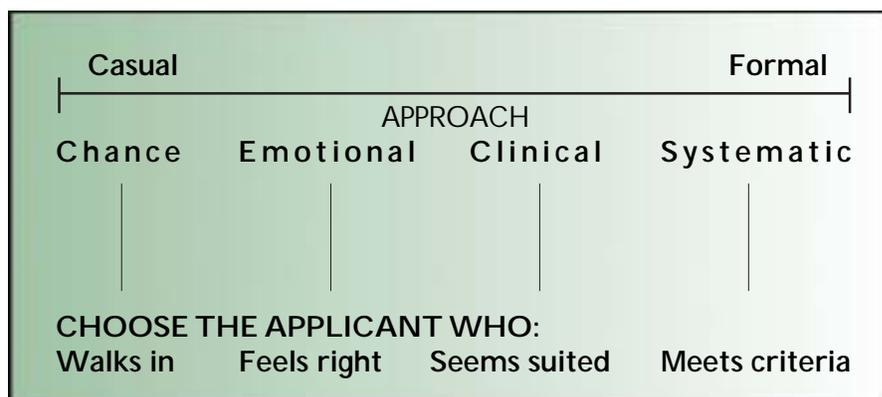


Further toward formality is the “clinical” approach, used by the employer who has some notion of what the job requires and then chooses the applicant who seems most suitable. A grower who talks with prospective mechanics, asks to see their tools, and calls their previous employers is probably using the clinical approach. Finally, at the formal extreme is the “systematic” approach, in which “suitable” is clearly defined and applicants are assessed in terms of specific criteria directly related to the job in question.

Figure 3.2. Approaches to selection.



What approach is most common in agriculture? When asked, most growers and supervisors chuckle a little and then point to the left side of the scale, often even believing that the somewhat greater expense of a systematic approach will save money and aggravation in the long run. Moving even a bit toward the right of the scale in Figure 3.2 by putting additional care into the selection of at least key employees can make a large difference in quality, performance, and morale of farm staff.

Two axioms underlie the use of a systematic approach to employee selection. The first is that people differ in background and characteristics (e.g., mechanical shop experience, comfort around large animals, hand-eye coordination, and ability to read or speak Spanish), and that individual differences translate into different capabilities to perform job duties (e.g., repairing tree shakers, guiding cows into the milking parlor, wrapping lettuce, following written irrigation schedules, staying abreast of scientific literature, communicating with a harvest crew). Second, the interests of both employers and workers are served when individual capabilities fit with job requirements.

Hiring Less Than the Best

Even if they favor a systematic approach, growers may have reason to deviate from trying to make the best possible fit between job requirements and current qualifications of individual applicants. Promotion-from-within policies, though beneficial in other ways, can seriously constrain freedom to hire the best-qualified individual available. Systems that advance employees strictly on the basis of their

seniority, or even those that consider merit, often leave behind the most suitable candidates for promotional positions. Strict up-from-within policies even may require that qualified outsiders be neglected despite the unavailability of present employees qualified to move up.

There are advantages in designating some jobs as promotional only. Entry level workers more readily commit themselves to an outfit that offers clear routes for career development, and managers can avoid the considerable uncertainty of hiring from the outside into key positions. Unfortunately, even well-known employees may disappoint or surprise their manager after moving into different positions. This phenomenon is all too common in cases where “the best worker” is promoted to a supervisory job. Good performance in job A is no guarantee of similar quality work in job B. The more different the jobs, the more dangerous a blind promotion policy. Neglecting job content when choosing employees for any position leaves the door wide open for trouble.

Some firms encourage employees to prepare for promotional positions but explicitly leave managers free to hire from the outside. Variants of the sample policy below provide some employer support (in the form of dollars, company equipment, or supervisory time) for the employee’s self-development efforts. They also may stipulate that certain positions not be opened to outsiders unless no minimally qualified insiders are found.

Probably the most common systematic departures from a “best current fit” approach are those that contemplate significant employee development on the job. Cow-calf operations, citrus houses, broccoli shippers, and hatcheries, for instance, often need to hire people who can “hit the ground running” and perform well right away. In other cases, however, new employees are expected to learn methods or skills on the job and to grow into their positions over time. The employer may even provide training to ease this process.



Sample policy on internal recruitment

The owners of this ranch want to staff all positions with persons well qualified to perform the job functions. We prefer to fill jobs above entry level through promotion of current employees but will recruit from outside the organization when necessary to meet our high standards. Written descriptions and specifications for all jobs are available to interested individuals. We encourage all employees to discuss with their supervisors any positions in which they are interested and to plan for developing requisite skills. We attempt to give current staff opportunities to become qualified for positions to which they aspire. Every job opening is announced first to members of our current workforce. If a clearly well-qualified candidate from present ranks does not apply, the opening is subsequently advertised outside.