for selection. Werbel & Johnson (2001 : 227-240) argue that given an increased emphasis on work teams in organisations, it is important to select applicants based on their ability to make contributions in a given work team. They propose that person-group fit should be useful to select applicants for work-teams who can form cohesive groups which will function effectively. P-G fit is defined as the match between the new-hire and the immediate workgroup i.e. co-workers and superior. P-G fit is likely to impact organisational effectiveness by promoting group co-operation and synergy.
Selection of employees for team-oriented environments must go beyond traditional job analysis which emphasises person-job fit which identifies the technical skills, knowledge and abilities an individual needs to perform the required job tasks. Interpersonal Interactions assume importance in team/group activities.

Groups taken together make an organisation. So, it is important to match people to the organisational context. The person organisation (P-O) match is important because organisations differ in their goals, values, reward system, culture and so forth. So individuals who are likely to work well in an organisation may need more than specific skills that fit the job requirements; they need personal attitudes and personalities that fit the broader context of the organisation.

For ensuring individual and organisational reflectiveness, the attributes / fundamental characteristics of the organisation such as culture, climate, goals and norms and the attributes/characteristics of the individuals such as values, goals, personality and attitudes must be congruent. For this, organisational analysis is useful. Numerous reviews suggest that many individual attributes contribute to effective individual performance at the executive level. So there is emphasis on ‘whole-person’ measurement, whereby motivation, attitudes, values, interests as well as knowledge, skills and abilities are assessed.

For selecting the ‘whole person’, the choice need not be exclusively on one type of fit or the other, all of them (PJ, PG and PO) can be used simultaneously to select the whole person.

Some researchers view that this approach to selection is meant for strategy implementation. In the closing part of the last century, with the growth of strategic human resource management, it was realised that an organisation’s survival and effectiveness depends on the match between key executives and business strategies (Beaumont, 1993 : 83). He notes the role of strategic selection where the design of the selection system supports the over-all organisation strategy.

A firm’s strategic orientation is related to the company’s goals, external opportunities and its internal forces including structure, culture, values and resources, all of which influence selection systems. As a result, organisational climate, culture, styles and management philosophies influence the types of people who will best fit in the organisation as a whole.
Snow & Snell (1993 : 453-459) point out that in efforts to develop a broader and more integrated perspective of selection, several researchers have argued that selection should be linked to strategic planning. The basic purpose of selection in Model-II is to implement-competitive strategy. Selection according to this model is a systematic process. In this model strategy supplements the traditional job analysis as a basis of selection. As environmental uncertainty increases jobs tend to become more oriented toward goals than procedures. Role-descriptions grow in use as organisations incorporate more contextual factors into selection decisions. Another characteristic of this model is its emphasis on the relationships among job and larger organisational units. This emphasis reflects interdepartmental, team synergies. It relies on an open systems perspective.

In addition to the link with strategy, selection practices have been connected with corporate culture.

Model-II, selection as strategy implementation is based on certain underlying assumptions. First, the model portrays selection as having a deductive logic – strategy is the premise and selection is the consequence. Second, this model is a reactive approach to selection. This model assumes that a company can formulate a strategy and then bring the necessary human resources to accomplish its goals, which means tight fit between strategy and selection.

However in rapidly changing companies it may be difficult to achieve this kind of responsiveness. So this selection model is most appropriate when there is sufficient time to position human resources in reaction to environmental changes and opportunities. Finally this model embraces the assumption that job-person-strategy is a desired state of affairs. In sum, Model-II may be best suited for organisations with clear strategies and known competences.

The limitations of Model-II led to the development of Model-III, selection as strategy formation. The origin of this model cannot be pinpointed in time or place. Probably the biggest stimulus of this model is coming from demographic changes in the global workforce. Another stimulus of this model is the growth of the service sector. A third factor namely global competition is also involved.

The central feature of Model-III is that selection propels strategy formation. As the competitive environment becomes more transitory, people become the most sustainable source of competitive advantage. Because people can learn and adapt, companies are
beginning to realise that the foundation of their competitive strategy is based on the quality of their human capital.

Another characteristic of this model is its focus on strategy capability. Instead of developing a single set of core competencies, emphasis is on developing a broad-skill base for value creation. A broad-skill base helps to prepare for an unpredictable or unknown future.

This model has been referred to as selecting 'the best available candidate'. Rather than hiring for a pre-defined position, this model suggests that companies hire on a value-added basis. This model is also characterised by rapid deployment of resources. Here reliance is placed on an open-system perspective.

At the moment, Model-III or selection as strategy formation, is more of a philosophy than a practice. (Snow & Snell, 1993: 464). Companies considering this model face a very different set of assumptions in their decision making.

First, selection follows an inductive logic – selection is the premise and competitive strategy is the consequence. Second, this model is a pro-active approach to staffing. Selection assumes an equal status with, perhaps even takes priority over all other resource acquisition and allocation decisions. For most companies, this would require major changes in philosophy and practice.

Last, this model is based on the notion of a loose-fit between selection and strategy. Whereas in Model-II, strategy and selection are tightly coupled, selection in Model-III is intended to generate some amount of organisational slack. That is, at any point in time, a portion of a Model-III company is likely to have excess capacity – more ideas and tools in its kit than are being used.

In sum, Model-III begins with a search for 'best' people. However, best is not defined as those individuals who are needed to implement a chosen strategy; best refers to people who possess value – added KSAOs.

By comparing and contrasting the basic components of the selection approaches of Model-I, II and III one can see how major selection activities vary across the three models.
Because Model-I is oriented towards maximising person-job fit, selection decisions are based on a rational process of rejecting less desirable applicants. Given the structured nature of jobs, selection decisions tend to be embedded in the testing process itself. In contrast, selection decisions under Model-II may be less systematic. Since the goal here is to select a configuration of individuals who can best work with one another and who, as a group, meet the strategy requirements, selection criteria would extend beyond the technical requirements of jobs to include such factors as interpersonal compatibility among team members and fit with corporate culture. Consequently, selection decisions might involve debate among managers, with each one providing his rationale for selecting certain individuals.

Along these lines there has been a trend among companies to move away from tests to methods such as leaderless group discussions and business simulations typically found in assessment centres.

Last, selection decisions under Model-III are not based on a preconceived definition of the job. The capacity to learn, rather than the skills possessed is becoming more critical under conditions of great change. Instead, selectors consider who among the available candidates offers the highest value-added contribution to the firm. That is, strategic capability is enhanced by choosing individuals who bring new skills to the company.

Model-III is the emerging model/approach of selection. The efficacy of the system is determined solely on the cultural background and value system of individuals which determine his personality. This in the ultimate analysis enables him to add-value, enhance learning capability and be a driving force behind strategy formation of the firm. This is the main factor behind maximum contribution towards the organisation.

From the discussion on the major types of approaches towards executive selection adopted in the Western world, we find that although it involves a systematic, scientific, careful, professional, strategic and dynamic approach, in the ultimate analysis it essentially depends on the subjective judgment of the selector/s.

B) Executive Selection Process in Western Countries

The selection process followed by a particular organisation may differ from another organisation in terms of complexity and steps involved.
There is no standard sequence of steps in a selection process. Different human resource specialists have put forward lists of steps and their sequence without unanimity about them. A perusal of their suggestions provide us with an idea about common requirements that must be met whatever procedure and sequence of the steps undertaken. The common requirements are – (1) information gathering which; (2) have predictive value; (3) Decision making; and (4) Feedback on the quality of the decisions. (Anderson, 1992 : 171-172).

Whatever selection process is adopted it should ensure adherence to the following principles – (1) the methods used must be technically sound; (2) the method should be administratively convenient i.e., neither too short nor too long; and (3) the method used must be and must be seen to be, as fair as possible. These three principles are interdependent. The selection procedure must follow a pattern and capable of being expanded and contracted as necessary (Higham, 1975 : 35-36).

In the following paragraphs some of the processes formulated by experts which are widely followed in the Western world are discussed.

Reviewing the relevant literature over a period of eighty years starting from 1920s, it is found that the three models provided the philosophy which to a large extent shaped the typical methods of selection. As will be seen that the steps or methods suggested by different experts fit well with the three models mentioned earlier.

Historically, the methods suggested earlier fall in the category of Model-I i.e., person - job fit, then in the category of Model-II (P-G fit, P-O fit and selection as strategy implementation) and only a few in Model-III (selection as strategy formation).

As the first model requires person-job fit, so the steps suggested take care of that requirement. Large number of experts have dealt with this dimension of selection process. We have located a good number of selection methods. The number of steps involved usually vary from five to ten, six being the modal number. The broad steps suggested by majority are – Application Form Blank, Initial Interview, Testing, Reference Check, Comprehensive Interview and Medical Check. (Link, 1928 : 340-355; Bingham & Moore, 1941 : 92-93; Stone & Kendall, 1956 : 135-139; Jucluus, 1963 : 155-156; Mandell, 1964 : 21-27; Pigors & Myers, 1981 : 272-77; Douglas et. al. 1985 : 254-255; Greenlaw & Kohl, 1986 : 87-89; Halloran, 1986 : 102-103; Mondy & Noe, 1993 : 209-210).

The second selection model is concerned with person-group and person-organisation fit facilitating strategy implementation. This model has been developed based on Model-I. The fact is evident if one looks at the steps involved in the processes which fall in the category of Model-II. These processes are not much different from the processes falling in the category of Model-I. The initial steps in most cases are akin to the steps discussed under the processes pertaining to Model-I. The main difference is reflected in the use of additional new group selection methods and assessment centres which are primarily aimed at ascertaining interpersonal skills, aspirations, values, cultural background, and personality of the applicants to determine emotional match between the applicant and his work group and also the overall organisation. This is much more crucial as compared to knowledge, skill, abilities match. KSA match is required but personality and cultural match is far more important in determining individual and organisational effectiveness.

The processes pertaining to P-G fit, P-O fit and selection as strategy implementation are closely related. However for convenience they are discussed separately.


107; Bernardin & Russell, 1998 : 137-166). The steps suggested by them generally include - Preliminary Interview, Application Blank, Test, Interview, Reference Checks, Assessment Centres, Physical Examination and Job Offer/Placement.

Assessment centre is a management selection technique usually conducted over a period of one to three days. It includes - individual exercises such as in-basket exercise and presentation; group exercises such as leaderless group discussion, psychological tests, Projective Personality Test (TAT), Pencil and Paper Intelligence, Aptitude and Personality tests, interview, business game, computer simulation, role-playing, interview, a personal history questionnaire and an autobiographical essay.

The selection system of a company supports the overall organisation strategy. So selection is viewed as a means to strategy implementation. Experts dealing with this viewpoint have suggested that business condition and strategic direction must be specified and on the basis of strategy related job requirements, a role-description format must be prepared for executives. The following general steps have been envisaged by experts :-


Leap & Crino (1989 : 221-263) point out that recently participative selection (subordinates participating in the selection of their superior and colleagues) is being practised in the area of managerial selection.

The third selection model, selection as strategy formation has been developed on the basis of previous models. As the environment is changing very fast, human resources of the companies are considered the most sustainable source of competitive advantage. To prepare for an unpredictable future, the organisation needs a pro-active approach where individuals propel strategy formation and not merely aid strategy implementation.

As noted earlier, Model-III at the moment is more of a philosophy rather than a practice, although this trend is emerging. Schmitt & Chan (1998 : 8-317) are perhaps
the only authors we have come across who opine that selection is now used as a corporate strategy or as a means of developing strategy.

An executive's performance depends both on ability and motivation. The traditional selection Model-I, person job fit is mainly directed towards ability in terms of knowledge, skill, ability fit. Research studies show that motivation is affected by the fit between individuals' culture and values and the culture and values of the organisation. So attention must be focused on person-group and person-organisation fit which embraces the concept, selection as strategy implementation.

Today an executive is not chosen for a definite job. As situation is changing very fast, the skills possessed are becoming obsolete. The organisational structure and mode of functioning are also changing resulting in self-directed empowered teams operating within a flat structure. To become successful, the executives need to bring new skills to add value to the company and most importantly their personality, personal values and operating style must be compatible with the work-group as well as with the organisation and its culture. The selection processes linked to Model-II and Model-III are now basically oriented towards exploring the possible extent of this compatibility.

The steps of executive selection process vary from company to company. The methods to be followed must be concomitant with the purpose/objective for which selection is being made. Job-fit approach demands a particular combination of steps which is different from P-G/P-O fit or selection as strategy formation.

C) Changes in the Western Executive – Selection Methods

At first sight, it may appear that little progress has been made with regard to selection methods and techniques. In the case of selection, organisations still place reliance on the traditional methods of application forms and selection interview.

Recent developments have not highlighted revolutionary new methods but have been concerned more with reassessing and refining the use of established methods. (Anderson, 1992 : 182-183).

The approaches to selection discussed in the preceding sections have undergone an evolutionary process. The matching of person to jobs has been criticised as being too mechanistic and applicable only in case of predictable organisational environment.
Increasingly greater recognition is being given to adapt selection practices to permit the assessment of applicants in terms of their suitability to fit into the group and the broader organisational context as opposed to a specific job. This is the approach of selection as strategy implementation.

However in rapidly changing organisational environment, the approach of selection as strategy implementation may fail, because sufficient time is not available to position human resources in reaction to environmental changes.

The limitations of this model led to the development of the recent approach, selection as strategy formation. This is a pro-active approach but still more of a philosophy than a practice.

This trend is found not only in literature but also in practice. The steps/methods are determined by the three approaches towards selection.

Another important trend, likely to gain in significance in the future, concerns the increased emphasis on fairness and avoidance of bias in the selection process together with greater recognition of candidates' rights. There is still a tendency to focus exclusively on the organisation's perspective in making selection decisions and to neglect the increasingly important aspects of how candidates make decisions, in deciding whether to accept job offers or not i.e. applicants' reaction to the process.

In this part we shall examine some of the prominent methods used during executive selection. The aim is to ascertain the way the methods are changing. At the same time the limitations of these methods shall be highlighted.

The main methods used during executive selection are – Application Blank, Tests, Interview, Reference Checks and Assessment Centres.

*Application Blank*

Application form/blank is one of the traditional methods of executive selection on which most organisations place reliance.

Traditionally application blanks include basic job-related information, candidate's background and in few cases personality and interest factors. (Bellows & Estep, 1954 : 195; Sidney & Brown, 1961 : 66-67; Chruden & Sherman, 1963 : 160).
Strauss & Sayles (1972: 417) and Higham (1975: 37) opine the application form normally includes biographical information, education, training and previous work experience and such other personal items as home ownership, interests, hobbies, general social activities, leisure-time activities and health histories.

Review of literature reveals that, a large number of application forms contain information relating to questions that are directly relevant to individual’s ability to perform the job for which they are applying. (Greenlaw & Kohl, 1986: 97; Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 243; Livy, et. al. 198: 108; Torrington & Hall, 1987: 234). These experts include biographical information (including family background), educational background and previous work experience in the application blank. These factors have some predictive validity. (Douglas et. al. 1985: 254).

Cook (1988: 14) reports that the (UK) Industrial Society’s Survey of 50 British application forms shows that biographical information, family background and previous occupation are stressed in most of the cases. Surprisingly very few forms ask about hobbies and leisure interests. The survey results indicate that about forty percent want to avoid nepotism and ask if the candidate has any relatives working for them.

Based on the assumption that one of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour, biographical information has been used widely and successfully in managerial selection. (Cascio, 1989 : 273). But because of equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation, the safest strategy is to ask questions that are job-related and be valid predictors of job-related behaviour.


Application blanks can be converted into Weighted Application Blanks (WAB). This is to make the application blank more job-related. This is an attempt to relate the characteristics of applicants to characteristics of successful job-holders. WABs can predict probabilities of success on the job. (Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 243; Torrington & Hall, 1987: 234).

Cook (1988: 14) considers WAB as economical, effective and difficult to fake. A number of discrepancies between responses of applicants on application forms and information provided by previous employers have been detected. So, WAB to some
extent can take care of it.

Most selectors use the application form to build up a preliminary picture – albeit subjectively and impressionistically, constructing a coherent picture of the applicant in accordance with the types of applicants required for jobs in the organisation.

Ostroff & Rothausen (1997 : 27), Gomez Mejia et. al. (1988 : 160-161), Carrell et. al. (1995 : 309), Richard Jeanneret and Rod Silzer (1998 : 308), Anderson (1992 : 172) mention that in addition to the usual contents of application form – biographical / personal information, education and training and detailed work history which are related to minimum job requirements the following are included / contained in the biographical information form (bio-data) which form a much broader spectrum of items such as leisure activities, hobbies, social relations, other life experiences, ambition / career plans & preferences and self-concept.

Some companies use weighted Application Blank (WAB). However it is often the weight – or lack of weight-assigned to specific information by particular decision makers that can seriously undermine the usefulness of the application blank. (Bernardin & Russell, 1998 : 140).

Biographical information blanks (BIBs) used by some companies are similar to WAB's except the items of a BIB tend to be more personal and experiential – based on personal background and life experiences. Cascio (1998 : 189) adds that BIB tend to be more personal and experiential – based on personal background and life experiences. Cascio (1998 : 189) adds that BIB covers past behaviour as well as present values, attitudes, interest, opinions and preferences. Although primary emphasis is on past behaviour as a predictor of future behaviour, BIBs frequently rely also on present behaviour to predict future behaviour.

However EEOC guidelines require that the contents of application form are job-related and non-discriminatory. The information on race, colour, national origin, religion, arrest and conviction records and credit rating should not be sought unless they are job related. (Byars & Rue, 1997 : 172; Carrell et. al. 1995 : 309).

Cherrington (1995 : 254) points out that faking represents a serious problem in application blank. Because the applicants want to look good, they may exaggerate their desirable qualities to the point of serious misrepresentation.
The issue of invasion of privacy has been raised by some. (Cherrington, 1995 : 255; Cascio, 1998 : 189). Some respondents may choose not to respond. However such responses are viewed by employers as an attempt to conceal facts that would reflect poorly on an applicant.

The above discussion clearly shows that application form is still one of the essential methods of executive selection. This step/method which comes in the beginning provide useful information to be used in later stages to arrive at a decision. Initially application forms were oriented towards determining the Person-Job fit which was reflected in terms of the questions which were related to biographical information, education, training and job-related experience.

However the form and content of the application form has changed a lot during eighties and nineties when more comprehensive versions of application form the weighted application blank (WAB) and the biographical information blank (BIB) were developed. These contain apart from job-related information leisure-time activities, hobbies, personality and cultural interests, social relations, social activities, other life experiences and self-concept. The inclusion of these items reflect a shift from the traditional person – job fit to person – organisation fit.

Biographical data are well documented as valid predictor of executive success. McCormick & Tiffin (1974 : 89) opine that there is a tendency to place more confidence in application form information which is relatively objective and unambiguous. However the applicants resort to faking because they are conscious about their limitations and do not want to disclose the same. Though application blank is positive it is used for rejection and not selection.

The application blank provides objectives information, however the selectors use the application blank to form a subjective opinion of the candidate. So the selector's mind-frame assumes utmost importance.

**Tests**

The concepts of testing is not new. We can trace testing back to Ancient China where the selection of civil servants was undertaken by written tests. Plato in The Republic called for the testing of the 'Philosopher Rulers' and defined both cognitive abilities and relevant personality characteristics. (Bain & Mabey, 1999 : 106-107).
Francis Galton as far back in 1883 developed a variety of tests of sensory
discrimination to measure intellect of persons. Pencil and paper testing is usually credited
to Binet in France in the year 1905.

Different types of tests viz ability tests, aptitude tests, intelligence tests, interest
tests, achievement tests and personality tests have been used in organisations for
selection of employees.

The applicability of tests for management selection remains an important question.

Experts opine that one difficulty in developing tests for managerial selection is lack
of adequate criterion measures. Managerial jobs are complex and involve less tangible
characteristics of personality and potential. So developing criteria for job proficiency which
is both meaningful and predictable is difficult. (Link, 1928 : 189-190; Ghiselli & Brown,
1948 : 205; Balinsky & Burger, 1959 : 75; Zeidner, 1963 : 14-36; Jaffe, 1971 : 4). Moreover, as very few management positions are there in a given category, no statistical
analysis between test score and job success is feasible. (Doohar & Marting, 1957 : 453).

A psychological test is a standardised measuring instrument but its application is
limited to the type of person and type of situation for which it is prepared. (Shouksmith,
1968 : 2). Tests are criticised for measuring only a part of the total amount of
information to make an accurate selection. Tests take too 'atomistic' a view of human
nature. So tests fail to measure many important characteristics of managerial applicants.
229-238).

Intelligence tests also measure a very restrictive aspect of individual endowments,
but in real-life the judgment has to be made on the whole person. An individuals failure
on the job is not usually lack of intelligence, qualification or interest, but his failure to
stand upto social responsibilities. So intelligence tests are not adequate. (Fraser, 1954 :
56-82).

In case of personality testing, the candidate answers in such away which will place
him in the best light in relation to the job. So he may falsify his answers if it appears
desirable. This issue of faking reduces the efficacy of these tests. (Stone & Kendall,
348; Cherrington, 1995 : 254-255; Greenlaw & Kohl, 1986 : 104, Gomez Mejia et. al.,
29
Apart from this, there is another problem with personality tests. Tests of personality have proved useful in clinical and counselling situation where the person describes his symptoms without reservation. The same attitude can hardly be expected in employment situation. (Stone & Kendall, 1956: 354-355; Maloney, 1961: 78-83; Strauss & Sayles, 1972: 420-435; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997: 30).

Personality tests are not that effective because personality may change over time and with the situation (French, 1978: 256).

Dessler (1997: 169-171) adds that for personality tests such as Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), it is difficult to prove that they are valid.

Another criticism of tests is that they measure what a person can do (ability) factors but not what he will do (motivation) factors. But performance of an executive is a function of intelligence and motivation as well as training and experience.

One of the most important reasons as to why tests are not prevalent in the area of executive selection concerns the issue of applicants' reactions to tests. A number of experts opine that executives have passed professional examinations conducted by appropriate bodies and are doing a good job. So the executives feel that they have already proved themselves and consider tests as objectionable. (Anstey & Mercer, 1956: 6; Maloney, 1961: 78-83; Hinrichs, 1966: 108; Stone, 1982: 193; Miner & Miner, 1985: 314-348; Torrington and Hall, 1987: 233-237; Bratton & Gold, 1994: 160; Cherrington, 1995: 228).

Some applicants point out that testing is a tangible and pervasive symbol of the invasion of privacy. So they resent tests. (Hinrichs, 1966: 106-107).

There are other criticisms of psychological tests. Dunnette (1966: 223) mention that tests assume that person and jobs are static entities and their linkage through selection is only accomplished by cold, mechanical process, giving little need to human values, preferences and aspirations.

Although psychological testing is highly objective the disadvantage is that the selectors cannot personally size-up the candidates/get a clinical picture of the individual. (Bellows & Estep, 1954: 9; Dessler, 1978: 83).
For these reasons, except management trainee positions, tests are not generally used/included in the executive selection process.

**Interview**

Interview is the most widely used selection tool in executive selection. It is either used alone or along with a number of other selection tools.

Researchers have been studying the employment interview for over six decades for two purposes - (1) to determine the reliability (consistency) and validity (accuracy) of the employment decisions based on assessments derived from the interview; and (2) to discover the various psychological factors that influence interviewer judgements. (Cascio, 1989: 203).

Prior to 1964, most research on the interview focussed attention on the problem of whether the interview as a whole is a reliable and valid selection instrument. Although there were some exceptions, in general the findings showed that unstructured interviews generally has poor inter-rater reliabilities and that in almost every case in which satisfactory reliabilities were obtained, the interview was structured.

Even when studies were able to establish high inter-rater reliabilities, however, validities were generally poor. Disenchantment with the reliability - validity questions resulted in research focusing on the decision - making process of the interviewers. (Greenlaw & Kohl, 1986: 105-106)

Studies have identified a number of variables which influence both the reliability and validity of the interview process. The variables identified include - first impressions, visual cues by the interviewee, body language, interviewer stereotype of the ideal candidate, prejudices, contrast effects, the type of information provided (with negative information weighed more heavily than positive), and so forth.

Until recently, the employment interview was considered an unreliable basis for employment decisions. However, research is beginning to indicate that the interview works well when - the interview is structured; interviewing applicants for specific jobs rather than interviewing in the abstract; the interviewers are trained to evaluate behaviour objectively.
On grounds of convenience, flexibility and cost interview has considerable advantages despite doubts on its reliability and validity.

For making an estimate of personality which is crucial for executive effectiveness the interviewer has to rely on his own judgements based on observation.

Hinrichs (1966 : 95) notes that one of the main reasons of the popularity of interview is that it has 'face validity' i.e., the interviewer and the interviewee meet and talk face to face.

Although some insist that interview is a fallible selection instrument, studies have shown that its shortcomings can be overcome and it can produce results. Douglas et. al. (1985 : 225) opine that properly conducted, an interview can disclose information beyond the capability of other techniques.

Earlier some selectors for a variety of reasons used to hesitate to establish a systematic selection programme. They used to select applicants with qualities they desired in others though they had no real relationship to the job needs (Dooher & Marting 1957 : 18-197; Weitz, 1961 : 52). Line and personnel executives often relied on superficial interviews.

Mandell (1961 : 9-64) points out that in many cases interview is conducted to meet a practical need with very little regard for the interview as a measurement or prediction tool.

McCormick & Tiffin (1974 : 85-89) report that one study indicates that a particular interview procedure covers four background areas – work history, education and training, early home background and present social adjustment.

Apart from matching strong abilities and skills interviews started aiming at personality-fit (i.e. matching personality of the applicant with the existing key staff) and value congruence between the applicant and the organisation. (Eder & Ferris, 1989 : 49-222). Famularo (1986 : 6.16 to 14.13) adds that beyond the technical knowledge requirements of the position, the hiring decision is based on communication skill, maturity, leadership adaptability, motivation, work-orientation and judgment.
So the interview process which initially was confined mainly in the parlance of ascertaining person-job fit gradually shifted towards ensuring person – group and person organisation fit. The use of detailed interview with top-management (after one / two screening interviews), depth interviews and behavioural interviews is in tune with the change.

The interview process is subjective in nature. The sources of error reside in the interviewer, the interviewee, in the nature of the interview situation and in the methods used. (Drake, 1946 : 15-39). So the potential sources bias are – background factors, psychological factors and behavioural factors. Bias may result from the four major kinds of interviewer behaviour – (a) errors in asking questions; (b) errors in probing; (c) errors in recording; and (d) errors in motivating the respondent. (Kahn & Cannell, 1957 : 59-192).

Interviewers ask questions to confirm pre-interview impressions about the applicant from the application blank. If the applicant is intimidated by the interviewer’s initial behaviour, the applicant’s performance may suffer in the Interview. (Eder & Ferris, 1989 : 49-222).


Experts have suggested ways and means to overcome these limitations and to make interview effective.
The applicant may also engage in impression management technique which affect interview decision. The applicant in order to convince the interviewer may expose only favourable aspects of his personal qualities. The amount of experience and practice the applicant has received from previous interviews should never be overlooked or ignored. The candidates are remarkably polished because of this exposure. Because of the capacity of self-salesmanship, the interviewers have a tendency to over estimate the applicants' capabilities. This means applicants divulge information that are socially acceptable rather than facts to cover-up job related weaknesses. But such self-promotion tactics can lead to two outcomes. First, it may lead to favourable evaluation, second the interviewer may identify the trick which may adversely affect selector's decision for that applicant (Bellows & Estep, 1954: 9-123; Bassett, 1965: 105-114; Peskin 1971: 26-239; Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 258; Werther & Davis, 1993, 248-251; Ferris et. al. 1990: 123-126).

Shouksmith (1968: 2) points out that one of the difficulties about interviewing is that most people (interviewers) think that they are naturally good at it. As a result, Yoder (1959: 262-263) stresses the importance of careful selection and training of interviewers.

Although research studies are being conducted to make interview more reliable, valid and objective the final decision is essentially subjective reflecting the mind frame of the selectors.

Reference Checks

Reference checks are widely used by organisations for selection of executives. Background investigation or reference check takes place either before or after in-depth interview. (Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 261).

References provide information to the selectors to make selection decisions. (Torrington & Hall, 1987: 244).

Reference checks are used for verification of information provided. This is because information provided in application form or interview may be incorrect. (Cook, 1988: 15-16; Mathis & Jackson, 1985: 261; Burack & Smith, 1982: 174). Research indicates that 20-25 percent of job applicants include at least one major fabrication in their job applications. (Bernardin & Russell, 1988: 141; Cascio, 1989: 187-188). Dessler (1997
identifies two key reasons for conducting pre-employment background investigation, (1) to verify the accuracy of factual information previously provided by the applicant; and (2) to uncover damaging background information. These are likely to predict job-success.

Sikula & McKenna (1984 : 180-181) argue that background investigations rely on the general principle that the best guide to what a person will do in the future is what he has done in the past.

Previous and current employers / superiors and others with appropriate credentials can be references. School and college officials which the applicant had attended or persons familiar with the life or work of the applicant may also act as referees. Previous employers are clearly the most often used source and are in a position to supply objective information. (Torrington & Hall, 1987 : 244; Sikula & McKenna, 1984 : 180-181; Byars & Rue, 1997 : 181; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997 : 28). Reference checking is not necessarily limited to the referees named by the applicant. (Cook, 1988 : 15-16).

The information about the candidate can be collected through reference letters, telephone interviews / enquiry or in-person contacts. (Famularo, 1986 : 13 + 24; Byars & Rue, 1997 : 181; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997 : 28). Many companies have structured reference forms which are sent to the referees for their opinion. Some companies even use telephone reference check form which is filled-up on the basis of information gathered from the referees. However many organisations do not reply unless the questions are put in writing.

Different kinds of information are obtainable from reference checks. Earlier information relating to applicants' background (including educational), previous employment and mainly job related personality were sought. (Bellows & Estep, 1954 : 204; Chruden & Sherman, 1963 : 160)

During eighties and nineties emphasis shifted to personality factors and interpersonal skills apart from job related information. Factual check and character reference comprise the presently used reference form. Factual check involves confirmation of Information provided by the candidate. This includes academic reference, prior work reference (job description, position held, duration of employment, pay, reasons for leaving etc.), and financial reference. Character reference includes opinion about the candidate by previous employer such as strong and weak points about the candidate, personal information, like

The contents of reference form indicates a shift from collection of information for person job fit to person organisation fit.

However the level of relationship of the applicant with the referee affects the nature of information provided about the applicant. Often the applicants mention the names of known persons, friends, professors or superiors who are expected to give favourable reports. As a result personal references have limited value, and in general are not related to job performance. (Yoder & Staudohar, 1982 : 185-186; Burack & Smith, 1982 : 174; Byars & Rue, 1997 : 181; Gomez - Mejia et. al. 1998 : 160).

The information provided about the applicant may not be of much value if the referee is disinterested or if he is not a competent judge of behaviour and work performance. (Torrington & Hall, 1987 : 244; Cascio, 1998 : 187-188). Sometimes the present employer gives satisfactory reference report to get rid of unsatisfactory employees.

Reference check is used frequently since it requires only a little time and money and little amount of effort. (Sikula & McKenna, 1984 : 180-181). However, Handled correctly reference check can be useful. (Dessler, 1997 : 184-185).

Although apparently objective reference checks are subjective in the sense that selector's mind set becomes crucial in utilising information provided to make selection decisions.

**Assessment Centres (AC)**

Assessment centres are used for selecting individuals for higher management positions. The use of assessment centres has grown considerably during the eighties. Assessment centre is a method, not place. It brings together many of the instruments and techniques of managerial selection. As a result assessment centres can be described as multiple method group selection technique. The prospective managers spend several days in assessment centres activites. (Beach, 1985 : 171-172; Brathon & Gold, 1994 : 160; Leap & Crino, 1989 : 261-262; Torrington & Hall, 1987 : 243; Cherrington, 1995).
Developments in the behavioural sciences have encouraged the selectors to look beyond the usual trait approach and seek additional clues to the complex of work relationships. Traditional selection practice is based on perspective that is too narrow. It ignores the expectations and likely reactions of applicants to such variables as organisational rules, physical environment and status. Assessment centres have the advantage of enabling observation of behaviour paralleling that required on the job. Instead of inferring behaviour from test-scores which in many act do not correlate with job performance, the empirical judgment possible in assessment centres can improve selection effectiveness. Assessment centres rely heavily on situational tests in which the applicant is told to assume that he is involved in a specific work task. (Yoder & Staudohar, 1982 : 186-187).

From the studies done to date, overall ratings of potential and performance from assessment centre procedures generally have shown impressive predictive validity especially for managerial jobs. (Cook, 1988 : 246; Ferris et. al. 1990 : 162-177).

Review of different methods of selection have found assessment centres high on reliability and validity, high on fairness, low on applicability and high on cost. Compared with other alternatives for selecting managers assessment centres look promising. So assessment centre has become a commonly used, well regarded approach to managerial selection. (Beaumont, 1993 : 67-70; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1987 : 30).

As assessment centre use has increased, so has the misuse of the logic of assessment centres. Some employers elevate a rather haphazard series of behavioural orientations, paper and pencil tests and interviews to the status of assessment centres.

Sackett et. al. (1990 : 175-176) raises question of generalisability of assessment centres. This caution, he adds should in no way be interpreted as an attempt to discredit assessment centres. Cascio (1998 : 238-242) points out some potential problems on assessment centre. First, the assessment procedures may be applied carelessly or improperly. Second, the assessors have a limited capacity to process information and that, the more complex the judgment task, the more it will be prone to cognitive biases such as contrast effects. Another limitation is related to the extent to which assessors share similar stereotypes of an effective manager.

Assessment centres have high reliability and validity. Besides, AC has high face-validity i.e. it is seen as fair and useful. (Bratton & Gold, 1994 : 160; Gomez-Mejia
et. al. 1998: 170). Nevertheless, the decision made by assessors (i.e. overall evaluation of applicant behaviour by all the assessors on the basis of all observations presented and discussed) essentially remains subjective.

The various methods of executive selection are undergoing change towards more objectivity, reliability and validity. Despite all these selection decision essentially remains a matter of human judgment.