




Exploring employee selection procedures in South African organisations



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Orientation: Using appropriate selection procedures assists organisations in acquiring applicants with the right competencies, a positive attitude and alignment with organisational values, providing a competitive advantage in the market.

Research purpose: The study aims to investigate the selection procedures used by South African organisations, including interviews, psychological assessments, reference checks, physical checks, and employment offers.

Motivation for the study: The literature review revealed that there is limited research on employee selection practices in the South African context across various industries and organisations.

Research approach/design and method: This qualitative study included a sample of 60 participants, and interpretivism was the paradigm the study followed. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and ATLAS.ti.

Main findings: The study revealed that the most commonly used selection procedures included online competency-based interviews, psychometric assessments and reference checks.

Practical/managerial implications: Not having an objective and well-trained selection panel may be detrimental to the fairness of the employee selection process. Managers should have different and innovative employee selection procedures to appoint employees with the appropriate competencies at the right time. Human resource practitioners need to act as change agents to promote the adoption of technology and innovation in their selection practices.

Contribution/value-add: This study was conducted across various organisations and proposes a new selection process that human resource management practitioners can use to select the right candidate. A seven-step selection framework is presented.

Keywords: interviews; referencing; psychometric tests; employee selection; South Africa.

Introduction

Employee selection is a topic of interest to organisations, academics and practitioners. Organisations are interested in how much it costs to select appropriate employees, as these employees can give organisations a competitive advantage in their respective industries (Abiwu & Martins, 2024). It has led organisations to invest in technology that assists them in selecting suitably qualified employees (Poisat et al., 2024). Employee selection practitioners use technology such as websites to attract and use metrics such as time-to-hire. Time-to-hire is how long it takes the organisation to hire (Ngonyama-Ndou, 2023). Academics address the research gap in employee selection by developing theoretical frameworks and offering practical solutions to practitioners and line managers (Shet & Nair, 2022).

Employee selection involves choosing the most suitable candidates from a pool of applicants for a position advertised (Sackett et al., 2022). This process often includes various procedures to gather valuable information about applicants, which is then compared to the job requirements. In this article, the procedure also refers to methods. Nel et al. (2021) opine that interviews, reference checks, psychometric tests, applications and curriculum vitae (CV) play a key role in identifying differences among candidates, helping talent acquisition practitioners and line managers to make an informed selection decision based on the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant.

The 2025 talent acquisition trend shows that 67% of organisations favour using social media to optimise employee selection (Korn Ferry, 2025). Employers specifically use social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and X to make decisions about applicants' behaviours

(Olshevska & Pryimak, 2023). It has been established that in the United States, eight applicants are hired every minute using LinkedIn, and just over 50% of Generation X and over 60% of millennials look at the employer brand on social media before applying to the organisation (Antonias, 2024). Employer brand is the strategy of how the organisation portrays its image differently from its competitors in terms of salary package and working conditions to attract applicants. Internally, how the organisation portrays itself to the workers in terms of compensation, stability and benefits is known as the employee value proposition (Hein et al., 2023).

Another innovative trend is organisations using an application tracking system (ATS) technology. It is software designed to automate repetitive tasks for talent acquisition practitioners, such as selecting and reviewing applicants' CVs, scheduling meetings with stakeholders (including hiring managers, panel members, and applicants), and sending emails (Susanto & Hamzal, 2024). Through ATS, line managers and talent acquisition practitioners can track the progress of the employee selection status (Olshevska & Pryimak, 2023). Even though using artificial intelligence (AI) in ATS has its benefits, Hunkenschroer and Luetge (2022) caution against the ethical dilemmas it presents. This caution arises from the fact that algorithmic bias stems from limited raw data sets and biased algorithm designers (Chen, 2023, p. 1). Employee selection practitioners should also be aware that external applicants may view ATS as unfair discrimination, especially when the applicant does not have sufficient data to complete the entire application process.

The main argument of this article is that the combination of employee selection procedures can improve the appropriate decision to select a competent candidate (Landers & Sanchez, 2022). It is noted that psychometric assessments, presentations and structured interviews are frequently used in organisations because they have been shown to achieve construct (i.e. measuring what is supposed to be measured) and criterion (predicting future performance) validity (Georgiou & Lievens, 2022). A survey conducted by Gul and Ghazain (2022) revealed that 67% of organisations prefer using structured face-to-face interviews, which involve asking applicants similar questions and the ratings used. There is evidence that psychometric assessments that are conducted fairly (Landers et al., 2021) and are not unfairly discriminatory assist in detecting applicants' attributes such as teamwork, problem-solving and handling pressure (Goerke & Maier, 2021). These assessments help determine whether the candidate is suitable for the job and if the applicant will fit well in the role. Online psychometric assessments are also cost-effective (Köchling & Wehner, 2020), and they provide assessment results that are given as a guideline or recommendation for applicants who meet the requirements for appointments. These results can also be provided within a short space of time (Ramos-Villagrana et al., 2022). Presentations are also frequently used by applicants applying for academic and managerial positions (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013).

Conducting interviews where there is no adherence to ethical and legislative requirements is problematic (Michelotti et al., 2019). The ethical requirements manifest when the selection panel asks questions that are not related to the job's key performance areas, and they opt not to appoint and discriminate against the applicants because of non-relevant job requirements or criteria such as religion and racial orientation (Sousa, 2022). Such practices are immoral and not in line with Section 9 of the South African *Constitution* and Section 6 of the *Employment Equity Act (EEA)*, which state that employers should not unfairly discriminate against applicants based on irrelevant concepts such as ethnicity, race, gender and disability. An example of discrimination is when a disabled applicant was not asked during the interviews about how his disability would be a barrier to executing the job tasks. Afterwards, during the reference checking, the referee was asked the question of the applicant's capability, and the employer opted not to hire him (Vedeler, 2024).

The other challenge is that the employee selection panel does not adhere to fairness principles. In South Africa (SA), there is evidence of selecting employees who are acquainted with or related to top managers, unions and political organisations. Such hires do not possess the required competencies for the job (Maleka, 2024), and as their selection was not based on meritocracy, they struggle to fit into the organisation's culture, and they perform badly (Baroun, 2022). In some instances, aggrieved external applicants go to dispute resolution agencies where the organisations experience brand and reputational damage. Internal applicants who deem the employee selection process unfair opt to resign, and the employer incurs higher costs to replace them (Kyeong & Kim, 2024).

A review of the South African literature showed that employee selection is an under-researched topic, especially when scholars conducted research across sectors. There has been less research since the employee selection framework was developed by Erasmus et al. in 2004. This framework entails the procedure and selection methods mentioned earlier. The employee selection landscape has changed in South Africa and globally, as can be observed in the earlier discussions. Therefore, this study will add value by investigating the currency and validity of the Erasmus et al. (2004) framework.

Purpose of the study

The primary objective of the study was to explore employee selection practices in South African organisations. The secondary objectives of the study were to:

- *Explore the frequency of selection procedures used by organisations in SA.*
- *Explore challenges experienced during the employee selection procedures in SA.*
- *Explore innovative employee selection strategies used by organisations in SA.*
- *Recommend a selection framework for companies in SA.*

Literature review

Employee selection is the next stage after recruitment in the hiring process and has been defined as a process by which the right person is chosen from the pool of applicants to be hired based on the specified requirements of the organisation (Hamza et al., 2021). This means that employee selection is a process of hiring suitable people who can successfully perform the job (Prabhu et al., 2020). The main objective of the employee selection process is to identify candidates who are likely to contribute the most to the organisation in the long term (Nel et al., 2021). Therefore, an organisation must devise a strategy to carefully select the most suitable employees to create a competitive advantage.

In the current SA context, there is a significant number of applicants compared to the available job opportunities. Despite a strong demand for skilled labour, SA continues to face one of the highest youth unemployment rates globally because of a persistent mismatch between the skills young people have and those required by the job market (Habiyaemye et al., 2022). Companies face the significant challenge of selecting from a large pool of applicants. However, this pool also includes unskilled individuals who often do not meet the job criteria. Employers need to pay due diligence during the employee selection process, as the efficiency of their recruitment and selection will have a significant impact on the quality of human capital (Bans-Akutey et al., 2021). The 'Human capital model' section will focus on a model that can guide the employee selection process to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Human capital model

Different theories and models focus on selection processes, which include human capital theory, person-organisation fit model, social exchange theory, realistic job preview model, multiple sequence model, multiple hurdles model, attraction-selection-attrition theory, resource-based view and many more. Each of these theories offers a different perspective on employee selection, highlighting various aspects, such as identifying, targeting and placing people into the best job position for them and the company, optimising efficiency, savings and job satisfaction (Prabhu et al., 2020). This article will focus on the human capital model, which views employees as assets whose skills and knowledge contribute to organisational success. Human capital theory has served as the foundation for studies on the recruitment and employee selection process (Yadav et al., 2021). The model was initially developed by economists like Gary Becker, who posits that individuals' skills, knowledge, education and experience are valuable resources – akin to 'capital' – that contribute to economic productivity and organisational success (Becker, 1962, 1964). It is about matching the competencies, experience, skills and education to the job requirements and choosing between a pool of potential candidates (Bangura, 2024).

According to Boxall and Purcell (2022), the human capital theory emphasises the need for organisations to develop the

skills and competencies of their human resources to enable more productivity. The acquisition and development of skills are leveraged through the firm's recruiting and employee selection procedures. Human capital is both a competitive advantage and a strategic asset. However, these benefits will only be realised if organisations employ and retain people who have knowledge that is both valuable and unique for the firm (Taylor & Woodhams, 2022). This model is applicable in employee selection procedures as it suggests that employers choose candidates with higher levels of human capital, such as formal education, work experience and relevant skills because these candidates are seen as more likely to enhance organisational performance (Becker, 1964; Karim et al., 2021). In a knowledge-based economy, having the right employees is the most critical factor for a company to achieve its goals and objectives (Crawshaw et al., 2020; Dessler, 2020; Hamza et al., 2021).

To select the right people, the organisation implements different employee selection methods and procedures that are aligned with the organisation's objectives. Employee selection procedures vary from industry to industry, company to company and even within a company's different departments (Mamgain & Mamgain, 2022). The section 'Erasmus' selection process' will examine the selection process established by Erasmus et al. (2004).

Erasmus' selection process

According to Karim et al. (2021), the employee selection procedure is the hiring procedure of prospective employees among alternative employees for doing a particular job. The authors further explained that the selection process includes six phases based on the Erasmus et al. (2004) model, which include a preliminary interview, employment test, employment interview, references check, physical check and lastly, the offer of employment. The Erasmus et al. (2004) model links to the Human Capital Model as they both aim to match the potential applicants to the job requirements by using various techniques. This section will focus on the selection process proposed by Erasmus et al. (2004).

Preliminary interview or screening

The preliminary or screening interview is the first step in the employee selection procedure, where human resource managers eliminate unqualified applications based on the information provided in the initial application. This information usually includes the applicant's CV, cover letter and qualifications. Preliminary interviews are conducted with candidates to get more information on their qualifications and experience. This process can be time-consuming and challenging because of the high volume of applications received for a single job (Van Esch & Black, 2021). Traditional pre-screening methods, such as manual screening and ranking, can be error-prone and biased in some instances because of personal preferences either by union or management representatives, resulting in the deselection of potentially suitable candidates. The majority of organisations

now utilise automated systems, and these e-selection methods have streamlined the hiring process, lowered costs and time requirements, and improved overall efficiency (Deloitte, 2025; Kurbetti & Maheshkar, 2021). Artificial intelligence can streamline employee selection by automating mundane tasks, for example, CV screening, scheduling interviews and sending advancement updates to candidates (Hewage, 2023).

Employment assessments and tests

Employment assessments and tests are becoming very popular devices for selecting the best candidates for different posts. Several types of assessments and tests are used to measure the skills and abilities needed to better understand applicants and to match them to the job requirements and organisational culture (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2013). The type of employment assessment or test chosen will depend on the nature of the job, responsibilities and the number of applicants. Some tests that are used include intelligence and aptitude. Personality and skills-based assessment can also be employed. Personality assessments have scant popularity in employee selection, primarily because they are difficult to defend legally (Rajyalaxmi, 2023). The EEA in SA places strict limitations on the use of psychometric testing in employment settings, especially for hiring and employee selection procedures. To be used legally, such tests must be proven to be scientifically valid, reliable and free from bias against any individual or group. Additionally, the EEA forbids the use of tests that have not been approved by the Health Professions Council of South Africa or another recognised authority (Maleka & Siziba, 2019).

Employment interviews

The primary goal of interviews, therefore, is to determine the suitability of applicants for a particular job (Armstrong, 2020). Previously, most of the interviews used to be conducted face-to-face, but because of the technological developments and the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), most organisations are using different methods for their interviews, which include online interviews or employees developing videos (Gualtieri et al., 2020). Competency-based interviews evaluate an applicant's fit for a role by using structured questions to explore past experiences that demonstrate key skills and behaviours. This method helps reveal the personal qualities needed for job success (Raisova, 2012). A competency-based interviewing approach is more effective than traditional interviews and is recommended as it can better identify applicants' inherent abilities (Ogbu et al., 2019).

Reference checks

The point of conducting reference checks is to acquire information about the candidates' past behaviour and confirm the accuracy of the information provided on the CV and/or application form. This process may assist in identifying discrepancies regarding the applicants' previous

employment and salary, as well as the reasons for exiting this previous employment (Armstrong, 2020). Reference checks also provide the organisation with other people's perceptions of the candidate's professional ability. However, the validity and reliability of the reference-checking process have been interrogated, specifically because of its unstructured nature (Bako & Aladelusi, 2017). Studies have shown that structured reference checks demonstrate good reliability, including internal consistency, inter-rater reliability and test-retest reliability (e.g. Hedricks et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2004). They also exhibit criterion-related validity comparable to other established non-cognitive assessment methods, such as personality assessments, assessment centres and biodata (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

Physical checks

The main purpose of conducting a physical or medical examination is to properly match the candidate's physical ability with the job requirements (Rajyalaxmi, 2023). Therefore, it is an employee selection method used by organisations to assess a candidate's physical fitness and health against the job requirements to ensure that candidates are physically capable of performing the job's essential tasks safely and effectively (Oyadiran et al., 2023).

Offer of employment

The final stage of the employee selection procedure is to evaluate the applicants' results from the interviews and any other assessments they have completed. The organisation may then provide a formal offer to the successful applicant. The offer will outline the terms and conditions of the employment as well as benefits, salary and responsibilities (Nel et al., 2021).

The Erasmus' selection process provides the traditional employee selection procedure, which one can argue is outdated, as there is criticism of the process based on its lack of consideration of factors such as the use of assessment centres' diversity and inclusion requirements, especially in the South African context and technological advancements. Hence, there is a need for more inclusive selection processes applicable to the current AI-driven environment.

Challenges in employee selection

Various factors affect the recruitment and employee selection procedure, including internal and external forces. Internal factors may include human resource structure, company size, recruitment budget and rate of growth and expansion (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). The external factors are those that are uncontrollable by the organisation, such as legal constraints, competition, politics and labour market conditions (Bans-Akutey et al., 2021; Omamo, 2022). One of the external challenges faced in employee selection includes government policies and legislation applicable to SA. In SA, employee selection procedures are guided by labour laws such as the *EEA 55 of 1998*. The *Employment Equity Amendment*

Act, No. 4 of 2022 provides stricter requirements to promote diversity and fairness in the workplace, with a specific focus on under-represented groups. In addition, it focuses on the use of psychological tests, the regulation of employment and employment benefits.

Innovative employee selection strategies

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being used in innovative employee selection strategies, as it offers reduced time and cost benefits in the handling of applications (Gusain et al., 2023; Suen & Hung, 2023). In addition, while employee selection is a crucial activity in human resource management (HRM), very little research has explored the process's characteristics (Savić-Tot et al., 2021). Most studies have focused on developing and testing the appropriate tools that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the selection process (Lievens et al., 2020). Therefore, this study will explore the different innovative selection strategies used in South African organisations, which will help highlight current challenges and recommend a selection framework applicable to the current world of work. This study will add value by investigating the currency and validity of the Erasmus et al. (2004) framework.

Research design

Research approach

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm to address its research objectives. The interpretivist perspective emphasises understanding how individuals interpret meanings and form subjective intentions within their social contexts (Bryman et al., 2021). This approach enabled the researchers to explore participants' views regarding the employee selection procedures used in their organisations. By employing a subjective and open-ended research design, the study enhanced the credibility of its findings, as it encouraged participants to provide genuine and candid responses (Collis & Hussey, 2021).

Research strategy

The research strategy that was used in this study was a case study, as the data were collected from the participants in the different organisations. Researchers collect and analyse data in alignment with the relevant theoretical framework to ensure meaningful comparisons and adherence to underlying theories (Bryman et al., 2021).

Research method

The qualitative research method was deemed appropriate to address the study objectives. A qualitative research method was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the participants' lived experiences and perspectives, which are not easily captured through quantitative approaches. This method allows for a rich exploration of complex social phenomena within their real-life context, aligning with the study's interpretive aims (Collis & Hussey, 2021).

Research setting

This study was conducted in various public and private organisations in SA. The selected organisations were primarily chosen based on availability, and participants were interviewed at their workplaces or online. In some instances, participants were emailed the research instrument and follow-up telephonic calls were made to solicit further clarity on their responses.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

A university's permission to conduct research was obtained, along with ethical approval. Three major researchers sought access to participants from different organisations. Through gatekeepers, each researcher was able to connect with participants from the various companies listed in Table 2. A gatekeeper is a key informant within the organisation who assists researchers in accessing participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Research participants and sampling methods

The study involved participants from organisations with a workforce of 50 or more employees, where at least one staff member was responsible, either solely or as part of a broader role, for carrying out the employee selection function. This designated staff member was approached to participate in the study. Using convenience and purposive sampling techniques, a sample of 60 participants volunteered to be part of this study. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from the initial participants to help identify additional individuals deemed appropriate for inclusion in the study (Bryman et al., 2021). As the data were collected from the conventional purposive sample, which is within the range of 5–20 (Saunders et al., 2019), the saturation point was reached by Participant 60. Hence, the sample size of the study was capped at 60. The sample distribution is shown in Table 1. The sample consisted predominantly of more mature organisations, having been in business for over 20 years (35%) and over 41 years (35%). Six organisations (10%) had between 50 and 200 employees, with the majority (46.67%) having between 501 and 1000 employees.

TABLE 1: Sample distribution.

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Location of the organisations (province)		
Eastern Cape	34	56.67
Free State	3	5.00
Gauteng	16	26.67
Limpopo	4	6.67
Mpumalanga	3	5.00
Length of business operation (years)		
0–19	7	11.67
20–40	21	35.00
41–80	21	35.00
81–120	11	18.33
Total number of employees		
50–200	6	10.00
201–500	11	18.33
501–1000	28	46.67
1001 +	15	25.00

Data collection methods

The semi-structured interview guide was divided into three parts. The first part gathered basic information about the organisation. The second part included 10 yes-or-no (dichotomous) tick-box questions aimed at identifying the employee selection methods in use. The third part comprised nine open-ended questions, which focused on employee selection practices, with a particular emphasis on exploring the challenges faced and the strategies employed to address them. Using semi-structured interviews that included open-ended questions allowed the participants to explain their answers (Collis & Hussey, 2021). This approach enabled the researchers to obtain detailed insights from participants regarding the employee selection practices used in their organisations. Data were gathered through both face-to-face and virtual interviews, which were audio-recorded. The recordings were then transcribed into written form for analysis and reporting. Each interview lasted approximately 40 min on average.

Data recording

All the recordings were stored in the folder for recording purposes only, including the verbatim recordings. It must be stressed that permission was gained from the participants to store their recordings.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

The researchers adopted the data quality strategies outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018). To achieve inter-rater reliability, each researcher coded the data individually, and the themes discussed in the findings section were agreed upon collectively. One strategy involved conducting a peer review, in which the manuscript was given to a selected scholar for evaluation. Another strategy employed in this study was to compare the data with existing literature. As the data are stored in a designated folder, they can be made available for audit trails to validate that the study's results were not fabricated. Additionally, quasi-statistics were used to describe the distribution of the sample.

Data analysis

Analysing qualitative data entails systematically organising, integrating and examining it (Bryman et al., 2021). To facilitate this rigorous process, the researchers coded the data and explored any patterns or connections. The researchers initially proposed generalisations that connected specific data to concepts and finally moved on to identify overarching trends and themes. This method of data analysis enabled the researchers to develop a deeper understanding, which was essential for answering the research questions posed in the study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Fort Hare Inter-Faculty Human Research

Ethics Committee (TOW001-23 Project). Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The participants were assured that confidentiality would be upheld through their responses being treated as anonymous. They were also assured that no names would be disclosed.

Results

This section discusses the results that align with the study's objectives. Table 2 provides insight into the different types of organisations represented in the sample. It shows that a variety of sectors took part in the research, with the automotive manufacturing, higher education, hospitality and retail and food industry sectors being the majority of those included in the sample. Most participants ($n = 20$) were from automotive manufacturing organisations. The other highest number of participants were from higher education ($n = 10$), hospitality ($n = 10$), as well as retail and food ($n = 8$) and service ($n = 8$) organisations.

The results in line with the first secondary objective are shown in Table 3. It is observable that interviews are the most frequently used selection procedure, as all the participants indicated that they used this technique. Psychometric tests, reference checking and presentations are also frequently used selection procedures. Application forms are still being employed, with assessment centres and in-baskets and/or role-plays only being used by less than half the organisations sampled. Most participants believed their organisations had efficient employee selection procedures and policies and were content with the selection processes adopted. There was a dominant stance that innovative selection techniques were required.

TABLE 2: Types of organisations in the study.

Industry of operation	<i>n</i>	%
Automotive manufacturing	20	33.33
Banking and finance	2	3.33
Energy	2	3.33
Higher education	10	16.67
Hospitality	10	16.67
Retail and food	8	13.33
Service	8	13.33
Total	60	100.00

TABLE 3: Selection procedures in use in this study.

Employee selection procedure	<i>n</i>	%
Application blank	36	60.00
Interviews	60	100.00
Reference checking	49	81.66
Psychometric assessments	52	86.66
Presentations	40	66.66
In-baskets and/or role-plays	24	40.00
Assessment centres	28	46.66
Additional information on employee selection procedures		
Content with selection processes	39	65.00
Efficient selection procedure	39	65.00
Use of innovative selection techniques	48	80.00

Next, the study's results are discussed with illustrative themes that emerged in the data to address the second and third secondary objectives of the study. The participants were allocated sequential numbers ranging from 1 to 60 to secure their anonymity.

Theme 1: Traditional employee selection procedures

The participants said they employed several traditional selection procedures to address the employee selection challenges they experienced and alleviate their concerns. These are explained in this theme. While CVs are still requested and application blanks are often expected to be completed, these are not popular selection methods. Employers must determine whether applicants possess the necessary knowledge, skills or experience to perform the job effectively (Nel et al., 2021). However, this study's participants highlighted that validating these through additional measures has become necessary. Several participants explained that this scepticism stemmed from doubts about the credibility or quality of the qualifications presented, while others noted that verifying the candidate's current competence was often necessary. Accordingly, reference checks remain a commonly employed selection method, as confirmed by participants in the following statements:

'We need to be very careful when hiring staff. We have huge pressure from our unions. We need to be sure that we have taken on the right person as getting rid of that person later (if they don't make the grade) is really not an option here. So, applicants can submit wonderful qualifications and show all sorts of achievements on their CVs, but we have to validate these. We use reference checking and psychometric testing to do this. We need to check the person can still do what they say they can do – at the same level of competence.' (P13, Gauteng, Higher Education)

'Police clearance assists a lot in screening out people as other things might be faked.' (P36, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'The credibility of information provided is a challenge. Often candidates get other people to complete their application.' (P39, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

This trend was also witnessed through the consistent usage of psychometric testing and presentations within selection processes employed by the participating organisations in this study. In this study, the majority of the participants used psychological assessments in their selection process. Psychological testing has increased in popularity as it is a selection procedure that enables consistent and reliable comparison of applicants (Puchert et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2022). A participant made this clear in the following statement:

'We use psychological testing a lot as it helps us be able to compare the applicants in a fair manner.' (P12, Free State, Retail & Food)

'If crucial procedures like psychometric testing are not carried out, validity and reliability may be called into doubt.' (P8, Gauteng, Higher Education)

One participant succinctly captured a key advantage of psychological testing, which was also emphasised by several others:

'Psycho testing is great – we do it online and so wherever the candidates are they can do it. Even if they are in Gauteng or Idutywa, they can go to an internet café and get it done. It is a very convenient way of screening out those candidates that don't make our entrance requirements.' (P11, Free State, Energy)

The results of this study reveal that online and competency-based interviewing are the predominant selection methods. All participants ($n = 60$) indicated that they utilised interviews for selection. The manner in which these interviews are conducted has evolved. Given their many benefits, these innovative interviewing techniques have become a norm in many sectors of the country, as confirmed by these participants:

'We learnt a lot from COVID-19. We used to always fly people here for interviews but now we use online platforms to do them. We use mostly Teams but also sometimes Zoom.' (P10, Free State, Higher Education)

'To assess a candidate's qualifications, questions are created to measure their competence.' (P1, Gauteng, Service)

Another participant provided further insight into this matter:

'We use a competency-based questioning method in interviews. It's the scenario, task, action, and results [STAR] method. Candidates must talk about precise examples, the action they took and the outcome. This way we get a real sense of the candidate's knowledge and problem-solving abilities.' (P12, Free State, Retail and Food)

'We use the targeted selection method which is a outcome-based interview method.' (P22, Eastern Cape, Higher Education)

'For senior positions, we will do case study interviews.' (P34, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'We use a panel interview where we ask questions about the person, where they see themselves etc, and then questions pertaining to the job. Can they do the job?' (P38, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

This theme has highlighted that organisations still use interviews, either face-to-face or online. The interviews are competency-based, and psychometric and/or psychological testing is a key factor. Also, reference checking is done during the selection of the candidates to validate their experience and qualifications.

Theme 2 (a): Employee selection input challenges

The calibre of applicants often falls short of meeting industry requirements and expectations. This was highlighted through the participants' comments:

'Attracting the right candidates is a big problem.' (P26, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'It's hard to get good quality candidates with the right skills.' (P33, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'The challenge is not finding the right people.' (P34, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'A major challenge is the shortage of qualified candidates, as most of the applicants do not have enough experience.' (P36, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Calibre of graduates is a concern. They often know the theory, but the practical component is missing. When take them on we have to teach them again. Almost like they do the degree again.' (P38, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

Another challenge identified by the participants in the selection process is the applicant's lack of commitment. The participants had the following to say about this challenge:

'Getting committed staff is a real concern for us.' (P29, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'We are seeing that people are applying, but then they aren't committed to following the selection process through.' (P37, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Candidates are just there for the money and lack commitment to their work and organisation.' (P48, Eastern Cape, Retail & Food)

The previous comment highlights another challenge that most of the study's participants raised. The evolving demands for competitive salaries and benefits have significantly influenced the dynamics of the employee selection process across various industries. The following comments emphasise this issue:

'There are huge salary and benefit-related demands.' (P25, Eastern Cape, Higher Education)

'The main deciding factor is money, as many people decline offers due to salaries.' (P30, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Most black people who are in consulting are sought after, so their salaries are very high.' (P34, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'If we want to attract good people, it comes with a heavy price.' (P38, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Some candidates do not show up even after accepting the offer.' (P53, Eastern Cape, Banking & Finance)

To deal with this challenge, some organisations are waiting for the applicant's acceptance of the job offer before progressing to the appointment stage. Another approach is explained in this participant's comment:

'We assess the candidate's salary first to see if we can afford to offer him more. It's not that we are looking for cheap candidates. We just don't want to waste our time.' (P32, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

A fourth challenge in the selection process identified by the participants is the misalignment of values between the organisation and the applicants. Participants make this clear in the following statements:

A key challenge has been the ability 'to attract and select staff that can fit the position (100%) and fit into the culture of the organisation.' (P21, Eastern Cape, Retail & Food)

'Sometimes there is a misalignment between values of the applicants and the organisational vision because of the selection tools that are not really developed towards uncovering that.' (P28, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

Organisations have adopted creative interventions to address this issue, as outlined in the following comment:

'We assess if individuals' values align with that of the organisation. We developed our own tool.' (P34, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

To address this issue, another company used an external consulting firm to design a culture, teams and values assessment to help predict the full integration of these recruits into the company:

'Fit within the company, culture of the company. I work on the Pareto principle – 80% attitude & 20% skills. I can train skills, but it's harder to train attitude.' (P38, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

The previous comment elucidates the fifth challenge identified by many participants, namely, the need to train the applicants after employment. Participants noted that this strategy was deliberately implemented to address the initial selection challenge identified within this theme – namely, the inadequate skill levels of applicants. The following statements highlight this issue:

'Many don't have the patience to employ graduates or people with no work experience... because they don't want to have to train them.' (P16, Limpopo, Retail & Food)

'We offer training ... to deal with that technical disability.' (P35, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Offering on-the-job training for struggling candidates.' (P36, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

The employee selection input challenges identified in this study include attracting the right candidates and ensuring they accept the offer, which is sometimes outside the existing salary range. Another challenge encountered by participants is getting candidates who fit into organisational culture and values, and when they are selected, the organisations have to spend money to train them.

Theme 2 (b): Employee selection process challenges

The participants expressed concern that their line managers were often biased in their behaviour and judgement towards applicants. For example, these managers were often negative towards applicants with tattoos and even their dress choice or hair length. This is expressed through the following statements:

'Lot of biases – how a person sits or dresses has nothing to do with how they will do the job.' (P33, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Biased judgement is a concern. The company should be more flexible and accept diversity.' (P54, Eastern Cape, Hospitality)

To deal with this challenge, several participants agreed that they had to arrange regular training for the line managers involved in the selection process.

'Some managers need training to assist managers to deal with their unconscious biases.' (P32, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Having a company policy that emphasises inclusivity and diversity also helps a lot. But we have to train them on this often. To remind the managers.' (P36, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'The different personalities of the panel have led to bias.' (P57, Mpumalanga, Energy)

Training line managers and other stakeholders involved in the selection process is also necessary to ensure they have the skills to conduct the selection procedures appropriately. This is expressed through the following statements made by the participants:

'Some managers are not well versed on how to go about selecting fairly.' (P21, Eastern Cape, Retail & Food)

'My only concern is managers not understanding the process and wanting to bypass some stages.' (P33, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'We need to train our managers, those of the panel interview, on interview skills to ensure they know how to do it.' (P48, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

Participants also identified the lengthiness of the selection process as a key challenge. They emphasised the importance of transparency and stakeholder involvement in determining the selection procedures and their implementation. A lack of such collaboration can contribute to significant delays in the recruitment timeline. This challenge is reflected in participants' comments:

'We put out an advert and a lot of people that apply just don't come close to qualifying so it takes a long time to go through all the CVs and then we have to go back to readvertise the position.' (P12, Free State, Retail & Food)

'A challenge for me is the turnaround time for filling vacancies.' (P23, Eastern Cape, Service)

'The process is long.' (P31, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'All line managers who are needed to be part of the panel might not be available at the same time, making the process longer.' (P33, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

Managers mainly pose a challenge during selection. The other challenges include the knowledge and skills of the selection panel and the duration of the selection process.

Theme 3: Innovative employee selection procedures

Participants described a growing reliance on AI-driven ATS and algorithm-based assessments to streamline the early stages of employee selection. As one Human Resource (HR) manager noted:

'Our ATS has really helped us cut down on time-to-hire. We can now process hundreds of applications in days instead of weeks, which is crucial in a competitive market.' (P20, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'Using an ATS ensures we're applying the same criteria to every applicant. It's made our process more consistent and helped reduce unconscious bias in the initial screening phase.' (P49, Eastern Cape, Retail & Food)

'We use an AI system that screens CVs for keywords and ranks candidates before we even look at them. It saves time, but sometimes I worry we're missing out on good people who don't know how to 'speak the system's language.' (P10, Free State, Higher Education)

This sentiment was echoed by several participants who expressed concern about the lack of transparency in AI decision-making. While efficiency was widely praised, questions around fairness and potential bias emerged consistently:

'AI is supposed to remove bias, but the algorithm was trained on historical data – and that data is biased. So I think we're automating discrimination in a way.' (P16, Limpopo, Retail & Food)

Social media platforms, especially LinkedIn, Facebook and X, were frequently cited as informal yet influential components of the selection process. Several participants indicated that social media checks are now routine, particularly in roles requiring high public trust or customer interaction:

'Before we even interview someone, we check their social media. It gives us insight into their personality, values, and how they conduct themselves publicly.' (P10, Free State, Higher Education)

However, this practice also raises ethical concerns. Some participants were uncomfortable with the blurred lines between professional and personal spheres:

'I've seen cases where candidates weren't shortlisted because of a photo or a political comment. Is that fair? I'm not so sure.' (P16, Limpopo, Retail & Food)

A novel interviewing technique was revealed in this study. After the first round of interviews, the second round is a case study interview with the line managers the candidate will be working with, and then, if successful in the third round, 'then the person will have a coffee chat with our MD.' (P34, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

Depending on the position, the participants must have a 'coffee chat' interview with the executive in the department or with several directors. This form of interview aims to help check for a good fit in terms of personality with the organisation and/or team. The following comments shed more light on this novel interview technique:

'Critical positions they will also have coffee sessions with directors.' (P32, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

'So, a coffee chat is basically an informal interview ... no script for that.' (P33, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

When asked about the likelihood or need to adopt innovative employee selection procedures, the majority (80%) responded affirmatively. A participant explained it well:

'We need to think outside the box nowadays. We even do our interviews and role-plays etcetera online. This saves on flight and accommodation costs, but we still get a good real sense of the person we are considering so our overall judgement isn't impaired. It's working smart not hard that counts!' (P14, Gauteng, Service)

Other innovative and practical employee selection procedures were identified in this study. These, too, link to the need to validate qualifications and experience noted in CVs and

application blanks, as well as to ensure that the correct level of skill is present. Participants provided these examples of their innovative selection methods:

'Positions related to the catering industry must complete a cook-off.' (P21, Eastern Cape, Retail & Food)

'Doing practicals for positions that are technical.' (P22, Eastern Cape, Higher Education)

'With the artisans, we need to check their level of knowledge, and we ask them how to fix things. It's about seeing if they can fault find.' (P38, Eastern Cape, Automotive)

The landscape of employee selection has undergone a significant transformation, with organisations increasingly adopting AI and social media platforms as tools for employee selection. Artificial intelligence-generated and social media-based employee selection techniques offer efficiency and new insights but introduce challenges around fairness, transparency and inclusivity. The participants recognised the potential of these tools but cautioned against uncritical adoption.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore employee selection procedures used by South African organisations. This study has provided support for the human capital theory developed by Gary Becker by showing that when selecting employees, skills, knowledge, education and experience are valuable resources (Becker, 1962; 1964). In the human capital theory, matching the competencies, experience, skills and education to the job requirements is sacrosanct (Bangura, 2024). In line with Boxall and Purcell (2022), the participants in this study mentioned that, in some instances, there is a disjuncture between the applicant's (also known as candidate) values and organisational culture; the applicants must be trained.

The other key result was the usage of the interviews and shortlisting. Neither Erasmus et al. (2004) nor the data used to propose selection frameworks (refer to Table 4) showed how AI can be utilised in automating routine tasks, such as

CV screening, scheduling interviews and sending progression updates to candidates (Hewage, 2023). The data used to propose the employee selection framework should be that competency interviews can be used face-to-face and online. The latter gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Competency-based interviews are used to establish the applicant's experience with the key functions of the job. This form of interviewing is an effective method of identifying applicants who meet the inherent requirements of the job and is well supported in the literature (Albrecht et al., 2015; Gatewood et al., 2015; Harky, 2018). This means that the applicant, when responding, should not give a theoretical response, but should give a previous scenario of how they handled tasks. Some of the tasks may entail teamwork and problem-solving. Similarly, like Erasmus et al. (2004), this study showed that using interviews is not enough in some job roles. Hence, psychological and psychometric tests should be conducted. One of the key interview methods not in Erasmus et al. (2004) is informal interviews by senior managers. Such interviews can be used to establish how the applicant is going to assist the organisation in meeting its strategy and to determine how they are going to fit into the organisation's culture and values. Psychological tests measure the applicants' intelligence, aptitude, personality, trade and interest (Rajyalaxmi, 2023). Within the South African context, psychological tests should be valid and reliable. Otherwise, as stated by Rajyalaxmi (2023), organisations may be taken to dispute and might lose the case.

This study also makes a methodological contribution by collecting data from different organisations, which, as was discussed earlier, similar studies in the South African context, are sparse. The Erasmus et al. (2004) selection framework has recently been validated in different companies and offered an updated framework (refer to Table 4).

Based on these findings and to achieve study objective four, the authors propose a seven-step employee selection framework. This multistage selection process builds on the Erasmus et al. (2004) six-step framework. Step two has been expanded to include not only the significant use of psychological testing but also the use of measures to assess values and attitude alignment. In step three, interviewing has been expanded to include both the virtual and face-to-face selection methodologies. In this step, competency-based interviewing is identified as a critical method to validate the knowledge and skills of the incumbents.

Step four is the step included in this framework that is completely novel to that prospect by Erasmus et al. (2004). This step includes more innovative 'out-of-the-box' type selection techniques. The reference check is also a procedure that appears in the Erasmus et al. (2004) and the proposed framework. The saliency of a reference check is to solicit information about the candidate's credit and criminal records. In terms of the latter, the data in the current study revealed that in some organisations, reference entails liaising with the policy to verify the criminal history of the applicant. In

TABLE 4: Erasmus et al. (2004) and proposed selection framework.

Erasmus et al. (2004) framework	Proposed selection framework (2025)	Traditional	Innovative (AI-related and/or online)
1 Preliminary screening or interview	1 Preliminary screening	✓	✓
2 Employment tests	2 Employment, values and attitude testing through psychological assessments	✓	✓
3 Employment interviews (face-to-face)	3 Employment interviews (face-to-face or online, and mostly competency-based)	✓	✓
	4 Innovative interviews (e.g. case study, 'coffee chat')	-	✓
4 Reference checks	5 Reference checks + police checks	✓	✓
5 Physical checks	6 Physical checks	✓	-
6 Offer of employment	7 Offer of employment or rejection letter	✓	✓

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article, Townes, J.I., Marange, T.S., & Maleka, M.J. (2025). Exploring employee selection procedures in South African organisations. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a3073. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.3073> for more information. AI, artificial intelligence.

addition, reference checks are used to point out discrepancies regarding the candidate's previous employment, past salary, reasons for leaving the job, qualifications and experience mentioned in their CVs (Armstrong, 2020).

The other similarities between Erasmus et al. (2004) and the data used to develop the proposed framework in terms of these employee selection procedures are, namely, physical checks and offer letters. The purpose of conducting physical checks is to assess the applicants' physical fitness and health against the job requirements to ensure that candidates are physically capable of performing the job's essential tasks safely and effectively (Oyadiran et al., 2023). Once they are declared medically fit, the organisation can make an employment offer. The nuance of the current study is that it showed that because of skills shortage in the South African labour market, selectors must persuade employers to make an offer higher than the grade. Unfortunately, if employers are not willing to do so, organisations find it challenging to select the right candidate.

Practical implications

This study not only proposed an employee selection framework, but its results also had practical implications. The results of this study demonstrate that employee selection procedures in SA have evolved. Interviewing techniques are increasingly being utilised and have become more technology-based. Psychometric testing, reference verification and various other modern employee selection procedures have gained popularity and are frequently conducted online instead of in person.

Based on the findings of this study, South African organisations need to increase the adoption of technology and innovation within their employee selection practices. The employee selection trends revealed by this study require HRM professionals to embrace AI and take on roles as catalysts for change. Employee selection procedures should increasingly incorporate automation through digital technologies. Additionally, HRM practitioners must critically reflect on their mindset and practices throughout the employee selection procedures to ensure they remain effective and appropriate in this era of AI. This will entail HRM practitioners checking if they have the requisite skills, are open to continuous learning and are flexible to change. Practically, HRM professionals engaged in staffing need to have sufficient expertise and skills to become proficient in these digital and innovative selection procedures. Whether advising senior management on acquiring these tools for internal use or negotiating with external vendors to select the best options, this knowledge and competence will serve as a key competitive advantage.

Additionally, HRM practitioners must cultivate advanced communication, negotiation and decision-making abilities to enhance their staffing approaches and effectively recruit the right talent for their organisations. Human resource management practitioners should ensure they are training and equipping the managers and other selection panel

members on these automated approaches and innovative selection techniques. This study identified that the line managers' biases affected their judgement in many selection decisions, and they often lacked the required skills to implement innovative techniques.

Based on the study findings, the following is recommended for management to overcome challenges identified in this study:

- Managers should focus on interview questions based on the job requirements, not candidates' appearance and clothing.
- Managers should attend training to enable them to conduct professional interviews and avoid bias.
- Panels should use competence interviews, as well as other selection techniques (such as reference checks, psychometric tests and presentations).
- Technology, such as ATS, should be used to reduce the time required to hire.
- Job advertisements should include salary so that candidates know what employers can afford.

Recommendations for future research

The study looked at various types of industries, as indicated in Table 2. However, some organisations were not as well represented as others; hence, future studies might focus on one industry to develop the best practices for that industry. In addition, other industries, such as the health industry, were not part of the study; hence, future studies can focus on industries that were not part of the study. In addition, a comparative analysis among different sectors might yield interesting results. Future studies are also recommended to focus on the actual applicants and understand their perspectives on employee selection procedures. This might include a longitudinal study focusing on the applicant's reactions and behaviours throughout the selection process. Because of the constantly changing world of work and unpredictable external societal and economic pressures, more studies are needed on employee selection procedures.

Conclusion

The study focused on exploring the employee selection procedures used by South African organisations, recognising that human capital is one of the organisation's most pivotal assets, influencing its success or failure. Various employee selection procedures are employed across different industries, primarily to ensure a good fit between the person and the job, as well as between the person and the environment, thereby enhancing effectiveness. Additionally, new innovative employee selection strategies are being implemented to align with changes in the world of work. It is concluded that the proposed employee selection framework for SA organisations (see Table 4), which includes preliminary screening, psychological assessments of employment values and attitudes, face-to-face or online interviews assessing qualifications, innovative interviews, reference and police checks, physical evaluations and an

innovative employment offer using AI, will be effective. This framework will provide guidelines for organisations to establish a functional employee selection procedure that helps review and identify candidates with the necessary skills, qualifications and professional competencies to perform their work effectively. Furthermore, a well-documented employee selection policy also promotes diversity and equality.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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