



THEORY INTO PRACTICE

G4S and the London 2012 Olympics (August)

G4S, an international security firm, gained the contract to provide security at all Olympic locations. G4S contracted Wave, recruitment marketing specialists, to run the recruitment campaign. It was projected in 2010 that 2,000 security staff would be required, but by late 2011 this had risen to 10,400. Wave appeared to run a very thorough recruitment campaign (see e.g. CIPD 2012) and in May 2012 it appeared that everything was on track for the increased number of guards. However, suddenly in mid-July G4S admitted that it could not fulfil the whole contract and 3,500 soldiers were drafted in to cover the shortfall. Nick Buckles of G4S, interviewed on BBC Radio 4, appeared to lack information about the detail of the recruitment/training/vetting processes, could not explain what had gone wrong and was unable even to confirm that all potential employees spoke fluent English.

G4S found there was a dropout of acceptable candidates when they realised the realities of the job, but even more importantly there was a shortage of licensed security guards and the company recognised that it would have to recruit inexperienced staff and train them in order to meet the new target. Such candidates had to provide a lot of data about themselves and be vetted and screened, then trained for four days in order to acquire the necessary skills, and then meet the criteria for a Security Industry Licence before they could begin their employment. The sheer scale of this task defeated the organisation, and it accepted that it had underestimated the challenge.

Questions

- 1 In what ways might contingency planning have helped G4S?
- 2 The chief executive of G4S only found out that it could not fulfil the contract in mid-July, which was very close to the start of the games. How might communication have been improved within G4S, and between G4S and Wave, and how might this have helped the planning process?
- 3 In a similar situation, if you were tasked with recruiting 8,000 similarly inexperienced staff, with less than a year to do this, how would you plan to ensure that all potential employees were vetted, screened, trained, licensed so they were qualified to begin work on time, and that the dropout rate was minimised?

Sources: Brockett, J. (2012) 'Olympian task', *People Management*, August, p. 9; Gabb, A. (2012) 'Safety in numbers', *PM Guide to Recruitment Marketing*, pp. 14–17; and general news media.

FURTHER READING

Eubanks, B. (2018) *Artificial Intelligence for HR*. London: Kogan Page.

A very useful text which provides some good definitions in chapters 2 and 3, and covers examples of AI use in recruitment, retention, engagement, learning and development and talent management. It will certainly help HR professionals leverage the potential of AI to improve efficiency and develop a productive and talented workforce. Keeping the emphasis on 'human', Eubanks reflects on the challenges AI brings and tackled AI bias, and the skills required from HR professionals.