The 'science' of headhunting

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Recruitment Consultants use Executive Searches – headhunting – to fill key vacancies in client companies. They cultivate a thorough understanding of the ideal candidate profile and the client's culture/strategy, and undertake a focussed search to identify competent individuals. A well-informed Consultant – sensitive to the requirements of both the client and the candidates throughout – will ultimately introduce the correct candidate to the correct job, to the benefit of all concerned.

'Can you hold on a moment while I close the door please' – as a Recruitment Consultant involved in Executive Searches (headhunting), one often hears this phrase, albeit in many different forms. Understandably, individuals are concerned that colleagues and employers might discover that they are actively interested in discussing other career opportunities. Despite this, during a prolonged period of time in any profession, most people, at some point, deal with a Recruitment Service Provider, either as a client and/or as a candidate.

Specialist search and selection consultancies exist for most commercial disciplines. These consultancies, unlike staff agencies, are client driven to find 'people for jobs', not 'jobs for people'. The pharmaceutical and bioscience industries have several consultancies to choose from when they require assistance with recruitment. However, many people remain mystified by the processes employed by these organizations, despite becoming closely involved with recruitment professionals at several intervals during their career. So how do consultancies discover whom they should be speaking to about a particular position? It might surprise many to know that, rather than using a blanket telephoning approach, processes are employed prior to picking up the telephone that are based on the analysis of a vast quantity of information. Some might even say that this is a science in itself, although maybe not an exact one! This article will, hopefully, de-mystify the process, and give a broad overview of the procedures that underpin a successful search assignment.

To search or advertise? The value of the briefing meeting

The decision regarding which recruitment strategy is the most appropriate to successfully identify appropriate candidates is based on information gained at a briefing meeting. During this meeting, the appointing Director or Manager will give a detailed description of the position to be filled and outline the skills and experience of the individual they wish to attract. Often, the Human Resources Department is also involved at this stage. Usually the Consultant will assist in defining the job and the ideal candidate profile. The Consultant will also seek to gain a complete understanding of the client company's culture, ethos, strategy and future plans. This is an essential component of the briefing. It ensures that candidates who progress to the company interview possess the correct blend of technical skills and personal qualities, enabling them to fulfill their technical and managerial responsibilities and, more importantly, fit into their new environment with minimum disruption to themselves or their colleagues.

A Researcher [who could themselves be a (post)graduate scientist from a relevant discipline] might accompany the Consultant to the briefing meeting. Researchers play a key role during search assignments, and are often the initial point of contact with interested candidates. Their attendance at briefing meetings means that they hear a description of the role and candidate specification, and get a feel for the company culture at first hand. This helps them to assist with the targeting of appropriate individuals during the search.

Executive searching is not the most appropriate method of recruitment to use for all vacancies (Fig. 1). It will only be successful where suitable candidates for the vacancy can

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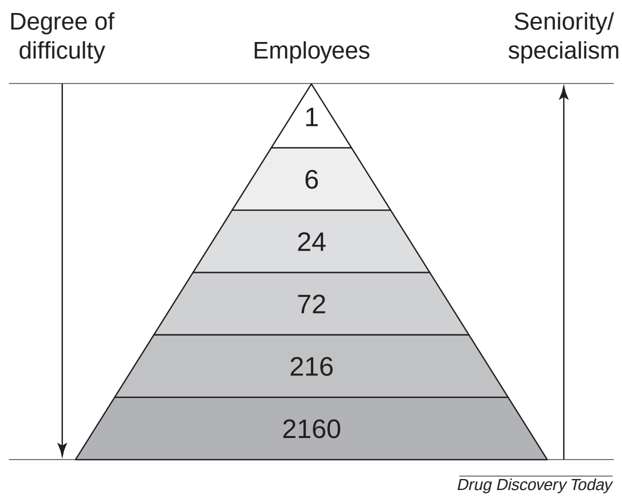

Figure 1. *Executive searches become more difficult and, hence, less applicable as the seniority or specialization of the position to be filled decreases. The process, which relies on being able to identify individuals with specific skills and experience, is complicated by the increased number of employees at each level (reproduced with kind permission of Silvester & Company, London, UK).*

be identified within their current organization. The exclusive use of a search is generally most effective for the recruitment of either senior personnel, or for positions that require a high degree of specialist knowledge and/or experience. In some instances, the Consultant might suggest a mixed approach, encompassing both a search and a high profile, targeted advertising campaign. This is particularly appropriate to assignments where potential candidates are currently employed by another client with which the recruitment consultancy has a relationship. These candiates are therefore 'off-limits' and cannot be approached directly. If such individuals are interested, they have the option of responding to the advertisement. It can sometimes also be useful for accelerating the process.

The research phase – Who do you call?

After the responsibilities of the job and the ideal candidate profile have been defined and agreed with the client, the Consultant and the Researcher will begin to create a search list. Initially, this list could include many people who will be approached purely as sources rather than as potential candidates.

Consultancies build search lists using many sources. Usually, much of the initial information will be extracted from the consultancy's own purpose-built database. This database contains details of individuals who have previously been in contact with the consultancy, either as candidates or clients, or as previous sources of referral. It will also include information on contacts obtained from a variety of 'public-access' sources, including press releases and conference proceedings. Commercially available list-brokers can also provide information for particular searches, and are used if deemed a cost-effective approach. The availability of information from the World Wide Web (WWW) now means that this is also routinely accessed for information pertinent to search assignments. When the lists are being constructed, a certain degree of lateral thinking is involved to ensure that as many sources of information as possible are examined, and that key opinion leaders in the recruiting area are identified.

After collating all the information, primary contacts and potential candidates will be identified. Where a large list has been created, it is important to prioritize the order of the calls to ensure key individuals are approached first. By its very nature, a search can be a protracted process. Hence, information from the most relevant sources and the interest of appropriate candidates should be obtained as early as possible to ensure efficient progression of the assignment. Once all the information has been assimilated and prioritized, the search calls can begin.

The search – Needles in a haystack?

As stated, the majority of the initial calls will be to referral sources, rather than to potential candidates. The aim of these calls is to obtain information, both on individuals who might be interested in discussing the vacant position, and also on further key contacts and opinion leaders. Consequently, during the early stages of a search assignment, the quantity of information on the search list should increase. It is important, therefore, that the Consultant and Research staff working on the search meet regularly to discuss all the new information gathered and to re-prioritize the search list.

The availability of key sources and potential candidates will sometimes mean that there can be a long period between identifying and speaking to these people. Obviously, contact must be made at an appropriate moment, to allow both parties to have a discussion. Timelines are further elongated as, often, the first contact with potential candidates consists of a brief description of the headlines of the role. A candidate will then, after a period of consideration, wish to discuss the position in more detail before submitting a CV. Consequently, several further telephone conversations with the Consultant can take place before an application for the post is confirmed.

As the search progresses, the Consultancy staff will examine the search list and focus on interested people who best fit the ideal candidate profile. An initial list of 40–50 people might therefore expand to >100, before decreasing to leave only 5–10 individuals with an interest in the position.

The interview stage – Matching client's and candidate's needs

With a search, often the interview stage will run in parallel with the search call stage: interested candidates identified early in the process might meet with the Consultant and the client, while other calls continue.

The initial meeting between the candidate and the Consultant is usually held away from the client's base. It should be wholly confidential, private and mutually beneficial, and is pivotal to the assignment. The potential candidate is given the opportunity to read the recruitment brief, which often contains confidential information not discussed during the search phase. They also have the opportunity to ask any questions they have about the client company and about the job. The Consultant can explore specific aspects of the applicant's skills, experience and personality in more depth, ensuring the position offers the correct next career move for them before they have to decide whether to make their candidature formal.

After meeting the Consultant, the most suitable candidates are invited to visit the company. They will meet with a small number of key personnel, allowing them to discuss the 'nuts and bolts' of the role, and investigate the environment in which they would work, should they be appointed. Occasionally, the Recruitment Consultant will attend these meetings to assist with the discussions and aid the smooth progression of the assignment.

Subsequently, a few candidates (usually two) will be invited back to meet with the company personnel for a second time. This stage could involve meeting a broader spectrum of people, and candidates might be asked to give a presentation and undertake psychometric and ability testing, if they have not done so already. Most consultancies offer such testing services to their clients, so they can be incorporated at any stage of the process. The Consultant will remain available to both the candidates and the client to help where needed, assisting with the process until the chosen candidate accepts an offer. Throughout the process, the Consultant will also assist with the debriefing of the unsuccessful candidates.

Key points to success – Happy hunting!

An effective search assignment by a competent and professional firm should not be a 'hit-and-miss' process, with *ad hoc* calls being made until a relevant lead is identified. The success of a search is reliant on several factors. Firstly, the Consultant should have sufficient education, training and background to enable them to be clear about the client's requirements and be able to define them when necessary. The information discussed at the briefing meeting and the understanding formed by the Consultant is the foundation for the whole process. This foundation ensures that the second key factor, assimilation of an appropriately targeted search list, is achieved. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the key to a successful appointment is the Consultant's ability to match the personality, experiences and aspirations of a candidate to the needs of the client. Quite simply, if it is right for the candidate then it will, almost by definition, be right for the client.

Mergers…

The corporate executive team for the new **Glaxo SmithKline** has been announced. Sir Richard Sykes [Chairman of GlaxoWellcome (GW)] will be the Non-Executive Chairman, and Jean-Pierre Garnier [CEO-elect of SmithKline Beecham (SB)] will be the CEO of the new company. John Coombe will be the Chief Financial Officer, Robert Ingram the Chief Operating Officer and President of Pharmaceutical Operations, James Niedel will be the Chief Science and Technology Officer and Tadataka Yamada, the Chairman of R&D. Other members of the team were also announced following the first Integration Planning Committee meeting. Appointees who currently hold the same position in SB include James Beery (Senior Vice President and General Counsel), David Stout (one of the Presidents of Pharmaceuticals, US), Howard Pien (President of Pharmaceuticals, International) and John Ziegler (President of Consumer Healthcare). Appointees currently holding the same position in GW include George Morrow (the other President of Pharmaceuticals, US), James Palmer (Senior Vice President and Director of Clinical Development), Timothy Tyson (President of Worldwide Manufacturing and Supply Operations) and Chris Veihbacher (President of Pharmaceuticals, Europe).

The proposed merger is subject to review by the regulatory authorities and approval by the shareholders of both GW and SB. It is expected to become effective in summer 2000.