

Recruitment Practices in Tunisian Industrial Enterprises

Emna Saidi

Introduction

Since national independence in 1956, job creation has been one of the main challenges for Tunisia, making unemployment a structural problem that has persisted for several decades. The unemployment rate in the country remains significantly high and has never fallen below 11% since 1956, with the highest value of 18% reported in 2011. The Jasmine Revolution, political instability, and socio-economic troubles during that year may explain this increase (Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives [ITCEQ], 2017, 2022).

On the other hand, the relationship between education and employment outcomes in the Tunisian labour market is negative; paradoxically, a higher level of education is associated with an increased unemployment rate (see Figure 17.1). At the same time, employers face difficulties in finding workers who match their needs. According to Nabli and Nugent (2022), Tunisian firms in the manufacturing and service sectors claim that 60% of their job applicants do not meet even the minimal skill requirements. One of the main reasons that can explain this negative correlation between employment and education level is the mismatch between the supply and the demand side of the labour market (Boughzala, 2019; Assaad & Boughzala, 2018; Stampini & Verdier-Chouchane, 2011).

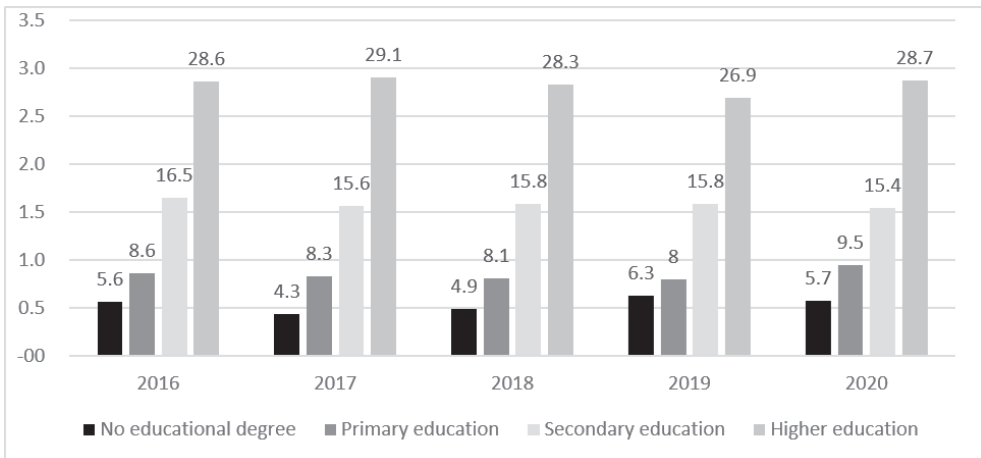


Figure 17.1. Unemployment rate in Tunisia by educational level, 2016-2020

Source: National Institute of Statistics (INS)

The Tunisian literature has primarily concentrated on supply-side factors, including job seekers' profiles and skills (Bakari, 2015; Belgacem & Vacher, 2023; Boughzala, 2019; Haouas et al., 2012), issues within the educational system (Allouch, 2020), and labour regulations (Belgacem & Vacher, 2023; Assaad & Boughzala, 2018). For instance, Haouas et al. (2012) argue that the training provided by the university system is mostly tailored to the public sector and emphasises academic rather than technical skills. As a result, many students extend their studies in hopes of minimising the risk of unemployment (Kodde, 1988). However, their overqualification does not match the private sector's demands, leading to a rise in unemployment among master's and doctorate graduates. Furthermore, weak collaboration between workplaces and universities results in a gap between employer expectations and the training offered (Haouas et al., 2012).

Regarding the demand side, it has received comparatively less attention. When addressed, focus tends to be on investment challenges, the uncertain business environment, and low technological capabilities (Stampini & Verdier-Chouchane, 2011). However, the characteristics of employers and their recruitment practices in connection with unemployment have rarely been explored. Existing studies are often in the management field and typically examine how recruitment practices affect organisational performance rather than labor market dynamics (Hassine, 2008; Arous, 2011; Mesfar & Ben Kahla, 2018). To address this gap, this article explores the demand side of the Tunisian labor market, focusing on employer recruitment practices – particularly search channels and the selection process – in the manufacturing industry. It aims to understand the factors influencing hiring decisions, while also considering socio-cultural aspects influencing recruitment beyond the traditional management perspective.

A Brief Definition of Recruitment

Recruitment broadly refers to the process by which an organisation identifies and attracts individuals with the necessary skills and qualifications to fulfil a specific job role. At its core, it involves aligning the right candidate with the appropriate position. In the literature, recruitment is often defined by outlining its key stages (Abdalla Hamza et al., 2021; Behrenz, 2001; Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). The first stage involves identifying the need for recruitment, which may arise due to factors such as organisational growth through new investments, the replacement of departing employees, or increased customer demand. This stage includes assessing organisational needs and defining the required qualifications, skills, and experience for the vacant role. The second stage is candidate sourcing, where organisations utilise a variety of channels to advertise the job vacancy. These channels are typically categorised into formal and informal types. Formal channels include employment agencies, recruitment firms, and job boards, while informal channels rely on the employer's personal and professional networks.

The third stage is the selection process, a crucial phase where employers evaluate and choose candidates based on predefined criteria. This process often involves several steps, including CV screening to shortlist applicants, job interviews, and, in some cases, additional assessments such as written tests or practical exercises. The final stage is onboarding, which facilitates the effective integration of the new employee into the organisation. This phase may include training programs, mentorship, and ongoing support to help the newcomer adapt to their role and the workplace environment.

It is important to note that these recruitment stages can vary widely across organisations, influenced by factors such as company size, industry sector, and the nature of the job. Each stage may also lead to different patterns of job vacancy distribution among various groups of job seekers (Russo et al., 2001). Since the identification of job needs falls outside the scope of employer decision-making and onboarding exceeds the focus of this study, the analysis will concentrate specifically on the second and third stages – candidate sourcing and selection – within the recruitment process.

Employer Search Channels

To find and attract suitable candidates, employers utilise a range of search channels to advertise job vacancies. These channels can be classified into internal sources, which involve existing employees within the organisation, and external sources, which target individuals outside the company (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Azmy, 2018; DeVaro, 2020; Furåker, 2005; Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). While internal labor markets offer valuable insights, this study focuses specifically on external labor markets. This emphasis is driven by an interest in how employers make hiring decisions under conditions of uncertainty, particularly when they lack detailed knowledge about potential candidates – a contrast to internal markets, where employers are typically familiar with employees' performance and behaviour. External recruitment methods can be further categorised into formal channels, such as job portals and recruitment agencies, and informal channels, such as employee referrals and professional or social networks. The choice between these methods is shaped by various considerations, three of which will be discussed in the following sections.

Cost Considerations

The scholarly literature frequently highlights that informal recruitment methods can help reduce hiring costs and lower the risk of selecting an unsuitable candidate. This approach may minimise or eliminate pre-hire expenses such as job advertisements and recruitment agency fees (Russo et al., 1996). However, other studies point to potential long-term drawbacks of informal hiring, including higher employee turnover, which can ultimately lead to repeated recruitment cycles – consuming both time and financial resources (Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). Additionally, informal methods may not be effective in attracting a large and diverse pool of applicants. In contrast, formal recruitment methods – such as using job portals or professional agencies – tend to reach a broader audience and are generally more effective in generating a larger candidate pool (Abdullah, 2018). However, they are also more costly.

The choice between formal and informal recruitment channels is often influenced by the size of the company. As noted by Ofori and Aryeetey (2011), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), due to their limited financial capacity, tend to rely more heavily on informal methods. In contrast, larger organisations are more likely to invest in formal recruitment strategies, as they have the resources to bear the associated costs.

Information Asymmetry

Hiring risks often arise from the information imbalance between employers and job applicants, where candidates possess more knowledge about their own skills and motivations than employers can easily observe. Akerlof's (1970) market for lemons theory – originally used to describe quality uncertainty in the used car market – offers a useful lens for understanding this issue in the labour market. This asymmetry can lead to poor hiring decisions, as employers lack reliable data to accurately assess candidate suitability. To manage this uncertainty, many employers turn to informal recruitment strategies such as employee referrals. These methods provide access to more trustworthy, nuanced insights into a candidate's intangible qualities – such as reliability, work ethic, or drive – that are difficult to gauge through formal processes. Referrals help mitigate risk in two significant ways: employees tend to recommend individuals who share similar values or traits, and they often possess firsthand knowledge of the candidate's prior job performance. At the same time, the referred candidates typically arrive with a more realistic understanding of the role and workplace, increasing the likelihood of a good match between both parties (Rees & Shultz, 1970; Fernandez et al., 2000; Castilla, 2013).

Trust

Information asymmetry in recruitment is deeply linked to the concept of trust. Trust serves to reduce uncertainty in situations where individuals lack full knowledge of others' intentions, behaviours, or dependability (Diego, 2000). In hiring contexts, it functions as a key tool for managing the perceived risk of bringing on an ill-suited employee. Employers often rely on their personal and professional networks to identify candidates who are either familiar to them or recommended by trusted contacts. These referrals tend to inspire greater confidence in a candidate's trustworthiness, dedication, and moral character (Gërxhani & Koster, 2015). Furthermore, because referrers put their own reputations on the line, they are generally motivated to recommend only candidates they believe will perform well (Bills, 2017; Emmanuelle, 2010; Castilla, 2013).

Nevertheless, trust is a subjective judgment and does not always correspond with actual performance (Ostrom, 2003). There are instances where the interviewed employers in this study, having hired individuals based on personal recommendations, later encountered poor performance and regretted their reliance on informal hiring methods. These experiences sometimes prompted a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of trust-based recruitment. Still, trust consistently emerged as a pivotal element – shaping not only how networks are used but also standing out as one of the most influential factors in hiring decisions overall.

Selection Process

Following the sourcing step, the selection process occurs, where various tools are used by employers to evaluate and choose from a pool of candidates. This process typically begins with CV screening, followed by interviews, written tests, or a combination of both. The primary aim is to select the

candidate best suited for the position, with the necessary skills and experience. Two key factors play a role during this stage: first, human capital, which includes educational background, technical skills, and prior work experience; and second, personal attributes such as communication style, appearance, and alignment with the organisation's culture, referred to as cultural capital.

Human Capital

The relationship between education, employability, and income is often framed by human capital theory, which suggests that education enhances productivity and leads to higher earnings (Becker, 1964). However, alternative perspectives challenge this assumption. Economists such as Michael Spence and Lester Thurow argue that education functions more as a signal or screening tool for employers, who rely on academic credentials to assess a candidate's potential when actual productivity cannot be directly observed.

Indeed, signalling models developed by Spence (1973; 1974) suggest that, even though an applicant's educational background may not directly affect productivity, employers tend to offer higher pay to more educated employees. Education, therefore, serves as a "signal" used by employers to infer the abilities and potential productivity of employees, despite it not necessarily enhancing actual productivity. This idea supports the notion that "to get a good job, it is necessary to have a good education," which is the core of human capital theory. On the other hand, Thurow's (1972) job competition model offers a critical view of the link between education and employment by suggesting that education does not necessarily enhance a person's productivity. Instead, it acts as an indicator of how easily a candidate can be trained. Employers sort applicants into a ranked queue based on characteristics like education, age, and experience, preferring those who appear less costly or time-consuming to prepare for a role. This approach implies that hiring decisions are influenced more by perceived trainability than by actual skills, and that formal education mainly serves to improve an individual's placement in this hierarchy rather than directly boosting job performance.

In some cases, an employer's decision may be based on characteristics unrelated to a candidate's performance or productivity. In other words, even if two candidates possess the same abilities and productive capacities, the employer might prefer one over the other based on factors such as race or gender. Labour economists have explained this behaviour through two main theories of the labour market: taste-based discrimination (Becker, 1957) and statistical discrimination (Phelps, 1972).

The taste-based discrimination theory assumes that employers may lack objectivity, choosing to hire one group over another based on their own subjective preferences or tastes, or those of their employees or customers. On the other hand, the statistical discrimination theory suggests that employers operate in an environment of uncertainty, where obtaining information about individual productivity is costly. As a result, they rely on observable characteristics of job seekers to make decisions. For example, an employer may discriminate against women not due to personal bias, but because they believe the job requires physical strength, which they assume men are more likely to possess. Therefore, the employer perceives men as more productive for that specific position.

Cultural Capital

Culture plays a crucial yet often overlooked role in hiring practices, particularly in traditional economic and hiring models that tend to disregard its influence or consider it unobservable. Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of cultural capital: embodied (personal habits, language, manners), objectified (physical cultural assets), and institutionalised (formal qualifications). Of these, embodied cultural capital plays a particularly influential role during interviews, where employers often make judgments based not only on competence but on perceived cultural fit.

Hiring decisions are frequently shaped by the employer's subjective impressions of the candidate's demeanour, values, or interpersonal style. As argued by Rivera (2012), employers often gravitate toward candidates who resemble themselves in terms of interests or social behaviours, interpreting this resemblance as a sign of trustworthiness and compatibility with company culture. This sense of “fit” – sometimes described as intuition or chemistry – may carry as much weight as qualifications or experience.

Indeed, trust is frequently highlighted by interviewed employers in this study as a key factor in hiring decisions, and it is often assessed through the lens of cultural compatibility. Rather than being viewed solely as a personal attribute, trustworthiness is shaped by broader social and cultural influences, including how well a candidate's behaviour and demeanour align with the values and expectations of the organisation. Elements such as accent, body language, grooming, or conversational style – while seemingly superficial – can play a powerful role in these evaluations.

Methods

While conducting this research on recruitment practices within 28 industrial enterprises in greater Tunis (see Figure 17.2 for more information about the distribution of enterprises per sector), a qualitative questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections. The first section, comprising questions about the interviewees themselves, was instrumental in providing a contextual understanding of the participants and their roles within the organisations. The second section of the questionnaire delved into the intricate details of the enterprises, seeking to uncover valuable information about their internal processes, especially those related to recruitment and HR management. Lastly, the final section was thoughtfully crafted to be open-ended, allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives on recruitment practices freely.

The empirical work spanned four industrial zones situated in Greater – specifically Manouba, Ben Arous, Ariana, and Tunis – where recruitment practices of numerous industrial enterprises were closely examined. For the sake of anonymity, the actual names of the firms were not disclosed. The data collection process was executed over three months, starting from January 15, 2023, and concluding on April 15, 2023.

Before conducting the primary interviews, a preliminary step of running five pilot interviews was taken to validate the questionnaire. After necessary modifications based on the feedback received, a final version of the questionnaire was employed in data collection efforts.

A crucial aspect of this study was the focus on HR managers, as they are recognised as the most knowledgeable individuals when it comes to recruitment within their respective organisations. An impressive 50% of interviewees belonged to this category (see Table 17.1). Furthermore, engagement with owner-managers was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes underlying recruitment practices. This was particularly relevant, given the prevalence of the concept of paternalism within Tunisia, which influences organisational dynamics significantly.

In the process of data analysis, an interpretive approach was adopted, allowing exploration beyond the surface to unearth the underlying nuances of the responses. To facilitate this, MaxQda, a software tool tailored for qualitative research, was utilised to organise and analyse the data gathered effectively.

The insights gained from this research provide a deeper understanding of recruitment practices in Tunisian industrial enterprises, particularly the various search channels employers use to find candidates and the selection processes they employ to hire them.

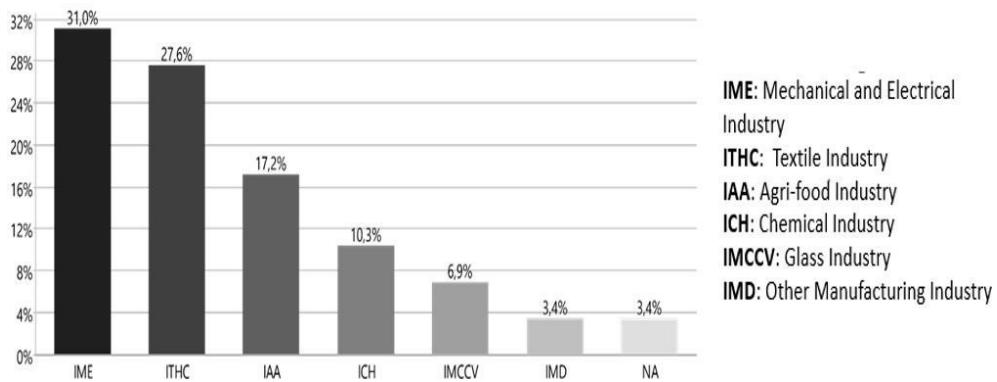


Figure 17.2. Distribution of interviewed enterprises by sector

Table 17.1. Characteristics of respondents

Profile of interviewees		Frequency (n=30)	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	60%
	Female	12	40%
Age	20–40	8	26.67%
	41–60	14	46.67%
	61–80	8	26.67%
Position	HR managers	15	50%
	Owner-managers	5	16.67%
	Managers	8	26.67%
	Experts	2	6.67%

Characteristics of the firms		Frequency (n=30)	Percentage
SIZE (number of employees)	Small (10–49)	12	40%
	Medium (50–199)	9	30%
	Large (more than 200)	6	20%
	NA	3	10%
Geographic Location	Manouba	11	36.67%
	Ben Arous	9	30%
	Ariana	6	20%
	Tunis	3	10%
Start of Company	1973–1995	8	26.67%
	1996–2009	11	36.67%
	2010–2018	8	26.67%
	NA	3	10%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Results

Employers Search Channels

As mentioned above, studies on recruitment have traditionally divided employers' search channels into formal and informal categories. During the fieldwork, eight search channels were identified by employers. All except direct applications were easily classified into formal or informal categories. Formal search channels involve the use of an intermediary, such as an impersonal service, to connect the employer with potential employees, meaning no personal contacts are used to fill the vacancy (Granovetter, 1995). In contrast, informal search channels rely on the employer's personal network, either directly or indirectly, to find potential employees.

Direct application is a unique channel because it involves candidates spontaneously submitting their CVs to the company without necessarily knowing about an open position. This category is ambiguous because the way candidates learn about the job varies. They might have found an advertisement through formal means, like an employment office, or they might have heard about it from a friend who knows the employer (informal means). Due to this ambiguity, we consider direct application a separate category, unlike other studies that classify it under informal channels.

Included under formal search channels are employment offices, job portals, social media, universities, private employment offices, and newspapers. Table 17.2 shows that 67.8% of the interviewed enterprises use employment offices to disseminate information about vacant positions, yet only 7.1% of last hires are made through this channel (see Table 17.3). Despite its widespread use, many employers find employment offices inefficient, noting that they do not make sufficient efforts to match candidates

with job offers. This inefficiency can be attributed to the lack of proactive commitment and limited resources available to screening and matching candidates.

In addition to employment offices, job portals, and social media are also considered formal search channels and are widely used by employers in the industrial sector to advertise vacant positions. Job portals refer to national online platforms where employers publish job offers and job seekers search and apply for these jobs. The most cited job portals by employers are Tanit Job and Kee Job. For social media, LinkedIn is the most used, followed by Facebook. It is important to note that social media and job portals are particularly effective for finding high-skilled workers, unlike employment offices, which are more commonly used to find low-skilled workers.

The primary reasons employers favour these three formal channels – job portals, social media, and employment offices – are their cost-effectiveness or lack of cost, especially in monetary terms. Unlike private recruitment offices and newspapers, which are considered more expensive, these channels provide a budget-friendly option for filling vacant positions. However, private recruitment offices are sometimes used to find individuals with specific skills, typically for upper management positions, where specialised expertise is crucial.

Of the employers interviewed, 39.2% also spread information about open positions through universities, which was unexpected since 21 out of the 28 interviewed enterprises are small and medium-sized (see Table 17.1). Typically, this search channel is more commonly used by larger companies due to reasons such as resource availability and the volume of hiring. Generally, this channel targets high-skilled workers who secure jobs after completing an internship or their final project – referred to in French as *Projet de fin d'études (PFE)* at the respective company. Another method to find candidates through universities is by hosting open house events – referred to in French as *journée porte ouverte* – during which employers visit university campuses to promote their companies and present job opportunities. Additionally, employers can simply contact the university and request candidates, often leveraging their network within the university to facilitate this process.

Included under the informal search channel category is the employer's network. As shown in Table 17.2, this method is used by 53.5% of enterprises and is the primary channel through which employers find their eventual hires (see Table 17.3). According to the interviewed employers, the main reason for using this search channel is trust; many expressed a preference for employing someone they know or at least someone who is vouched for as trustworthy.

Networks can be classified into informal networks, such as family and friends, and formal networks, such as colleagues, customers, or suppliers. Nearly all employers mentioned that they have no issues using their formal networks. These formal connections are often seen as professional and reliable sources for potential candidates, as they involve individuals the employer has interacted with in a business context.

However, opinions on using informal networks, especially involving family, are mixed and reveal a range of attitudes and practices. Some employers, mostly owner-managers, feel a sense of duty to employ family members or people from their region. This sense of obligation is motivated by cultural values and the belief that employing family members strengthens family ties. For these owner-managers, hiring family members is seen to honour and valorise the family, reinforcing social ties and ensuring loyalty. They argue that this practice helps maintain a trustworthy and dedicated

workforce, as family members are more likely to align with the company's values and long-term goals. Additionally, employing individuals from their region can foster a sense of community and mutual support.

On the other hand, some employers (generally human resource managers or managers) express concerns about the potential inconveniences of hiring through an informal network. They point out the risk of conflict of interests and mixing personal and professional relationships, which can complicate decision-making and affect workplace dynamics. These employers argue that such decisions can lead to familial tensions. For instance, two interviewees mentioned having conflicts with their mothers because they refused to hire their long-term unemployed siblings.

Under the direct application channel, a significant share of interviewed employers (39%) mentioned this as a search channel. This method is predominantly used by low-skilled job seekers who typically hand their CVs to the security guard at the factory entrance. Consequently, a large collection of resumes often accumulates in the security guard's office. The initial decision to pass a candidate's resume to the HR department is frequently made by the security guard, who thus plays a crucial role in the preliminary selection process. One employer mentioned that the security guard sometimes demanded money to forward CVs to the HR department, which led to the guard being fired.

Direct applications are also submitted via email, where job seekers send their CVs to the company and request employment. Additionally, some applicants attempt to bypass the security guard and directly approach the HR manager if permitted entry. This search channel is not only used by job seekers but also by those looking for internships.

Table 17.2. *How information about vacancies is spread*

Search channel	Number	Per cent ¹
Employment office	19	67,8%
Networks	15	53,5%
Job portal	13	46,4%
Direct application	11	39,2%
Social media	10	35,7%
University	11	39,2%
Private employment office	7	25%
Newspapers	4	14,2%
Total	28	

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

1 The percentages add up to over 100 because some employers have stated more than just one answer.

Table 17.3. Search channel used for the last hire

Search channel	Number	Per cent
Employment office	2	7.1%
Networks	6	21.4%
Job portal	5	17.8%
Direct application /word of mouth	5	17.8%
Social media	4	14.2%
University	1	3.5%
Private employment office	1	3.5%
Newspapers	2	7.1%
Don't know	2	7.1%
Total	28	

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Selection Process

Almost all the employers interviewed used only two tools to select candidates: CV screening and job interviews. For some companies, the interview process can extend to three rounds to ensure a thorough evaluation of the candidate's suitability. Only two of the interviewed enterprises mentioned incorporating written tests as a final step in the selection process, indicating that this method is relatively uncommon among the sample group.

In general, the selection process depends on three factors: the search channel through which the candidate was found (formal or informal), the specific requirements of labour quality (low-skilled or high-skilled labour), and the industry in which the company operates. In this paper, the focus will be on the first two factors: the search channel and labour quality.

As mentioned, employers' search channels can be formal or informal, and the type of search channel can significantly affect the selection process. Candidates found through formal channels typically undergo a meticulous selection process. Employers spend considerable time screening CVs and conducting interviews. This thorough approach ensures that the candidate meets all the formal requirements of the position and aligns well with the company's needs. In contrast, the process is simpler and quicker when a candidate is found through an informal search channel, especially if recommended by friends or family. In such cases, the employer might only conduct a brief interview before proceeding to offer the job. This accelerated process is largely due to pre-existing trust and knowledge of the candidate's reliability and abilities. Employers feel more confident in the candidate's suitability because they have personal support, which reduces the perceived risk in the hiring decision.

The specific requirements for labour quality also significantly influence the selection process. For low-skilled positions, the process tends to be shorter and less complex. In some cases, neither CVs nor job interviews are required; simply accepting the job offer can result in immediate recruitment. This

is particularly common in sectors that primarily require low-skilled employees, such as the textile and agri-food sectors. These sectors face challenges in attracting this specific category of workers, making the selection process less strategic.

When it comes to selection criteria for low-skilled positions, employers typically focus on factors such as age, gender, physical condition, and the geographical location of the employee. A lack of experience or inadequate educational level does not significantly affect the employability of the candidate. Conversely, for highly skilled positions, the selection process is typically more demanding. Employers generally look for candidates with adequate education and experience. Which demands a more rigorous evaluation starting with CV screening for a preselection and ending with job interviews.

We now move on to the selection criterion. In addition to asking open-ended questions about the selection criteria for the most recent hires, we also included a closed question where employers were asked to rate the importance of various requirements on a scale from one to ten for the last open position (see Figure 17.3). It is important to note that nearly all these positions were for graduates and highly skilled workers, such as engineers, accountants, and technicians, with only three positions being for low-skilled workers.

The most critical criterion for almost all employers was that the candidate be a trustworthy person. This preference helps explain why networks are one of the main search channels used by employers. Trustworthiness is a trait that is not easily observable, and the use of personal contacts to fill a position reduces the employer's uncertainty about a candidate's characteristics. Trustworthiness is one of the main personal characteristics needed by employers, and they highly value it among potential hires.

Other personal characteristics that were frequently mentioned by the interviewed employers included the candidate's motivation and moral commitment. To assess moral commitment, employers often look at the duration of the candidate's tenure in their last job, as indicated on their CV, or they ask about it during the job interview. Generally, a longer tenure in a previous job is viewed more favourably because it indicates the candidate's loyalty.

These personal characteristics are sometimes considered more important by employers than previous experience or the possession of an appropriate diploma. While having a relevant educational background is important, it is often not sufficient on its own. Additionally, for many of the most recent open positions, experience was not deemed highly important unless the role involved managerial responsibilities or required specific technical skills. Indeed, while qualifications and experience are valued, many employers place a higher emphasis on personal traits such as trustworthiness, motivation, and moral commitment when making hiring decisions for high-skilled positions. This emphasis on personal characteristics underscores the importance of using networks and personal contacts in the recruitment process, as these channels help employers better assess these intangible qualities.

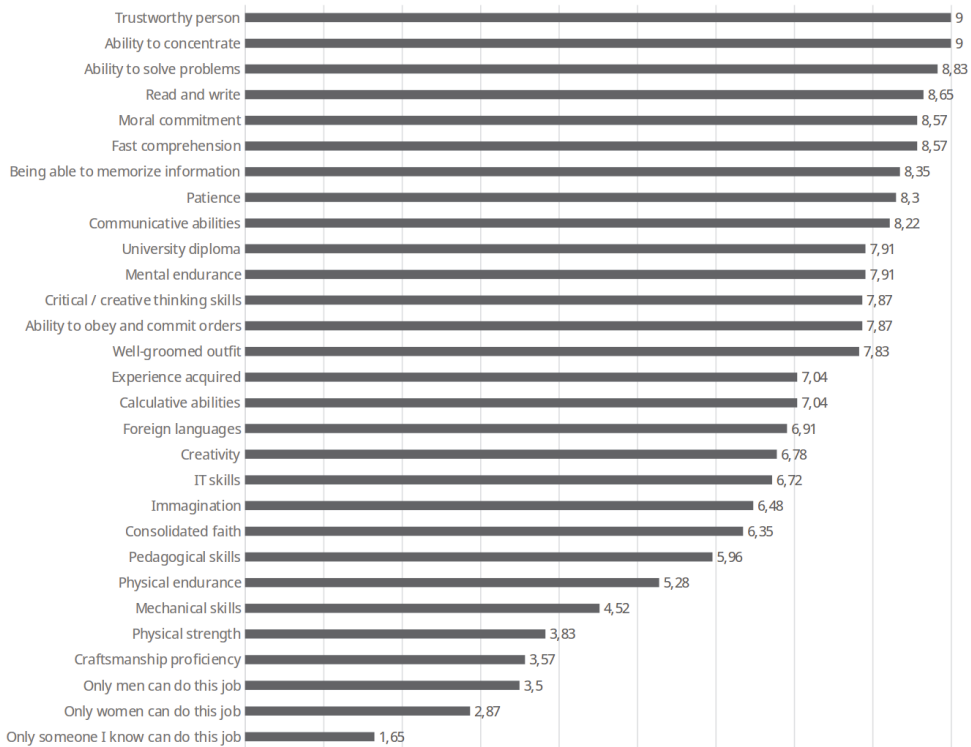


Figure 17.3. Average criteria ratings in the position

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Another way mentioned by interviewed employers for assessing these personal traits was intuition. The expression “I can feel it” was frequently repeated during the interviews. Many employers explained that their extensive experience allows them to distinguish between a “good” or a “bad” candidate based on their intuition. This intuitive sense, they believe, has been honed over years of experience, enabling them to make quick judgments about a candidate's suitability. Employers also mentioned that they assess these personal characteristics by observing various cues from the candidate. These cues include how the candidate walks or talks, their style of dress, and sometimes even their physical appearance. Some employers also consider the candidate's background, including the occupation of their parents. One employer mentioned that the environment in which a candidate was raised can significantly influence their work ethic and values. For instance, this employer specifically gave the example of candidates with a father in a military position, as they might be perceived as more likely to be diligent and committed employees.

Even though gender was ranked as the least important selection criterion in the closed question, many employers still consider it significant during the selection process. While some employers do not regard gender as a critical factor, others believe that certain positions are more suitable for either women or men based on their perceived productivity. For example, one employer mentioned a

preference for men in managerial positions, citing their ability to work longer hours and stay late at the office, whereas women, due to family responsibilities, might be less efficient in that regard. Conversely, another employer stated that he always hires women for commercial positions, believing that their feminine personality and appearance help them attract more customers than men.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to understand the recruitment practices of Tunisian industrial enterprises, particularly focusing on employers' search channels and selection processes used to find suitable candidates for open positions. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Greater Tunis with 28 employers operating in the industrial sector.

The results of this study highlight that both the employer's search channel and selection process vary depending on the skill level required for the position. For low-skilled labour, employment offices and direct applications are more commonly used and effective channels. In contrast, for high-skilled labour, job portals and social media (e.g., LinkedIn and Facebook), and occasionally universities, are preferred methods. Many employers also favour informal search channels for both high- and low-skilled workers, citing cost considerations and the trustworthiness of candidates, which may be influenced by uncertainty and information asymmetry, as discussed in the literature review. However, some employers express concerns that informal methods may blur personal and professional boundaries.

Regarding the selection process, this not only depends on the skill level required but also on the search channel used. For low-skilled labour and candidates found through informal channels, the selection process tends to be less strategic and rigorous, often involving only a simple interview to make the hiring decision. For high-skilled labour sourced through formal search channels, the selection process is generally longer and more rigorous. In these cases, employers use education level and experience as initial indicators, though personal characteristics such as motivation, trustworthiness, and moral commitment are equally valued by many employers. To assess these traits, some employers rely on their intuition, a practice that may lead to taste-based discrimination, as it often involves subjective judgments.

Additionally, employers consider productivity-related characteristics in their recruitment decisions. For instance, some prefer male candidates for certain positions, citing physical strength as a factor that makes men more productive than women in those roles. This practice reflects statistical discrimination.

The study suggests further investigation of these recruitment practices in other sectors, such as the service or commercial sectors, and in other regions of Tunisia. Such practices may vary across sectors and could also be influenced by the geographical location of the enterprise itself.

References

- Abdalla Hamza, P., Jabbar Othman, B., Gardi, B., Sorguli, S., Mahmood Aziz, H., Ali Ahmed, S., Yassin Sabir, B., Burhan Ismael, N., Jamal Ali, B., & Anwar, G. (2021). Recruitment and selection: The relationship between recruitment and selection with organizational performance. *International Journal of Engineering, Business and Management*, 5(3), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijebm.5.3>
- Akerlof, G. A. (1970). The market for “lemons”: Quality uncertainty and the market mechanism. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 84(3), 488–500. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1879431>
- Allen, D. G., & Vardaman, J. M. (2017). Recruitment and retention across cultures. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 153–181. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113007>
- Allouch, B. & Akkari, A. (2020). L'enseignement supérieur en Tunisie : A-t-on sacrifié la qualité face aux pressions quantitatives ? *La Revue Marocaine de La Pensée Contemporaine*, 5. <https://revues.imist.ma/index.php/RMPC/article/view/18824/10234>
- Arous, K. (2011). *Les pratiques de la gestion des compétences : Cas des grandes entreprises tunisiennes*. CREG–Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour. <https://www.agrh.fr/assets/actes/2011arous.pdf>
- Assaad, R. & M. Boughzala (Eds.) (2018), *The Tunisian labor market in an era of transition* (Vol. 3). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198799863.001.0001>
- Azmy, A. (2018). Recruitment strategy to hire the best people for organization. *Journal of Management and Leadership*, 1(2), 1–9.
- Bakari, S. (2015). *La Question du Chômage des Jeunes Diplômés en Tunisie : Evolution, Caractéristiques, Limites et Perspectives (1990 – 2014)*. [The issue of unemployment of young graduates in Tunisia: Evolution, characteristics, limits and prospects (1990–2014)]. MPRA Paper. https://mpra.uib.uni-muenchen.de/84243/1/MPRA_paper_74702.pdf
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, G. S. (1957). *The economics of discrimination*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Behrenz, L. (2001). Who gets the job and why? An explorative study of employers' recruitment behavior. *Journal of Applied Economics*, 4(2), 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2001.12040565>
- Belgacem, A., & Vacher, J. (2023). Why is Tunisia's unemployment so high? Evidence from policy factors. *IMF Working Papers 2023* (219), <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400257025.001>
- Bills, D. B., Di Stasio, V., & Gërkhani, K. (2017). The demand side of hiring: Employers in the labor market. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43, 291–310. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074255>
- Boughzala, M. (2019). Marché du travail, dynamique des compétences et politiques d'emploi en Tunisie. European Training Foundation (ETF), 2019-08.
- Castilla, E. J., Lan, G. J., & Rissing, B. A. (2013). Social networks and employment: Mechanisms (Part 1). *Sociology Compass*, 7(12), 999–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12096>
- DeVaro, J. (2020). Internal hiring or external recruitment? *IZA World of Labor*, 237, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.237.v2>
- Fernandez, R. M., Castilla, E. J., & Moore, P. (2000). Social capital at work: Networks and employment at a phone center. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(5), 1288–1356.
- Furåker, B. (2005). *Sociological perspectives on labor markets*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gambetta, D. (2000). “Can we trust trust?” In D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (electronic edition, Chapter 13, pp. 213–237). Department of Sociology, University of Oxford.
- Gërkhani, K., & Koster, F. (2015). Making the right move: Investigating employers' recruitment strategies. *Personnel Review*, 44(5), 781–800. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-12-2013-0229>
- Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a job: A study of contacts and careers* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

- Haouas, I., Sayre, E., & Yagoubi, M. (2012). *Youth unemployment in Tunisia: Characteristics and policy responses*. Topics in middle eastern and north African economies, 14. Middle East Economic Association and Loyola University Chicago. <http://www.luc.edu/orgs/meea/>
- Hassine, A. Ben. (2008). La GRH dans les pays du Sud : Le modèle tunisien. *Revue Sciences de Gestion*, 69, 95–104.
- Ibrahim, N. S., Hashim, J., & Rahman, R. A. (2018). The impact of employer branding and career growth on talent retention: The mediating role of recruitment practices in the Malaysian public sector. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(6), 766–778. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v8-i6/4300>
- Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives (ITCEQ). (2022). Pour un renouveau de la politique industrielle : Exigences du positionnement compétitif (Tribune économique, No. 15). ITCEQ. <http://www.itceq.tn/files/tribunes/tribune15.pdf>
- Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives. (2017). Chômage structurel en Tunisie : Une lecture de la relation entre la formation et l'emploi. <http://www.itceq.tn/files/tribunes/tribune15.pdf>
- Kodde, D. A. (1988). Unemployment expectations and human capital formation. *European Economic Review*, 32(8), 1645–1660.
- Marchal, E., & Rieucan, G. (2010). *Le recrutement*. La Découverte.
- Mesfar, S., & Ben Kahla, K. (2018). L'impact du capital social familial sur la gouvernance de l'entreprise familiale tunisienne. *Question(s) de Management*, 20(1), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.3917/qdm.181.0045>
- Nabli, M. K., & Nugent, J. B. (2022). *Tunisia's economic development: Why better than most of the Middle East but not East Asia*. Routledge.
- Ofori, D., & Aryeetey, M. (2011). Recruitment and selection practices in small and medium enterprises: Perspectives from Ghana. *International Journal of Business Administration*, 2(3), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v2n3p45>
- Ostrom, E., & Ahn, T. K. (2003). Introduction to “Foundations of social capital.” In E. Ostrom (Ed.), *Foundations of social capital* (pp. 1–39). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Phelps, E. S. (1972). The statistical theory of racism and sexism. *American Economic Review*, 62(4), 659–661.
- Rees, A. (1966). Information networks in labor markets. *American Economic Review*, 56(1), 559–566.
- Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 999–1022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412463213>
- Russo, G., Gorter, C., & Schettkat, R. (2001). Searching, hiring and labour market conditions. *Labour Economics*, 8(5), 553–571. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0927-5371\(01\)00044-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0927-5371(01)00044-6)
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355–374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>
- Spence, M. (1974). Competitive and optimal responses to signals: An analysis of efficiency and distribution. *Journal of Economic Theory*, 7(3), 296–332.
- Stampini, M., & Verdier-Chouchane, A. (2011). Labor market dynamics in Tunisia: The issue of youth unemployment. *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance*, 7(2), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1475-3693.1394>
- Thurow, L. C. (1972). Education and economic equality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 42(1), 1–16.