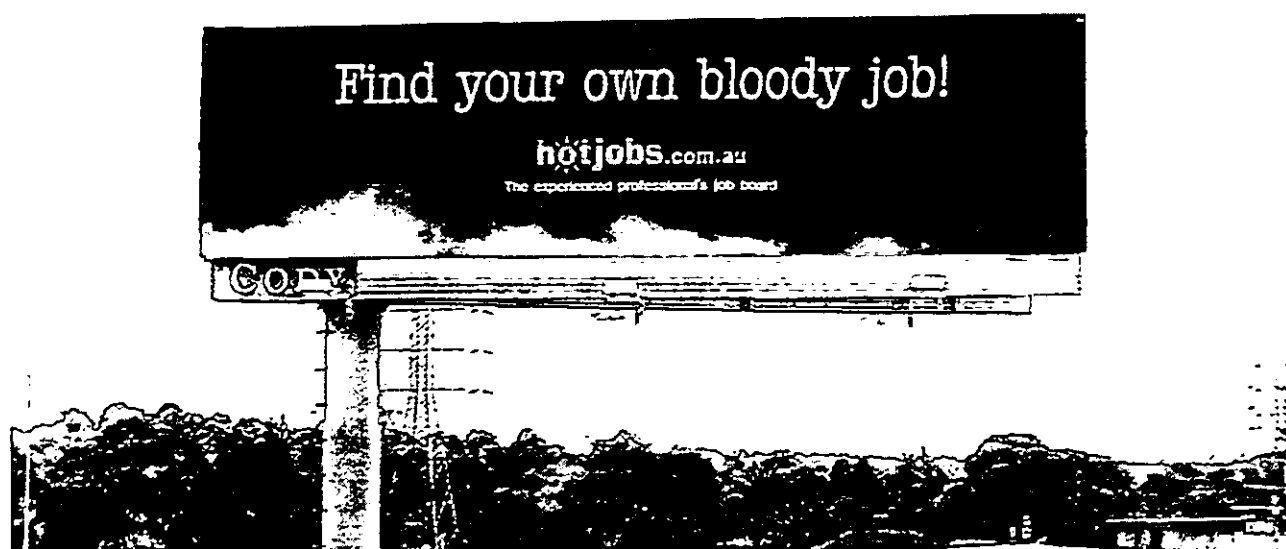MONASH UNIVERSITY
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JOBS.COM: RECRUITING ON THE NET – A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF E-CRUITMENT[1]

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Working Paper 56/00
October 2000

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Abstract

Recruitment is an inexact science where hiring decisions rely on an unpredictable combination of subjective judgements, intuition and formal selection criteria. Like all human resource management functions, recruitment is a social process. It is the first step in the social relationship that develops between representatives of the organisation and potential employees.

This social relationship is undergoing radical change in the late 1990's. The recruitment industry is going digital and employers are being persuaded to use web-based recruitment strategies with the claim their organisation will be "empowered" by the use of the Internet to access " a gold standard workforce"[2]. Puzzled by this hyperbole and the rhetoric of cyber-recruitment, we, two management academics decided to become participants in this brave new world of e-cruitment.

Despite the promises of a sophisticated and effective method of attracting the best candidates for employers, as potential employees we found the on-line interaction to be frustrating and time-wasting. Having spent many hours attempting to respond to the prompts, we experienced the decision protocols underlying the web-based recruitment programs to be so immutable we could not even succeed in registering our interest in the advertised position.

This experience lead us into a dialogue as we both sought to understand our personal responses to the dissonance between the rhetoric of e-cruitment and our reality. Reflecting her theoretical bias towards a psychoanalytic perspective, Jan asked 'What in the process of recruitment is being defended against by the adoption of e-cruitment methods?' Sue's social constructionist perspective led her to a different question. 'What are the disciplinary effects of emerging social practices such as e-cruitment?

In the spirit of co-operative inquiry that encompasses a both/and approach we will use these two critical theoretical perspectives to analyse the construction of 'e-cruitment' as a digital tool for attracting and selecting human resources. We intend to hold a dialogue that includes theoretical insights from both these perspectives to broaden our understanding of the issues as well as identifying the gaps and silences in each perspective.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, organisations both create and seek to contain anxieties for its participants. Rules, procedures and processes it is argued, are not just instruments of efficiencies but also establish a sense of order and control that serve to protect members from organisational anxieties. Within the field of human resource management exists the myth of "the best employee" and recruiters are charged with the organisational responsibility to find that one best employee for the job. To do this requires them to sit in judgement on others and on the basis of whatever assessment tool/s, predict future performance. To assist with this impossible task and to minimise some of the many anxieties this may invoke, we argue recruiters seek to separate their individual self from this process by the creation of more "scientific" tools of selection – job analyses are conducted, job descriptions fine tuned, competencies identified and now e-cruitment strategies are being tried.

The discourses surrounding e-cruitment and the taken-for-granted nature of the technologies that brings people together through cyber-space, creates the myth of boundaryless, globalised, democratic, yet personalised access to jobs and careers. In contrast to this view, we argue that e-cruitment practices are highly inflexible, discriminatory and de-personalising. We conclude that e-cruitment has the effect of defending against complexity and ambiguity and narrowing and disciplining recruitment practices.

Foucault's work on the constitutive and disciplinary effects of social discourses that impose particular and seemingly unchallengeable 'truths' about the social world helps us to understand the e-cruitment phenomenon. The unruly and often unpredictable practices of recruitment and selection are made controllable and certain through discourses of technical rationality and managerialism.

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[2] From a brochure advertising the *Slash Time and Costs Through On-line Recruitment* conference, Sydney, Australia, November 1999

INTRODUCTION

The spread of Internet technology, as we are told by many, is socially, culturally and economically important (Graham, 1999; Barr, 1999). Any-right-minded person, if we believe the hyperbole, cannot doubt the importance and power of the net as a business tool, cultural phenomenon and economic gold mine. The extraordinary growth and reach of the Internet is seen by many writers as a fundamental shift in the way in which we communicate with each other in all areas of social endeavour.

These claims about the Internet or more specifically claims about the importance and usefulness of the Internet as a human resources management tool for recruiting staff attracted our interest from two standpoints. Firstly, that of 'outsiders' who did not really 'get' the hyperbole surrounding the net and secondly, that of two management academics who felt there was a 'problem' with all this hype.

This paper and our presentation grew primarily out of what we viewed as 'a problem' – the hyperbole surrounding the apparent power and efficacy of recruiting staff (e-cruitment) through the WWW. We were suspicious of the advertising claims and the expensive conferences (designed to tell people how to recruit on the WWW). We were wary of the overall construction of the Internet and the WWW as the one best way to conduct business, recruit staff, to communicate ideas, and the many other claims made by proponents of the WWW.

We also had some experience of e-cruitment. Taken in by the hyperbole, we attempted to find a great job on the net. The right job for each of us. What we found was a very different world to the one promised in the rhetoric. When we registered ourselves as potential candidates for positions advertised on a number of recruitment sites we became increasingly frustrated and suspicious of the rhetoric. It took an inordinate amount of time to register because of slow Internet connections and tiresome design protocols that restricted our movements once on line. In addition to this we were often asked to categorise ourselves into prearranged categories that did not fit our experience, skills and abilities. The system felt alienating, controlling and immutable.

This paper is not so much concerned with whether or not e-cruitment works on the WWW but rather the process of moving from an oppositional and problem defining orientation towards an iterative dialogue of understanding. In this dialogue we respond to each other's concerns about 'the problem' from our chosen theoretical position. As the dialogue develops we show how the two theoretical approaches - Jan's psychoanalytic perspective and Sue's social constructionist perspective offer insights into our understanding of our own social construction of the 'problem' and the reality constructed by and through the Internet.

EITHER/OR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The starting point of our dialogue represents the either/or of traditional academic critique, looking at a 'problem' from within the confines of a particular theoretical perspective. The two perspectives mark out the theoretical ground for looking at the 'problem' of e-cruitment on the WWW.

Selection and recruitment – a social constructionist perspective

Background

In recent years social constructionist or postmodern studies of organisation and management have created a growing and dynamic alternative to traditional modernist approaches to these disciplines. The literature covers a wide range of organisational and management issues including organisational research (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997), strategy (Barry and Elmes, 1997), human resources management (Townley 1992), leadership (Calais and Smircich, 1988) and gender inequalities (Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997 and Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998), organisational culture (Casey, 1999) organisational analysis (Burrell, 1988 and Smircich et al, 1992) and general approaches to understanding complex organisations and organisational theory (Chia 1996; Dachler and Hosking, 1995).

Post-modern approaches assume that different realities are constructed in different historical and social contexts (Dachler and Hosking, 1995:4). Therefore postmodern analyses call into question the cultural and historical specificity language and knowledge in the process of knowing what is real and under what conditions, reality exists. This view contrasts with the modernist view that language and knowledge merely report the nature and state of a reality 'out there'.

The mechanisms through which we know our social world are discursive and there are many possible ways of 'knowing' and understanding our social reality. For example texts, images, documents, theories, codes of morality, utterances and even computer programming protocols are powerful elements in the reality construction process. They represent forms of social practice that make available to us knowledge that tells us what there is to know and whether what we know is a valid account of our experience. Hence concepts such as truth and reality must be understood in terms of the discursive mechanisms through which knowledge and language constitute social reality in terms of seemingly incontrovertible truths that define and order our experience (Chia, 1996:14,

Selection and recruitment: a psychodynamic perspective

Background

It is a truism, often challenged but nonetheless repeated, that an organisation's greatest assets are its people/ employees/ human resources. Irrespective of whether this is merely an organisational platitude the significance of the role people perform in organisational effectiveness cannot be challenged. For some writers the greatest source of competitive advantage stems from an organisation's human resources (Schuler and Jackson, 1987; Connor and Ulrich 1996; Ulrich, 1997). With an increased emphasis on quality, customer service, productivity, employee commitment, workforce flexibility, teamwork and so on is an even greater necessity for all organisations to attract and recruit the right person for the right job at the right time (Stone, 1998; Compton and Nankervis, 1998). This requirement for quality staff in a competitive environment has placed growing pressure on all organisations to ensure they have the capacity and capability to meet the demands of selection and recruitment.

Efficient systems are required not only to meet commercial imperatives but also to ensure the selection and recruitment process complies with employment legislation. And although the new economy operates as if there are no geographic boundaries, most organisations do continue to operate from some physical locale. The necessity for legislative compliance is therefore in addition to whatever informal local social and political demands may prevail. For instance, although within Australia equal employment, anti-discrimination and industrial relations legislation regulates all aspects of the employment relationship, there are also expectations that corporations and public sector agencies will employ targeted disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities, indigenous Australians and so on.

The final, but not the least important consideration in the selection process is the estimated cost of selection and recruitment. The more senior the position the greater the cost, with some writers estimating the direct and indirect costs of replacing senior staff to be as great as A$75 000 (Abbott, De Cieri and Iverson, 1998). And of course this is separate to any financial

Potter, 1996:125-140).

Discourses are central to understanding practical strategies that give rise to competing social realities. The elaboration of meaning through discourse involves conflict over competing and hierarchically ordered systems of knowledge. Alvesson and Billing (1997: 40) define discourse as:

> ...a set of statements, beliefs, and vocabularies that is historically and socially specific and that tends to produce truth effects – certain beliefs are acted upon as true and therefore become partially true in terms of consequences.

Discourses contain within them the will to truth, or legitimating strategies that define and defend some forms of knowledge and ways of knowing reality over others. Hence the discursive construction of reality emerges out of knowledge producing and legitimating strategies, that impose particular kinds of order on the social world while simultaneously excluding others.

The mechanisms I refer to may be understood in terms of disciplining practices. Foucault (1981) argues that knowledge is disciplined through discourses that give rise to specific forms of social practice that constitute specific and possible ways of knowing by ordering and constraining knowledge in terms of what is possible to do or say or construct as real. For Foucault (1981) this is evidenced by the growth of regulatory practices throughout history that constitute ways of knowing reality in terms of classifications and rankings via strategies of prohibition, division and rejection (McNay, 1994:86; see also Townley, 1993).

Prohibition strategies operate in ways that place constraints on objects and circumstances of speech. These strategies name what can be talked about, how it is discussed, what can be named in discussion and who is authorised to name and speak for certain kinds of knowledges. For Foucault, prohibition strategies operate through sexual discourses and give rise to sexual taboos (McNay, 1994:86).

Strategies of division and rejection divide the world up into the real, what is true, good, moral or right and the 'other', that which cannot be incorporated or embraced by the true or correct reality. Disciplinary (as in various academic) knowledges divide the world into elements that can be

costs associated with any litigation that may occur as a result of poor selection and recruitment practise.

The process of selection is therefore not a simple task. Any appointment of staff is mediated by organisational requirements, legislative prescriptions and social and political expectations; all within the context of significant financial repercussions should inappropriate or unlawful selection practices occur.

It is clear from this perspective there is considerable scope for anxiety generated by the processes of selection and recruitment. I will argue these anxieties emanate from both the conscious and manifest concerns with the task as well as the unconscious fears that are triggered by the demands of the selection process. And it is because of these conscious and unconscious anxieties that recruiters establish rigid controls over the process. At the same time, because the consequences of a poor appointment could be so significant for the recruiter/ human resources practitioner/ manager it appears every attempt is made to minimise any personal or subjective involvement in that same process.

With so much at stake it is perhaps not surprising the process of selection and recruitment whether addressed from the perspective of Human Resources Management (HRM) (Stone, 1998; Compton and Nankervis, 1998) or organisational psychology (Schein, 1980) prescribes the efficacy of rational choice and objective and scientific methods to select the right person for the right job. Sophisticated technologies and testing procedures have been designed with the intent to evaluate general ability, specific skills and personality and/ or psychological profiles of applicants (Compton and Nankervis, 1998). Predicated on the need to create objective constructs of prediction and measurement, much of the recruitment literature condemns the use of non-scientific processes such as face-to-face interviews as inefficient, costly and highly subjective (Compton and Nankervis, 1998; Graves and Karren, 1996/1998).

Social defenses against organisational anxiety

There is a large body of work within organisational literature that recognises the influence personal and group psychology has on organisational life (eg. Schien 1965; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Hirschhorn, 1990; Diamond, 1993). For this discussion however I shall be focussing on the psychodynamic approach that emerged from the Tavistock Institute in London by researchers who examined the way in which participation in work and

legitimately incorporated into specific academic systems of knowledge and that which cannot giving rise to epistemological rules that define what is and what is not counted as valid knowledge.

The social constructionist project is therefore not interested in uncovering 'the truth' or 'solving the problem' rather it seeks to ask questions about why we know what we know and deconstruct what is taken for granted. To quote Chia (1996:15):

> ...the process of [social constructionist] enquiry is a matter of continually reweaving webs of beliefs to produce new and novel insights into the human condition...it problematizes the very basis of what constitutes scientific knowledge by inverting the priorities accorded to such privileged notions as truth, reality, and fact and show them to be inextricably linked to our own self-organizing practices.

The discursive constitution of on-line recruiting

There is a large literature that uses post-modern frameworks to analyse and understand what are generally to be considered new and hitherto unexplored realities constructed through the Internet (Barr, 1999; Wynn and Katz, 1998 and Civin, 1999). The general view is that the post-modern world of Internet communication requires a post-modern analysis to provide a new language and set of concepts to make sense of it.

Criticisms of this literature are generally framed in terms of a modernist challenge to post-modernism (see for example Wynn and Katz, 1998) rather than exploring the mechanisms of reality construction. The analysis presented here is not about providing new ways of understanding a new reality but rather it seeks to understand the outcomes of discursive strategies that cement and legitimise particular constructions of the Internet as a an effective and efficient personnel recruitment tool.

This approach, I argue, enhances our ability to critically evaluate everyday realities presented to us as true, correct and apparently unchallengeable. As such, social constructionism offers an inclusive and generative path towards a greater understanding and comprehension of the social world.

I use Foucault's framework of prohibition, division and rejection (McNay, 1994:86) to discuss the ways in which discourses surrounding e-cruitment constitute either/or understandings of on-line

organisational life stimulates painful anxieties which in turn leads to the creation of powerful defensive systems within organisations. Elliot Jaques (1955) and Isobel Menzies (1970) showed that in addition to functional reasons for the establishment of various organisational systems, processes and structures these arrangements also provided organisational cohesion in the defense against shared anxieties.

In describing this process as a social defense, the concept provides a link between individual and collective anxieties and offers a way of seeing the interrelationship between the individual and the group. It is as an individual taking up a work role that particular anxieties are generated; it is in establishing systems to defend against those anxieties that social systems are created. Over time the social defense system is built up and maintained as members of the group enter unconscious agreements to diminish their task-related anxiety (Gilmore and Krantz, 1990).

Identifying the ways in which organisational members use the psychological processes of splitting, projective identification, idealisation and so on Elliot Jaques (1953/1990) provided an elegant example of how the experience of splitting and projection has institutionalised the role of a first officer aboard a ship. Any ambivalence, negative feelings, fears and doubts experienced by the crew is split off and projected onto the First Officer, whose duty is to take responsibility for everything that goes wrong. This unconscious process allows the ship's captain upon whom the crew is dependent, "to be more readily idealised and identified with as a good protective figure" (p. 426).

Yet another example is provided by Menzies' (1970) in her seminal work on nursing, in which she argued considerable anxieties are generated when engaged in the tasks required of an occupation essentially about illness and death. In performing these tasks feelings of fear, disgust and distaste may emerge; just as feelings of compassion, guilt and libidinal and erotic attraction may be experienced. She showed that in an effort to defend against these anxieties, systems within hospitals were designed to limit close contact between nurses and individual patients - rosters rotated staff through different wards and shifts; rituals were introduced such as waking patients to give them drugs when sleep was more beneficial; patients were often identified not by name but by bed or illness and so on. With no particular ties to any individual patients and with no thought required to perform mindless rituals nurses were able to avoid feelings of anxieties.

recruitment. These strategies operate through the discourses surrounding Internet recruiting activities to discipline ways of knowing about the Internet by defining and de-limiting what we can know about on-line recruitment and the technologies that make it possible.

A good example is the mystery that surrounds the nature and operations of the Internet. For many of us, the Internet is at once part of our everyday life and a mystery. We use it everyday but at the same time we wonder about its scope, applications, its size and its phenomenal rate of growth. What is it? Where is it? How does it work? Who pays? Who are involved in it and how are they related to one another? These are questions often asked and seldom answered.

Wynn and Katz's (1998) discussion of an 'as if' world constructed through the Internet may offer some explanation for why it is difficult to remove the mystery surrounding the Internet. The authors argue the current literature on the Internet creates an 'as if' world. An unreal reality represented as a fantastical world, qualitatively different and disassociated from the reality outside the Internet.

While the article does not consider the processes through which these realities are constituted and the outcomes knowing the Internet in terms of an 'as if' (either/or) reality, the authors do provide a good summary of the rhetoric surrounding the WWW and popular constructions of Internet realities. These include:

- Futurism and radical scenarios
- WWW as fantastic and unreal
- WWW has no relation to the social context in which it has developed
- WWW has transformed culture
- Social domain with no known boundaries

The materiality and legitimacy of this world is created and sustained through strategies that prevent or prohibit us from comparing it with realities outside the Internet. How can we compare the world we now know with such a futuristic, unreal and difficult to define scenario? We can't because we only have limited discursive resources made available to us to do so.

Civin (1999) points to a similar phenomenon. In an article titled 'The Vicissitudes of cyberspace as potential-space' the author points to a wide range of views on cyber-technology that range from anti-technological Luddism to the absolutely rhapsodic.

Although much about nursing practise has changed since Menzies' account the use of social defenses has not. Before moving onto a discussion of how the use of on-line recruitment acts as a defense against the anxiety experienced by selection and recruitment I shall examine just a few of the psychological issues associated with selection and recruitment. For the purposes of this paper issues shall be examined only from the perspective of the recruiter and will be limited to only three issues - the myth of the perfect or idealised employee and the ways in which feelings of envy and rejection and exclusion are intrinsic to the process of selection and recruitment. Other psychological responses to the recruitment process that may emerge within applicants as well as recruiters will not be considered – word limits providing a boundary to this discussion.

The perfect or idealised employee

Pressures for improved performance, growing incidence of corporate mergers and rationalisations, downsizing, global competition and so on are creating a demand for "super-employees" who have multiple skills and can work within increasingly demanding working environments (Graves and Karren, 1996). These expectations of super-employees are both difficult to achieve and highly ambiguous. For instance commentators, while noting the paradox as if an aside, identify the necessity for employees to take risks but avoid failure; know every detail of the business and delegate more responsibility; be passionate about vision and be flexible and able to change direction quickly and speak up, be a leader and be participative, listen and co-operate (Kanter, 1990).

It is apparent that no employee can fulfil these impossible (dare one say schizophrenic) expectations. Such demands create fantasies of an ideal or perfect employee and in so doing create for recruiters an impossible task. At an executive level perfection may require the skills and qualities of a superhuman saviour. And yet despite the elevation in the business press of some corporate leaders to a god-like status (eg. Michael Eisner of Disney, Jack Welch at General Electric, Bill Gates at Microsoft) the essence of humanness is imperfection. The fantasy of the perfect employee or the leader as saviour is just that – a fantasy.

The cost of belief in finding the perfect employee can be enormous. Intrinsic to the fantasy of the perfect employee is the fear of hiring an imperfect candidate. Such a fear may (and has) paralyse/d the process of seeking the most suitable candidate, whether it be on

For me, the two articles demonstrate the discursive division and discipline of possible ways of knowing about the Internet. We can go with the mystery and engage in a rhapsodic support of cyberspace or question the mystery and engage in the dangerous Luddism of those who are sceptical. There is no room for fence-sitting!

On a personal note, I read Gordon Graham's book *the Internet:// a philosophical inquiry* (1999) for this paper. Graham also points to the limited ways in which the Internet can be talked about. He makes the observation that the only grounds for acceptable critique of the Internet are firmly located in terms of technological advancement and futurism. Arguments to the contrary are rejected as anti-technological and the work of Luddites.

Taking this information on board I wrote myself a note in the margin of Graham's book:

> Be careful not to appear to be like this [too anti-technological] – we need reasoned argument.

In hindsight I now recognise why I wrote this note. I wanted to challenge the assumptions and claims made by supporters of the Internet but I had very little choice over how I would do this. I could remain in the realm of the rhapsodic or risk being marginalised and not heard by taking an anti-technology position.

The discursive strategies of prohibition, division and rejection discipline our understanding of the Internet by constituting systems of hierarchically arranged and often mutually exclusive realities. As I demonstrate above, these discursive strategies constitute the Internet in terms of an either/or reality by reference to that which is outside its ken (quite literally), the other, a world that is not the Internet.

Disciplining Human Resources

HRM, as Jan argues above, is concerned with the development of objective and scientific methods for recruiting and selecting appropriately qualified staff in an efficient and effective manner. In order to achieve this aim, HRM theories and practices operate as techniques that render the subjects of HRM, people and organisations, objects of practice by construing them as controllable and manageable units through the application of rational and scientific methods.

an insistence the advertising be listed as widely as possible, that a large enough pool of candidates is available, that all selection criteria be met and so on. In this circumstance no employee can be "good enough".

Rejection and exclusion

Corporate down-sizing, frequent mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing of services, privatisation of government services and agencies and a sustained unemployment rate in Australia of about 8% have all contributed to a large pool of professionals seeking employment. Although not all commentators on the human cost of down-sizing see a parallel with the horrors of the Holocaust (see Stein, 1996), the psychological impact of forced redundancy can be enormous (Sparrow and Cooper, 1998; Luthans and Sommer, 1999;Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly and Greenberg, 2000).

It is this contextual factor that must be considered when making explicit the presence of rejection and exclusion within each step of the process of selection and recruitment. Because there are usually more applicants than positions available the task of informing a candidate of success is mediated by the awareness that many more applicants must be informed of their failure – that is, of their rejection. To reject is almost as unpleasant as to be rejected; responses to the feelings rejection invokes may vary – but for most are feelings of considerable anxiety. As infants we were excluded from our parents' world and every person no matter their subsequent circumstances has therefore experience of rejection and exclusion. Rejection is to deny belonging and attachment – and to belong is considered a fundamental human psychological and physiological need (Maslow, 1970; Bowlby, 1973; Klein, 1986).

For recruiters, although it is they who are engaged in the act of rejection and exclusion, it is the anxiety of their own rejection that is experienced in the act of excluding an Other. I intend to discuss later how on-line recruitment has been taken up so readily as a defense against these anxieties.

Envy

One of the rarely discussed features of organisational life, envy, can also be readily invoked during the process of conducting a search for a new employee (Bedeian, 1995; Stein, 2000). The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary suggests there are two aspects to envy – the first involves a wish to have the good fortune and/or possessions of an Other; the second

Townley (1993) argues human resource theory and practice encompasses a broad range of complex and heterogeneous elements of organisation and human behaviour, which are defined and ordered by HRM discourses. Following Townley's (1993) post-modern analysis, I argue that HRM discourses surrounding on-line recruitment give rise to strategies of division and rejection that simultaneously define both the subjects and the relations assumed in personnel selection and recruitment on the Internet.

Below is a brief analysis of the rhetoric surrounding on-line recruitment from text-based and on-line sources. The analysis demonstrates how the strategies of prohibition, division and rejection operate to discipline and de-limit possible ways of understanding and discussing e-cruitment in terms of the nature of those who participate in these activities and the assumed relationships between them.

The Internet is 'HOT'

A general theme found in the rhetoric is that the Internet is 'HOT'. It is new, technologically advanced and therefore its efficacy as a recruitment tool cannot be questioned. Similarly the goodness and technological savvy of those involved in Internet recruitment also cannot be questioned.

This is the kind of rhetoric Civin (1999) describes as the rhapsodic support of the Internet. It operates by creating a discursive space that disciplines our ability to question the underlying assumptions of recruitment on the Internet. It divides potential employers and employees into two groups, those who use on-line recruitment (read those who are 'hot', modern, technologically correct) and the 'others' (read those who are 'not hot': the less technologically savvy and less successful) who don't.
The 'others' those who don't participate in on-line recruitment face rejection and failure. They are the ones left behind (see the dinosaurs below)and the inefficient and ineffective ones.

The Internet is transformative: it has radically transformed the rules of recruitment by changing the roles and relationships in HR

A number of themes are linked to the idea that the Internet is transformative. These include the view involves feelings of resentment and discontent towards the more fortunate Other. Employee resumes and curriculum vitae provide significant amount of personal information that is readily accessible to all those involved in the selection process. Details of place of residence, educational achievements, career history and successes and so on can provide a very clear image (or fantasy) of the applicants perhaps highlighting individual shortcomings by the discrepancy between recruiters' own achievements and the successes of job applicants.

Although there are many ways in which envy may influence the selection process the focus of this paper is on the existence of envy invoked by the ready access to large numbers of applicant's employment histories. Envy is an extremely unpleasant emotion to experience and individual responses to envy can be very internally destructive (Klein, 1957). It is nonetheless an aspect of the selection and recruitment process that must be considered.

It is apparent involvement in selection and recruitment of staff can be a process fraught with psychological stresses. Either consciously or within their unconscious recruiters face fundamental anxieties – the anxiety of fear of failure, the anxiety of rejection and exclusion as well as the anxiety created by envy.

Internet recruitment or e-cruitment

Over recent years[3] on-line recruiting which uses the spread and access of the World Wide Web (WWW) has become increasingly popular for recruitment agencies, job-seekers and organisations alike (eg. Starcke, 1996; Wyld, 1998; Kay, 2000). Exponents of electronic recruiting claim it has changed the way the recruiting industry works and that it is faster, more efficient and cheaper than traditional methods (eg. Browne, 1998; Useem, 1999; Stellar Services Home Page, 2000; Kay, 2000; topjobs.com.au, 2000).

Despite the hyperbole (eg. The banner of a flyer for a two-day conference on on-line recruitment began with *The labour market is undergoing a paradigm shift. Recruiters not exploiting the cost efficiency, speed and reach of the Internet will find their company floundering in the face of their competitors*) that surrounds the unlimited and unbounded potential of the Web I will argue rather than representing a paradigmatic transformation it is merely a linguistic

[3] The first article I have been able to find that discusses the use of the Internet to recruit staff was in 1995. The trickle of articles in 1996 and 1997 is now a torrent as any glance at an electronic data-base will attest.

that Internet technology changes roles and relationships in HR and these changes cannot be ignored.

Statements such as 'the world of recruitment is changing' and HR practitioners need cheaper faster delivery of services because of the global nature of the business world are examples of this rhetoric. The implication is that HR people are desperate for new recruiting strategies that redefine the ways in which HR departments find new candidates (see for example Bryant, 1999:34-35).

Once again strategies of division and rejection work to at once create the world in which HR recruitment operates (global and rapidly changing) and the kinds of practices HR practitioners must adopt in this brave new world of recruitment. The world HR practitioners once inhabited is gone, rejected out of hand as an irrelevant past along with the activities they traditionally engaged in as the next section demonstrates.

The old ways are difficult and crude

The 'other' divided off world must be rejected because the 'old ways' of recruitment are difficult, outdated, technological naive and crude as the following extract states.

> "Recruiting will not be the rather crude process it is today of plugging a roughly round person into a roughly round hole and hoping that the fit is good enough (Callander, HR Monthly, May 1999:54)

Don't be a dinosaur

The rhetoric outlaws traditional recruitment tools in terms of the efficacy and degree of technical sophistication offered by the Internet. Managers and recruiters are implored not to become 'dinosaurs' (Howes, 1999:55). The Internet at once offers managers the potential to add value and become technologically sophisticated (hot – see above), as well as avoiding the difficulties of making judgements about potential job candidates (see Greengard, 1998:75).

In summary, strategies of prohibition, division and rejection work to construct the Internet as a world of science that takes the inexactitude out of recruiting staff. Simultaneously the strategies of division and rejection take the complexity out of human beings.

shift from recruitment to e-cruitment. Still baffled by the claims of electronic recruiters I do not understand how e-cruitment has radically challenged the essence of selection and recruitment. I shall therefore argue the Internet is just one more technological tool in a raft of tools recruiters use to defend against the anxieties generated by the process of selection and recruitment.

UNDERSTANDING THE DICHOTOMOUS REALITY OF RECRUITING ON THE WWW

We have presented our two quite distinct positions on on-line recruitment. Sue has argued discourses surrounding e-cruitment give rise to discursive strategies that discipline and control our understanding of the efficacy of this new form of recruitment. Jan has argued the anxieties inherent in the practise of selection and recruitment have contributed to the unconscious need for recruiters to create social defenses – of which on-line recruitment is just one more defence. Despite our quite disparate positions, our intention is not to argue for the "correctness" of one over the other. We now want to move from the possibility of an either/or position to the greater intellectual challenge of a both/ and conversation. In order to do this we have agreed we will examine just some of the hyperbole of the claims of e-cruitment and seek to offer some analysis that informs rather than annihilates the others' perspective.

The Internet is HOT

Jan: My first response to the use of HOT is hot and sexy; hot and sweaty. Sex. I don't think it necessary to embark on a discussion about Freud's identification of the power of the libidinal drive because we all understand at some level why sex sells.

I guess it is easy though to suggest why recruiting through the Net might be attractive – if the Net is hot, then presumably people who use the Net are also hot. Therefore if I use the Net I am hot and the people I want to recruit must be hot too.

As I mentioned one of the anxieties of finding suitably qualified staff is the necessity to find people with the appropriate range of skills, competences, attributes and experience. Almost by implication, to be hot also means smart and savvy and with the skills required to be part of a new Millennium workforce. The use of the Net is therefore a screening process - the very use of the technology ascribes particular qualities to the prospective employee. In my quest for the idealised and perfect employee, there is some reassurance that the hot employee who is "out there" is within the reach and access of the Net.

From a personal perspective there is also real attraction in using the Internet. If I am hot I am not dull and boring and drab. From a psychodynamic perspective my doubts and fears about my "hotness" quotient can be split off and projected into the Net – which can then be introjected or taken in as hot. In this process I get rid of my daggy bit and because I use the Internet I am now cool (aka hot).

Sue: This is a dividing and rejecting strategy. The subtext of the 'Internet is hot' is of course; everything else is not (hot). As I indicate in my brief analysis, discourses surrounding Internet recruitment create a dichotomy that disciplines the ways in which we not only come to know and talk about Internet but as you indicate Jan, construe those involved in online recruitment activities.

Internet recruitment is given a materiality and legitimacy by linking into discourses of rationality and technical competence to construct the either/or world of relatively simple, rational, and technology based solutions to a complex and difficult activity. Other ways of thinking about the Internet and recruiting staff on-line are rejected and dispensed with, time and time again. The Internet is constituted and legitimised as not only the 'one best way' for recruiting staff but also the staff that are recruited are constituted as being of a particular kind with particular qualities which 'fit' into the futuristic scenario of Internet recruitment. Potential employees are no longer mundane, messy, complex and difficult to categorise individuals they are constituted as an undifferentiated group of highly skilled, technologically savvy, committed and discriminating people.

Jan: You talk of the world of either/or used as a way of simplifying the difficult and complex and chaotic. It sounds very similar to the process of splitting, projection and idealisation – Melanie Klein refers to this as the paranoid schizoid position in which the dichotomy of good/bad or simple/complex and so on is established in order to manage the complexity and uncertainty of living. Of course this position may lead to rigidity and loss of creativity (Krantz, 1996) – so focussed are we on maintaining the dichotomous relationships there is little room to contemplate playing with possibilities or challenging the basis of the split.

It is also apparent we have a shared view of the "idealisation" of the potential applicants – you refer to the undifferentiated in which there is no room for shades of skill, competence etc. Again, from my perspective the use of Internet recruitment perpetuates the myth or fantasy of the perfect employee.

Sue: Yes I think the idea of splitting is very relevant. I see it in terms of practical strategies of prohibition, division and rejection that discipline and simplify ways of knowing complex social phenomena. All the messy stuff, the difficulties programmers face in developing software to deal with human complexities and differences are split off, assumed away, rejected out of hand. We are discursively prohibited from discussing such difficulties as well as psychologically defending ourselves from them.

Your point about the idealised employee is also interesting. The discourses surrounding the Internet constitute those engaged in on-line recruiting (recruiters and recruitees) as rationalised, relatively contextless, non-complex and homogenous participants and 'the other' those who do not embrace the technology or fit the requirements of online recruiting.

At a more personal level we both experienced this when we attempted to register ourselves for jobs on one of the on-line recruitment sites. Our skills and experiences did not fit neatly into the categorisations offered by the database protocols. Do you have a further comment about this?

The Technology Changes Roles and Relationships in HR

Jan: Before I answer the question I will offer a brief explanation of the practicalities of on-line recruitment. For recruitment companies and companies conducting their own recruitment on-line, software and hardware has been developed to sort resumes matching key words to pre-set criteria, to conduct on-line psychological and behavioural testing, to interview applicants and generate letters for unsuccessful applicants (see McCune, 1998). Interactive voice response or computer assisted telephone-screening systems have also been developed to automate the recruitment process (McCune, 1998; Davey, 1998). Should it be required the technology allows for no human involvement in the process of selection and recruitment.

It is apparent the use of technology to engage in the process of selection and recruitment has created considerable distance between recruiter and potential applicant. Just as the use of technology in the finance industry has changed the concept of "customer" from a flesh and blood person who meets with a teller or a consultant or a bank manager to a transaction file that details dealings with bank services (Arnold, 1998), the use of on-line recruiting has changed a potential job applicant to a resume and the recruitment company to "a portal for job-seekers" (Steggall, 2000).

The many claims of the technology in general and the Internet in particular make it a very attractive tool for recruiters not just for its efficiencies but because of the diminution of any direct human involvement in the selection process. The technology is portrayed as objective, rational, impersonal and powerful (Shade, 1997), it provides anonymity and can transcend gender, ethnic, racial differences and avoid being prejudicial or discriminatory.

From a psychodynamic perspective the attractiveness of on-line recruitment can be understood as instituting a social system that depersonalises job seekers and removes any subjective engagement between recruiter and potential employees. Just as Menzies identified the way in which ritualised systems served as an antidote to the anxieties of nursing, so too does the use of Internet technology to conduct selection and recruitment allow recruiters deny the anxieties generated by recruitment.

In answer to your question Sue. I think because the requirements of the technology (of course which are driven by the people who demand and programme it) we were little more than disembodied entities. I recall how we felt at the time. We tried to engineer our work experience to fit the requirements and we couldn't do so. There was no opportunity for us as whole people to be considered – our bits did not fit. And our bits, let alone our whole were not valued.

At the time we tried to find a phone number to speak to someone about the application and the only point of contact was an email address. Not only could we not be known to the recruiting company they could not be

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known to us. There was no opportunity to establish any relationship in any way with the recruiters or the recruiting company. Very strange.

Sue: I agree. Those who engage in Internet recruitment are participating in a pared down reality where the relationships between individuals are constituted in rational and impersonal terms. I see this in terms of what Foucault calls governmentality (McNay, 1994:85ff). The discourses surrounding Internet recruitment operate as both an objectivizing force and a subjectivizing force. The Internet at once creates categories of job seekers and defines the subjectivities of those who fit the category 'job seeker'. Again as I said before, this depersonalised category assumes an undifferentiated group of individuals, a group of same people who fit the mould.

SOME CLOSING COMMENTS

In this paper we have conducted a dialogue from within and across the social constructionist and psychodynamic perspectives to understand online recruitment and our personal responses to this relatively new addition to management discourse. Our dialogue offers theoretical insights from both these perspectives as well as our learning from each other's theoretical knowledge and analysis. Our attempt to pursue a both/and approach has broadened our understanding of not only the Internet as a medium and a method for recruiting and selecting personnel but also the ways in which theoretical discourses define and delimit possible ways of knowing in terms of incommensurability rather than inclusiveness.

Our dialogue demonstrates the power and usefulness of a both/and approach to understanding complex social phenomena. Our open and ongoing conversation between what are traditionally considered two quite different and mutually exclusive, either/or views of the social world continues ....

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