



Selection Processes and High Performance Work Systems – What You Get is Rarely What You Need - Part 1

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Most major change initiatives spend an enormous amount of time, energy and money on designing a rigorous Selection Process. It is almost self-evident that success hinges on getting the right people, with the right skills and the right virtues into the right positions.

Teams of maybe five to eight people work for 40 to 80 hours or more to design the process. In excess of \$200,000 may be spent on creating an analytical skill test that is rigorous enough to set the acceptance bar very high, and is legally defensible. Scores of hours are spent on parsing out ways to evaluate any individual's ability to effectively be a member of a team. Upwards of 12, hourly and salaried highly valued and capable employees, interview perhaps 80 potential applicants. The Human Resource group does a file review for every one of these candidates. Additionally, detailed Accomplishment Records are completed and then reviewed and evaluated by Manufacturing and Human Resources. What is the outcome? The outcome is that it almost never works right.

The goal of a selection process is to deliver a high percentage of the right people with the right skills to the new organization. This is absolutely the right goal. However, what happens in the real world is the design of the process overwhelms the purpose of the process. Somewhere along the way the design becomes the focus rather than candidates delivered. Yet who cares if you have a process that Human Resources thinks is effective, Legal thinks is legally defensible and Labor Relations thinks is palatable, if some high percentage of the right people do not end up in the right positions. If you do not surface the right people then what is the point of all that effort, time and money?



Another failure factor has to do with risk tolerance. The diverse corporate and field groups involved in creating the Selection Process have very different perspectives. Legal believes their role is to minimize or eliminate risk; manufacturing and organizational effectiveness believes that selection processes are an inherent but necessary risk and human resources thinks the team must manage risk. These are very different visions and they are fundamentally in conflict.

Moreover, an unintended consequence of such a selection process is to create deep resentment amongst almost everyone. You end up with haves and have nots. "I" didn't get picked because "I" tell it like it is and "they" don't want to hear it. "They" picked "him" because "he" is a suck up. This resentment is often not localized to the impacted department. It can and does spread across the entire facility. You end up with the chosen few and everyone else is not good enough, except you cannot run your facility without the larger disaffected group. Often you cannot make the transition work because it is the have nots whom will be running the existing equipment while you transition to the new.



A composite picture from multiple experiences in large, 1100 plus employee manufacturing facilities paint the following picture. This composite used Selection Processes similar to what has been described above. One or two percent of candidates were eliminated because of the interview process, one to three people as a result of the records review and one or two candidates as a result of the analytical skills test. Is this the outcome you want for your initiative? Is this a valuable expenditure of time, energy and money? Is a 3% to 9% deselection rate what you want?



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A results-oriented organizational effectiveness practitioner, with over 35 years of hands on experience in designing and implementing sustainable work system/cultural change initiatives. Intellectually knowledgeable enough to know what might work. Experienced enough to know what will work. Have coached and mentored leadership, from Front Line Supervisors to Superintendents to VPs. Have a real knack for quickly establishing, strong trust-based relationships.

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