Understanding Lifeguard Recruitment and Selection Practices in Victorian Aquatic and Recreation Centers (ARCs)

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Abstract

Extensive research has focused on human resource management (HRM) and recruitment and selection practices across different settings. However, there is a gap in the scholarly literature in ARC settings, including lifeguards. Additionally, the aquatics industry is experiencing unprecedented levels of lifeguard turnover within aquatic facilities. The recruitment and selection process can impact employee turnover. Therefore, an important first step to address lifeguard turnover is to better understand the current recruitment and selection practices of lifeguards. This study focuses on the recruitment and selection practices of ARC management to better understand the recruitment and selection of lifeguards. The analysis is based on 16 semi-structured interviews with ARC managers involved in lifeguard recruitment and selection. Participants included center managers, assistant center managers, and operations managers/coordinators. A deductive analysis was able to effectively explain the current recruitment and selection practices for recruiting lifeguards in Victorian ARCs.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Recruitment, Aquatic and Recreation Centers, Lifeguards

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is considered a crucial factor within sports and recreation organizations (Hoye et al., 2018; Weerakoon, 2016). An essential step in HRM is the recruitment and selection process. Recruitment is an all-encompassing term referring to the activities and processes undertaken by an organization to generate a suitably qualified pool of candidates. Studies across several industries have determined that effective HRM, including the recruitment and selection processes, can positively impact the overall performance of an organization including reducing employee turnover (Bawa & Jantan, 2005; Saengchai et al., 2019).

Currently, there is a gap in the scholarly literature in HRM and recruitment for Aquatic and Recreation Center (ARC) settings, including for lifeguards. Furthermore, there is a shortage of lifeguards within the aquatics industry (Kang-chung, 2018; Leisure Institute of WA Aquatics Inc. & Royal Life Saving Western Australia, 2020; Oud, 2019; Porteous, 2015), which is experiencing unprecedented levels of employee turnover amongst lifeguards.

The first important step to better understand these concepts and issues is to identify and explain the recruitment and selection practices of lifeguards. As previously stated, very little literature exists about HRM and recruitment in ARCs. As a result, it was necessary to draw upon contemporary HRM literature to understand current lifeguard recruitment practices.

Background

Human Resource Management Recruitment & Selection

Management is a multifaceted process described as a technique of influencing resources, including employees, finances, and equipment, to achieve organizational goals and objectives by understanding the values, vision, and mission of an organization (Mull et al., 2009). Although leisure management and the management of ARCs is unique (Zimmermann & Tower, 2017), basic management principles still apply.

HRM is usually an essential ingredient for organizational success (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018). Enticing, developing, and retaining capable employees can provide an organization with the resources it needs to thrive and grow, and ultimately gain a competitive advantage (Taylor et al., 2015).

Effective HRM is the strategic and coherent approach to the management of employees, an organization's most valued asset. Managing employees within an ARC involves planning, organizing, directing and controlling tasks to meet the goals of the organization, all while working towards a particular vision (Schwarz et al., 2019). An essential step in HRM is the recruitment and selection process. Recruitment and selection involve identifying, attracting and choosing appropriate people who meet an organization's human resource requirements (Weerakoon, 2016).

Recruitment generally occurs because "either a new position has been created or an individual has left a position due to termination, temporary leave, or a job change" (Schwarz et al., 2019, p. 126). Recruitment offers an organization the opportunity to choose the type of candidates it employs, including changing the kind of person they want in the role. Figure 1 identifies the eight steps in the recruitment and selection process (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015) that were used to guide this study.

Figure 1

HRM Recruitment & Selection Process

The Recruitment Process							
Forecasting	Job Analysis	Job Description	Job Specification	Employer Branding & Promotion	Recruitment Methods	Shortlisting	Selection Techniques

(Adapted from Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015)

Forecasting

The first stage of recruitment and selection requires extensive HR planning and adequate forecasting (Hassan, 2010; Llego, 2015). Forecasting involves estimating the size and composition of the workforce required to meet an

organization's objectives. Effective forecasting will identify several key concepts, including predictability and capacity to accommodate staff turnover; the suitability of paid, full-time, part-time, casual and volunteer staff to their roles; annual or cyclical fluctuations in staffing that need to be managed; and specific competencies required in the future that the organization currently lacks (Taylor et al., 2015).

Job Analysis

Identification of the ideal composition of the future workforce is followed by job analysis, the second step in the recruitment process. Job analysis is the specification of the tasks to be performed and the knowledge, skills and abilities required for the effective performance of a role (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018). It requires an understanding of the current organizational structure and context, including "the work activities that need to be accomplished and the knowledge and informational content present within the organization" (Schwarz et al., 2019, p. 125).

Best practice recruitment requires a comprehensive job analysis (Wyatt et al., 2010). Managers must effectively analyze and classify work tasks before recruiting employees, to ensure that they know exactly what is needed or expected from an employee (Hung et al., 2016; Wyatt et al., 2010). An effective component of job analysis includes employee consultation. Information sharing among employees and employers has been found to improve competitive advantage (Sheehan, 2014). Employers start developing a job description once data has been gathered through a job analysis (Smith, 2015).

Job Description

A job description generally includes a job title, reporting structures, a summary of roles and responsibilities, the level of decision-making permitted, and recruitment requirements (Arnold et al., 2012; Bill, 2009; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018). Job descriptions used in recruitment are designed to gain the attention of and attract candidates (Pavur, 2010). The job description presents the opportunity to potential candidates in an appealing manner, thus underpinning the formulation of the job advertisement. In combination, the job description and job specification communicate expectations about performance and provide an outline of the kind of person required to do the job (Bill, 2009).

Job Specification

Job specification outlines the human qualities needed to carry out a role (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018). A job specification statement includes the set of key criteria including knowledge, skills and attributes (KSAs), as well as the experience a person must possess to perform a particular job (Arnold et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2015). Key criteria are most often categorized into two groups: essential and desirable. Essential criteria are the minimum requirements to perform the role, without which the candidate would be unable

to carry out the job (Bill, 2009). Desirable criteria are those that enhance a candidate's capacity to perform in a role.

Employer Branding & Promotion

Employer branding and promotion is the process of creating measures of difference (Franca & Pahor, 2012) and packaging of functional, economic and psychological benefits for the employee, to make employment in the organization attractive (Sengupta et al., 2015). This differentiation is based on an organization's capacity to understand its current context and conditions by specifying the organization's purpose and direction to be able to promote the organization's reputation (Innes & Wiesner, 2012; Kaliannan et al., 2016).

Recruitment Methods

Organizations may seek to recruit new employees either internally or externally, as well as through e-recruitment via web technologies or by using a combination of all these methods (Arnold et al., 2012; O'Meara & Petzall, 2013). Internal recruitment involves the development of an internal labor market within the organization (O'Meara & Petzall, 2013). External recruitment methods include traditional approaches such as hard copy and online advertisements in newspapers or trade journals, the use of public employment agencies, the offer of internships, and the recruitment of graduates direct from universities (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015; Weerakoon, 2016). E-recruitment must be integrated into the whole recruitment process (Kim & O'Connor, 2009) and may be as simple as posting the position online, or be more involved, requiring candidates to apply online, submit references, and complete online tests (Arnold et al., 2012).

Shortlisting

Once applications have been received, it is necessary to begin the shortlisting process, during which a group of applications is reduced to a manageable number of candidates who are likely to be successful at the selection stage. Shortlisting is the process of reviewing the applications to determine those which meet the essential and desirable requirements (Thomson et al., 2015). A careful review of each application, assessing it against the essential and desirable characteristics identified in the job specification, is required when shortlisting. Only those who meet the essential requirements listed in the job specification will be shortlisted, and those who also meet the desired characteristics will be prioritized over others (Thomson et al., 2015).

Selection Techniques

Several selection techniques are available to organizations to assess shortlisted candidates (Taylor et al., 2015). The most common selection approach is the employment interview (group or one-on-one interviews), but others include telephone pre-interviews, work sample assessments, and reference checks. Organizations need to screen and select the most appropriate candidates and

ultimately convince those selected to the accept the job offer (Nikolaou & Oostrom, 2015).

Employee Turnover Issues
While the loss of established employees through employee turnover is costly, new staff appointments who leave shortly after being recruited create substantial financial strains, given the often-expensive process of recruitment, selection, and training (Griffeth & Hom, 2001). Recruitment and selection practices can affect employee turnover (Lee et al., 2018).

A realistic job preview (RJP) can be used to shape candidates' expectations of the position to better match the reality of the job. RJP "was created as a substitute for seduction method of recruiting in which candidates were only told positive information… this was done to maximize the attractiveness of the position at the expense of decreased accuracy of the actual duties and/or work environment" (Baur et al., 2014, p. 201).

The primary goal of RJP is to reduce unnecessary costs incurred by recruiting ill-informed candidates who voluntarily leave the organization when the reality of the job is not as they expected (Susanto & Hartika, 2016). RJP can be implemented in various ways throughout the recruitment process including in the job description, during a work sample assessment, or following recruitment interviews (e.g., group interviews) (Susanto & Hartika, 2016).

Work sample assessments are hands-on performance tests in which a job applicant is required to complete a job-specific task under conditions similar to those required on the job (Callinan & Robertson, 2000). They offer benefits beyond the usual scope of assessing a potential candidate's knowledge, skills and abilities by providing candidates an RJP through which they can glimpse the organization's culture and value system (Susanto & Hartika, 2016). The use of work sample assessments is considered an effective method for assessing multiple competencies as they are widely accepted within organizations and tend to leave a positive impression on candidates. Implementing such practical performance tests helps to provide the candidate with a realistic and positive impression of the organization and increases the chance of the candidate viewing the organization as a favorable place to work (Truxillo et al., 2004).

During the recruitment process, organizations must use effective employment interviews to assess person-job or person-organization fit. Staff are likely to remain with the organization when appropriate staff selection is practiced (Lee et al., 2018). It is also essential to be transparent during the recruitment process. It has been demonstrated that employees who perceive fairness in the recruitment and selection process tend to stay with the organization for a longer tenure (Santhanam et al., 2017).

Aquatic and Recreation Centers

ARCs play an important role in Australian society by providing the facilities to teach children about water safety and how to swim, as well as offer recreational spaces that provide physical activity opportunities (Peden & Franklin, 2009). These centers "provide individuals with an escape from the pressures and tensions of daily life, can lead to improved levels of physical and mental health, and help individuals build up strong social networks and relationships" (Howat et al., 2012, pp. 85-86).

An ARC is typically a community venue that provides a swimming pool along with fitness and active recreation facilities (Tower et al., 2014). Each ARC may include several swimming pools to accommodate a variety of ages and abilities and may provide aquatic spaces such as children's play areas and spas, as well as multipurpose areas for other activities such as group fitness classes, childcare, and gymnasiums (Sport and Recreation Victroria, 2017).

ARCs are typically grouped into three categories – commercial, not-for-profit, and government. The commercial sector consists of organizations that are in business primarily to make a profit. Not-for-profit organizations do not earn profits for their owners; all the money earned or donated is invested back into the organization to accomplish goals and objectives. A government structure means local councils control an ARC's operation (Veal et al., 2013).

ARCs employ staff on a full-time, part-time or casual basis across various departments including upper and middle management, customer service, gym/ group fitness, café attendants, and aquatics including swim instructors and lifeguards (Belgravia Leisure, 2019; YMCA Victoria, 2020).

State of the Aquatics Industry

The aquatics industry in areas of Australia is experiencing a high level of voluntary employee turnover (Leisure Institute of WA Aquatics Inc. & Royal Life Saving Western Australia, 2020). In the public and private sectors internationally, aquatic facilities have closed or reduced operating hours due to a shortage of lifeguards, attributed to high employee turnover (Kang-chung, 2018; Oud, 2019; Porteous, 2015).

Chang et al. (2017) explored lifeguard career developmental satisfaction and reported that satisfaction was "not very high" (p. 199). Worryingly, the aquatics industry is experiencing high levels of lifeguard turnover; however, very little research exists that explains the reasons for this turnover. As recruitment and selection processes can influence employee turnover, it is essential to identify and better understand these practices for appointing lifeguards in ARCs.

Lifeguards

Lifeguards have an essential role in protecting patrons as they swim in, and spend time around, recreational bodies of water (Tipton & Wooler, 2016), recognizing and reacting to emergencies that may arise and taking preventive action to avoid an incident occurring. Lifeguards also provide vital information on drowning and injury prevention (Tipton & Wooler, 2016). A lifeguard's role has changed immensely over time, from someone who is taught the skills of how to react to an emergency, to a professional who can recognize and prevent an emergency from occurring (Royal Life Saving Society Australia [RLSSA], 2020). The modern lifeguard requires other skills beyond their primary function of preventing drownings and accidents. "Accordingly, lifeguards need to master a variety of skills to provide constant surveillance of their designated zone of coverage. These skills include scanning, recognition of people in difficulty, communication, and public relations and education" (Petrass & Blitvich, 2017, p. 1).

Lifeguards must complete the Pool Lifeguard Qualification as a pre-requisite to employment in Victorian ARCs. The qualification requires 22 hours of training, including assessment through a theory paper and a range of practical activities. The qualification is valid for 12 months and requires an annual refresher course (Lifesaving Victoria, 2020).

Little is known of ARCs' HRM and recruitment practices and particularly the recruitment of lifeguards. Enhanced understanding of these practices may provide strategies for improved recruitment and selection processes, resulting in decreased lifeguard turnover. This study aimed to investigate the recruitment and selection process of lifeguards in ARCs, as a first step towards improved practices.

Method

The study investigated Victorian ARCs that operate year-round. Seasonal pools were excluded from the study because seasonal pools often recruit lifeguards for a contracted period and may adopt different recruitment strategies. A survey of Victorian councils identified 86 year-round facilities that met the current definition of an ARC (Victorian Auditor-General, 2016). At the beginning of the study, a simple random sampling technique was chosen to recruit participants for interviews. Each ARC had an equal probability of being approached to participate. The Microsoft Excel RAND function was used to assign a random number to each of the 86 ARCs. However, when recruitment became challenging, it was necessary to adopt a snowball sampling technique (Naderifar et al., 2017). As a result, participants were not selected at random but were drawn using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involved referrals from initial interviewees to generate additional participants. This method of sampling was efficient and cost-effective to access participants who were otherwise difficult to find (Naderifar et al., 2017).

ARCs were grouped into three sectors based on their management structure, i.e., commercial, not-for-profit, and government. Research commenced once approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. All ethical considerations were applied to protect the participants.

The study incorporated semi-structured interviews exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of lifeguard recruitment. The semi-structured interviews were voluntary and completely anonymous. Pilot interviews were completed with two participants who had previously worked in ARCs and had recruited lifeguards. The pilot interviews determined the research instruments were both workable and realistic for the current study. Sixteen respondents participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants included center managers, assistant center mangers, or operations managers of their respective ARCs.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were completed at individual ARCs. The interview guide and questions were prepared based on the research objectives and themes surrounding lifeguard recruitment. Open-ended research questions were created based on previous HRM literature and real-world operational practices (see Figure 1.). These questions allowed participants to provide a more detailed answer (e.g., Can you describe the social attributes, knowledge/experience, and physical abilities you seek in potential lifeguards?).

Methods for recording interviews for documentation and analysis included digital recording and writing field notes. Occasionally, transcribed interview data was returned to the participant to confirm accuracy. Data analysis incorporated a deductive approach. A deductive approach was initiated with pre-determined recruitment and selection literature and then moved to the analysis of interview data (Mayan, 2016). The analysis process followed the "key steps of data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions" (Graue, 2015, p. 11).

Data was collected then transcribed into text files for analysis and archiving. Research data were reduced and coded with the assistance of Atlas.ti. As this study relied heavily on researcher interpretations to generate data, it was important to use multiple researchers to code and interpret the data (Archibald, 2016). Bias and reliability were controlled when each researcher interpreted the data the same and reached similar conclusions. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

Results

Participants were asked several contextual questions to initiate the semi-structured interviews. This produced a profile of the participants and allowed the researchers to understand the ARC managers' experience. The 16 participants were from two not-for-profit, six commercial, and eight

government ARCs. Eleven participants had more than 7 years of experience working in ARCs. No participants had less than 1 year of experience. Four participants held the title of center manager, three were assistant center managers, and nine were operations managers. The deductive analysis results, categorized according to the recruitment and selection process identified in Figure 1 and outlined below, describe the current recruitment practices of lifeguards in the Victorian ARCs included in this study.

Forecasting

The forecasting of recruitment was based on the size of the ARC and significant issues, such as possible growth periods, seasonal influences, or downsizing to meet budget constraints during slower business periods. At the time of the study, there was no formal, documented forecasting procedure. However, participants often cited seasonal requirements and university timetables as providing alternatives to structured forecasting procedures. Participants explained how, rather than documenting forecasting procedures, they initiated recruitment coming into summer or at the end of university semesters. As one participant explained: "Lifeguarding is a job that people have while they are studying, so [recruitment] is really relating to [a] lifeguard's university timetable."

Job Analysis

Lifeguard participation in the job analysis process was not a widely recognized component of the recruitment process. Two substitutes were identified during the study as an alternative to a standard job analysis, including uniformity of roles and responsibilities, and benchmarking. Participants explained that lifeguard roles and responsibilities are standardized, so their input to the job analysis was not valued. As one participant explained: "The lifeguard role is fairly entrenched; from comparable facilities, the roles and responsibilities are all fairly similar, not a lot of changes."

Other ARCs collected job analysis data by benchmarking their ARC against comparable facilities within the area. As one participant explained: "We tend to benchmark against other facilities, to see what they are doing … for us, it is the similar facilities within the area."

Job Description

Job descriptions were used to explain what the role involves for candidates who are new to lifeguarding. Each ARC included a job description during the recruitment process. None of the ARCs used a site-specific job description during the recruitment process. Instead, generic job descriptions were used across two or more ARCs. Commercial and not-for-profit ARCs adopted documentation, shared from a central location, in a top-down management approach. As one participant explained: "We have a standard, company-wide position description for all our lifeguards." Another said: "We follow a position description provided by head office." Government ARCs obtained their

recruitment documents from a local council or government; most often, generic documents were used across multiple facilities and venues within the local council.

Job Specification

The study asked participants to describe the social and personal attributes, knowledge, experience, and physical abilities they seek in potential lifeguards to determine how they managed the job specification stage of recruitment. It became apparent through the interviews that ARCs sought to recruit lifeguards who could effectively communicate, demonstrate maturity, and resolve conflict. One participant explained: "[It's] often hard to [find] lifeguards [with] maturity and communication, both skills being paramount. We do a lot of group interviews to try to assess the best communicators." Another described how they looked for communication skills. "I look for the ability to work well with others and of course, customer service skills."

Participants prioritized applications that demonstrated a high level of maturity, due to the nature of the lifeguard role. As one suggested: "Lifeguards need to respond to stressful situations, and I have seen the impact it has on them and others. The maturity that comes with age is utmost; I think it is entirely unrealistic as an industry to train and employ them and pretend that they may not have to deal with [death]."

Employer Branding & Promotion

The interview data indicated a distinct split in how ARCs applied employer branding. According to the interviewees, Government ARCs were an employer of choice for most lifeguards, because of the sizeable wage gap for lifeguards employed in a Government ARC compared with those in a commercial or not-for-profit facility. As a result, Government ARCs tailored their employer branding to sell the benefits of being employed by a local council or government. A participant from one government ARC stated: "We are amongst the very few Government facilities, giving us quite attractive real estate. We sell the benefits, the wages, leave entitlements; they know they will be treated fairly and consulted on decisions." Another participant suggested: "Equally, our pay rate is probably much better than your [commercial and not-for-profit]."

Participants from commercial and not-for-profit ARCs noted the inconsistencies in lifeguard wages. As a result, they focused their branding and promotion on other areas, including incentives. Such incentives included personal development, training opportunities, free memberships, and award schemes. One participant stated: "I think where we can set ourselves apart is by offering a free gym membership. I will often place that in our advertising. As well as access to the facility and try to get them across the line that way." Another explained: "We have an employee benefits scheme, they have access to pools, gyms, and other facilities. We have an employee assistance program.

Used in all circumstances, stresses from home, work, or studies or just anything on our lifeguard's mind."

Another participant described their award scheme: "We reward lifeguards on an ad-hoc basis, we have a weekly meeting with management and try and recognize lifeguards that have done the right thing … We do vouchers for high performing lifeguards or extra money in their pay."

Recruitment Methods

All 16 ARCs represented by the participants engaged in a form of external recruitment using a combination of e-recruitment methods, the most popular of these being recruitment websites. Government ARCs primarily advertised on council websites with the assistance of internal HR programs. Commercial and not-for-profit ARCs attempted to fill vacancies using generic recruitment websites (e.g., www.seek.com.au) or industry-specific websites (e.g., www.sportspeople.com.au).

Commercial and not-for-profit ARCs indicated that industry recruitment websites provide favorable results. According to one participant, they "[attract] the right candidates, and candidates that already work in the industry." Another stated that: "[The website] Sportspeople is where we get the best quality candidates; if people know to go onto Sportspeople, they will generally know the industry". ARC managers also described the use of generic websites: "It appeared people are just pressing 'apply' without any understanding of the role." Furthermore, as one participant stated, some candidates who applied from generic websites "didn't understand what lifeguarding was, [and] didn't know a qualification was required."

Shortlisting

Participants used shortlisting to identify candidates who best met the selection criteria, and who were most likely to be capable of meeting the position's requirements. The shortlisting process also provided information regarding the number of applications. Results showed that, at the top end, one ARC received an average of 150 applications per recruitment, while at the other end, another received as few as 10. Most often, the reason cited for low application numbers was the location of the ARC. Rural and regional ARCs tended to have fewer applications.

Two themes were identified as to how ARCs reduced applications to a manageable number: quality and content of the application and applicant availability for shifts. Participants explained that if content was missing or the application was poorly written, the application would be rejected. For example, one participant stated that an application "without a cover letter was not considered." Another participant was concerned with whether the applicant could "articulate what they are saying in a meaningful way." Participants considered a candidate's availability important because many ARCs operated

seven days a week, with extended opening hours. One participant explained their specific availability requirements: "If anyone was not available for weekends that was also a no."

Selection Techniques

Following the shortlisting process, ARCs engaged in various selection techniques to further assess candidates. Selection techniques allowed ARCs to differentiate between candidates and to recruit those they considered most likely to succeed in the role. Several themes were identified, including group interviews, work sample assessments, and reference checks.

Group interviews were a popular selection technique across most ARCs. Participants explained the benefits associated with undertaking group interviews. One stated: "It's good to see how they interact with others." Another said: "[They are] beneficial to assess corporate skills, team building, and initiative, decision making, and teamwork skills, how they communicate in front of large audiences while evaluating tone and language used."

Participants indicated that group interviews were time effective in an already time-consuming recruitment process and that ARCs could interview a large number of candidates at one time. As one participant explained: "We can interview more candidates, saving time." Another said: "Group interviews are effective when we are in a hurry."

Work sample assessments were a contentious issue. Several participants viewed work sample assessments as impractical. As one stated: "[It was] not practical, it was a huge ask on the candidate's time." Others suggested the responsibility of management includes teaching and training, and, as one stated, while "our job is teaching these skills" it was not possible to teach "the will and the passion that you [may] see in a practical."

Other participants were more positive in their responses, stating that they find work sample assessments useful in assessing teamwork, communication, and fundamental lifeguard skills. One participant explained the facets of work sample assessments: "We jump in the water, complete spinals, patient tows, and rollovers." Some found that work sample assessments were effective in determining, in one participant's words, "how [candidates] communicate in groups." One participant stressed that "candidate communication [is] effective in a spinal emergency," showing the importance of communication through work sample assessments.

Discussion

This study improves the understanding of how ARC management recruits and selects new lifeguards. In doing so, the study contributes to the limited research in ARCs, particularly concerning recruitment and selection of lifeguards. The analysis commenced at the forecasting stage, and identified that ARC

management did not document a formal forecasting procedure. In its place, rather than documenting forecasting procedures, they initiated recruitment approaching summer and following university semesters. This process shares similarities with the qualitative forecasting technique: allocation planning. Allocation planning involves making decisions about labor supply or demand by observing the movement of employees through positions at the same organizational level (Sutanto, 2000).

Ideally, recruitment must not merely fill lifeguard vacancies; instead, it should proactively focus on bringing the KSAs sought by ARCs (Collins & Kehoe, 2009). Following the forecasting process, ARC managers considered the job analysis. ARCs did not engage in a conventional job analysis during the recruitment and selection process. Instead, to assist in determining the KSAs required by potential lifeguards (Arnold et al., 2012; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2018), ARC managers benchmarked and compared with other ARCs in their regions. ARC managers considered this appropriate as lifeguards' roles and responsibilities are consistent and do not change from one ARC to the next.

Together, the job analysis and an ARCs employer branding and promotion create the framework for a job description and recruitment documents (i.e., job advertisements). ARCs must endeavor to be attractive employers, to employ talented lifeguards. ARCs need to be unique, as uniqueness translates into value (Elving et al., 2013). ARCs must consider what makes them unique, and this must be represented in the employer branding and promotion framework.

There are two distinctive approaches to employer branding and promotion that demonstrates a wage gap in the industry. Government ARCs trusted that substantial monetary reimbursements would entice the strongest lifeguard candidates. However, this is not always the case. Employees are attracted to employers for various reasons, when they are encouraged and supported to grow, assisted in developing a broader range of skills and abilities, and rewarded and recognized for high performance (Baker, 2014). ARC managers from commercial and not-for-profit facilities recognized the inconsistencies in lifeguard wages. Consequently, they focused on personal development, training opportunities, free memberships, and award schemes to attract the strongest candidates.

E-recruitment is considered an effective method in the recruitment and selection process and has reported advantages (e.g., cost per candidate is reduced when compared to physical recruitment) (Akila et al., 2020). Not-for-profit and commercial facilities in this study identified a key difference in the quality of candidates when using recruitment websites. The quality of candidates who applied through generic websites (e.g., www.seek.com.au) was often poor compared to candidates from industry-specific websites (e.g.,

www.sportspeople.com.au). A limitation of e-recruitment is that the ease of use of an electronic platform means that employers can be inundated with applications, including some candidates who are unqualified, or not suitable for the position, as well as those who are not serious and have no intention of leaving their current role (Galanaki, 2002; Yadav, 2017).

In addition to practical lifeguarding skills, other characteristics that employers considered vital to their recruitment decisions included maturity, and communication and conflict resolution skills. Lifeguards were also required to exhibit exceptional customer service skills. As highlighted by Nikolaou and Oostrom (2015), recruitment choices should not be based on the results of one selection method alone. ARCs need to combine two or more selection techniques to assess a variety of skills, knowledge, and attributes in potential candidates. Importantly, ARCs that took part in the current study engaged in multiple selection techniques to evaluate candidates. The number of steps in the selection process and their sequence will vary, not only with the organization but also with the type and level of position (Nankervis et al., 2016).

To evaluate and assess characteristics they considered important, ARC management demonstrated a preference for group interviews over one-on-one interviews. Organizations that use group interviews are likely to emphasize a candidate's personality and attitudes, their communication skills and intelligence (Stone, 2013), and their capacity for leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving skills (O'Meara & Petzall, 2013). Around half of the study participants completed work sample assessments (e.g., a CPR scenario or a spinal injury emergency). Those who did not use work sample assessments considered them to be impractical and time-consuming. Moreover, they believed education and training of their employees, in particular new recruits, to be part of the role of the ARC manager. Disadvantages of such an approach are the missed opportunity to assess multiple competencies or KSAs, and the failure to provide a preview of the organization's culture and value systems and a realistic impression of what the role requires (Sutanto, 2000; Truxillo et al., 2004).

The shortlisting process (i.e., reducing applicant numbers based on quality and content of the application) and selection techniques chosen by ARC managers (e.g., group interviews) follow a variation of the successive hurdles approach to recruitment decision-making (e.g., those who pass the application screening move to the next hurdle, such as the interview, reference check and so on). Candidates who fail at any hurdle are automatically rejected (Stone, 2017). The shortlisting process and selection techniques form the final steps in the HRM recruitment and selection process. The HRM recruitment and selection process creates a key part of an organization's resourcing strategy, which recognizes and secures individuals needed for an organization to survive and succeed (Ekwoaba et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and extend knowledge about the recruitment and selection processes for the employment of lifeguards at year-long ARCs in Victoria, Australia. Semi-structured interviews explored the experiences and insights of ARC managers regarding lifeguard recruitment and selection. Additional research should explore whether there is an explicit link between the current recruitment and selection processes and the high turnover of lifeguards in ARCs. A similar research framework could be implemented to understand the recruitment and selection processes within other ARC departments (e.g., swim instructors or customer service staff).

This study had some limitations. First, the snowball sampling methodology limits the ability to generalize the results. Second, the sample was not fully representative of ARCs in Victoria, as the researcher was unable to include participants from the remote north-west area of Victoria and because only ARCs that remain open across the full year were considered. Finally, participant numbers from the not-for-profit sector were limited to only two. Nonetheless, the research has contributed to the scholarly literature by identifying and explaining the current recruitment and selection practices in these Victorian ARCs.

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