Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Professional Development Scheme

Generalist Personnel and Development

People Resourcing

November 2007

6 November 2007 13:50-16:00 hrs

Time allowed - Two hours and ten minutes
(including ten minutes' reading time).

Answer Section A and SEVEN of the ten questions in Section B.

Please write clearly and legibly.

Questions may be answered in any order.

Equal marks are allocated to each section of the paper.
Within Section B equal marks are allocated to each question.

If a question includes reference to 'your organisation', this may be interpreted as covering any organisation with which you are familiar.

The case study is not based on an actual company. Any similarities to known organisations are accidental.

You will fail the examination if:

- **you fail to answer seven questions in Section B and/or**
- **you achieve less than 40 per cent in any section.**

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SECTION A – CASE STUDY

Note: It is permissible to make assumptions by adding to the case study details given below provided the essence of the case study is neither changed nor undermined in any way by what is added.

You are one of the Human Resource Managers for a medium-sized multinational in the financial services sector, focusing on providing pensions and investment management facilities for a select group of up-market clients (ranging from corporations to 'celebrities' with large amounts of disposable income). Your business normally interacts with its clients through intermediaries (such as banks, accountancy firms and financial services advisors).

The board has made a strategic decision to open an additional office in a city more than 200 miles away from its current HQ near London. The new location has been chosen because of (a) its significantly lower labour and infrastructure costs, (b) the incentives offered by the city's development agency, and (c) the availability of suitable talent in the local labour market, albeit without any direct knowledge of or experience in financial services. Indeed, the latter consideration is viewed as an advantage, since your company wants to break out of its financial services 'mould', much as First Direct did in 1994.

This migration of a large part of your firm will present challenges for the HR department, which has no previous experience of geographical moves on such a scale.

The first challenge is to relocate a group of your senior management. Undoubtedly the ones who move will benefit from an excellent work-life balance and exceptional career opportunities (because the new site will be the hub of your company's future and those who go there first will be in on the ground floor, so to speak). On the other hand, some will have concerns about moving their homes and families, or will find it difficult not being near London.

Your second challenge is to run an extensive recruitment exercise in the new city. Initially you will be looking for about 100 employees, split between graduates, middle management and senior executives. The problem is that you will be a new organisation so far as the target city is concerned and you have low brand awareness there, both as an employer and as a business. To make things even more difficult, you do not have many people available to plan the recruitment programme.

Underpinning the whole change is your board's desire to retain your most talented employees, and the need to 'get it right first time', because if you make mistakes your eventual success in the new environment will be even more problematic.

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Produce a report, addressed directly to your company's HR Director but intended ultimately for wider distribution to the Chief Executive and other board directors, in which you offer reasoned responses to the following questions. In developing your arguments you should make maximum use of third-party knowledge, experience and research sources, where possible. This is because the majority of the board comprises professional accountants, investment managers and actuaries, who will not tolerate anything they regard as nothing more than vacuous posturing or bland platitudes.

1. **On what basis should the relocation of the company's employees (including the initial group of senior managers) be planned and executed? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the various options available? Which, in the ultimate analysis, is the one your company should choose?**

2. **How should the company's planned recruitment exercise in the new city be planned and implemented, bearing in mind the factors summarised above in the case-study brief?**

3. **More broadly, the board considers that the relocation may present some other opportunities for changing the culture of the business. What do you think these opportunities may be, and how can the organisation make sure it reaps the benefits from them?**

You should devote approximately 40% of your time to task 1, 40% to task 2, and 20% to task 3.

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SECTION B

Answer SEVEN of the ten questions in this section. To communicate your answers more clearly you may use whatever methods you wish, for example diagrams, flowcharts, bullet points, so long as you provide an explanation of each.

You should assume you have just entered your office at the start of the working day and switched on your PC. The following email messages appear on the screen. You are required only to indicate the content of your response to your chosen seven questions; the method you would use in order to convey your reply is not relevant.

1. **From a member of your professional network group:** I agree with Nick Parfitt, who says "there has been a perceptible increase in the number of candidates, particularly those in their teens and twenties, who turn up at interviews convinced that sheer presence and over-weening confidence will be sufficient to land them the job … Rather than give measured, considered answers … they instead offer up glib, meaningless statements such as 'I succeed in everything I do', or 'I am a born winner'. [Nick Parfitt, 'All style, no substance?', *People Management*, 9 November 2006] Faced with the prospect of encountering such candidates as an interviewer, what should you do, and why?

2. **From one of your managerial colleagues:** Jack Welch (the former Chief Executive of General Electric) has been saying that "No company should be without a rigorous appraisal system and no manager should be too weak-kneed to implement it. This kind of system has a swift and amazing effect on underperformers. You rarely have to fire them. They usually leave on their own." What does the available evidence tell us about the validity of this argument, both for organisations in general and for our own organisation in particular?

3. **From one of the members of a CIPD discussion forum:** A few years ago, Douglas Coupland introduced the concept of a "McJob", defining it as employment in the service sector with "low pay, low prestige, low benefit [and] no future". Drawing on empirical evidence to justify your views, how far do you think this kind of work is increasingly the dominant feature of today's labour market?

4. **From an advisor to a charity that promotes the well-being of the elderly:** We're investigating the impact of the (relatively) new regulations about 'ageism'. Marie Strebler has written ['Why motivation holds the key to an engaged, age-diverse workforce', *People Management*, 23 November 2006] that these regulations are meant "to encourage employers to develop policies and practices that create an age-diverse workforce." Part of the problem in achieving this, though, is our belief that organisations have to understand that older and younger workers are motivated by different things. What is the evidence to support **OR** refute that belief?

5. **From a research student:** In his CIPD report, *Effective People Management* (2000), David Guest claimed that "in the majority of organisations people are not viewed by top managers as their most important asset." What do you think this remark means, especially given the fact that a large proportion of company reports specifically refer to the contribution of their employees to the reputation and results of their organisation?

6. **From a friend who is a final-year undergraduate:** When I finish my course I'm thinking I'd like to build a career in HR. Yet I am curious about the frequent use of the word 'professional' in relation to HR practitioners. Now you're in people resourcing: what does it mean, in practical terms, to be a people resourcing 'professional'?

7. **From a colleague in another organisation:** It's been decided here that line managers will shortly take more personal responsibility for staff selection. We're concerned that some of them may inadvertently say or do things which will lead to claims of discrimination by some applicants. Please summarise for me the major "do's and don'ts" which we should warn our managers about.

8. **From a features writer for People Management**: We're planning to publish a collection of articles about employee induction, and we'd welcome your contribution as part of a 'round table' page reflecting employer views. Here are the two questions we'd like you to consider: (a) What are the principal purposes of employee induction? (b) How can these purposes be best achieved? Draw on your own work experiences, research or 'good practice' approaches used in other organisations, in order to inform your response.

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9. **From a fellow student:** The preamble to the People Resourcing syllabus says that "Many of those engaged in employee resourcing concentrate on minor incremental efficiency or system changes and on the legalistic, ethical and procedural dimensions of resourcing – instead of the added-value dimensions." To what extent do you think this is true, both generally and with specific reference to your own organisation? What evidence do you have to support your views?

10. **From your mentor:** Here is a question to get you thinking. The 'traditional' or systematic approach to people resourcing goes through a standardised sequence from HR planning, recruitment, selection, induction, training and development, performance management, recognition and reward. Yet many businesses don't use this 'traditional' model at all. Why don't they? What do they do instead? Most importantly, do these alternative approaches ever work?

END OF EXAMINATION

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Introduction

The following table summarises the results from the November 2007 cohort, after moderation within the People Resourcing team of Examiners but before final moderation by the CIPD itself.

November 2007		
Grade	**Number**	**Percentage of total (to 1 decimal point)**
Distinction	2	0.7%
Merit	27	9.4%
Pass	85	29.5%
Marginal fail	37	12.8%
Fail	137	47.6%
Total	**288**	**100%**

The figures shown are simply calculations based on the number of candidates sitting the examination in November 2007, whether for the first or a subsequent time, and are for interest only. They are not to be confused with the statistics produced by CIPD headquarters, which are based on the performance of candidates sitting the examination for the first time. It is from these figures that the national average pass rates are calculated.

Let us not beat about the bush. These results are disappointing, not only in themselves but also because the causes for failure – described in detail below – are so commonplace and so easily avoidable. The overall pass rate is no higher than 39.6% (though it almost certainly will rise after final moderation), and a larger proportion of the total entry – 47.6% – has failed altogether to satisfy the CIPD's professional standards in this subject. It is rare indeed for the number of outright failures to exceed the number of successes, and I trust it will be a situation which is conspicuous for its uniqueness rather than for its frequency. None of us can be proud of this state of affairs – neither ourselves as examiners, nor tutors, nor employers nor the candidates.

It's worth emphasising too that, this being the November diet, a proportion of those sitting the examination were re-take candidates. Some of these will have received comprehensive, helpful, positive and constructive advice about improving their performance as a result of securing personalised feedback reports from the Chief Examiner after their earlier attempts. All re-take candidates might be expected to have learned from their past experience and to have concentrated on remedial actions, whether seeking specific feedback or not. Yet it is depressing to find the same errors and weaknesses demonstrated – sometimes even magnified.

I have made the point several times before – though not, strictly speaking, with the words I am about to use – that success in this examination, as with the Professional Development Scheme (PDS) as a whole, depends crucially on a demonstration of appropriate attitudes. These attitudes need to comprise a mixture of businesslike, strategically-focused values, supplemented by a 'Thinking Performer' concern for

continuous improvement; a recognition that even if current performance is 'good', this should not encourage complacency or a contentment with the status quo, and a predisposition in favour of change.

Readers should note that these desired attitudes make no mention of people. This is not because people are unimportant or insignificant: quite the contrary – they are the engines through which organisations achieve progress and performance. It is only people who can deliver discretionary behaviour, only people who can inspire, visualise and implement change, and only people who can (through their empathetic actions) create customer loyalty. However, people are not ends in themselves: they are valuable principally for what they can bring to the business, and for their contribution to its reputation. Any sensible enterprise will first nurture its people, in the confident belief that if it does so, then its people will deliver worthwhile behaviours and outcomes. At the same time, the link between nurturing and performance cannot be taken for granted, so the nurturing has to be purposeful; that is, the mechanisms for nurturing must be measured against the extent to which their application will facilitate the organisation's strategic purposes and competitive position.

So the possession and display of positive attitudes is essential for the properly-functioning HR professional. This is not a matter upon which diversity management should have much to say, because we can advocate diversity of appearance, of religious background, of ethnic origin, and so forth – but we don't have to accept that organisations should also seek a comprehensive range of attitudes among the members of its workforce. The People Resourcing examination is founded on a philosophical framework, therefore, in which resourcing professionals are 'thinking performers', capable of reflecting constructively on current resourcing strategies and practices, anxious to learn from elsewhere but also to invent and innovate, and also equipped with the 'political' skills which enable them to function as change agents within their existing corporate culture, whatever form this culture may take.

Against this background, some fail in their attempts to pass the People Resourcing examination because their knowledge of the subject-matter is inadequate, but a much larger proportion fail because it is clear that they have not assimilated the values presented here. More specifically, they demonstrate one or more of the following deficiencies:

- An almost incestuous concentration on the people resourcing strategies and practices in their own organisation or sector, without (seemingly) any awareness of what is going on elsewhere in the resourcing arena. In one extreme case, a candidate referred in almost every answer to his/her employer, a major High Street bank, as if its people resourcing strategies and practices were totally impeccable and incapable of being improved – but said nothing about people resourcing strategies and practices in any other organisation or sector.

- Where there is some awareness of people resourcing practices in other organisations and sectors, a strong tendency to over-simplify, to stereotype and to misrepresent these practices so that they appear at best naïve and at worst impractical.

- Another variant of this deficiency is the tendency to over-simplify cause-and-effect relationships within organisations. It was argued that "Learn Direct have introduced a mentoring scheme and reduced attrition from 30% to 17%" as if the mentoring scheme has achieved this improvement on its own. Another suggested that "Sony have introduced an emotional intelligence leadership training programme which [has] significantly improved engagement". Perhaps the training programme has contributed to this result, but mono-causal 'explanations' of corporate outcomes are seldom convincing.

- An automatic rejection of resourcing strategies and practices from other organisations and sectors.

- An exclusively operational orientation, with little or no concern for the strategic dimensions of people resourcing.

- A strong preference for the view that effective people resourcing relies exclusively or principally on legal compliance.

- Uncritical repetition of conventional wisdom about some of the strategies and practices frequently encountered in people resourcing (for example, panel interviewing and the link between pay and performance) without any recognition of the fact that many of these strategies and practices are unsupported by anything that could be construed as worthwhile empirical evidence.

- A refusal to deploy evidence-based argument in support of proposals for change or even proposals to uphold the existing state of affairs.

- Reliance on presenting statements of 'fact' based on nothing more than the writer's emotions ("I feel …" or "I think …") or anecdotal 'evidence' ("Based on my experience in various organisations …", "I know from first-hand experience …"). Such phrases would be more acceptable if the same answers were supplemented by authoritative citations or references, but they never are.

- A wilful reluctance to obey instructions, when asked to present the Section A response in a particular fashion or to incorporate some third-party reinforcement in Section B answers. Much of the responsibility for this problem can be laid at the door of tutors, because it was noted that from one large centre not one candidate wrote their Section A in the form of a report (despite the clear direction that they were required to do so), whereas from another centre, with 18 entries, everyone produced their material in a report format. These variations are too stark to be explained away as mere coincidence. If any tutors are failing to mention the importance of presentational issues to their students, despite the constant emphasis on this aspect of the assessment system in my Chief Examiner reports, and despite the 'P' in the CIPD's 'BACKUP' formula, then their behaviour amounts to professional negligence.

- The failure to indicate that any appropriately postgraduate reading has taken place (as opposed to the study of populist newspapers, TV programmes and Personnel Today). Again, taking the two centres mentioned above, only one individual from the first centre actually mentioned Stephen Taylor's textbook in his/her script, whereas virtually everyone from the other 18-person centre did so (and the majority cited some other sources as well).

Poor time management remains a difficulty for several – and this probably stems in turn from a reluctance to engage in systematic practice undertaken under examination conditions. One candidate earned 76% for an absolutely excellent Section A treatment, but then produced only 24% for Section B, with most answers consisting of no more than two or three lines. It was entirely clear what had gone wrong, but the planning mistakes made here were so elementary that the solution is straightforward. At the other end of the spectrum, another candidate attempted Section B first, achieving 59%, including two answers with Distinction marks and two more with Merit grades – yet then produced fewer than 20% for Section A with an answer which occupied only two sides of A4 and which ignored Task 3 altogether.

Section A

Contrary to statements advanced in some quarters about this case study, it was not focused on relocation. True, a relocation exercise constituted part of the case study brief, but this was merely the vehicle for a group of conventional questions about some major themes within the indicative content for People Resourcing. They were:

On what basis should an organisation's employees be selected when the company is opening a new office 200 miles away from its headquarters?

What strategies and procedures should the business initiate when embarking on a recruitment programme for what is, to the company, a greenfield site?

What might the organisation do to change its culture (assuming it wishes to do so) when establishing its presence in a new location?

Not only was it necessary for the underlying themes for each question to be properly understood, it was also essential for candidates to absorb the general obligations expected from them. From the case study brief, these obligations were as follows:

The requirement that any answer had to be written as a report. This means that an essay was not acceptable, and a sequence of random jottings even less so. Arguments should have been reinforced by relevant third-party sources of supporting information, from corporate experiences elsewhere, research and/or authoritative literature. Answers without such evidence-based material automatically ceased to be eligible for anything more than 50% of the possible marks.

Text made up of "vacuous posturing or bland platitudes" had to be avoided (because, it was said, the majority of the company's directors comprised accountants, investment managers and actuaries, all of whom value 'facts' above pious generalisations, crude over-simplifications and unsupported speculations).

So, where recommendations were to be advanced, they were expected to be specific and meaningful.

One absolutely superb treatment of the case study, earning a mark in excess of 80%, not only did everything that was asked for by the brief, but also covered the subject-matter in a sensitive, reader-friendly style with proper attention to the topic's strategic and business-related dimensions. The answer material was arranged into the following sections, each one properly separated and highlighted.

- A list of the basic assumptions and business goals.
- An outline of the alternatives with a brief review of the merits and disadvantages of each: voluntary redundancy, early retirement, selection processes, and so forth.
- A proposed recruitment programme, emphasising the need to create 'brand awareness' in the new labour market area, but also summarising some credible recruitment strategies.
- A discussion of the opportunities for culture change in the organisation, focusing on performance management, employee involvement and engagement, a high-level statement of the company's vision and values, work-life balance priorities, job design, and workforce autonomy.

By contrast, too many attained poor marks for what seemed to the examiners to be elementary errors and omissions, like the failure to organise their material systematically. To illustrate this point, one attempt at Question 2 (about the recruitment of staff for the new site) opened with a recommendation to "find out local universities in the area – run a graduate fair" but then, much later in the answer, indicated that it might be a good idea to "draw up [a list of the] competencies that we are looking for". A little prior thought, and perhaps the preparation of a rough-outline answer before finally committing pen to paper, might have encouraged the belief that a competency framework should precede the graduate fair.

Task 1

Approximately 40 marks were available for responses to this (though within the overall assessment process some marks were earmarked for adherence to the requirement that answers had to be structured in the form of a report to the company's HR Director). As always, credit was given for references to third-party knowledge, information or research sources, and what the examining team expected to see was a treatment that highlighted the following themes:

- The options available – such as a reliance on volunteers or the identification of employees and managers judged to possess capabilities appropriate to what was, in effect, a start-up scenario.
- The advantages and disadvantages of each – to the business rather than to the workforce, given that the decision to open a new office had been inspired by a commercial imperative.
- The option considered to be optimal – with reasons for that choice.
- The selection techniques to be used – if some selection of suitable people was to be incorporated in the recommendation.

Though there were some competent and well-organised responses, many more were disappointingly discursive and platitudinous. Vague exhortations about the need for any choosing process to be "fair" so that the organisation can "select the best people for relocation" are hopelessly unhelpful. Anyone reading a report containing such proposals would be none the wiser about what specifically they would be expected to do in order to make the system "fair", especially as no criteria were advanced about what the phrase "best people" might mean.

Task 2

Competent treatments (for which, again, up to 40 marks were available) were expected to address the following considerations:

- Given that the company had low brand awareness in the city to which it intended to move, it would be desirable to engage the services of a local recruitment agency, and this could be especially advantageous in view of the scarcity of suitable specialists in the firm's HR function.
- Some Internet recruitment could be relevant and cost-effective.
- Specific projects might incorporate a highly-publicised recruitment showcase event using an expert team from the company (in co-operation with the employment agency), but it could also be useful for the firm to create a positive profile for itself in the community.

In too many instances, recommendations were advanced without any supporting evidence whatsoever. It was confidently proposed, for example, that the selection of senior executives for the new site should be via a "panel interview" and a "presentation on a topic chosen by us" – but the author of these claims did not bother to indicate why a panel interview is a worthwhile selection technique, or why short presentations should be a valued predictor of subsequent occupational success.

Task 3

The brief stated that the company's board considers that the establishment of a new office could present some opportunities for changing the culture of the business. We are also told that one of the attractions of the targeted city is the availability of talent in its local labour market, albeit without any direct knowledge of or experience in financial services. It is even suggested that this lack of familiarity could be an advantage.

Against this background, candidates were expected to explore what kind of 'new' culture would be beneficial. Clues had been presented – especially the named reference to First Direct, a high performance company whose customer-centric, empowered and high-involvement strategies and practices should be studied by every CIPD student. The examining team wanted to see the application of some of the techniques associated with High Performance Working, reinforced by citations from authoritative sources like Purcell and Pfeffer.

Any explicit culture change project pursued as part of the establishment of the new office would clearly have had implications for the kinds of existing employees encouraged to move, and also the values to be sought among the people to be

recruited locally – which emphasises the point (already made in previous reports) that in addressing the case study students should have prepared their draft responses comprehensively before writing their answers. In principle, coverage for Tasks 1 and 2 depended very much on the cultural change aspirations presented in the treatment of Task 3. In practice, this degree of alignment was seldom present, and it was much more likely, or so it seemed to the examiners, that Tasks 1, 2 and 3 were each treated as self-contained elements. No wonder, then, that the marks awarded for Section A were often so inadequate. It made little sense to read about some radical and innovative cultural transformation in the company, as part of the response to Task 3, yet see no reference to the recruitment and selection impact of this change in any part of the responses to Tasks 1 and 2.

And let nobody complain that, given this interaction between the three tasks, the mutual dependencies among them, then Task 3 (about the opportunities for cultural change) should have come first. Had this been the case, then the examiners are confident that many students would still have approached all three tasks as if they were unconnected to each other; moreover, the point I wish to emphasise is precisely that people resourcing strategies do not (or should not) exist in isolation, and do not (or should not) function independently of the company's cultural aspirations.

Responses to Task 3 often created the impression that considerations of 'culture' do not feature prominently in candidates' revision strategies when preparing for this examination. A few ignored this task altogether. A few generated very low-level ideas for change ("Allow for secondments in the future across the two HQs"); a larger number had concluded that "culture change" is solely about recruiting a more diverse workforce and/or multi-skilling, or the introduction of "green" policies (which, it was claimed, would help employees feel more engaged, project a good image for the company, and "also save company money [by] reducing carbon emissions"). Still more, perhaps uncertain of their ground when dealing with such 'soft' issues as culture change, kept their thoughts as tentative as possible ("Perhaps [sic] we should consider making the floors 'open plan' so all management sits amongst their colleagues"). If only culture change could be effected merely by taking down office walls, what a wonderful world it would be …

Section B

Although the point has been made before, it is always worth repeating that a 'good' Section B answer will contain at least some of the following:

- a demonstration of knowledge of the subject-matter within the question's domain or principal theme.;
- some evaluation and critical analysis of that knowledge;
- at least one reference to or citation from a worthwhile third-party source;
- reinforcing evidence from a named organisational exemplar (sometimes the candidate's own);
- brief yet clear-cut proposals for action, if required.

I appreciate that not all Section B questions lend themselves to this simplistic formula, and I also concede that trying to cram all five requirements into a single answer could be impossibly demanding in the restricted time-frame of Section B, but this nonetheless remains the yardstick for evaluating a majority of Section B treatments.

The rubric for Section B indicates that candidates, in order to communicate their answers more clearly, may use whatever methods seem appropriate, including diagrams, flowcharts or bullet points, provided that each is accompanied by an explanation that indicates proper understanding of what has been presented. The key requirement for any acceptable answer, however, is that it should communicate the writer's thoughts clearly. This therefore suggests that responses should be lucidly and systematically organised, not merely offered as a stream of spontaneous consciousness, as in this example from one treatment for Question 2 (about performance appraisal). I promise all my readers that the following quotation has been reproduced verbatim from the relevant script, including the grammatical mistakes and the gratuitous capital 'c' for the word "Company".

"Appraisals are good and can be tangible when used properly, we have them in our Company, as does other Companies I've worked for, the advantages are yet it sets key objectives and goals, allowing individuals to become champions in their own field and promote excellence in their dept or for the company [note the absence of a capital 'c' here], however it can also have a traumatic effect on employees who's [sic] managers who can't or simply don't want to be bothered, so no positive or constructive feedback is provided or questions not solutions."

The unfortunate fact is that hidden deep in this single 85-word sentence are some insights that are worth hearing, and buried there is some knowledge worth repeating. Such a pity it hasn't been articulated coherently.

One further, relatively minor, issue needs to be mentioned as well. Although the setting for Section B is constructed from hypothetical email messages, it is not expected that responses should necessarily themselves be written as emails, with the kinds of salutations or farewells that seem nowadays to be characteristic of that medium. Even so, the examiners were treated here and there to such fatuous and inappropriate effusions as "Hey!" or even, in one instance (coverage for Question 8), "Alright mate, surprised to hear you wanted to get into HR." Naturally, the cause of this latter surprise was not explained, but it seemed likely to the examiners that the author, despite seeking a professional qualification from the CIPD, cannot imagine why anyone would voluntarily join the occupational category that the CIPD represents.

Question 1

Nobody challenged the quotation that appeared in the stem for Question 1, and which provided the basis for Question 1 as a whole. This immediately suggests that a majority of those taking the examination are familiar with the sorts of candidate behaviour described; that is, a tendency to produce "glib, meaningless statements such as 'I succeed in everything I do' or 'I am a born winner'." It may be worth noting that according to research by SHL (reported in People Management, 1 June 2006),

over 50% of job candidates believe that telling lies in job interviews (and telling lies in CVs or application forms) is acceptable. Truly we live in a bizarre world, where personal promotion in the selection process – always permissible – is gradually transformed into outright lying, but this is the reality and we must therefore confront it.

Some of the 'solutions' that could have been presented in response to Question 1 are:

- Prior to the interview, selectors should develop an accurate, comprehensive and specific role profile (job description and person specification) so that candidates can be measured objectively against each element.
- A competency-based interview approach is valuable, if candidates are asked to supply examples of actual experiences in which they have performed badly or impressively, plus a summary of the lessons learned.
- Hypothetical scenarios should be avoided because they simply generate equally hypothetical responses which don't necessarily reflect the way the applicant would actually behave in what passes for real life.
- Whenever candidates use the word "we" about work-related achievements, it is essential to investigate further to unearth what they each personally contributed.
- Open questions leading to detailed answers are always preferable, with follow-up questions to probe beneath any simplistic banalities.
- Positive body language must be sustained.
- Rather than any direct demonstration of scepticism on the part of the interviewer, it would be preferable to express scepticism more neutrally ("How would you answer someone who wondered about the adequacy of your experience with handling difficult customers?").

Question 1 was quite popular, and yielded some authoritative, convincing and persuasive responses. Of course, there remained some who missed the point, or who appeared over-optimistic about the likely efficacy of 'traditional' techniques like the need for a "clearly written job description and person specification" and/or a "list of competencies which relate to the job requirements/skills/competencies of the role".

Although Question 1 was clearly focused on the dynamics of the selection interview, several didn't mention interviewing at all, but implied (or even stated openly) that because the interview is incorrigibly inefficient as a method of selection, organisations should place increasing reliance on psychometric testing, assessment centres and other more indirect devices for sheep/goat evaluation. This was an approach not viewed as helpful by the examiners, who take the view that incisive, determined interviews can (and should) probe beneath the glibness of the candidate who is all façade and no substance.

My examining team, and in particular myself, were irritated at the oft-repeated assumption that all interviews are panel interviews. Doubtless panel members should be trained, and panels should "review their procedures" (whatever that might mean), but one of the things they should also do is challenge the efficacy of the panel interview. This, of course, they never do.

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Question 2

Sensitive approaches to Question 2 were expected to recognise and acknowledge that poor performance by individual employees, and even by groups (teams) of employees, may go unchallenged, for all kinds of reasons. Theoretically, appraisal offers an opportunity for poor performance to be considered (though in practice it should be considered when it occurs, not merely stored up and brought out in an appraisal meeting), but even then it may not be confronted. Appraisal that allows anodyne comments (with meaningless adjectives like "good") and vague generalisations, in place of rigorous evaluation, serves no useful purpose – even for the under-performers themselves, who may be performing badly because they are in the wrong job, or haven't been properly trained and monitored, rather than because they are congenitally incompetent.

Question 2, like Question 1, was also quite popular, and equally generated some relevant, constructive and insightful responses, plus some others which caused the examiners to wonder whether these candidates had been sensible for selecting Question 2 at all. Almost incredibly, a significant minority didn't write about performance appraisal at all (probably the same people who, tackling Question 1, didn't write about the selection interview at all), but offered instead some recommendations about performance management – as if 'performance appraisal' and 'performance management' are the same thing. Here are extracts from a representative sample of other less competent treatments:

- "Appraisals are not appropriate for the majority of the staff within my organisation as it is a manual manufacturing environment where performance and output is [sic] based on targets which are quality based not quantity. Under-performers are therefore identified through quality standards."

  What then happens to these underperformers? How precisely does this emphasis on "quality standards" make appraisals inappropriate? Neither of these questions (and a few more which occurred to the examiner marking this script) was resolved.

- "In [the] light of recent evidence [what evidence?], a yearly review seems ludicrous and my personal organisation runs quarterly appraisals to which our salary depend on."[sic]

  If annual reviews seem "ludicrous", then quarterly appraisals linked to salary awards seem equally ludicrous, if not more so. However, because this is evidently the system applied in the student's own business, it is treated as sacrosanct: no attempt is made to evaluate its effectiveness against any research findings from authoritative third-party sources.

- "At the end of the day," claimed one person, "it depends how many resources an organisation wishes to dedicate to such schemes."

  No it does not, because a fully-functioning appraisal scheme, operated by managers who care about their people, costs little. What matters is whether the enterprise genuinely believes in its employees, and empirical evidence for

such beliefs is sometimes problematic (see Question 5, below), with the result that performance appraisal can be honoured more in the letter than in the spirit.

- "Enron adopted this philosophy [i.e., the approach advocated by Jack Welch] and look what happened to them! Many organisations now link the failure of Enron to their appraisal system."

  Frankly, I have seldom heard anything so absurd.

Question 3

Relevant to an exploration of this topic could have been some research recently undertaken by Professor Adrian Furnham into the subjective work experiences of those employed by McDonalds. Furnham investigated the opinions of 475 people, including McDonalds employees, friends, parents and teachers.

Parents had few reservations about seeing their children in a service industry. Just over 70% reported a positive change in their offspring since they started work at McDonalds, perhaps because of the positive 'work ethic' disciplines instilled into employees.

Reports from the employees themselves showed high levels of job satisfaction and the belief that they enjoyed better promotion prospects than their friends working elsewhere. As Furnham concludes, "They liked the teamwork and were very positive about the corporate culture."

Across the service sector as a whole, there is some evidence that the worst kind of McJob is gradually disappearing – or is being migrated to other countries where expectations about work are (so far) lower. As customers become more demanding, so low-level, script-based service interactions become less appropriate and less acceptable, and the value of permitting or encouraging some 'discretionary behaviour' from customer-facing employees is enhanced. It is surely not an accident that the John Lewis Partnership grows its business and its profitability every year, based on a strategy that combines favourable prices with exceptional customer service, using employees who are expected to use their initiative and relate to each customer as an individual rather than as a mere piece of codified meat.

Question 3 lent itself to the presentation of glib, confident statements unsupported by anything that could be construed as worthwhile evidence. One answer indicates precisely what the examiners have in mind, but let no reader of this report believe that the quotations reproduced here are idiosyncratic.

> "I do not believe [sic] this type of role [the McJob] is as dominant in today's labour market." Why not? Where is your evidence for this claim, other than your belief?
> "I believe [sic] that many companies are looking at ways to improve and engage these types of roles." That's very possible, but what is your evidence for this claim, other than your belief?

> Herzberg introduced "the idea of job rotation, job enrichment and job enlargement." So what? To what extent are these 'ideas' applied in practice within a representative cross-section of the jobs market? "Many organisations offer secondments and similar programmes." Do they? How many is "many"? Can you specify any examples, not only of these practices but also about their cost-effectiveness?

In addition, several confined their answers to a commentary about McDonalds, which meant that they missed the point of the question. It was really about the existence of any type of work in which employees have very restricted opportunities to exercise discretion and personal autonomy. Such jobs may exist not only in McDonalds but also in (some) customer contact centres, in (many) retail businesses, and (everywhere) in mass-production manufacturing.

By contrast, others didn't mention McDonalds at all in their answers. One individual wrote at length about Marks & Spencer, without giving any clear reason for doing so:

> "Marks and Spencer as reported in People Management 2007 [sic] part of the problems of the store a couple of years ago [sic] was because the stores were looking tired, there was a hierarchical ladder to progress careers and the products were expensive and could be found cheaper elsewhere. The solution was to give the stores a makeover, show career paths and communicate that they were achievable, a rigorous performance management framework, even though the salaries were not too much above minimum wage there is a clear route to the higher levels."

Even allowing for the possibility that this analysis of the M&S turnaround was accurate (which it definitely is not), the examiners were forced to question the relevance of these comments to the notion of a McJob. After all, nothing had been written in the same answer about job design at M&S (which could have been relevant), and nothing had been said about the extent to which any such changes in M&S were typical of what was happening elsewhere in the labour market.

Someone else advanced the opinion that "Many people are becoming carers to relatives" and reported some 'research' which had identified that nearly 20% of the population were performing unpaid roles of this kind. Another suggested that according to "research recently reported in the media", "the UK workforce is working harder, with longer hours". "When people go for lunch or get home at the end of the day it is more convenient to order a coffee, sandwich or pizza rather than prepare one yourself." All highly fascinating, but entirely speculative and, so far as I can tell, entirely irrelevant to the question.

Question 4

Two recent surveys by the Institute for Employment Studies, involving more than 12,000 employees in a variety of sectors, show that older workers tend to feel less valued and involved in their organisations than their under-30 counterparts. Indeed, older workers often seem to join their companies already feeling less valued – in other words, even before they begin their period of employment.

At the same time, older workers are generally happier in their work than younger staff (perhaps because they are more grateful for actually being employed). It does appear, though, that the factors driving 'engagement' do change with age:

Engaged younger workers are more likely to be motivated by these elements:

- intrinsic job satisfaction;
- the challenges and interest involved in the work itself;
- the social impact of working for an organisation they respect;
- the pace of change.

Engaged older workers, by contrast, are often more passionate about:

- being involved in decision-making;
- having the opportunity to exercise a wider business perspective;
- receiving performance feedback
- personal development and fair rewards.

That old favourite Maslow was routinely trotted out and cited as evidence, either supporting the view that older and younger workers are motivated by different things, or claiming that older and younger workers are motivated by the same things. This in itself should persuade us that Maslow's hierarchy provides little if any useful or usable information. Its complete lack of empirical reinforcement or definitional clarity means that it can be deployed to 'prove' more or less anything. What irritates the examiners, too, is that despite the popularity of Maslow's model, there are still those who misrepresent it and him.

"Maslow believes [sic] that pay is an important motivator but is purely a hygiene factor – what's more important is other motivating factors such as personal fulfilment and self-actualisation." Maslow never made any such claims. For him, self-actualisation only becomes significant (for most people) after all the lower-level needs have been fulfilled.

One candidate reproduced Maslow's hierarchy as a four-step system: Self-actualisation, "human needs" (whatever they may be), social needs and "psysiological" needs. Others presented similar, basic errors.

Nobody ever incorporated any of the customary caveats about Maslow into their answers; that is, the absence of any research-based evidence to justify the existence of a generalised hierarchy, the cultural ethno-centrism of his framework and the misleading simplicity of his conceptual language.

More generally, Question 4 seemingly lent itself to the presentation of unsupported statements about motivation at work. It was claimed that "everyone needs feedback, challenging tasks, available learning and development incentives and a chance to work in a team-based environment, to make the work more interesting." Really? Everyone? And who says so? Certainly not Maslow.

People Resourcing

EXAMINER'S REPORT

November 2007

Question 5

It is regrettably true that the rhetoric of corporate-speak may not be reinforced by the reality of people management, and this question was designed to provoke some analytical discussion about the reasons for this state of affairs. The examiners hoped to see citations from Purcell's 'black box' studies for the CIPD, since his work does show a link between the genuine recognition of people as a crucial source of strength to organisations and the attainment of above-average corporate results.

Question 6

According to Fletcher (Appraisal and Feedback: Making Performance Review Work, CIPD, 3rd edition, 2004), a 'professional' ethos is characterised by the following ingredients:

- The opportunity to display high levels of autonomy
- The ability to apply some independence of judgment
- Self-discipline and adherence to some aspirational performance standards
- The possession of specialised knowledge and skills
- Power and status based on expertise
- Operating, and being guided by, a code of ethics
- Allegiance to a professional body

In dealing with Question 6, candidates could have used the Fletcher approach, or could have relied upon the four roles for HR presented by Dave Ulrich, or could have used the 'BACKUP' model used for the assessment of entries within the CIPD's national examination system, or applied the ten competencies that underpin the whole of the CIPD's professional standards. There was thus no shortage of conceptual frameworks which could have been deployed in order to give some coherence to the question – and to the answer. Any would have been preferable to treatments that merely contained a collection of pious platitudes.

Question 7

Question 7 was popular, perhaps because it was so straightforward and because it dealt with a topic – selection – which forms such a central part of the People Resourcing domain. Generally speaking, those who opted for Question 7 produced adequate if not impressive responses, though they sometimes earned slightly fewer marks than they might have hoped to achieve, because in effect they sought double credit for presenting the same argument both as a "do" and then in its prohibition form as a "don't".

Question 8

The purposes, principles and practice of employee induction are explored at length by Stephen Taylor in his CIPD textbook (People Resourcing, CIPD, 3rd edition, 2005, pp. 251-266). Question 8 was structured around two sub-questions, with up to ten marks available for each. However, marks of six or more for each part were only awarded for treatments that incorporated references to research, 'good practice'

experience, insights (favourable or otherwise) about the candidate's own organisation, or aspirational evidence from world-class enterprises.

The difficulty with some responses for Question 8 was that they described the purposes of induction purely in operational and thus low-level terms. "The principal purposes of an induction are to inform the new employees that there is a policy/practice/ procedure on all areas of business such as attendance, holidays, maternity/paternity/ working hours/clothes (code)/discrimination and equality at work. Secondly and a paramount [sic] is the H(ealth) & S(afety) at work, new employees should be shown where fire exits are, how to get out, where the muster points are, told who is the fire wardens/officers, where the first aid is and emergency call (buttons) are for fire/personal injury" – and so forth.

If any induction programmes are designed in the way described here, then they are missing a major opportunity – indeed, a necessity. Induction is principally important as a vehicle for inculcating the corporate culture and behaviour values, expectations about performance and 'discretionary action' (assuming that such action is encouraged), the proper treatment of customers, the emphasis on team-working (again, if such an emphasis is part of the organisation's modus operandi), and the corporate view about employee engagement. Some of these principles should have been explored during the selection process, but they all deserve to be reiterated so that they become firmly embedded in each recruit's mentality.

Question 9

With Question 9 students were required to examine the validity of the proposition outlined in the stem of the question, both generally (up to ten marks) and within their own organisation (also up to ten marks). The examiners left plenty of room for alternative views to be put forward, but in an ideal world 'adding value' should be primarily concerned with continuous (incremental) and transformational change, not merely with the maintenance of the status quo and problem-solving. In other words, 'adding value' does not apply to mere cost-saving or the removal of performance impediments, because such initiatives simply help to create an 'efficient' set of processes, systems, policies and actions. Understood more creatively, 'adding value' is about actions which enhance the 'effectiveness' of the resourcing operation; for example, by turning the business into an employer brand, by enhancing the company's ability to produce high-quality recruitment/selection decisions, and by helping to mobilise the energies of the workforce.

In a succession of Chief Examiner reports, and elsewhere, I have constantly emphasised the point that the function of people resourcing is not simply to ensure that everyone involved obeys the law. Yet a significant minority of those tackling Question 9 seemed to suggest that legal compliance is the main purpose of any resourcing exercise. As one student wrote, "HR can also add value through the legal aspects as by not discriminating and individual through the recruitment and selection process means you are less likely to go to tribunal through discrimination so this demonstrates how HR adds value." [Readers should note that this is an exact copy of the candidate's words. The phrasing may be clumsy, but the meaning is clear.]

Legal compliance is important, and should not be neglected or denigrated, but the resourcing practitioner does not 'add value' merely by making it less likely that employment and discrimination laws are not broken. 'Adding value' reflects the design and implementation of positive change or system enhancements, not the prevention of (hypothetical) financial and reputational losses arising from adverse tribunal judgments.

Question 10

Clearly some organisations work more spontaneously in their recruitment and selection activities – perhaps because of a conscious decision to avoid what they perceive to be the excessive bureaucratisation associated with the application of more 'systematic' routines, or because they want to retain the benefits of seizing recruitment/selection opportunities as their businesses expand. Others apply a non-systematic paradigm because they are transient structures, or because they have a transformational vision: more than anything else, they may seek people who share that vision and will help to translate it into reality.

Part of Question 10 sought comments on whether these alternative approaches ever 'work'. Candidates were expected to explain, briefly, what they thought the word 'work' might mean in this context, and then illustrate their arguments with examples – perhaps from companies like Pret a Manger, First Direct or Cisco Systems.

The examiners were emphatically hostile to any treatments for Question 10 that comprehensively condemned all approaches that depart from the 'systematic' model, whilst being totally unable to produce any authoritative evidence to justify such a condemnation. We were also hostile to the frequent appearance of vacuous, vapid and unhelpful commentaries, including the claim that people resourcing is about "getting the right people into the right jobs in the right place at the right time". And, one might add, at the right cost; but even to add this further obligation would still not make the proposition meaningful.

Conclusion

In continuing to uphold the CIPD's professional standards through the CIPD's national examinations and ancillary forms of assessment, I am assisted by my team of highly competent examiners in this subject, comprising Sadie Reynolds, Carole Parkes, Andrea Latham, Dave Sharman and Dr David Watt. They are all enthusiastic, committed to the values that underpin the Professional Development Scheme, and conscientious in their application of the criteria which apply to this postgraduate qualification process. I continue to give thanks for their willingness to take part in this exercise twice a year, despite its occasional frustrations.

Ted Johns
Chief Examiner