

# CURRENT ISSUES REGARDING THE RAILWAY HUMAN RESOURCES SELECTION PROCESS ARISEN DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## **Abstract.**

*A correct forecast of the personnel required must be permanently associated with the foreseeable changes of the environment - the conditions of the market, public health, economy, competition, technology and finances. Due to the instability of the current economic environment, railway companies are determined to re-organize themselves, searching new methods to control situations of crisis, which upturn the existing theories. An important feature of all modern approaches is the idea that all human resources must be mobilized towards the achievement of organizational goals. The importance and topicality of this idea are given by rethinking the strategic role of human resources at the level of organizations, people being considered their main competitive advantage. These developments stress the importance of recruitment and selection as the determining factor in ensuring the need for human resources.*

**Key words:** *selection, recruitment, rail transport, human resources*

**JEL Classification:** M12

## **1. Introduction**

Staff selection is fully integrated into the system of human resources activities, rationally following the analysis of positions, the organization of employment positions to be filled, and the recruiting staff who must attract enough potential candidates of which the most qualified would be selected to fill out the vacancies. Therefore, job analysis, human resources planning and recruitment represent basic premises or prerequisites of the staff selection process, and in turn, the selection through the quality of decisions made, influences both other staff activities and the achievement of organizational objectives. The human resources necessity in any organization is decisively determined by the volume of its activities. Specifically, this need appears as an expression of the organization's business plan as a need for specific human resources.

In the employment process, after the recruitment stage, which aims to determine and encourage people to look for a job in an organization, the selection process takes place in order to identify and hire the most qualified applicants. Based on the amount of candidates as a result of the staff recruitment activity, in order to choose the most competitive or the most suitable for the vacancies, the organizations carry out their selection. In specialty literature, personnel selection is defined as a human resources management activity, which consists of choosing, according to certain criteria, the candidate most competitive or suitable for a certain position (Manolescu, 2013, p.288).

The responsibility for the selection is assumed by the human resources department together with the specialists from the departments with vacancies and, as applicable, the superiors. Selection procedures ensure and enrich the essence of an organization that consists of its human resources. The selection of candidates capable of optimal activity brings substantial improvements in productivity and lowers costs, ergo the purpose of the selection process is to find the best match between staff, job and organization. Under these hypotheses, the selection process is defined as the set of actions undertaken by the human resources

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department together with specialists, who choose, according to certain criteria, the most suitable candidate to fill a certain position (Mathis et al., 1997, p.100 ).

According to certain specialists in the field, the design of a selection strategy involves the following aspects (Milkovich G.T. and Boudreau J.V., 1991, p.262):

- the criteria used in the selection of candidates;
- the techniques or methods used to collect the necessary information;
- the use of the information obtained during the selection process;
- the measuring of results or evaluation of the staff selection process efficiency.

Given these aspects, Professor A. Rotaru considers that the staff selection should be seen as a process of harmonization between the requirements of a position and the physical and psycho-intellectual abilities of the selected candidate (Rotaru, A., Prodan, A., 2016, p.89). This alignment determines the quantity and quality of the employee's activity, as well as the costs of training and operation, as employees who are unable to perform the expected work quantity and quality negatively influence the organization, generating costs and time loss.

In one of his study, C.V. Marinas, analyzing the human resources recruitment and selection criteria, ranks them according to the scores obtained and concludes that the four most used criteria at the level of organizations in Romania are: candidates' qualities, abilities and individual skills, studies, professional knowledge and experience. According to the author, as opposed to public institutions in Romania, characterized by the predominant use of studies and personal relationships, in the organizations in Germany or the United Kingdom, the emphasis is placed on the technical or professional competence of candidates (Marinas, CV, 2010, p.312).

In a study in which a survey was conducted based on a questionnaire applied to managers and staff with executive positions, from eight large companies in Romania, including a railway company, conclusions obtained concerned the poor management of human resources selection and motivation. According to the authors, the analysis of the applied questionnaires highlighted a poor performance management at all hierarchical levels, the existence of a poor payroll policy, but especially the lack of managers' capacity to firmly mobilize human resources through effective motivation to ensure a greater competitive capacity of the companies analyzed (Greco, I., Greco, G, 2010, pp. 60-69).

## **2. Stages of the human resources selection process**

The human resources selection process includes a set of activities undertaken in several stages assessing the candidates' qualities, training and skills and their collation with the specific requirements of the position, in view of choosing the best candidate.

The speciality literature provides numerous assessments regarding the phasing of the human resources selection process. Starting with a three-step approach that includes obtaining information about interested candidates, assessing each candidate's qualifications and deciding on the job offer, some authors develop the content of the seven-stage selection process by completing it with interviewing, testing, medical examination and selection (Petrovici, V, 2007, p.71), and others consider the personnel selection procedures as being carried out completely within nine stages (Manolescu, A., op. cit., p. 291). Depending on the available resources, the complexity and importance of the position, each organization determines how it uses the staff selection process, so that each stage offer the possibility of obtaining relevant useful information to choose the candidate viewed most appropriate and to substantiate the employment decision. Concurrently, each selection stage is for job seekers a way to eliminate those who do not meet the job requirements. In agreement with the specialists who consider the selection process complete by checking the nine stages, especially for the decision-making and management positions, the description of the process content is presented schematically in figure 1.

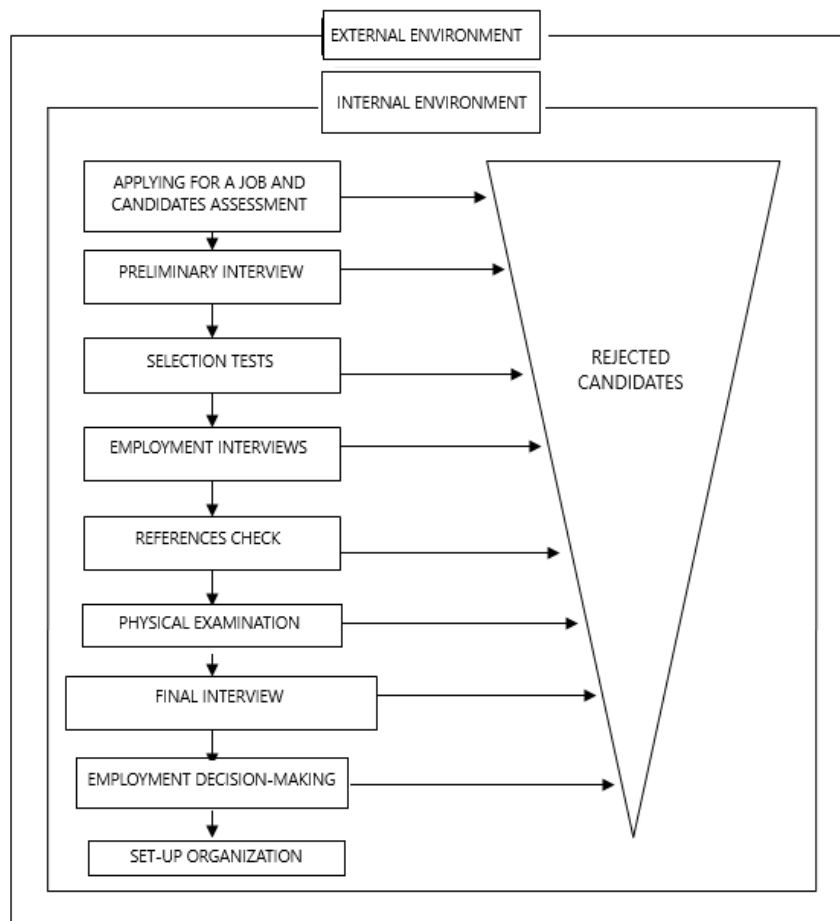


Figure 1. Human Resources Selection Stages

Source: adaptation after Petrovici, V, Manolescu, A.

The submission of applications and the assessment of candidates' files is the first stage of the selection process and has in view the evaluation of files and the selection of candidates in relation to the position requirements. In accordance with the job advertisement, the candidates submit the following documents: curriculum vitae, letter of intent, candidate form and references. Curriculum vitae is a first means of preliminary screening and contains real and concrete data on marital status, training, experience in the field of activity specific to the job, motivation, skills and important achievements in the organizations where the candidate was previously employed. Being an activity memorandum based on easy-to-interpret and concisely expressed biographical information, the curriculum vitae prepares the ground for the employment tests and interview. In practice, there are two types of curriculum vitae used: *chronological*, which includes the evolution in time of the candidate's activities starting with the current period and continuing in reverse chronological order with other activities, with no empty periods of time, and *functional*, which accentuates the skills and achievements of the candidate throughout their career, regardless of their chronology.

The letter of intent accompanies the candidate's curriculum vitae and through a concise, clear and direct presentation argues the motivational side of the job. Based on these two documents, a preliminary screening of candidates is made; those rejected are informed with an explanation of the cause of rejection, and those accepted are offered a new selection document, namely the candidate's file or the application form.

The candidate's form is a questionnaire which, through its content, offers the possibility to get a clear image of the candidate, regarding the extent to which they correspond to the requirements of the vacancy. The preliminary interview as a second screening stage is a

practical way to provide candidates with information and answers and allows them to decide whether or not to accept the vacancy.

Selection tests are tools that assess the candidate's ability to undertake the position or job. Thanks to these, candidates' physical and mental capacities are investigated, this being their objective and standardized measure. Candidates accepted as a result of the interview are subjected to certain tests, thus pursuing a two-fold purpose: identifying the applicant's weaknesses, which are restrictions or shortcomings for the position and establishing a certain skills ranking, highlighting those required by the vacancy. According to some authors, in order for the test results to prove their effectiveness, a close collaboration between the psychologist and the human resources specialist or manager is needed, because the collaboration of the two parties clarifies the issues that appear in the selection process and the testing process is conducted on the most profitable path for both the organization and candidates (Manole, 2006, p.118).

### **3. Human resources selection methods and techniques**

The selection activity carried out in an organization is bidirectional: professional selection for staffing purposes and selection in terms of promotion purposes. In both cases, the selection is conceived as the activity of choosing the best candidates according to the requirements of a certain profession, the meaning of the action moving from profession to individual, as in the case of professional orientation. The selection implies a comparison of the particularities of the considered position and the individual characteristics of the persons applying for the respective position. The practice of human resources selection has registered a wide range of instruments and different requirements in terms of their content and level of standardization. In the absence of widely accepted rules, each organization is required to choose those techniques that best meet the requirements of the vacancy, that give equal opportunities to each candidate and that do not contradict the internal cultural environment. The most well-known selection techniques that have advantages and disadvantages, depending on their use in various situations, are the following: meetings, tests, graphological analysis, group discussions, simulation and evaluation centers.

The meeting characterized as a structured meeting between a representative of the organization and each of the candidates, in view choosing the person with the profile aligned to the job competencies, is required in most selection processes and is sometimes the only technique used. The meeting proves its usefulness both for the recruitment specialist, who has the possibility to make a more accurate choice, obtaining information about the reasons and interests of the applicant, and the candidate, who has the possibility to measure the differences arisen between their expectations and possibilities offered. The drawbacks of the meeting are determined by the absence of a level of content validity, which leads to the occurrence of risks and time constraints, determining the fragility of this technique in the selection process.

Tests, defined as evaluation that allow the identification and quantification of skills, especially of those who are in the same situation, are calibrated and validated through a large number of experiences. The assumption that all skills are quantifiable and measurable by means of a test is not accepted by a large number of specialists. In this context, J. Ivancevich opines that personality tests are best able to be used in the selection of managers, and their validity is given by the extent to which this selection technique can accurately predict one or more important elements of the candidate's behavior for the future job (Ivancevich, J, 2004, p.226). At the same time, some of the disappointing results obtained by using personality tests in the selection of human resources could be caused by a mismatch between the test and the situation where it was used. For these reasons, tests are a danger if their seemingly scientific results are considered sufficient in making employment decisions. It is thus mandatory for

them to remain what the employment practice has confirmed, respectively an important complementary tool in the selection of staff.

Graphological analysis is a beginning stage in the complex process of human resource selection and is used by specialists with extensive experience in the field, which allows them to apprehend the dominant features of a personality. This technique involves filling out documents by hand by the candidate - curriculum vitae, contact form - and allows an additional sorting of candidates, so that the number of those accepted be reasonable.

Group discussions are a technique used in cases where a large number of applicants have responded to the recruitment campaign and through it the selection goes on with the aim of either communicating information to candidates and studying their behavior or determining their personality traits. The method has proven to be difficult to apply in practice, as it is expensive, and its support requires the development of teams of specialists and their training in this regard.

By using the evaluation centers as a technique for selecting human resources, the aim is to identify the personal and behavioral characteristics required for a particular position. The procedures of the evaluation center emphasize the observation of the candidates' behavior while performing, as simulation, the tasks of the vacancy. After the observation, an estimate is made of the results obtained by each candidate for the respective position. This technique is detrimental due to the difficult conditions which consist in the simultaneous presence of evaluators and candidates in the same place.

To some extent, the evaluation of human resources selection techniques and procedures is speculative, because, regardless of what subsequent investigations reveal about the performance of those attracted to the organization, it is not possible to assess the potential behaviour of those who were not selected. Therefore, the most certain indication of the probable performance of the selected candidate is the systematic evaluation of their achievements.

#### **4. Rail human resources recruitment and selection in view of employment**

Employment at CN CFR SA, both for executive and administrative and management positions, is achieved after several stages, which correspond to the recruitment and selection endeavors within modern organizations. Hiring takes place following the results obtained by candidates in the competition, exam or other forms of selection, carried out in compliance with the qualification and seniority conditions. Other forms of selection are interviews, questionnaires, grid tests or aptitude tests used mainly for leadership and decision-making positions.

The employment of human resources at CN CFR SA is performed only for the vacancies based on the vacancies regulation, personnel norms or list of positions. The personnel norms arise from the applying of labor norms, instructions and regulations regarding the traffic safety according to the specific conditions of each subunit. The labor norms are elaborated by CN CFR SA in agreement with the unions and are made available to the employees at least five days before the application. The elaboration of the labor norms is a continuous process, in accordance with the changes that take place in the organization and the level of the technical work endowment.

The recruitment process is initiated until the selection of candidates. The first recruitment stage, which is carried out both from internal and external sources depending on the specifics of the position, corresponds to the approach initiated by the operational managers in each railway subunit, regarding the indicator of the demand for new jobs, until the job definition and candidate's profile for those requirements that have been set together with the specialists of the Human Resources department and the senior management from the central apparatus of the branch or company. Vacancies are published at least fifteen days prior

to the competition or exam date, together with the date and place, registration conditions and necessary bibliography at the headquarters or in the media.

The candidate for a position competing for train safety, in addition to the conditions listed, must meet the necessary qualification conditions, respectively be a graduate of a qualification course organized by the competent authority for the railway field, CENAFER and be authorized in that position by a commission composed of specialists of the regional center and representatives of the Romanian Railway Authority, AFER.

The employment of the personnel with executive positions is accomplished by competition or examination only for those vacancies established based on the personnel and positions norms. The contest or exam takes place in Romanian only from the published bibliography and topics and consists of theoretical, practical or aptitude tests, as the case may be. The examination for unqualified staff usually consists of a practical test. The competition, examination or other forms of selection take place in the presence of a committee approved by the body responsible for employment. A representative of the union must also attend the exam or competition. Hiring is done in the order of ranking based on the exam. If equal results are obtained, the family members, respectively husband, wife, children of the employees of CN CFR SA, have priority when filling the position. The result of the competition or exam is valid only for the vacancies for which it was organized.

Upon employment, in order to select the persons who promoted the competition, the Human Resources Department draws up personal files containing the following documents:

- curriculum vitae and letter of recommendation;
- study and qualification documents;
- the medical, psychological or medical-psychological aptitude certificate, showing that they are fit for the positions related to traffic safety;
- the documentation prepared for the competition or the exam.

In order to ensure the necessary staff with higher education in positions for which employment requirements are low, the company has the opportunity to recruit for employment after graduation, students attending the last two years of accredited education, with priority among family members of CN CFR SA employees or to conclude contracts with its own employees who attend accredited state or private faculties. In both situations financing commitment contracts are drawn up between the company and the beneficiary.

The employment and promotion in management or administrative positions is performed in addition to the necessary conditions for the personnel with executive functions, through an interview, in order to assess the capacity to exercise the management position by a commission set up in this regard. The interview is carried based on a topic prepared and approved by the regional organizing center, in which one or more issues with technical, economic, financial, legal, social or organizational content are analyzed with each participant separately. The interview involves members of the committee asking the applicant questions, so as to present their standpoints on the issues that form the subject of the interview.

The interview is conducted on the basis of a program prepared and approved by the General Coordination Directorate or the organizing regional branch, which is brought to the attention of the participants at least thirty days before the scheduled interview date. One important aspect is that in case of promotion the recommendation of the direct hierarchical leader of the interviewed person weighs heavily. The assessment of the capacity to exercise the tasks is done by giving out the *satisfying or unsatisfying* qualifications, which are registered in the minutes drawn up by the interview committee.

## 5. Conclusions

The human resources used in the railway transport carry out in the related infrastructure operation an activity with particularities generated in continuous regime, on railway vehicles or next to those in motion, with frequent and long trips, in any atmospheric conditions and whose responsibility for trains traffic safety, for the integrity of passengers and goods, imposes a strict disciplinary regime.

We believe that these specific requirements for the railway activity must be allowed for as a model for choosing a certain occupation in the railway transport system by the candidates with such an aspiration, as well as by the human resources specialists or managers who develop the human resources recruitment and selection in view of employment within railway companies.

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