

Informal Conversations: A Short Case Study

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Introduction

This paper contains a 'real' story of how one firm selects people based on their fit. It comes from a large database of recruitment and selection stories, fifty of which I have published in a book entitled *Experiencing Recruitment and Selection* (Billsberry, 2007). The stories in this book came from students taking certificate in management courses at the Open University. They are the students' best recollection of events as they looked back on them.

The story in this paper was told by Jenny (pseudonym). It relates her own recruitment experience as she applied to work in a provisional hospital after training in London. It is interesting as a counterpoint to Philip's story in a previous case study. Just like in Omega, Jenny was given the opportunity to talk to staff informally when she came for an interview.

Jenny's Story

I attended an interview at a large regional hospital for a place on its registered midwife training course for nurses who had already completed their Registered General Nursing training. I had completed my training in London and decided that I wanted to specialise in midwifery. I had family living nearby and knew the city was a good place to live. It was a big decision to leave London, but I felt it was the right time to go.

Before the interview I was sent a comprehensive pack of information, including directions to the hospital and some details about the midwifery school and the course. On arrival at the hospital I was shown to a waiting room with the four other candidates who were to be interviewed that day. They were all local women who had done their nurse training locally. They were surprised to learn that I was from London and couldn't understand why I wanted to live in the provinces.

We had access to refreshments and toilet facilities before we were taken for a tour of the obstetrics and midwifery department. We saw all the facilities and had a chance to speak to both qualified midwives and some that were still under training. On this tour I met a student midwife who had trained at the same hospital as me. She took me to one side and told me that I should not do my training at the hospital. She said, 'I hate it here. They hate the fact I'm from "Big London" and every time I make a suggestion or show some initiative they tell me not to show off my "fancy London ways". Don't come here, you'll hate it.'

Discussion

Whereas Philip's story demonstrated how one big happy family built social capital through their personal interactions, Jenny's story suggests that this does not always

happen. During her walk around a large public-sector hospital she inevitably bumped into some disaffected staff. 'Don't come here, you'll hate it.' As I read this, I found myself bracketing this encounter with Philip's story of Omega. Do selection panels know what employees say to applicants? Do selection panels manage what employees say to applicants? Do selectors choose which employees they invite applicants to speak to? The inbreeding that Omega's recruitment and selection policy has produced probably means that Philip has few concerns about what people will say. The selectors in the regional hospital may have mixed feelings. They will be pleased that an applicant was able to discover that she would probably not be happy working there, but concerned that good applicants are being scared off.

This is the double-edged sword of effective recruiting for fit. It opens up the possibility that excellent candidates who satisfy all the KSAOs discover, rightly or wrongly, that they will not fit in. It is quite frustrating for companies to find good people only to have them reject job offers because the panel has given them opportunities to find out more about the organisation than they otherwise would have done. This might be the right thing to do, but it comes at a cost and it is better than taking someone on only to find out a little later that they are a poor fit.