

Recruitment and Selection as a Tool for Strategic Management of Organizations – El Corte Ingles Case Study

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to acknowledge how can recruitment process & selection be used as a strategic partner in the management of current organizations.

Having as a reference an international prestigious organization recognized, El Corte Ingles, this case study will go from an analysis of the state of the art of this topic, trying to understand how to find different and innovative ways to use, whether recruitment or selection techniques, to leverage the management of intangible assets and get competitive advantage towards the various players in the market, moving on for a qualitative analysis of the case in study and the ways in which this organization uses the process of recruitment and selection, continuously, as an essential tool to achieve the organizational goals.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Human Resources Management, R&S.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the change in the economic paradigm that has occurred at the end of the 20th century, together with the exponential technological evolution and the great boom of globalization, organizations came to encounter new problems. One of them was they started being evaluated both by tangible factors and also by those that are not, such as the knowledge held by their human capital, the ability to innovate and the speed of adaptation and response to changes in the markets where they operate.

The axis of wealth is decisively shifting from the classic factors of production: land, work, capital for an emerging factor: knowledge, and with it the new essential variables have changed. Thus, people, time and value creation have become the central variables for organizational life.

The relative stability that markets lived up to now, with long product life cycles and more or less balanced competitiveness, became obsolete. The characteristics that started to define the markets were disorder, turbulence and constant change. In the face of this new competitive scenario it became essential for organizations to adopt new ways of dealing with daily problems.

In the *Age of Knowledge* (Drucker, 2003), the search for the competitive advantage that allows a sustainability organization over time has become a constant in the organizational day-to-day. The

intangibles, which have historically been treated as residual values that do not have representativeness, either in the financial system of companies or in the impact of national wealth, become step-by-step, decisive factors and through which the value of companies is measured. For this matter, it is extremely important for companies to leverage their human resources. They are, after all, the knowledge holders that are part of the DNA of each organization, which, in a way, constitutes its identity, which differentiates it from the others.

In this scenario, strategic planning begins to gain new outlines, calling to the core of their concerns the fact that "... to bring into the organization, or to operationalize within it, responses that allow the organization to have the right people to cope with the strategic needs of the business, both in short and medium-long-term" (Qasemi, 2017).

With this aim, strategic management begins to look for new tools that enable the organizations the empowerment of their employees, and to use HR policies in a different way, looking for them to achieve value creation that feeds the competitiveness needed for survival.

It is important to analyse and reflect on cases where these tools are used as an innovation factor by reference organizations in the field of people's management policies. In this study it is intended to understand how Recruitment & Selection is being used in Corte Ingles as a tool of strategic management, helping, in a constant cycle, to keep available the people who allow them to respond either to strategic needs or to the more operational ones, keeping their

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human resources at a level of relative stability that enables them to develop value-added work for the company and, in turn, to the market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Strategic Management and Strategic Planning

1. Brief Historical Approach to Concepts

It is relevant, first of all, to address the concepts of strategic management and planning, which are the base of this work: management has two aspects: current and strategic, the current being the one that allows the business to be able to run the business and the strategic one that puts the company in "conditions of labouring" (Ansoff, McDonnell, & Ansoff, 1988). The managers, in the exercise of their functions, take two basic types of decisions: routine and non-routine. The first type concerns repetitive, programmed and structured decisions of operational management, while the latter relates to unscheduled, unstructured decisions and, which respond, most of the times, to unusual problems in the organization. These are, therefore, typical of a higher level management, and it is where the strategic decisions, which are interdependent and have a global impact on the company, are taken.

The word Strategy has its origin in the Greek-language "strategia" which means "command or craft of a general. This etymology takes us to the military roots of the strategy and to the fact that it is intimately related to the "true art of making war" (Sunzi & Giles, 2006) and through time it has been gaining a comprehensive and broaden sense on diverse areas: military, political, economic, etc., not having, in any case, lost its intrinsic meaning – plans, methods (or manoeuvres) for the reaching of a given goal (or outcome).

Since it has become an intrinsic subject of the world of business in mid-20th century XX, it is possible to observe, over time, that the methodologies of strategic approach followed the organizational paradigm and, through its change, were adapting and evolving. The development of the field of strategic management was, effectively, outlined in many stories in recent years (Thomas, Wilson, and Leeds, 2013). Therefore, it can be observed that to every theory prevalent in a certain phase of the evolution of the studies in strategy, corresponding variations in the levels of analysis and the methods of research were seen. For this development it has contributed, in a decisive way, the appearance of one of the most important management schools, the Harvard Business School, in the USA. It promoted a

debate on the issues of management, which inevitably led to strategic reflections, although the word itself was not even part of the lexicon used in the context area.

It is certain that it was the 60's that marked the boom of that concept with the confront of the two major schools of the Strategy at those times: Harvard and Carnegie. This was a rich period for the subject, for this confrontation has originated a constant fervent of ideas of which resulted a continuous enrichment to this area, as well as the emergence of tools that, to this day, have become unavoidable to Strategic Management, as is the case of the so-known SWOT¹ matrix, that allows you to cross the weak and strong points of a company with the threats and opportunities of its surroundings, materializing in this way, the company's relations with the external context, giving emphasis to this relational binomial par excellence, which is the basis of SM². This classical matrix has not yet become obsolete and has previously undergone adaptations that allow it to be equally important in the analysis of the current markets, marked, as we know, by features so specific and different from those of the time when SWOT was created. The new matrix has come to consider one of the most important variables in the current market: the time, which was not considered before. The quadrant "Threats" was discarded as an isolated issue, allowing them to be seen in the prism of opportunities. This new form of matrix translates, in a manner, the new way of thinking and acting in the turbulence of our days, in which the strategic process has to be essentially dynamic, since this is the only valid way to adapt the constant changes that mark and define the extreme competitiveness of arenas where organizations are struggling. Therefore, a static photo like SWOT should be used in a dynamic way.

Obviously, there are, among so many striking authors of this area, a name that is imposed, Igor Ansoff³. Considered the "Father" of strategic planning recommends, in his work⁴, the elaboration of a formal plan that displays the systematic structuring of the strategic decision, in a perspective of planned design. Ansoff is responsible for one of the most used tools in the strategic decision, the *Products-Markets*⁵ matrix which is a model that helps to determine growth strategies for an organization (company or business unit).

¹Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, i.e.,

²Strategic Management.

³Carnegie School.

⁴Corporate Strategy (1965).

⁵Or Ansoff Matrix.

Ansoff was also the protagonist of one of the best known "wars" of ideas in the area of management opposing Mintzberg, author of the work *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, where the latter harshly criticizes strategic planning. Ansoff, as one would expect, did not like this "attack" and responded through specialty publications. This dispute has enriched, for a long time, the field of SM, because the confrontation of ideas, at this level, is the lever of reflection and creation of knowledge.

Another of the inescapable authors of this area is undoubtedly Michael Porter, who launched, in the 80s, his work on competitive strategies that became references to SM. Porter, the man of competitive advantage, is responsible for another of the most important tools for strategic analysis: The model of the five forces of Porter, published in the form of the article "The five competitive forces that shape the strategy" in 1979, in Harvard Business Review.

Not being this an historical work, it would be impossible, (nor is it the intention) to tell "the history of the strategy" in depth. However, for a better understanding of the concept, they refer subsequently, in a synthetic way, different ways to see SM through the "eyes" of some of its most emblematic authors:

Andrews, Christensen, Bower, Hamermesh and Porter (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2009) refer to the strategy as: "The union between qualifications and opportunities that places a company in its environment".

Ansoff (1965), on the other hand, defines the strategy in a more technical way, as being: "The business in which we are; The trends that occur; First-order heuristic decisions; Competitive niche; and portfolio features".

For Schumpeter (quoted in Mintzberg *et al.*, 2000) and Drucker (1980), the strategy is perceived "as new combinations that aim to explore new and different opportunities in the future". Here, the innovation factor, strongly defended by Drucker and Schumpeter (considered the prophet of innovation) arises as the only sustained form of creating wealth over time.

As for Porter (1996) and Mintzberg *et al.* (2000), the strategy "is the choice of a unique and valuable position based on systems of activities that are difficult to copy and add value".

Beyond the definitions, we can say that if one of the most important roles of the manager is to decide (and

also one of the most difficult giving that deciding is ultimately to face the consequences of that decision), then to increase the possibility of a better decision it's necessary to analyse all elements. This analysis enables us to properly, and profoundly, diagnose the company in terms of competencies (resources) and critical success factors, and for this purpose, SM's tools are decisive. Analysing is needed to gain sustained and competitive advantage over time. Nowadays, that is not possible to be achieved without the continuous innovation factor, which is intimately dependent on knowledge, the production factor of the 21st century. SM and SP⁶ haven't lost importance, on the contrary, they have just changed their approach, making the process more dynamic, more intuitive and more interactive.

All steps of the SP, (analysis-formulation-implementation) are in constant interdependence, retrofeeding themselves and happening simultaneously, and not, sequentially, as seen before. Only then we can respond to the current competitive paradigm.

Under the current framework, with innovation and knowledge as central to the business strategy, SM becomes more important to people (as they are the knowledgeable ones) and the search for new tools linked to the management of people emerges as essential to the area of strategy.

2. People and their Role in the Organization

Nowadays, people are seen as one of the strategic resources for the sustainability of organizations, they are the true source of competitive advantages because of their value, their rarity, their inimitable and unreplaceable qualities (Davel *et al.*, 2010), in an increasingly less predictable organisational environment, both from the external and internal points of view, human resources are one of the main guarantees of adaptability to change, flexibility of creativity and innovation, which contributes directly to the company's competitive capacity, as stated by Ulrich (1998). The traditional competitiveness factors can, sooner or later, be copied, remaining people as the only inimitable key factor.

Lacombe and Heilborn (2003) define the management of resources as the set of efforts that have as goals planning, organizing, directing,

⁶Strategic Planning

coordinating and controlling the activities of a group of individuals, which are associated in order to achieve common results. People management is a way to apply the basic principles of management to human resources, because they are the ones that define and lead the existence of any organization.

Being people one of the most important resources of the organization, without the right individuals in the appropriate places it will be very difficult to make the organizational strategy result without a human resources strategy aligned with the business objectives, even in other functional areas. Thus, the strategic HR management assumes a very important role for the organization, since it is the role of defining the strategic vision of the company's human resources in order to develop the HR activities to support the organization's strategy.

The Strategic Approach to human resource management enables the consistent use of modern tools to manage human resources in a company. This allows companies to achieve close integration of different human resource management systems and increase their effectiveness (Smolarek & Deziendziora, 2017).

The main objective of the HR strategic management is to ensure that the people of the organization are prepared to make their contribution to achieve the aims of the business, being, for this, a thorough work on the level of analysis of the places of work, design and description of functions, recruitment and selection, remuneration policy, training management, talent retention performance management, and even management of the organization's outflow of people.

a. Strategic HR Planning

The concept of Strategic Planning of Human Resources (SPHR) emerged at the beginning of the 80s, with two approaches at the time: *the Michigan Concept*, developed by Tichy and its collaborators and the Harvard concept. The first defines the strategic planning of human resources such as the linkage of the mission, strategy and structure of the organization with human resources, consisting its role in developing four factors: selection, evaluation, remuneration and development. On the other hand, the second approach attributed greater emphasis to the role of human resources as active participants in the definition of the organization's strategy, and four key areas were defended for the determination of human resource policies: degree of contributor's influence

(participation); the HR flow (recruitment, use and dismissal); the rewards system; and work systems (work organization).

As the role of people in the organization was gaining prominence, the strategic planning of human resources was also seen with greater attention from organizations, Anthony, Perrewé and Kacmar (1996) indicated that, in the 90s, the HR strategy, in addition to recognizing the impacts of the environment, also began to have a long-term focus on the choice and decision-making process, considering all the individuals of the company and not just the operational ones, being aligned with the corporate strategy. Fisher (1998) also points out that HR management began to assume a new meaning at that time: the management of people as a competitive advantage, with the prospect of companies increasingly focused on the business, that the role of people for the obtaining competitiveness gains prominence. If the strategy is differentiation and obtaining competitive advantage, it is up to HR management to ensure that people are also a source of competitive advantage, and it is up to HR management to transmit strategies to people and transform them into competitive agents. Ulrich (1998) defines four main functions in the area of human resources: the strategic, the competitive, the one of promoting and assisting the processes of change and the function responsible for the involvement of employees with the company.

Cunha *et al.* (2012) states that the processes of strategic planning of human resources include: the determination of HR needs (HR planning); the attraction of potential new members (recruitment); choice and hiring (selection); training in relation to working procedures and the development of future competences (training and development; career management); the evaluation of its operations (performance evaluation); retribution and motivation (compensation) and the creation of a positive work environment."

Currently, HR strategic planning focuses, according to Qasemi (2017), on anticipating the future and bringing to the organization, or to operationalize within it, responses that allow the organization to have the right people to meet the strategic business needs, either in short or medium/long term.

Although the strategic planning of human resources is different from organization to organization, Watkins (2013) defends the existence of six important steps for the development of a human resources strategy (Figure



Figure 1: Emotional and Relational Skills.

1): to identify the strategic direction, to design the human resources management system adjusted to the strategy, to plan the necessary workforce, to have the required human resources, to invest in the development and performance of these human resources, and ultimately, to evaluate the organizational performance.

According to Sousa *et al.* (2015), a well-defined and applied Human Resource Management Practice plays a decisive role in the well-being of the organization. The reflection of this will not only be to attract and retain people with the proper skills that best fit the organization and its goals, but also strengthens the behaviours of individuals and of groups that flow in the strategic alignment of the organization. Thus, stands out as relevant the fact that the attraction of people to the organization - recruitment - emerges from the beginnings of the definition of strategic HR planning in prominence. Therefore, it seemed pertinent to us, to deepen how human resource management really matters to this process and how it operationalizes to be strategic for the organization.

b. R&S as a Strategic HR Planning Tool

It is essential to give importance to the recruitment process, as a means of identification of talents and the selection as a process by which the same is chosen. The first condition to attract talents will be to identify the appropriate, and needed, profile and skills to the function and business. This way, the best candidates should also be in unison with the mission, vision and values of the organization where they want to work and prosper. According to Silva and Reis (2014), the strategy for human resources must go through

obtaining, maintaining and training workers to ensure the appropriate skills for the scope of the organizational objectives.

The preparation and development of recruitment and selection processes has been gaining complexity. As Pereira *et al.* (2015) states, it is not enough to just announce the vacancy, receive resumes and candidates and apply the legal and administrative procedures. It is imperative to plan the profile, to decide the required quantity of employees, the desired behaviour, the deadlines for hiring, the financial and material resources and, mainly, to clearly establish the line of ascension of these people within the organization.

According to Almeida (2009) a process of recruitment and selection is not inflexible and can be changed based on the need and strategy of the organization. Thus, the process goes through different stages (recruitment; assessment; screening; the candidates' list) until the final decision and subsequent contracting. These stages seem important to deepen each of the practices

III. METHODOLOGY AND REFERENCE FRAME

A. Description

In order to understand the articulation of the R&S process currently made by reference organizations, as the utmost input for Strategic RH Planning, advocated by Qasemi in 2017, El Corte Ingles has been chosen as a reference framework, where a qualitative study will be carried out on this subject, through the conception, application and further critical analysis of an interview

with its Human Resources Manager, as well as a collection of various information and its qualitative analysis held on the staff of the HR department, in this particular case those that are allocated to R&S.

B. Characterisation of the Organization

In 1934, the founder, Ramón Areces, bought a tailoring, located in one of the most central streets of Madrid, Calle Preciados, and opened a limited liability company. In 1940 the company's capital was opened. After Areces' death, his nephew Isidoro Álvarez was named successor and quickly became one of the most influential Spanish businessmen. In 1995 El Corte Ingles bought his only serious rival, the Preciados Galerías, which were in bankruptcy.

The international expansion of the group began in 2001 in Portugal, with the opening of a large warehouse in Lisbon, followed in 2006 by the opening of another unit in Vila Nova de Gaia-Porto. The group is not limited to department stores, but is comprised of several companies, such as Viajes El Corte Ingles (tourism Agency), Hipercor (hypermarkets), Opencor (convenience store), Supercor (supermarkets), Informatica El Corte Ingles, Sfera, among others.

The ECI business model allows you to offer a wide range of products and services of different nature. In each area they seek the best, trying to satisfy all kinds of customers.

They also seek to ensure the quality and safety of the products they commercialize through quality controls and laboratory analysis. In 2015, approximately 306,000 laboratory tests were carried out in food products, in fashion articles, in manufactured items, among others.

They operate to increase the catalogue of sustainable products in all categories of articles (food, cosmetics, textiles, household appliances, etc.). They have a wide range of ecological products, fair trade, and others tailored to specific tastes and needs. They continuously increase the number of products with certificates that guarantee their sustainable provenance (fishing, paper, wood, etc.), offering differentiated and innovative services.

Their history of over 75 years has contributed to the recognition of the ECI business model, which extended to all areas of activity, based on innovation and constant adaptation to the new needs and demands of society. From El Corte Ingles, a large agile and dynamic

warehouse model, to travel agencies, insurance business, supermarkets or the DIY chain, all businesses move under the same innovative and excellent parameters. They innovate in the product, in the service, in the development of computer tools, in the logistic processes, in the management systems... This vocation has led them to be pioneers in numerous areas of activity and to introduce innovative concepts in the field of trade. As a responsible company, they maintain a constant concern for the environment that leads to a permanent improvement of those impacts related to commercial activities. In this sense, the main efforts are related to the consumption of materials, energy and water, as well as those aspects related to the control of greenhouse gas emissions and the management of waste.

The mission and values of this organization, although not expressed institutionally by words, are underlying in the five principles that regulate its commitment with the clients (Figure 2):



Figure 2: Organization Mission and Values.

- Quality - In all areas of action, they, essentially seek excellence in facilities, services and products;
- Warranty - Security and confidence is offered;
- Service – El Corte Ingles's vocation for customer service leads them, not only to sell products, but to offer their customers more than 50 different services;
- Assortment - The customer can choose, in a wide range, the products that best suits their tastes, needs and economic possibilities;

- Specialization- It is the complement of the assortment. Each of its departments is a specialized store;

C. Critical Analysis of Results

Through the qualitative analysis software NVivo a frequency and tangible weight of words analysis was performed, under the interview made to the HR Manager of the case- study company. Through the results, we can easily highlight some interesting aspects such as the fact that the interviewee used the word "our" quite frequently. The same was observed with the word "we", but it was removed from this research because a "Minimum length of 4 letters" filter was used. This fact points to a well- present team spirit, and the answers were all given on behalf of the organization, and on the policies followed by it.

Another of the words that marked our word "cloud", resultant from NVivo analysis was "people" which draws attention because the questions were always made using the designation "human resources" but in the answers, it was clear that people are the main concern of this organization, and that they are not only perceived as mere resources. This accompanies everything that is state of the art in human resources management and reinforces the fact that the HRM has begun to be seen in recent years as a strategic partner called strategic decisions.

Another of the facts that draws attention in the analysis of the interview is the use, more than once, of the Hammel and Prahalad's (1989) concept "Strategic

Intent", which is here related to the operationalization part of this strategy. It was noticed that they use the R&S processes as a means of continually guaranteeing that this intention is transformed into an initiative through the appropriate people. We cannot fail to relate this position with the fact that recent studies reveal that it is the "Strategic Initiative" the unit to which we must refer to the origins of profitable growth (Mauborgne and Kim, 2016). It is this kind of initiative that can lead organizations farther away, and in this case, for El Corte Ingles the strategic initiative is based on the continuous demand of people who ensure the diversity of skills and knowledge of the team, for the pursuit of organizational objectives. It is important to take into account that 3,300 people currently work for this organization, in Portugal.

After gathering all the information from the HR department it was possible to realize that the process of R & S goes through several different stages: data input in Meta 4 (the used software), scheduling phone and email interviews; market prospection; document file; group dynamics, (first phase of the selection process); choice of candidates to go to the next stage. These steps are continuously sequential, systematic and made with human resources only allocated to this process.

Each organization has, obviously, its own culture which translates into different uses of management tools, whether strategic or current. However, and for the success held by the company under study, it seems worthy of a reflection on this specific use of R&S.

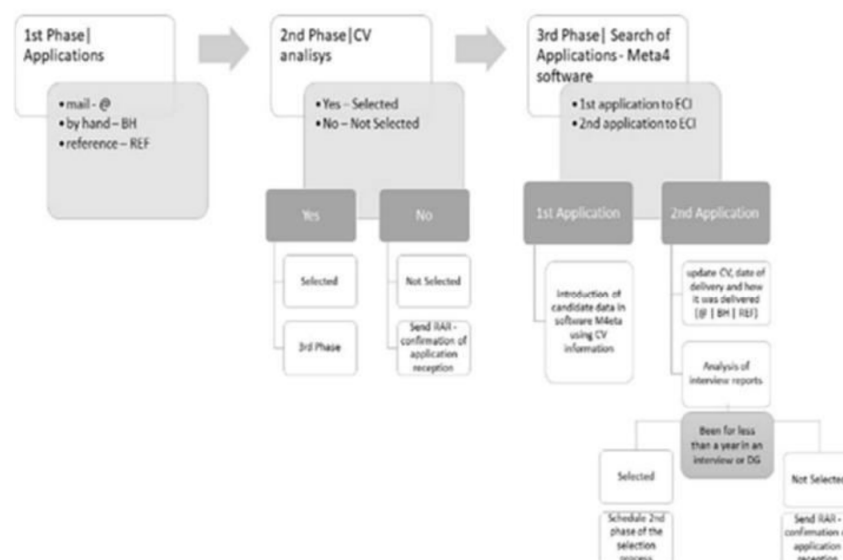


Figure 3: El Corte Ingles R&S process.

Thus, based on the analysis of the materials and the collection of the information, it was attempted to systematize the process and to gather its various phases, creating a flowchart that explicates, in a functional way, how this continuous process of R&S is carried out, here presented:

(It is relevant to point out that the *software* mentioned in this flowchart is the one of the current case-study. It can be replaced by any other considered suitable to any other organization's context)

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Looking to the presented flowchart at the light of Watkins (2013) model, we can conclude that El Corte Ingles HR department considering and saving digitally its applicants information after each interview is building up an organizational memory that can be easily used in subsequent HR processes, aligned with strategic management and organization goals, in a faster and efficiently way, so that planning its workforce (one of the main steps referred by the author to develop a HR strategy) is really effective.

This kind of R&S process is strongly based in well-defined IT support and can be seen as an innovative tool for HR management as a true partner of top management.

Throughout this study we could perceive that the SPRH in the El Corte Ingles translates the current perspective of some authors who refer that this essentially consists in the search to bring to the organization responses that allow to have the right people to implement the strategic business decisions, both in the short and in the medium/long term. In this sense, this organization has perfected a continuous R&S system that has become a strategic tool to operationalize its vision of the future.

For many companies, this can be an example to be followed, adapted to each reality, but based on the creation of an instrument of this type (a systematic process) that allows a rapid and consistent response to the mobility and turbulence that characterizes the current markets.

We reiterate the premise that HRM has increasingly being called to the "decision table by the BM. This means that HRM must be present in the design of the strategy since its beginning for it will have a real possibility of being properly implemented through the

design of a human resource management system correctly adapted to the organizational strategy.

Being the strategic part of the management that puts the company in a position to execute we can say that the SPHR, in the present case for the differentiated use of the R&S system, but in a general way with innovative ways to use the HR subsystems, is the one that can best give these conditions to the organization, since they are the ones that ultimately execute the strategy.

The present case study had several obstacles, namely the timeframe. Therefore, only some conclusions were possible to be drawn. Thus, it would be interesting to be able to broaden this type of study to other organizations that stand out by the use of differentiators' processes in its PERH, to try to reach a consensus, or at least raise a serious reflection, centred on this subject, in a somewhat central way to the management of organizations in the current days.

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