

## Vetting and Screening of Prospective Employees Remain a Critical Element of People Acquisition and Placement and a Risk Control Measure Too



### Introduction

As we grapple with the current business demands of shorter response times, value-adding HR offerings to business and the need to re-engineer our HR employee life-cycle processes to be fit-for-purpose, we cannot afford HR processes that put business at risk. This article emphasises the need to be scrupulous in the recruitment, selection and placement of existing and newly acquired employees.

### Context

The article should be read within the context of two case studies with due regard to the sensitivity surrounding the first case study.

### Case Study 1

At the time of preparing this article, the family of Uyinene Mrwetyana is still reeling with shock and trauma at the tragic death of their lovely daughter under tragic and heart-breaking circumstances. An employee of the Post Office has confessed to this heinous deed and the law is currently taking its course. Details have subsequently emerged that the suspect has a previous conviction of robbery (<https://www.all4women.co.za/183493727> : Accessed 27 September 2019).

Furthermore, it is alleged that the employee was part of those employed *en-masse* (with thousands of others without any screening or vetting) as per an agreement between the Post Office and labour to employ the previous labour broking employees into permanent positions.

### Case Study 2

In 2010 the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) employed Daniel Mthimkhulu on a fraudulent curriculum vitae in an executive position (as a Chief Engineer), and for the next 63 months the Company paid him more than R15-million in salary and related company-to-cost benefits and in the process reportedly suffered hundreds of millions (<https://www.msn.com/en-za/money/news/prasas>: accessed 27 September 2019).

This week, the high court ordered Mthimkhulu to pay the PRASA R5.7-million in damages resulting from his employment in the executive position based on his fictitious CV.

Mthimkhulu was promoted back in 2010 to the position of executive in charge of engineering services and this appointment would make him the Company's head engineer, a position requiring a minimum of an engineering diploma or degree.

Mthimkhulu had claimed that he possesses a national diploma in mechanical engineering from the Vaal University of Technology, and that he obtained a degree in mechanical and maintenance engineering from Wits University.

With a matriculation certificate as his highest qualification, for the above-mentioned period of employment, Mthimkhulu impersonated a top engineer, and in the process he reportedly intentionally and dishonestly persuaded PRASA to pay him an additional R7,072 million - an amount which puts his monthly salary to R112,258.43 per month.

Interestingly, Mthimkhulu, in September 2010, informed and presented to the then CEO of PRASA, Lucky Montana, with a false letter of appointment as a specialist engineer for DB Schenker, a German company, and lo and behold, PRASA counter-offered the R2,8 million supposed offers. Furthermore, Mthimkhulu informed his then CEO, Montana, that he had additionally obtained an engineering doctorate degree from Technische Universitat Munchen, resulting in his salary growing to a gross amount of R240,864.43 per month for the 63 months he deceitfully remained in the job

(<https://www.msn.com/en-za/money/news/prasas>: accessed 27 September 2019).

Mthimkhulu was eventually dismissed by PRASA in August 2015 and the Company followed him in a civil claim for damages at the high court, demanding he pay back his improperly gotten salary. The high court has ordered Mthimkhulu to pay PRASA R5.7-million (plus interest at 9% per annum). In addition, he was hit with the costs of the case at a punitive scale as well as the cost of PRASA's two counsel for the case, which amount is still to be determined

(<https://www.msn.com/en-za/money/news/prasas>: accessed 27 September 2019).

Shockingly, the above two case studies seem to strongly suggest that the two incidents are but a tip of the iceberg: One of the provincial departments was still in the recent past reportedly hiring and placing/promoting existing and newly recruited employees without fully screening and vetting these.

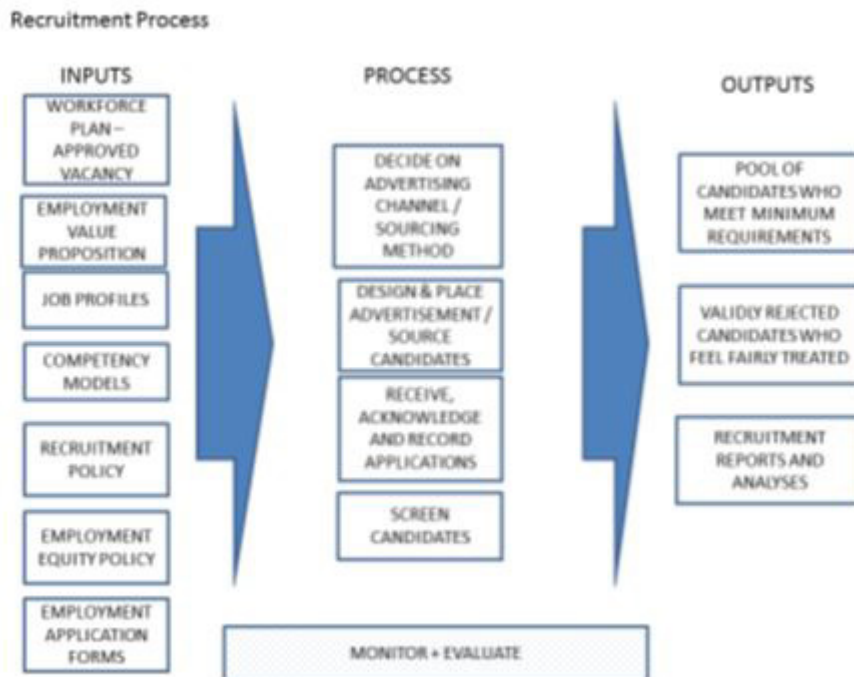
### **Professional Practice Standards on Recruitment and Selection**

The case studies referred to above put the HR processes, policies and processes on the spot.

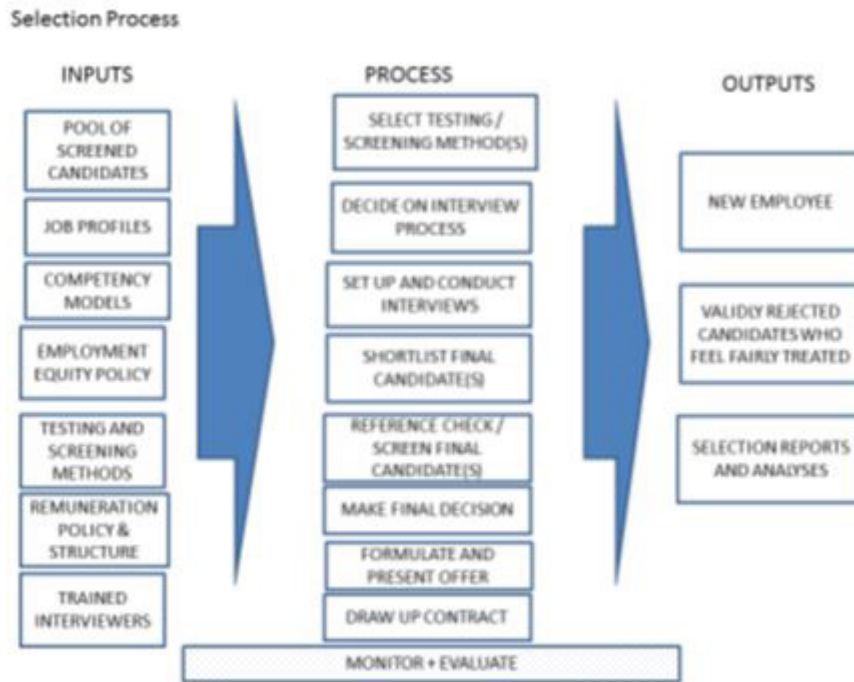
The Professional Practice Standards (PPS) are a critical component of the National Human Resource

Management System Model and Standard and were developed and launched by the SABPP in 2013. Each PPS sets out the operational/tactical process that constitutes best industry practice in that discipline of HR management, with emphasis on application of the HR Standard/s (SABPP, 2015)

Two processes relevant here are the Recruitment and the Selection Professional Practice Standards. As depicted below, the pre-screening of candidates' CV's, salary information and expectations; and qualifications constitutes this Standard



On the other hand, the Selection Standard calls for inter alia, the screening of final candidates by conducting previous work reference and criminal checks.



### Human Resource Practices Susceptible to Unethical Behaviour

Empirical information is available from a survey conducted in 2002 and again in 2006, followed by a longitudinal survey conducted in 2014 among HR professionals who are members of the SABPP in South Africa. The respondents of the survey were required to among others, indicate the degree to which they perceive specific HR practices to be prone to unethical practice. The Table below indicates that nepotism was rated the highest in 2006, while employee selection; and recruitment and recruitment advertising occupied positions 1 and 3 in the 2014 survey (Erasmus & Wordsworth, in SABPP: 2015).

HR Practice	Position in 2006	Position in 2014
Nepotism	1	-
Affirmative action interventions	2	-
Performance appraisals	3	-
Diversity issues over merit and reward systems	4	-
Employee selection	-	1
Performance management and appraisal	-	2
Recruitment and recruitment advertising	-	3
Remuneration and reward	-	4

### Implications for HR

As we re-engineer and continuously improve HR processes, we need to tighten these up to mitigate the above-mentioned HR and organisational risks. The case studies referred to above are an indication of what catastrophes organisations are likely to end up with if such risks are ignored. What a pity that a life of a lovely and promising young girl was lost due to what looks like porous recruitment; and selection processes.

As indicated above, the vetting and screening of prospective and existing employees remain a critical element of people acquisition and placement, and an HR risk control measure too.

### **References**

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