

Ethical issues in Recruitment- Wendy Harrison, Shell

27th April 2010 at 24 Greencoat Place

-After the usual housekeeping announcements, Philippa introduced the afternoon's speaker, Wendy Harrison (WH) from Shell. Wendy has worked for Shell for nearly 30 years, mainly internationally, and set out the topics of her discussion:

-The Shell recruitment model consists of the following 9 points:

- 1) Treating all applicants with integrity, honesty and respect.
- 2) Being an equal opportunities employer.
- 3) Informing all applicants, interviewees and new hires of Shell's principles
- 4) Credential checks
- 5) Recruitment marketing guidelines
- 6) Assessment using 'job group methodologies' in order to fit the person to the right business division.
- 7) Interviews can be in the candidate's local language although most will be held in English.
- 8) All Hiring Managers ensure that all new hires go through an on-boarding process using the Global On-Boarding checklist and tools.
- 9) Leverage all existing Group Recruitment suppliers first.

-The dialogue surrounding Ethical Due Diligence (EDD) started at Shell around 3 years ago, as it was believed that the company had become too trusting.

-WH convinced Shell HR to introduce EDD because of events at Intercontinental Hotels Group: a senior player in the business had lied about his academic achievements early on in his career, claiming three degrees he did not have. He had moved across to IHG from a company that the group had acquired, and his file had never been checked.

-Other similar examples included Richard Lee of Hong Kong Telecoms Group, who falsely claimed to have attended Stanford University, and Anne Wilson of BBC Television, a convicted fraudster whose activities had not been detected.

-Shell's approach is to check back with the original institution and to check references across the board. This is particularly significant for Shell given its exposure to the risk of terrorist sleepers in refineries and in certain politically unstable countries.

-How much do Shell need to know? WH said there is no need to go into private lives, although the question remains what it is fair and ethical to consider about peoples' backgrounds.

-Ethics of bribery and corruption: Shell faces the problem of cronyism in certain countries where royal families and politically powerful families expect jobs to be provided for their members. This presents a big challenge to Shell, as it is not fair to award positions on the basis of connections, but neither is it fair to deny talented individuals employment opportunities because of their background. Sometimes the brave thing is to offer the job rather than not.

-Shell has established the following guidelines to recruitment:

DON'T

-Allow anything other than skills to be important

- Accept, give or allow bribes
- Hire relatives or become involved in their recruitment
- Accept or give 'uncomfortable' gifts
- Write or record anything which is not fact
- Write or record anything which could not be said to the candidate's face
- Record irrelevant or personal information
- Conceal, alter or destroy documents
- Keep people waiting for too long for decisions

-The session was then opened up to the floor for questions and comments, and a discussion developed which covered the following issues:

-Ethical issues surrounding the use of keyword searches to screen electronic applications.

-The use of the 9 principles at a higher level of recruitment; for more senior positions at Shell more extensive checks (including police) are carried out.

-The impact of the Equality Bill in the UK; Shell used to practice positive discrimination in the UK, and there were questions as to whether this was ethical or a necessary evil. Being fair to everyone is very difficult.

-The employment of ex-offenders; nothing in this case is completely black and white. If the offence is of no risk, there is still a need for consultation higher up the chain.

-Health and safety issues and employment: Shell has 12 'lifesaving' rules, which are usually very strictly enforced, although mitigating circumstances will be considered. One example involved a driver who answered his mobile phone while driving, after a member of his family had been missing for some time.

-The use by companies of Facebook and other social media to present themselves, and the need for people to remember that normal rules still apply to online activities.

-The issue of fraudulent qualifications and the penalties; these may vary depending on how pertinent the claimed qualifications are to the job in question.