The advantages and challenges of turning towards e-recruitment for small and medium sized businesses (SME).

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This thesis overlooks the possibilities and implications given by online recruitment in small and medium sized companies. First of all, the concept of e-recruitment is defined with a description of different development phases. Then, the principal advantages and challenges of such technological tools are analyzed in the context of SME. In the following chapter, a practical case of [ipt], an IT consultant company active on the Swiss market, is presented with the pros and cons of turning towards a higher e-recruitment level. After that, a number of good practices based on previous experiences and studies are enumerated to help an organization in making decisions at the level of online supported recruitment tools.

**Key words:** e-recruitment, online recruitment, human resource, job posting, job portals, career webpage, HRIS
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1. Introduction

E-recruitment is a new technological mean for selecting one of the companies’ most crucial resources, i.e. human resource. This technological innovation improves the process of recruiting knowledge sources by using the Internet. It allows businesses to make cost savings, update job offers and status at any time, to shorten the recruitment cycle time, to identify and select the best knowledge potential out of a wider range of candidates and gives the company an opportunity to improve its image and profile.

The precedent elements describe the possible improvements e-recruitment can generate, which emphasizes the need for line and top managers to consider integrating this technology and innovative process approach in their firm’s strategies. Furthermore, better and faster recruiting can constitute a competitive advantage against enterprises from the same market.

However, web-based recruitment is now sufficiently widespread to represent a disadvantage for companies that delayed its integration in their own corporate information systems and strategies.

Moreover, passive and active job seekers also tend to prefer online applications to traditional application methods, because it saves time and money and makes it possible to browse through a wider range of job offers. It also allows job hunters to navigate through the corporate websites to build first impressions and opinions on the company (either because jobs offers are being searched directly on the corporate website, or through links, or by personal incentive).

The many different opportunities of e-recruitment methods are less widespread among small and medium sized businesses. The core objective of this paper is to determine which factors refrain small and medium sized enterprises, referred as SME, from focusing more on e-recruitment methods and what the reasons are for them to concentrate more resources and attention on (further) developing e-recruitment tools in their system and strategies.

First, in order to answer this problematic thoroughly, the concept of “e-recruitment” will have to be precisely defined, with its various technical forms, to determine the scope of the paper. The changes the new Internet-based tools have brought to the traditional recruitment
tasks will also be pointed out. Afterwards, the differences between larger companies and SME will be explained and a model of phases by Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel (2005) will be used to describe different stages of e-recruitment development. This will help categorize the level companies are at. Thereafter, the various improvements and challenges e-recruitment means, which can be expected by SME implementing them, will be researched, explained and analyzed one by one. Then, in order to better understand the pros and cons of such means, the theoretical findings of the research are compared to a more practical one of a company’s experience. At first, two SME were to be analyzed, which would present characteristics of two different phases of e-recruitment level, based on the model of Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel (2005). However, after some time spend searching for a second company, it appeared that it was unnecessary to do so, because most SME are still at a very low level of e-recruitment integration. Therefore, a single interview was conducted with the Human Resource manager of [ipt], the enterprise who agreed to collaborate for this research work. Firstly, the situation of the company will be defined, and the recruitment process will be presented with a special focus on online recruiting tools. The answers to the interview are a way to reflect in a concrete context the implications of e-recruitment that are presented in this thesis. The last part of this practical section will then analyze whether a higher level of e-recruitment integration is recommendable or not. Finally, a chapter is dedicated to good practices that can be observed by any company to increase the chances of implementing successfully further e-recruitment tools to support the recruitment process.
2. E-recruitment

2.1 Definition

What is e-recruitment?

Recruitment is a core function of organizations, which consists in increasing the human capital to pursue strategic goals. The traditional recruitment process is rather linear (see Figure 1) and covers all activities regarding the identifying and hiring of potential knowledge held by individuals (Holm, 2012). This process can be divided into three main phases, the attraction, screening and selection of applicants (Bartram, 2000). The first phase is about identifying the potential knowledge the company needs and attracting them in a large pool. The screening phase is about filtering the applications and sorting out a smaller group of candidates, who fit the position, according to key criteria considered crucial to the job profile. The final phase is about selecting from the remaining applicants by conducting interviews and eliminating the candidates who fail to meet the requirements of the recruiter(s) and head management.

![Diagram of traditional and e-recruitment process]

*Figure 1: The design and sequence of tasks in traditional paper-based recruitment process vs. the (new) recruitment process using e-recruitment (Holm, 2012)*
The use of Internet technology for recruitment has thoroughly changed the activities of a recruiter (Dhamija, 2012). E-recruitment, which stands for online recruitment, can be generally defined according to Kim & O’Connor (2009) as “any recruiting process that an organization conducts via web-based tools”. The process of recruitment is thus to be redefined when Internet support is used, and all three previously mentioned phases of the process may become web-based. Here are examples of e-recruiting activities and services: online job posting such as on corporate websites or job portals, receiving of applications over the Internet, storage of these applications, screening applications, online tests, response and status management (Singh & Narang, 2008). E-recruitment should not be considered as a process itself, but more as a web-based assistance that must be integrated into recruiting and selecting methods. A high integration level of e-recruiting is achieved when parts of the online recruitment process are automated by a corporate information system. This type of information system is called Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and is part of the Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM). HRIS is an advanced system that allows to support a company in every HR function such as recruiting both internally and externally, testing applicants with web-based questionnaires and e-assessment methods, managing candidates and employee’s information and providing meaningful decision support tools. (Dhamija, 2012; Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005).

2.2 Evolution of recruitment tasks

The addition of web-based tools to the recruitment process has brought a major evolution to its role and activities. Maurer and Liu (2007) described this as a change from “batch mode” to “continuous mode” that allows a firm to constantly collect and process information such as entering job applications, status changes or statistical data. Furthermore, they claim the introduction of e-recruitment methods enables a reciprocal communication facilitated by Internet support which happens earlier than in the traditional recruitment process. In fact, Internet has become a widely spread source for employment searches and job seekers are also progressively using proportionally less of the traditional channels such as printed media and employment agencies to turn towards online job advertising (see Figure 2: Ratio of jobs filled per recruitment channel (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005)).
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(Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008). The reasons for its success are numerous. First of all, job seekers achieve time and cost saving when applying online, such as on corporate websites, job portals or professional networks. In fact, there is no need to print a CV, a motivational letter, nor to send it. The entire sending action takes no more than a few seconds, and since a computer with an Internet connection can be considered a standard, the tools that are necessary for an individual to send an application online are already available.

![Figure 2: Ratio of jobs filled per recruitment channel (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005)](image)

2.3 Reach of e-recruitment tools in SME

Differences between bigger companies and small to medium sized ones

Web-based recruitment tools are now common and a wide range of companies use them with different integration levels (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005). This is most certainly the case of large companies, as well as most of small to medium-sized ones. However, SME do usually not have the same tools as their bigger concurrents, which are usually less sophisticated and integrated into corporate strategies. There are multiple reasons for it, and this paper is an attempt to define them and to understand the consequences that it
implicates, in the present as well as in the long run. Therefore, differences between SME and large companies in terms of e-recruitment needs have to be clarified.

First of all, SMEs do not employ as much workforce as wider enterprises do. Then, because of that, the need to recruit may not be as frequent and intensive as for their bigger counterparts, which further explains a lower concern and need for formalizing and automating recruiting activities. In fact, most SME may find themselves in a satisfying situation, in regard to their recruitment procedures and tools. However, this satisfaction may not last in the long run, and this is the very reason why organizations, from smaller to larger sizes, should consider the opportunities a technological improvement of their HR activities with online recruitment tools can bring to their recruitment process.

2.4 Phases of e-recruitment integration in a company

What are the stages of e-recruitment?

There are several integrations levels of e-recruitment solutions, which vary in terms of complexity and tasks they support and/or automate. In 2005, Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel presented their study about the information system supporting the recruitment process, in which they conducted quantitative and qualitative research to determine four different phases of e-recruitment development. For reasons of simplicity and common understanding, this paper will refer to the four e-recruitment stages already defined in Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel’s work (see Figure 3), which are as follow:

- Phase 1: Use of isolated solutions that each support a specific task in the e-recruitment process. These solutions are run independently from the others as well as from the corporate information system. Examples of such e-recruitment tools fitting this first stage would include job postings on the corporate website, the use of job portals and the services they propose (job posting, searching of the database, sending of applications directly to an e-mail address, applicant status management, partly automated response system, etc.), storing of applicant data on a computer of the company.
- **Phase 2:** Firms at this stage have developed an integrated applicant management system, which support the entire recruitment function, from attracting potential candidates and job posting to the receiving of applications and final selection.

- **Phase 3:** Utilization of external service providers that are independently integrated to the corporate information system, but allow a somehow continuous workflow of the recruitment process.

- **Phase 4:** This final stage includes a complete integration of all recruitment activities. All exchanges of data such as applications are standardized and the files do not require a format change of any kind. The entire recruitment process is supported by the information system and assisted by web-based tools.

As Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel say, these phases are not strictly delimiting, i.e. a part of the recruitment process can be largely integrated with sophisticated tools which support a few tasks only, but do not cover any of the remaining activities. These are called hybrid forms.
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3.1 Advantages of e-recruitment tools

The improvements a small to medium sized company can await when implementing (further advanced) e-recruitment tools

There are multiple advantages to utilizing e-recruitment tools. These are to be discussed in this section, with a special regard to the situation of small to medium size enterprises. Most advantages could be applied to both situations, however the context is different.

Time and cost savings

The most obvious advantages would certainly be the time and cost savings they generate (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). Indeed, the duration of the whole recruitment process is considerably cut down, thanks to the faster exchanges of information. Applications are sent within seconds thanks to the Internet, by addressing it directly to the recruiter’s e-mail address or by using a job portal as an intermediary, for instance. Same with the answer of the recruiter and further exchanges; this saves time to both the recruiter and the applicant. Moreover, the cost of electronic job posting is usually lower than the one of printed media, employment agencies, headhunters and other traditional recruitment means (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005). However, the posting of job offers on job boards can be expensive; most of them charge considerable amounts for the posting of an employment advertisement. Nevertheless, as it will be discussed later on in this paper, the effectiveness of this e-recruitment mean is ordinarily worth the fee.

Reduction of the administrative load of work

Another significant advantage is the one of diminishing the administrative burden of the HR department (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). Since part of the e-recruitment can be automated by integrating tools to the corporate information system, some tasks will be automated and
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therefore reducing significantly the bureaucratic load of work – which, in addition, also saves time (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005). Depending on the level of e-recruitment development at which a company stands, the amount of automated tasks varies. In fact, the higher the level of technology use, the more activities will be supported and automated by the HR system or the corporate information system. Kumar & Pandya (2012) said that, in the case of a HRIS (Human Resource Information System), it is proven that with such integration development, both the administrative load of work and the costs for the recruiting activities are significantly reduced. Kumar & Pandya (2012) also claim that an HRIS decreases the need for HR staff. However, this is not necessarily the objective companies are aiming for, especially not SME, since the number of employees working in the HR department is generally not very large, if there is a HR department at all. But in the situation of a sudden and sustained growth of an SME, a HRIS might be a solution worth considering. Although the initial investment is significant, this could represent a competitive advantage against concurrent firms. Kuman & Pandya (2012) further demonstrate that it would secure the position of an enterprise in terms of technology use, since the progress of computer science is exponential. Organizations should turn sooner rather than later towards technology, especially if their competitors are doing so and if the market they are in is somehow related to their field of specialty (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003).

Reach of international knowledge

In addition to the time and cost efficiency and to the bureaucratic relief a certain level of e-recruitment tools can bring, its influential support also needs to be taken into account: the reach of international knowledge. Indeed, Internet access is available to almost everyone, it could be considered granted. Preeminently for firms searching for specific or high-qualified knowledge, it is crucial for them to attract a sufficient number of potential candidates to choose from (Holm, 2012; Dhamija, 2012). Not only does online recruitment reach a bigger pool of applicants; equally important, the potentially recruited candidates often present better profiles than when using traditional means only (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). According to some, a higher proportion of international applicants within the knowledge pool could lead to higher unemployment or under-employment rates in specific regions, because of the increasing number of foreign recruits. However, Kinder (2000) claims this is not a valid
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argument, since the hiring of international workforce can potentially push schools and institutions towards leveraging their quality of education. Furthermore, he claims that labor migration is a mutual mechanism, and that it does not necessarily leave the local labor force out of work; especially not when the European Union is aiming to lower the unemployment rate by smoothing their migration and labor policies. Altogether, the wider variety of nationalities within candidate pools can benefit any company, from all sizes, especially if the knowledge they are looking for is specific and of higher academic background.

Reach of passive job seekers

Recruiting online has also brought a new category of candidates into the recruiting pool; the passive job seekers. Even though they are not looking actively, they may have an interest in finding a job with better work conditions, a higher salary, or maybe another work experience. This also expresses a trend among today's workforce; it is much more mobile and knowledge-specific, and maybe also less loyal and attached to a company (Kinder, 2000). Motivations of job seekers put apart, they often present interesting profiles with quality potential (Dhamija, 2012).

Another category that is extremely present among job seekers is the one of students. In 2000, 90% of all graduates in America were already searching actively for a job on the Internet (Bartram, 2000). This could be explained by the fact that young and educated job seekers are often computer literate (Dhamija, 2012).

Positive impact of the corporate website

Electronic job posting has brought a new facet to recruitment activities, that is the importance treating the image of the company and the design of the employment advertisement with enhanced attention. As Barber (2006) said: “Recruitment is, in reality, job marketing”. This is certainly not an exaggeration, because both web pages’ design and corporate image play a significant role for the impressions job seekers have on a company (see Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.) (Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008). Job seekers use it to learn about the firm’s values, its benefits and to form a general opinion on it. The support of Internet makes it possible to design a job posting and website page in
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a more interactive and informative way, for instance by using images, videos or adding links to them (Maurer & Liu, 2007). If the company is doing a fine job at designing their employment offer and their website page, it will attract more job seekers and the firm will be able to chose from a bigger pool of applicants (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). Furthermore, the better the image of the organization is, the more job seekers will be drawn to the website and potentially apply. Another factor that determines how successful an enterprise can be when attracting potential knowledge is the prominence of the corporate brand (Parry & Tyson, 2008). In fact, advertising for job positions on a corporate website of a company which does not have a reputation nor a certain notoriety is not of much use, unless the company advertises on job boards as well, so that it can reach a larger amount of job seekers. This is probably more the case of SMEs, since their size and their corporate brand may be less popular compared to larger companies. So an organization’s success in attracting applicants depends on how well known she is, although the appropriateness and interest that the employment advertisement can draw cannot be neglected (Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008). Therefore a company should consider all these previously mentioned matters as important factors, i.e. the design of job postings, their website and corporate image, as e-recruitment advantages that can greatly improve the attraction phase of the recruiting process.

Decentralization of HR activities

Another modification and advantage e-recruitment integration can lead to is the one of decentralizing HR operations. This, however, requires a sufficient level of e-recruitment development, such as the use of a Human Resource Information System, or a company using e-recruitment tools of phases 3 or 4, perhaps also phase 2, of the phase model earlier described in this paper. Most SME are at phase 1, but the following explanation can be seen as an argument for implementing further e-recruitment tools into a corporate information system (Kim & O’Connor, 2009).

Here is how this can be explained: traditionally, a recruiter would have to report regularly to a head manager or HR head manager about important information. It could mean updating the superiors about the progress of a recruiting process, sending applications of the potential candidates for confirmation, scheduling of interviews, etc. With the help of e-
recruitment tools that are supported by an information system, this exchange of information can mostly be replaced by storing applicants’ information and status on the corporate system. The head manager could then consult the information regarding the development of recruitment process without using the recruiter as an intermediary. This further means that more responsibilities could be transferred to the recruiters, without having superiors completely take out of the loop (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). Altogether, the head management can be relieved of certain recruiting activities but still supervise the entire process, and the recruiters benefit from more liberty when pursuing their tasks, because crucial recruitment information is made available over a common and shared resource: the corporate information system

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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Figure 4: Percentage of organizations expecting to reduce use of other methods because of Internet recruitment (Parry & Tyson, 2008)

Technology shift: rather sooner than later

Finally, the last argument does also further support Kerrin & Kettley’s claim (2003) regarding the importance of integrating online recruiting tools as soon as possible, in order to “move the recruiter up the value chain” to serve the strategic objectives of the organization. If integrating more advanced e-recruitment tools is a risk for companies, not turning towards technology for recruiting or postpone its integration also means exposing the organization to competitive disadvantages against concurrents and an uncertain future. Figure 5 shows the growing interest companies draw towards e-recruitment methods.

Although most SMEs may not be against the idea of integrating further technology into their corporate strategy, a hesitation as to which level of e-recruitment development chose and how much to invest might better describe the majority of SMEs’ situation. Therefore, the previously discussed advantages have to be weight against the issues and challenges such technology can also bring with its implementation. This is to be examined in the next section.
3.2 Challenges and issues

Difficulties that are to be expected by SME

Although e-recruitment often brings numerous opportunities for development at the level of human resource management, its downsides are not to neglect in any way. This section is an attempt to enumerate some of the most common obstacles firms might encounter when implementing a higher degree of online recruitment tools.

Budget constraint

A difficult decision to make for an enterprise is to attribute a budget for strategies such as e-recruitment tools implementation. This is especially true for SME since their investment and financial possibilities are significantly more limited than those of larger companies (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). In fact, a good and effective online recruitment support requires a considerable budget for its implementation as well as its updating. According to an IES study conducted in 2003, the high start-up and maintenance costs of advanced e-recruitment integration can be afforded mostly by larger technology-driven enterprises. Time, commitment and adequate staff are also important factors for a successful insertion (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). Altogether this means, that for an SME to turn towards Internet technology for recruitment support is not only a strategic decision, but also a question of financial capacity.

Risks of project failure

Furthermore, with the integration of e-recruitment tools come certain risks. Indeed, the implementation process should never be over; it requires constant development and the risks of malfunctioning and technical issues at the beginning are considerable, because the system is usually rather complex. This process needs time and adjustments, which bring further costs to take into account (Kim & O’Connor, 2009).

Quantity and quality of applicants

Another serious issue that has been brought with the use of e-recruitment tools is the one of the quantity and quality of the applications companies receive through those new channels.
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Whether a firm uses job boards and/or their own website or e-recruitment system, the number of entering applications may be extremely large and the problem turns toward selecting the ones that present the best quality potential. In order to face the quantity issue, good and effective selection tools are necessary. These, again, are to consider soon in the implementation process, otherwise the HR staff will be quickly overloaded by the multitude of potential candidates. And choosing such tools can be somehow complex, because there are numerous possibilities (Bartram, 2000). Online psychometric tests are an example of the preceedently mentioned tools, which make it possible to categorize the applicants into various profiles, to question their motivation, to measure certain abilities and to test their reasoning. Although these psychometric tests have proven to be efficient and to select a fair number of quality candidates, only 4% of 50 rather large organizations the IES study surveyed reported using such tools (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). Moreover, the use of similar selection tools requires a certain knowledge and experience that HR departments of most SME may not possess. This brings us to the next major issue.

Cultural change

Bringing online recruitment tools into a company can cause several changes within the organization. Here are the most significant ones: the existing software to which the new technology is added may be offline (Kim & O’Connor, 2009), the staff must be trained to deal with the new methods and possible issues (Cappelli, 2001), and a cultural approach towards the recruitment process has to be presented (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003).

As Cappelli (2001) says: “the adoption of e-recruitment is about more than just technology.” By that he meant that not only the technical capabilities and knowledge of a company have to revised and deepened, but also the workforce. For instance, companies should train HR staff to deal with Internet communication issues, or provide educated staff to support the employees during the transition (Holm, 2012; Kim & O’Connor, 2009). Lou Adler, CEO of POWERhiring.com, which is an online hiring system, claims that online recruiting requires different qualities from the HR staff than its more traditional functions (2001). He said “Recruiters have to act with the speed, flexibility, and creativity of marketers.” Therefore, the commitment of the head management and HR team has to be as high as possible for it to possibly be successful. This might not be a challenge any HR manager is willing to accept.
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Increased labor force mobility among competitors

In addition, online posting has made work conditions and information relatively more available. This means that individuals can compare their work situation to other similar ones. This, in turn, can lead to companies fearing to lose some of their employees and having their competitors hiring them from the organization (Singh & Narang, 2008). On the other hand, a worker can be concerned about his employer hiring him away or replacing him with a better-suited candidate, which then further increases his propensity to leave. Such worries can deter a firm’s working atmosphere and relationships between staff and head management (Cappelli, 2001). Therefore, it is essential for an enterprise to take the new trend into account by making their staff feel comfortable and have HR members deal and decrease any potential insecurity.

Potential discrimination

E-recruitment has additionally brought another legal and social issue. There is a possibility that online recruiting may discriminate some categories of applicants. This is especially true for enterprises using selection tools on top of recruiting tools with their HR system. For instance, if a company uses psychometric tests, minorities in terms of ethnic affiliation, competences and mental abilities could be rejected because of the limited number of profiles the tests utilize (Dhamija, 2012; Cappelli, 2001). Some also argue that e-recruitment discriminates lower skilled individuals, because of their potentially lower interest in online search (Kinder, 2000). For this former reason, organizations should perhaps refrain from using too much e-recruitment tools if their employment needs do not require especially high educated and specific skills, as well as controlling the conditions and functioning of online selection tools, if the company is using any (Bartram, 2000).

Data security and confidentiality

A common fear arising from online job seekers and applicants is the one of data confidentiality and security. When using traditional means, CV’s are to be returned to the applicant if the enterprise has no interest in pursuing the candidature. However, CV’s can be stocked in databases when using e-recruitment tools, and the system can better track any
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former applicant than when using simple statistical tools. This is why, in order to be perfectly legal, the company has to certify that the information it is receiving from applicants is strictly confidential (Kim & O’Connor, 2009; Bartram, 2000).

Negligence of personal interaction

The last major challenge enterprises encounter when integrating e-recruitment tools is the lack of personal interaction candidates experience in the recruitment process. This can lead to the candidate ending the applying process because of the frustration he feels and missed opportunities to exchange with the potential employer (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). The final phase of the recruitment process is the most crucial in terms of human interaction and it is necessary for the company not to put too much weight on technology support at this point (Barber, 2006)
4. Practical example with the firm [ipt]

4.1 Presentation of the SME and its context

This section examines the situation of a SME, Innovation Process Technology [ipt], present on the technology market in order to add a more practical side to the previous sections analyzing the general impacts of online recruitment that have been found in various research works and studies over the last decade. The following material has been collected both from an interview conducted with the HR manager of [ipt], Flavia Arizzoli, and the website of the company (www.ipt.ch).

4.2 General information about [ipt]

[ipt] is a consulting company that was founded in 1996. It offers asset-based software engineering to companies wanting to improve their own information system or further implement technology tools, which are often too complex for their own IT department to handle. [ipt] works at the customer side, uses some products of their technology partners to build individual solutions. The reason for choosing this mix between buying a solution and making it from scratch is a procedure that leads to fewer mistakes than when implementing an IT solution from the beginning, and costs less than a completely built product that may probably not fit the exact needs of a customer. The maintenance is then the customer’s responsibility. [ipt] is contacted and consulted by a company to propose a solution, which then leads to a project that ends when the solution is installed at the customer’s side.

4.3 [ipt] within the technology market

Typical competitors of [ipt] are large national and multinational IT Service Providers such as TATTA, Unisys, Trivadis, Elca, Zühlke, and sometimes freelancers. All of these are present on the Swiss market, are active on the same market as [ipt] or a closely related one, and are considerably bigger. The firm employs over 70 workers, and is led by 6 partners who constitute the head management.
Even though the company is not as well known as its concurrence, it aims to grow bigger and more popular in the long run. In fact, with competitors such as the one previously mentioned, [ipt] experiences some difficulty in increasing their market share, because its name and reputation is not as widespread as the ones of multinational enterprises. Moreover, some potential customers may have the feeling that [ipt] is somehow too small and therefore trust more easily the larger companies. Nevertheless, its customers, such as the Swiss government, mostly remain loyal and keep working with [ipt] and further consult them for other projects.

4.4 HR department and recruiting activities

[ipt] wants to differentiate itself by making it all about the customer. The company values its proximity with the client as well as its ability to communicate well in terms of language, i.e. German, and technical vocabulary. [ipt] is active on the Swiss market and swissness is one the key point of its philosophy. Therefore, their workforce has to possess certain critical qualifications, such as German knowledge, a certain academic background, programming skills, and competences in consulting and communicating with customers and. Moreover, since projects are usually led by a consultant and a purpose-built team, the ability to work in a group is also imperative. Flavia Arizzoli emphasized the importance of finding labor force, which fits the company, and not just a position.

Flavia Arizzoli is in charge of the recruitment activities and personal marketing, which consists in ensuring that potential employers find the company and like what they can discover about it. In terms of recruitment means, [ipt] has been using several tools to support the recruitment process. Firstly, the company regularly posts employment offers in newspapers and specific magazines. Online posting has been used for awhile, both on the corporate website and on job boards. Flavia Arizzoli says she hardly ever receives applications on hard copies. She also explains it with the fact that most positions that she is recruiting for regard the IT field. For this reason, one can easily imagine that an IT specialist would prefer the Internet as a mean for searching jobs and also use it to apply, if the possibility is given to do so. Nevertheless, [ipt] has never used external agencies to undertake the recruiting process.
An important point that Flavia Arizzoli has emphasized was the need for the potential candidate to search for and find the enterprise. The reason for this, she says, is because it proves that the applicant has an interest in [ipt], and usually the candidate, if hired by the company, will be more committed to the firm. The HR manager of [ipt] further adds that, however, quality candidates who qualify for positions the company is trying to fill are quite rare, and the demand rather high.

4.5 Online recruitment means

The corporate website of [ipt] is quite simple to navigate and has various informative pages to describe the company and its activities. To get to the job offers’ page, a single click is necessary, two if the language is set on English. [ipt] gives the possibility to apply either by using a form, or by sending an e-mail.

As examples for job boards the company is using to inform about job openings, Flavia Arizzoli has cited Monster.ch, jobs.ch, ictjobs.ch, jobs.nzz.ch. Monster.ch is not the one through which [ipt] receives the most interesting applications, as Flavia Arizzoli says, because most of the applicants are foreigners, and do not speak German, which is a necessary knowledge for any position within the company. On the other
Practical example with the firm [ipt]

hand, jobs.ch, ictjobs.ch, jobs.nzz.ch are swiss job portals, quite widespread. [ipt] is also present on social networks, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, XING, and Kununu as well, which is an employer rating platform. These are not direct means of recruitment, but are used to increase the renown of the company name and to advertise as an employer.

4.6 Phases of e-recruitment level according to Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel

At which stage of e-recruitment is the company?

[ipt] is not using any form of HR system to support the recruitment activities and has not integrated any recruitment activities to the corporate system. The only automated task is the receiving of online applications over a corporate e-mail address. All remaining online activities are pursued independently from the internal system, i.e. online posting through corporate website and job boards, use of application forms and other online websites for personal marketing, and online communication as well. The development level of e-recruitment for [ipt] therefore fits the requirements of the first phase of Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel’s phase model, presented in §2.4 Phases of e-recruitment integration in a company. In fact, [ipt] utilizes only isolated solutions to support the recruitment process, which are not integrated to the corporate information system.

The next phase would consist in supporting the entire recruitment function to the company’s system, from attracting job seekers to the receiving of applications, as well as the final selection. The development that would be required for [ipt] to reach this second phase is considerable, but could certainly represent an asset for the future.
Analysis of a higher level of e-recruitment in [ipt]’s situation

5. Analysis of a higher level of e-recruitment in [ipt]’s situation

5.1 Is a further integration of second phase online recruitment tools recommendable?

HR perception regarding further e-recruitment development

Miss Arizzoli asserts that a further integration of e-recruitment tools is not necessary at this point for the company. She explains that the quantity of applications she receives and the size of the company in terms of employees does not require more advanced technological support. In fact, in average, miss Arizzoli receives 50 to 60 applications per month, from which she estimates 10% are quality applications. Miss Arizzoli is in charge of the whole recruitment process, and HR activities. Knowing that the firm employs less than a 100 workers, this seems reasonable.

Implementing e-recruitment tools rather sooner than later

Nevertheless, [ipt] is aiming to grow over the coming years, and depending on how favorable the market and the economic situation will be, this growth may be considerable. In fact, when a firm wants to respond to an increase in demand, the company has to adapt and increase their offer. However, when the capacity threshold is reached, an enterprise faces the decision to expand or not. In order to take advantage of any positive future prospect, integrating further advanced online recruitment tools could represent a serious asset when trying to gain market shares over competitors. Indeed, since the integration of e-recruitment tools is rather complicated and requires time to design, implement and adjust, it is necessary to plan such a development sufficiently in advance. If the need for more advanced technology is not covered in time, then HR capacities can be overwhelmed.

For this reason, [ipt] should consider integrating e-recruitment tools in their corporate system structure, because of the long term advantages it represents. The current situation of the company would not require any change soon, but it may be more interesting for [ipt] to plan
such an implementation rather sooner than later, because of technical and competitive reasons.

Financial constraint

The budget required for such a project is, as seen previously, considerable, especially for a SME. The asset such an e-recruitment tools system integration represents is to balance with the financial costs and risks which come along. Moreover, such a decision is made on a strategic level, on a middle and long term horizon. Therefore, it is important for the head management of [ipt] to be committed to the decision to implement e-recruitment tools within the corporate system, in order to give the project sufficient chances to meet success, and to integrate this choice with other strategic decisions. Furthermore, this implementation would benefit the same purpose [ipt] is wanting to pursue in the coming years; increase its labor force and general size. The question of affordability and need cannot be deeper analyzed, because of the lack of information on the financial health of the enterprise, however the idea would probably be of interest for [ipt] in the coming years.

Technological knowledge

The advantage [ipt] presents compared to other SME is its knowledge of technology, since it corresponds to its field of expertise. Indeed, the company is offering IT solutions using asset-based software engineering. In this case, [ipt] would not need to search for an external service provider for implementing an e-recruitment support within the corporate system, but it would have the necessary resource within its own company. However, Flavia Arizzoli has been the only person managing the recruiting tools until now. To integrate more advanced e-recruitment tools, a team of IT specialists would have to be assigned to an project beside Flavia Arizzoli. Her tasks in such an internal project would be to define the needs of [ipt] and thoroughly describe the goals [ipt]’s programmers would have to aim to reach a higher level of e-recruitment. By joining the knowledge of two different departments within the same company, this would represent several advantages for [ipt]. First, it would prevent the firm from having to seek external help for such internal project, would lower the costs for maintenance, reduce the risks of misunderstandings which may occur when delegating these
Analysis of a higher level of e-recruitment in [ipt]’s situation

Responsibilities to an external organization, and increase the chances of succeeding in this project, because of the availability and closeness of the required knowledge. A further convenience of [ipt]’s specialized know-how is the one of ensuring data security and confidentiality. Technology being the field of expertise of the company, it is in a better position to provide a reliable implementation. These last points constitute a remarkable strength and an advantage for [ipt] if it were to consider an integration of online recruitment tools within the corporate system.

Reach of international labor force

A positive impact of using online recruitment tools is the reach of international job seekers, which not only increases the size of the applicant pool, but also rises the number of high qualified and experienced candidates. This, nonetheless, is not necessarily an advantage for [ipt]. Because of the importance [ipt] puts on the availability and swissness of its staff, international candidates would not be the first to meet crucial qualifications of positions within the company. First of all, the knowledge of German is essential for communication with the clients. Then, [ipt] wants its applicants to be committed to the firm and to present a serious interest for the company. This may not be typically the case for people living outside the country. For these reasons, [ipt] may not be interested in reaching international labor force through online recruitment methods. However, the company has been using job portals for a while, and miss Arizzoli has been able to target more accurate potential candidates by selecting mostly swiss-based job boards. A further integration would certainly not change the number of international low quality applicants [ipt] would receive, if the enterprise continues to choosing the best suited candidate pools of online portals.

Reach of high-qualified applicants

The qualification level of the candidate pools is very important for the company. Indeed, since most of the positions within the firm require an academic background in a specific field of IT, and because the number of potential qualified job seekers is rather low, it is necessary for [ipt] to pursue as many interesting tracks as possible, to reach the job seekers that fit the profiles in time and quantity. Online recruitment not only diversifies the number of channels used to recruit, but also consists in an increasingly important attracting tool, that has become
one of the most popular and effective one. For this reason, [ipt] has many interests in using further and consequent e-recruitment tools, to ensure a wide and deep reach of candidate pools within the Swiss or German-speaking borders.

Reach of job seekers

Besides the international and high-qualified categories, there is also another type of candidates that online recruiting methods allow to reach; the passive job seekers. This category is of particular interest for [ipt], because these applicants usually have a certain experience, and are looking for other open positions to improve their work conditions, or to change their professional environment, or also because of a particular interest in a specific enterprise. Because of the size difference between [ipt] and its competitors, some workers might prefer working in a smaller structure because of the potential differences in conditions.
and atmospheres. Anyone, working in an IT department with a profile that more or less fits the positions [ipt] is generally recruiting for, can in parallel conduct searches over the Internet if the person wishes to change his/her professional situation. Moreover, seeking jobs online can be done without having his/her employer discovering it. This reasoning obviously works both ways; i.e. [ipt] can fear having its own employees searching for job opportunities elsewhere. However, [ipt] is seen as a great employer by its labor force, according to ratings of its staff on kununu.com, an employer-rating platform. In this regard, recruiting online is also an attractive mean for the company to inform passive job seekers about open positions.

Importance of personal interaction

A non-negligible consequence of automating processes with e-recruitment tools is the decreasing amount of personal contact of the entire recruitment process. This possible outcome can be avoided by emphasizing the importance of human touch during specific tasks of the hiring procedure, such as contact, interviews and communication. For instance, candidates could be contacted by telephone instead of receiving pre-formatted e-mails. This of course, can be done when it concerns a small number of individuals only, otherwise it would be overly time consuming. Another example of focus put on interpersonal contact would be the one of taking the time to present the company to selected candidates who come into the corporate building for an interview. In this regard, [ipt] has maintained a good balance between automated and human-conducted tasks so far. In addition, because of how important [ipt] values the fit of a person within the firm, the need for personal interaction is necessary to appropriately evaluate a candidate match with the corporate culture. On top of that, for every candidate selected for an interview regarding a position, [ipt] sets up a lunch with a current employee of the firm, to give the interviewee the possibility to learn more about the firm, and to have an additional inside perspective of the organization’s functioning. Therefore, although an advanced use of online recruitment methods tends to disregard the relevance of interpersonal interaction, [ipt]’s approach to contacting and selection of candidates would doubtfully lead to disregarding the human side of recruitment.
Analysis of a higher level of e-recruitment in [ipt]’s situation

Steps towards the second phase of e-recruitment development in the case of [ipt]

Altogether, the firm presents many advantages for implementing more advanced technology in terms of online recruitment techniques, such as the technological knowledge it has on hand, the candidate pool it can reach thanks to e-recruitment tools and the strong corporate culture that would prevent the company to diverge too far from its strategic goals. Nevertheless, [ipt] is in a situation where a further integration of such tools is neither crucial nor necessary. The financial consequences and the complexity of such a decision are considerable, and therefore should not be rushed. However, as it has been explained earlier, it is recommendable for [ipt] to start planning a further implementation to reach the second phase of e-recruitment level. A first step towards the second phase would be to form a team with some of [ipt]’s employees and Flavia Arizzoli. The purpose of this team would be to plan and design the structure possibilities of an integrated e-recruitment system supporting all functions from attracting applicants with their corporate website and various job boards to selecting a specific candidate. Based on the propositions resulting from this collaboration, further decisions could then be taken as to how further plan the transition towards the second phase of e-recruitment development. At the level of the market, the conclusion of such a project would allow [ipt] to secure its position in terms of technology use within the firm.

This step would represent a good solution for the long term, because further tools, such as screening or statistical tools, could then be integrated to this applicant information system more easily, developing each time the online recruiting level further. The interest of this development would be to prepare the company for a later growth and to improve and automate the current recruitment process, even if it has proven to be functional for the time being.
6. Good practices

6.1 Solutions to improve or prevent the difficulties faced with further implementation of e-recruitment

After the practical case of [ipt] seen in the previous chapter, let’s turn towards good practices that can be observed by enterprises seeking a higher level of e-recruitment. Several basic methods and approaches will be presented in this section in order to help these companies increase the chances of successful e-recruitment tools implementation. These have been extracted from studies and researches conducted with companies which have integrated technology to support the recruitment process, and can be applied to firms of any sizes.

e-recruitment, one aspect of the recruitment process

First of all, online recruitment should not be considered in a separate context; indeed, it corresponds to one aspect of the recruitment procedure, which even if it may be significant, cannot be seen as the main component (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). E-recruitment represents valid tools in assisting a recruiting team in their assessing and selecting process. These however, have to be used effectively and understood correctly from the recruiters to support the expected results; selecting the best-fitting candidates.

Incremental approach to e-recruitment implementation

The implementation of such methods is, as explained earlier, rather complex and has to be planned on the long term. The integration of these technological tools into the recruitment process and corporate system take time and needs adaptations. In fact, such an implementation should be done incrementally, to allow changes at any time without having to modify the entire structure over and over (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005). This approach also allows the firm to understand which technological needs are fulfilled at different phases of the integration, and which are still to cover. Furthermore, a recommended first step before implementing e-recruitment tools, according to Malinowski, Keim, & Weiztel (2005), is to redefine the internal activities regarding the recruitment process.
and adapting them to Internet-based perspectives (see Figure 1: The design and sequence of tasks in traditional paper-based recruitment process vs. the (new) recruitment process using e-recruitment (Holm, 2012)). A new activity flow allows the company to redistribute tasks among the recruitment team, which then should be continually modified if necessary.

**Assessing and measuring the performance of e-recruitment tools**

In order to quantify the benefits of integration e-recruitment tool into the recruiting process, a company can and should assess the effectiveness of the online means it is using. Examples for evaluating the performance of such tools are; the retention rate of hired candidates, measuring the satisfaction degree of head managers with newly hired candidates, analyzing the traffic on the company’s career webpage or also keeping track of the number of applications retained for selection (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). Nonetheless, it is important for the enterprise to remember that the implementation of e-recruitment means may not bring effective performances at the beginning (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). Indeed, it takes time for the recruiting team to modify their behavior and approach to the hiring process, and little adaptations of the system can lead to considerable improvements over time. Therefore, evaluating regularly the effectiveness of the online supported process is crucial to define the tasks which are well or mediocrelly functioning.

**Commitment of head management**

Because head management is responsible for making strategic decision, it is crucial for the HR department to communicate well with the line managers in order to promote, plan and implement further online recruitment techniques. As equally important, the success of e-recruitment developments strongly depends on the commitment of the head management to improve the recruitment process with Internet-based tools (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). In fact, the more committed senior managers are, the more resources they will mobilize to set up a plan to further advance the technology used to assist the recruiting technique. It also leads to a greater interest in the results, which further increases the motivation of recruiters to adapt and use efficiently the implemented tools (Kim & O’Connor, 2009). Therefore, it is important for the HR department to communicate the interest of using more advanced
online recruiting means and to present arguments weighing in favor of a further development (Kim & O’Connor, 2009).

**Emphasis on the corporate website**

Company’s websites represent nowadays an important potential for attracting applicants, and a significant increase can be seen among the methods used by companies (see Figure 7: Use of online recruitment methods). Cappelli (2001) said firms should build their home page with potential candidates in mind. In fact, both the content and the form of the corporate website play a significant role in the attraction process (Holm, 2012). One of the most crucial criteria is the time needed to find the career webpage, or a specific job advertisement. Thompson, Braddy & Wuensch (2008) found out, that the smaller the amount of clicks required to get to the career webpage, the higher the inclination of the job seeker to actually apply for the open position is. This is even truer for the formatting of the employment offer, i.e. the more appealing it is, the more positive the influence on the job seeker’s readiness to respond to the offer will be. The willingness to apply for the company’s job advertisement is however also impacted by the impression the job seeker has on the enterprise as an employer (Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008).

![Figure 7: Use of online recruitment methods (Parry & Tyson, 2008)](image)

Furthermore, according to Malinowski, Keim & Weitzel (2005), application forms on the website of an enterprise correspond to the preferred application form of job seekers. In regard to a very advanced formalized and system supported recruitment process, they also
say this eases the processing and assessing of candidate applications and profiles. Indeed, if the company is using softwares to scan the content of applications, it facilitates the process of eliminating the profiles who fail to meet the crucial criteria for a specific position. This, however may not be the case of many enterprises, especially not SME. Altogether, the enterprise should pay attention to both the design, the format and the usability of its corporate website, by using colors and bold fonts, putting the link of the career page on the home page, or decreasing the number of necessary clicks to reach the employment advertisements and application forms.

Quick contact

By answering to an employment offer over the Internet, the applicant begins an electronic communication. Because of this, it is important for the employer to maintain interactive contact with the potential candidate to avoid him or her being discouraged by slow responses and to increase his or her interest (Maurer & Liu, 2007). Speed is an essential factor as well; in fact, when an interesting profile is found, it is crucial to contact the applicant rapidly, to avoid him/her shifting his/her efforts and attention towards another company, or having a competitor attract and hire the candidate first (Cappelli, 2001). However, automated e-mailing is to be used with precaution in this regard. These should be used as rarely as possible, and only to save time when quantity is problematic. For instance, it could be used when confirming the receiving of an application. Otherwise the firm risks making the applicant feel indifferent about the company and disappointed as well (Malinowski, Keim, & Weitzel, 2005).
Summary and conclusion

7. Summary and conclusion

This paper intends to explain the main opportunities of e-recruitment methods and their challenges, in regard to the smaller and medium sized businesses. In fact, such tools are less widespread among SME than larger companies, mainly because of the fewer resources available and the less important need for formalization in the recruitment process. However, all of these problems can be faced by enterprises of any sizes.

The problems which may be encountered when implementing any or further online recruitment are various and only the most important and obvious ones have been treated in this paper, such as the budget constraints, the risks of the implementation project failing, an increasing quantity of low quality applications, the cultural change brought by the integration of such Internet-based means which may be difficult for the employers adapt to, the risk of increasing the mobility of candidates among competitors, data security and confidentiality problems, and the lack of personal interaction felt by candidates. As it was explained in this paper, some of these challenges can be avoided or minimized by adopting the right measures and by thoroughly planning the integration of technological tools to support the recruiting process. For instance, implementation failures can be prevented with constant evaluations and testing of the tools or system implemented and by measuring their performance; the number of uninteresting applications can be reduced by choosing the tools and job boards which attract the most interesting profiles for the open positions; a difficulty in accepting the cultural change can be eased by explaining the need and advantages of such a strategic decision to the employers of the enterprise.

All these difficulties possibly encountered by SME, and also larger companies, are to weigh against the advantages and opportunities a further implementation of e-recruitment mean can bring. The central ideas presented in this paper in favor of further recruitment integration are the time and potentially cost savings, the reduction of administrative burden, the reach of international knowledge which is particularly interesting for specific and high qualifications, the including of passive job seekers into the candidate pool, the positive impact of advertising for employment openings over the corporate website, the possible
decentralization of HR operations, and the significance of turning towards technology to support the recruiting process rather sooner than later. These opportunities are also both valid for SME and larger businesses as well. However the needs for improving the recruitment activities by the integration and utilization of Internet-based tools may not be as urgent for SME than rather large enterprises, which explains the difference of integration between the two categories. Nevertheless, although the level of development of e-recruitment cannot be expected to be the same for SME as for wider companies, the interest in further developing this level is still accurate and valid. In fact, the profits of implementing e-recruitment means rather sooner than later and doing it incrementally and at a slow pace gives them better chances to get used to the change and to adapt the tools to their strategy. Indeed, time is an important variable in the integration of such a complex project. And because technology becomes more and more important for companies nowadays, the earlier the insight into this kind of technology, the easier it is to learn how to deal with the challenges.

In conclusion, this paper explains the different implications of implementing e-recruitment within SME, and shows that there are overall considerable advantages and interests in turning towards this technology. Although the challenges of such integration cannot be neglected, a thorough consideration of those and an observation of good practices that have been settled by both studies and the experience of other companies can help SME, as well as larger companies, to successfully lead organizations towards a more advanced technology supported recruitment system. This turn towards technology, finally, places the firms in a better position than those delaying the integration of e-recruitment tools into their recruiting process. Finally, it is the duty of HR managers and staff to promote the best-suited e-recruitment tools and to remain updated on innovations in the HR field.
8. Bibliography


9. Acknowledgments

I particularly want to thank Dr Stefan Hüsemann for his support, his comments and his patience throughout the completion of this work. Special thanks are also to be directed to Flavia Arizzoli, for accepting to be interviewed and spending some of her precious time sharing valuable information for this research work.
10. Annexes

10.1 Declaration of originality

I hereby declare that this seminar thesis has been written independently and with no other help than the sources mentioned in the bibliography. No part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication before.

Céline Deillon

10.2 Key questions used for the interview with Flavia Arizzoli

Interview with Flavia Arizzoli, HR manager of [ipt], conducted in Bern the 27.06.2013

INTERVIEW REGARDING E-RECRUITMENT TECHNOLOGY

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT [ipt]

THE HR DEPARTMENT OF [ipt]

➢ Which position does the HR department of [ipt] occupy in the company’s organization? How important is the decisional role of the HR department?

➢ Generally, what are the main functions of an HR department nowadays? (In contrast to how it was 20-30 years ago, its growing importance, a higher-impact department, etc.)

[ipt] AND (WEB-BASED) RECRUITMENT OVER THE YEARS

➢ How have (online) recruitment tools been developed within the company?

➢ Can this development of e-recruitment technology be considered as incremental?

CURRENT E-RECRUITMENT PHASE

➢ What are the different recruitment techniques used in the company? (Announcements in printed media, Internet (posting on corporate website, web portal), external job agencies, etc.)

➢ How much do e-recruitment techniques count for?
Annexes

- How does the recruitment process work? Which recruitment activities are integrated in the corporate information systems? (more specifically the processes using web-based tools)
- What are the tendencies in recruitment today?
- How do you situate your company, compared to firms of the same field, and firms from all kinds of different sectors?

Define the phase IPT is in, according to Malinowski et. al’s models.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF E-RECRUITMENT

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of e-recruitment, which you experienced within your company?
- Which obstacles did you encounter so far?
- Which goals did the integration of e-recruitment allow your corporation to achieve?
- For what reasons did you and your company pursue the implementation of e-recruitment tools?
- What would you have done differently, with the knowledge you have acquired from the past years using e-recruitment tools?

E-RECRUITMENT PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

- Do you have any plans of implementing further e-recruitment technology?
- How do you see the recruitment process in the future? (in general)