

WHAT ARE THE PITFALLS TO SELECTION?

A look at good practice

A consideration of how to avoid some of the pitfalls in our questioning and our selection processes.

■ What do we want from our selection processes?

Asking this question to different groups has suggested the following:

- Test vocation to cross-cultural mission through specific mission agency
- Ascertain appropriate time-scale
- Determine factors influencing suitable locations
- Identify training, pastoral and spiritual needs
- Affirm as a Christian loved and valued by God

Two models to help us consider the *status* and *nature* of selection material:

1 The Selection Strategy Window

(A much modified version of the Johari Window)

- The two columns are things the candidate
 - **knows** about self and
 - things the candidate **does not know** about self;
- The three rows are things that the selectors:
 - **know**,
 - things that they **think, assume** or **feel** and
 - things that they **do not know**

	YOU (candidate) KNOW	YOU (candidate) DON'T KNOW
WE (selectors) KNOW	OPEN	BLIND
WE (selectors) THINK	SUSPECTED ASSUMPTIONS	UNSUSPECTED ASSUMPTIONS
WE (selectors) DON'T KNOW	HIDDEN	UNKNOWN/ POTENTIAL

- Evidence and intuition
 - We need evidence to make decisions, to justify our decisions to ourselves, candidates (and tribunals!)
 - We use intuition to decide what issues to explore in seeking evidence

■ Transparency

- **For those we select**, we need them to understand location parameters, training, pastoral and spiritual needs
- **For those we do not select**, if they are not to be damaged by the process, we need them to understand our reasons
- We need to get as much material as possible into the OPEN domain; we are helping candidates to know themselves better.

■ Interview Reports

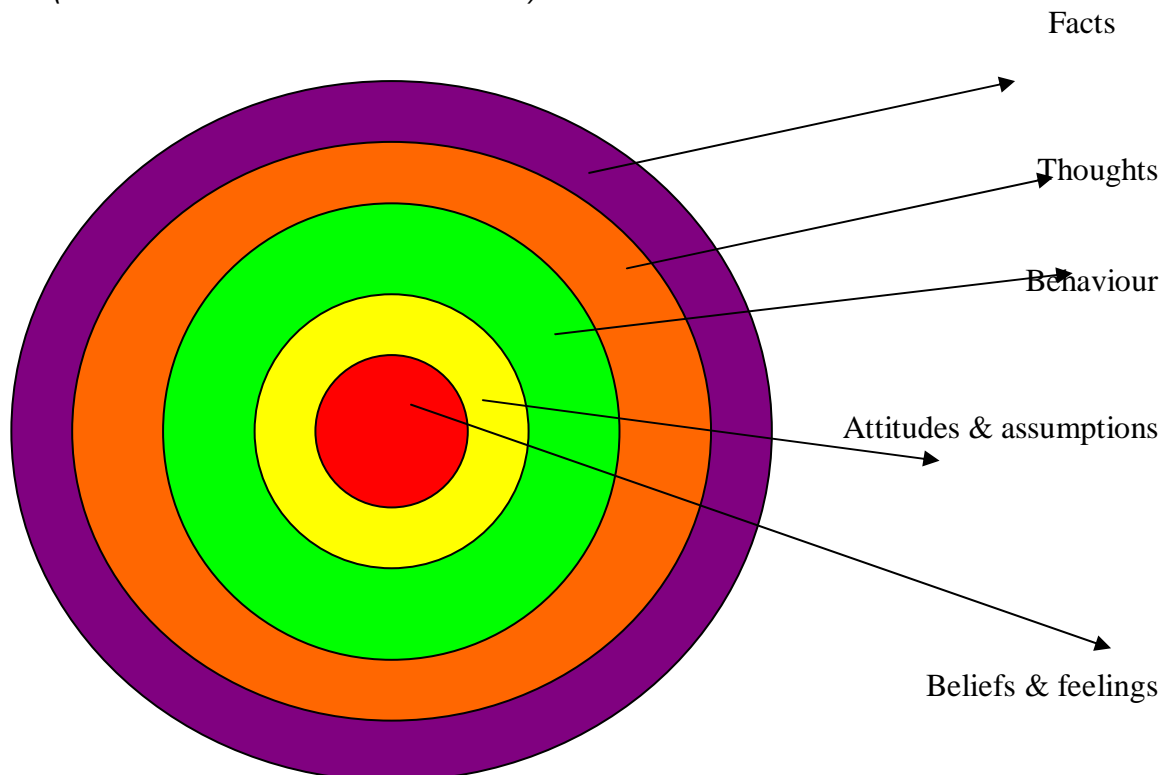
- Legally these can be read by candidates
- Keep them narrative based
- Only when we have fully explored the issue through different episodes, should we include a value judgement

■ References, Home Church, Activities, Testing etc

- We don't know if these are true assessments; they need to be treated as assumptions and we need to find evidence to explore the truth, or otherwise, of these assumptions.
- We don't always know whether the candidate is aware of the assumptions being made, and so will need to be sensitive in how we explore such assumptions
- The input of References, Home Church, Activities, Testing etc needs to come early enough in the process for further exploration to take place in interview so that these assumptions can either be affirmed as knowledge or dismissed.

2 The Onion Model

(Based on Onion model of culture)



■ What shapes Beliefs?

Christian faith, but also:

- Generational perspectives
- Cultural perspectives
- Personality
- Peer pressure
- Family pressure
- Church teaching
- Role models
- Books
- Experience

■ How do you feel about?

Will usually tell you about *thoughts* rather than about *feelings*

■ Doctrinal questions

Doctrinal questions will usually tell you about thoughts, rather than real beliefs. Stories about conversion are often about when a thought process changed. To explore both of these we need to explore behaviour and how that has changed as a result of conversion. How does behaviour reflect doctrinal understanding? When someone has been brought up within a Christian family then it is helpful to explore what happened when they moved away from the family influences and had a real choice of behaviour.

■ Well rehearsed narratives

Candidates know they need to share details of a difficult situation; a broken relationship, divorce, a job that didn't work out or other 'failure'. They can easily rehearse what they are going to say and what we are presented with is a chosen narrative of the events – these are in the *thoughts* layer. We need to ask questions to get deeper than this and explore behaviour and the assumptions and attitudes that lie beneath this. It can be helpful to ask about what they have learnt (about themselves or God) or what they could have done differently. Although both questions can easily be answered at the 'thoughts' level, answers can be followed with exploration of behaviour and then underlying attitudes and assumptions can be explored.

■ Hypothetical questions

Tell you about verbal reasoning and how the candidate operates at the *thoughts* level. To find out how the candidate might cope in the future, explore real situations they have faced and how they have coped in the past; explore at the *behaviour* level. In the *Selection Strategy Window*, hypothetical questions are in the *selectors don't know/candidate doesn't know window*; you should explore issues in the *hidden domain* with issues that the candidate is aware of. By helping the candidate reflect on how they have coped in the past, or not coped in the past, they will have better idea them self of how they are likely to cope in the future

■ Exploring the unknown/potential

The answers will be found in the *hidden domain* of the *selection strategy window*, by exploring real situations; the clues as to what needs to be explored will be found in the *suspected assumptions* and *unsuspected assumptions*

■ Consistency across the layers of the onion

We should be looking for consistency across the different layers of the onion. If we notice that assumptions and thoughts are at odds with each other or that behaviour doesn't match what they feel their beliefs are, we should be helping the candidate reflect on this.

■ The Selection Strategy Window and Selection Processes

- With some processes, the interviewers appear to use their own windows, rather than it being a shared view amongst all of the selectors
- This might be because each interviewer wishes to come in fresh and make their own decision about the candidate, rather than be influenced by previous interviews
- In such cases, decisions can easily be determined by the dynamics between the interviewers
- If we are clear about *what we know* and *what we think*, interviewers can pool knowledge and, because they are different, healthily bring different assumptions to the process
- We should pool the information we have as interviewers into one window to work effectively; this means writing and sharing narrative interview reports
- *Assumptions* need to be turned into *knowledge* through further interviewing
- The selection process needs to have enough stages in it to allow exploration of material like references that inform our assumptions so that we can produce the evidence needed to make decisions

Who Interviews?

■ Nurturing or selecting?

Processes tend to start with an **enquiry**, where vocation is being nurtured, before becoming an **application** where selection or the testing of vocation is occurring. It is healthy to indicate when the process moves from enquiry to application.

- It is Good practice, for long term, to move away from staff to a more objective interview group
- An interviewing group can better focus on what God is saying. Staff, if they have developed a close relationship with the candidate over a period of time can become more subjective; they can also be influenced by, concern about numbers and the filling of specific openings
- In Acts 13, it is The Body of Christ setting aside those who God has called. Some agencies speak of candidates being selected by the membership

■ **Rolling Review of Interviewers**

If you have an interviewing group, it is helpful to look regularly at the balance of those who you use, not only for the depth and range of experience that you have to draw upon, but also for what the make up of your interviewers says about your agency. You may wish to consider:

- Age
- Gender
- Regional experience
- Ethnicity
- Theology/churchmanship/missiology
- Professional skills
- Recent experience & interviewing experience

■ **Preparing your interviewers**

- Self-evaluation forms can help interviewers reflect on how they prepared for and conducted their interviews
- Interviewers Meetings can help interviewers keep in touch with
 - Ethos and practice of your agency
 - Overseas issues
 - Current personnel issues
 - Changes in the selection process

■ **Training your interviewers**

Training events can helpfully focus on the following:

- Using the paperwork
- Generational issues - language
- Cross-cultural interviewing
- Bias, prejudice our 'baggage'
- Listening and observation skills
- Interviewing skills
- Recording and observing role played interviews

***The above material is covered more fully in
Called by God? – a handbook for those testing Christian vocation
Stuart Buchanan SPCK September 2008.***

See particularly:

- ***Developing a Strategy*** – ***Part 2***
- ***Interviewing*** – ***Part 4***
- ***Making Decisions*** – ***Part 5***

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. References** – *a pastor has written a reasonably positive reference for a candidate then follows this up with a message on your answer phone saying “ I didn’t want to put this in writing, but I don’t feel that the candidate is that good at sustaining relationships with others and isn’t self aware on this issue. Please don’t tell the candidate that I have said this.” While respecting the pastor’s confidence how would you go about exploring the issue of relationships? What, if any, follow up do you have with the pastor?*
- 2. Doctrinal questions** – *A candidate happily assents to your doctrinal statement and gives model answers to doctrinal questions on your application form. How would you explore whether she is just saying what she feels that you want to hear, or whether it really reflects her beliefs. Consider how you would explore a couple of key issues within a doctrinal statement or some doctrinal issues that are important to your agency.*
- 3. Well rehearsed narrative** – *A candidate tells you about different episodes in his life. You notice that often things haven’t worked out in his different jobs or relationships, but you are always presented with a good reason why others were to blame for this and not him. You notice that there appears to be a pattern to this behaviour and that you are probably being presented with well rehearsed narratives. How would you go about exploring the issues further? How can your processes bring in other insights apart from those gained through interviews?*