

Evaluation of the Use of Biodata System for the Hotel Employee Selection

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the use of biodata system for the hotel employee selection. Data were collected by developed questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to human resource managers in 33 five star hotels located in Hurghada. After excluding incomplete questionnaire, 29 questionnaires were valid representing a valid response rate of 87.8%. The results showed that most hotels use biodata as a selection method to choose and recruit their employees. Biodata was found negatively related to staff turnover. In other words, when hotels use biodata system to select their staff, their staff turnover will be reduced. Moreover, the results indicated that there is no significant difference between hotels according to management pattern about the use of biodata system for employee selection.

Keywords: Biodata, selection, recruiting, staff turnover

1.Introduction

Employees play a significant role in the success for their organizations (Manely, 2003). It is important to effectively select the right employees to achieve organization development (Ramsay, 2002; Dessler, 2012). This issue is increasingly important for all types of organizations and especially for service organizations such as hotels, as their staff directly affect service quality and the impression of guests about hotels (Dickinson & Ineson, 2002). It is the responsibility of HRM to select and recruit high qualified and competent employees (Nickson, 2007; Cameron, 2008). There are several methods used to select employees as: 1) assessment centers which consist of a group of techniques to assess each applicant as situational exercises, presentations, group discussions and intelligence test (Torrington *et al.*, 2002), 2) tests which contain personality test to evaluate applicants skills and his thinking in different situations (Berger& Ghei, 1995) and psychometric test which aims to assess applicants mental abilities (Torrington *et al.*, 2002) and 3) interviews which are a popular method used by most organizations and is more acceptable to applicants (Barclay, 2001; Hodgetts & Luthans, 2002). One of selection methods is biodata (biographical data). It is an effective selection instrument which measures the applicants based on personal biographical history as past behavior, attitudes, interests, and demographics (Hammer& Kleiman, 2000). It is known in the hospitality industry as the employee form (Tanke, 2001). It is a good predictor of future performance based on past behavior predicts future behavior and performance (Allwort & Hesketh, 2000).

Thus, it can be used as a screening device for applicants to differentiate between them to determine those who do not match with job description and job specification and exclude them (Tanke, 2001; Dean, 2004). Accordingly, the aim of the study is to evaluate the use of biodata system for the hotel employee selection.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Process of employees recruitment and selection

One of the main duties of human resource management within any organization is recruiting and selecting employees (Nickson, 2007; Cameron, 2008; Adu-Darkoh, 2014). Human resource management (HRM) is a group of activities conduct employees toward achieving organizational goals (Byars & Rue, 2011). The human resource department should share with management to the issue of making sure that employees recruitment and selection are made on a fairly and legally basis (Noe *et al.*, 2011).

Recruitment and selection are interrelated processes (Boella & Turner, 2005). The main aim of them is to determine the extent of convenience between applicants' capabilities and the qualifications required for a specific job. Recruitment and selection processes should be well prepared. Several benefits have been resulted from effective recruitment and selection such as: reducing labor turnover, increasing employees' morale, and improving organization performance (Adu-Darkoh, 2014). In addition, they ensure that organizations can get the suitable employees who can do the job more efficiently (Boella & Turner, 2005). On the other hand, wrong selection process can cause adverse effects on the organization as loss of productivity, cost of hiring and training, poor performance, low quality products or services and dissatisfied customers (French & Rees, 2010; Opayemi & Oyesola, 2013).

Opayemi and Oyesola (2013: 96) defined recruitment as the process of generating a pool of capable candidates applying to an organization for employment" and selection as "the process of hiring; offering jobs to one or more candidates from the applications received through recruitment; managerial decision making process through which suitable persons who are likely to perform on the job are identified and selected from the pool of applicant". Recruitment and selection processes complement each other. While recruitment aims to attract individuals to organization, selection determines from the applicants the most suitable and qualified ones to the vacant positions. It focuses on choosing the applicants based on the compatibility between their ability, knowledge, skills and experience with job requirements (McCulloch & Turban, 2007; Adu-Darkoh, 2014). Selection process must ensure that individuals' characteristics are compatible with the details of job description and job specification of the organization (Cameron, 2008).

The key for the success of any organization is its employees, so selecting the appropriate individuals becomes an important issue for organizations. Since employees are a critical component in any organization to achieve competitive advantages and represent a large operating cost, selection methods should be effective to choose the qualified staff (Rebic *et al.*, 2015). Through effective employees, organizations can keep their right customers and achieve

development. Consequently, selecting the right employees has always been a necessary concern (Ramsay, 2002; Dessler, 2012). Organizations that succeed in recruiting high qualified employees can be superior than their competitors (Agbola, 2016). This issue is increasingly important in service organizations as employees are considered a critical resource and directly affect the services quality (Dickinson & Ineson, 2002). This is of particular importance in hospitality industry, where quality of service provided to the customers determines contemporary hotel rating (Rebic *et al.*, 2015). So, hotels should be interested in getting competent employees who upon them depends their success through effective selection procedures (Kelliher & Johnson, 2001; Agbola, 2016).

Selection methods can be considered as a crucial tool to predict how can applicants match with jobs and their future job performance (Agbola, 2016). There are many selection methods as assessment centers, interviews, tests, and biodata (Berger & Ghei, 1995; Torrington *et al.*, 2002). Biodata as a selection method is attributed as inexpensive compared to other methods and is a good predictor for job success (Ramsay, 2002).

2.2. Biodata concept

Fleishman (2000) and Mumford and Owens (2003) described biodata system as a method of gathering individuals history data used in the selection process. It is as a method of gathering individuals history data used in the selection process. It is considered a selecting method which gradually increases its importance. Hammer and Kleiman (2000: p86) defined biodata as "a systematic method for assessing job applicants based on personal biographical history factor, for example past behavior, attitudes, interests and demographic background". Gunter *et al.* (1993) referred to biodata as a group of items which ask about the applicant previous experiences (his demographic, experiences, attitudes) and all other information found in the application form which are collected, gave them scores and subsequently evaluated with specific criteria related to the work. Biodata have been applied to a wide range of occupations such as clerical jobs in the private sector, accountants, mechanical equipment distributors, hotel stay, civil servants, managers (Robertson & Smith, 2001).

Dickinson and Ineson (2002) and Agbola (2016) described biodata as a screening device used when selecting employees to carefully examine and identify long and short-stay employees for new hotels. Biodata facilitates the selection process by screening out the applicants and determine those who do not match with job description and job specification and exclude them. Therefore, human resource department does not need to make interviews with those applicants who excluded by using biodata which leads to reducing interview time and cost and diminishing large numbers of unnecessary applicants (Tanke, 2001; Dean, 2004).

The main idea of biodata is to measure future behavior through past behavior. This can be explained by the fact that past experiences make individuals change and develop their skills, knowledge and attributes associated with their performance (Allworth & Hesketh, 2000). Biodata ask about individuals' age,

sex, marital status, educational achievements, job history, attitudes, skills, experiences, and past behavior to predict their performance for a specific job (Cook, 1993). In other words, it can be considered a criterion that predicts a successful job (Gunter *et al.*, 1993)

The biodata is recognized as "the employee application" in hospitality industry. It is considered as one of the most common screening tools used today (Tanke, 2001).

The importance of using biodata system in the selection process is due to three reasons. First, biodata searches in the applicants past history which is considered a good criterion to predict their future performance and behavior (Gunter *et al.*, 1993; Allworth & Hesketh, 2000). Several previous researches have showed that biodata is an effective tool to measure job performance (Oswald *et al.*, 2004). Second, biodata questions can be a clear and useful tool to measure the applicants' degree of commitment (Robertson & Smith, 2001). The last reason is that biodata items ask applicants about objective facts concerning their past experiences rather than subjective reasons. Individuals are less likely to demonstrate their motivations behind their actions (Ramsay, 2002).

Biodata have emerged in industry since long time but in the 1950s, it had begun to be used extensively in employee selection process. Despite the early emergence of biodata, human resource professionals still use it in the selection process on a limited scale because they do not know enough about it and it needs highly qualified employees to design and test it (Ramsay, 2002). As biodata is an effective selection tool has important future in the hospitality industry, it has begun significantly used (Ineson & Brown, 1999).

2.2.1. Biodata items attributes

Biodata items should be based on job analysis to develop questions and statements related directly to tasks, skills and behavior required to the job and measure applicants' previous experience (Allworth & Hesketh, 2000). Biodata items can be extracted from the following elements: a) demographic data, b) habits and attitudes, c) recreation, hobbies and interests, d) previous life (parental, home, childhood, teens' experiences, and values), e) opinions, preferences, and work (Gunter *et al.*, 1993)

Biodata contains two types of information: 1) hard biodata items which means all the previous events as past experiences and interests (Asher, 2001; Cook, 2009). These data are based on real and verifiable information (Mitchell, 2001) and 2) soft biodata (opinions and attitudes that are resulted from previous experiences) (Furnham, 2001; Cook, 2009).

According to Owens *et al.* (2001) when preparing biodata questions, some elements should be taken into consideration to improve their reliability: 1) be short and inclusive, 2) responses in a numerical format 3) be neutral or pleasant for the respondents and 4) be informed to applicants that their responses will be verified (Mitchell, 2001). Additionally, Asher (2001) showed that biodata items should achieve validity in three forms. First, items should be related to the job requirements (content validity). Second, when change the words of the biodata questions while retaining the same meaning and examine them with a

second sample of similar individuals, they give the same answers (concurrent validity). Finally, questions should be valid in predicting future performance. Items included in the biographical application blank should be valid and indicate future job performance. To achieve this issue, all items should be checked to measure how they can predict future job performance so correlation between an item and the measurement of successful job performance is computed. Only items which have showed significant relationship can be used in the application blank to predict future job performance and select future applicants (Gunter *et al.* 1993; Allworth & Hesketh, 2000)

Asher (2001) and Gunter *et al.* (1993) indicated that biographical item may vary on any of the following dimensions: a) verifiable- non- verifiable, b) objective-subjective, c) discrete -general, d) job relevant vs. non- job relevant, e) controllability- non controllability, f) historical –futuristic, g) memory-conjecture and h) biographical- attitudes.

2.2.2. Measurement of biodata

Biodata are collected from the applicants through a multiple-choice questionnaire which is considered an effective tool to gather a large amount of information in a short time period (Robertson & Smith, 2001). Biodata are gathered from applicants through a specific type of application form called 'weighted application blank'. Applicants should complete this form before making the interview with them (Asher, 2001). Weighted application blank is characterized as unrealizable and hard to fabricate. It is unrealizable because when the applicant applies for the job, he knows that he should complete an application form but he does not know that this application is scored and will be used in selection process. It is hard to be faked because most of the items could be subsequently verified. The main advantage of the application blank is that it includes all the necessary details about the applicants needed by the organization (Gunter *et al.*, 1993; Mitchell & Klimoski, 2003).

Biodata are considered as criterion so, their items are weighted and then the applicants responses scored using the empirical keying method (Mitchell & Klimoski, 2003). As each biodata item or a group of items is considered a criterion to measure the applicant, the empirical keying method weights biodata items based on their relative contribution (or predictive validity) to the criteria (Allworth & Hesketh, 2000). By using this method, human resource managers can weigh and score applicants responses and differentiate between them as high or low measurement on specific criteria (Ramsay, 2002). The main advantage of empirical keying method is that there is a statistical relationship between the item and the criteria which means that the relationship between them is not haphazardly. This makes this test is hard to be fabricated by the applicants (Manley, 2003).

When these data are available for human resource managers, they can fairly compare between job specification and applicants specifications (Boella, 2005). Hotels weighted each group items of biodata to give a score for an individual. Only applicants who have high scores are asked for to make interviews (Hammer and Kleiman, 2000).

2.2.3. Benefits of biodata

Biodata as one of selection methods has several benefits compared to the interview which is used on a large scale as it is quicker than the interview in collecting the same type of information (Smith & Pratt, 1996). Biodata can reduce the time to prescreen the applicants especially with jobs with large number of applicants and therefore can diminish interviews and tests to applicants (Mitchell, 2001; Dean, 2004). Thus, it is an effective selection technique for any hotel and restaurant to hire the appropriate employees. It can also differentiate between long and short stay for a new hotel (Ineson & Brown, 1999; Agbola, 2016). As biodata is characterized by its accuracy, validity, reliability compared to other selection methods, it can be used instead of tests (Reilly & Chao, 2000; Mitchell, 2001).

The type of biodata items which ask about individuals past behavior can be a good predictor measure of future behavior and performance, job success, job satisfaction and team performance (Ramsay, 2002). It can relatively easy to get biodata information. Additionally, biodata is an inexpensive selection method compared to assessment centers or work samples (Saville & Holdsworth, 1999) and can collect a wide range of information (Dean *et al.*, 1999). Biodata can reduce turnover rate and training cost and time. So, it is a useful selection method for job attributed by high turnover rate especially hospitality industry. Biodata is more preferred for jobs that have repetitive or similar attributes (Fleishman & Bass, 2000; Drakeley *et al.*, 2001).

Preparing and testing the final biodata may take some time, however, their low administration costs, effective measurement of hotels employees and the good database of candidates it avails to hotels to choose from can outweigh the time consumed in preparing and testing it (Saville and Holdsworth, 1999).

2.2.4. Concerns and limitations about biodata

Although biodata have several benefits, they are still used by rather limited organizations because they have some concerns about it.

Some organizations worry about the use of biodata as a method of selection because it cannot be generalized. Human resource managers think that when a biodata is designed to a specific organization, it does not fit another organization. This issue concerns organizations, especially the smaller ones (Wilkinson, 1997). On the other hand, biodata established in an organization can be generalized across organizations and industries (Robertson & Smith, 2001) several researches have showed that biodata instrument can be generalized between organizations and demographics (such as race, gender, age, education, work experience, work tenure) based on biodata test concentrates on attributes which shared by many jobs rather than specific job (Rothstein *et al.*, 2004).

Another concern about biodata is the settlement of its validity. Although biodata system proved its validity compared to other selection methods such as assessment centers and personality tests, the settlement of its validity is limited. This means that the validity of biodata items drops by the time (Mitchell & Klimoski, 2003; Shaffer *et al.*, 2002). Because of this, reevaluation and

reweighting the scoring key should be conducted every 2 to 3 years (Reilly & Chao, 2000).

The validity of biodata items drops by the time due to several reasons: a) any change in predicting the job performance (e.g. changes in skills required for a certain job), b) changes in the way used by the organization to measure the criteria which, in turn affects the scoring key and weighting system, and c) any changes in the organization cultures or personnel policies which could impact its effectiveness, d) changes in the labor market (Mitchell, 2001).

One more concern is the invasiveness of biodata. Some organizations think that questions included in biodata may be invasive which can affect their attractiveness to their applicants so, they do not tend to use it in the selection process (Hammer & Kleiman, 2000). Invasiveness can be minimized by applying some steps: 1) questions that seem to be too personal such as religion and political affiliations should be averted (Arnold, 1990; Mael *et al.*, 1996), 2) questions should be concentrated and related to work, school, and past experiences, 3) questions should be well-written and related directly to job performance and designed based on job analysis (Allworth & Hesketh, 2000).

Another concern is its susceptibility to faking. Biodata items that are attributed as more subjective, hypothetical, and less verifiable are more likely to be counterfeited by the applicants. To avoid faking from applicants, biodata items should be developed very well. Additionally, applicants should be informed that their responses will be checked and verified by human resource managers (Mumford & Owens, 2003; Scharder & Osburn, 2000)

3. Methods

A questionnaire was developed to evaluate the use of the biodata system for the hotel employee selection. It was divided into four sections. The first section included questions about the characteristics of investigated hotels. The second section covered the selection methods used by the investigated hotels. The third section asked about the biographical data system, its benefits, and disadvantages. A five- point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. The last section covered the respondents demographics including their gender, age, education level and work experience. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. The questionnaire was distributed to human resource managers or their assistants in 33 five star hotels which represent all five star hotels located in Hurghada. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, 29 questionnaires were valid representing a response rate of 87.8%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct statistical analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondents' Profile

Results of table (1) showed that all managers were male. The hotels management believes that this position is better to be maintained by men as they will deal with staff problems, government institutions, such as taxes, social insurance, and workforce offices, also Hurghada town is considered too far area for female. In terms of age, 41.2% were less than 45 years, 44.8% of

them were in the 45 to 50 years category, and 13.7% were above 50 years of age.

According to the educational background of managers, the majority of managers are college graduate (62%), 24.2% graduated from a high school and 13.8% of them claimed that they hold postgraduate degree. In terms of respondents position, 17.3% were assistant managers of human resource managers while, 82.7% were human resource managers. Regarding the years of work experience 3.4 % of respondents have 5 to less than 10 years, 55.3% from 10 to 15 years, 41.3% more than 15 years.

Table (1): The demographic profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	29	100%
Female	0	0
Total	29	100%
Age	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 35	1	3.4%
From 35 to less than 40	4	13.7%
From 40 to less than 45	7	24.1%
From 45 to 50	13	44.8%
More than 50	4	13.7%
Total	29	100%
Education	Frequency	Percentage
High school	7	24.2%
College graduate	18	62%
Postgraduate	4	13.8%
Total	29	100%
Position	Frequency	Percentage
Human resource manager	24	82.7%
Assistant human resource manger	5	17.3%
Total	29	100%
Years of work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
From 5 to less than 10 years	1	3.4%
From 10 to 15 years	16	55.3%
More than 15 years	12	41.3%
Total	29	100%

Results shown in table (2) reveal that 68.9 % of hotels were used the biodata system as the main method for employee selection, 24.1% of hotels were used the interviews, 3.5% of human resource managers used the assessment center, and only 3.5% of hotels used the tests to select their employees. This means that most hotels using the biodata system (application form) as a main method for employee selection. These results confirmed that biodata is an effective selection technique for hotels and can be used to carefully examine and identify long and short stay employees for new hotels (Ineson & Brown, 1999; Agbola, 2016). Biodata helps hotels and restaurants to hire the appropriate employees by screening out the applicants and determine those who do not match with job description and job specification and exclude them (Dickinson& Ineson, 2002; Agbola, 2016).

Table (2): Employees selection methods

Selection methods	Frequency	Percentage
Biodata (application form)	20	68.9%
Interview	7	24.1%
Tests	1	3.5%
Assessment center	1	3.5%
Total	29	100%

The mean score of human resource managers' awareness of the benefits of using the biodata system are listed in table (3). A five point Likert-type scale was used ranging from "1" which meant very low to "5" very high to measure their awareness to the benefits of using the biodata system. According to the findings, the overall mean score for the statements of the awareness were 3.18. Human resource managers agreed that " Low cost associated with this method" (4.73), " It is a good predictor for future applicants behavior, job performance and success and job satisfaction " (4.40), " Provides a database of candidates that can be used at any time" (4.33), " Effective method to get ideal employee" (1.35), and "It is easy to get biodata information " (1.11). This result agreed with Gunter *et al.* (1993), Cook (1993) and Ramsay (2002) who stated that the type of biodata items which ask about individuals past behavior can be used as a good predictor measure of future behavior, performance, and job satisfaction. Additionally, although preparing and testing the final biodata may take some time, their low administration costs, effectively measurement of hotels employees and providing them with a good database about applicants and savings gained through recruiting the best staff can outweigh the time consumed in preparing and testing it (Saville & Holdworth, 1999).

Table (3): Benefits of using the biodata system

Benefits	Mean
Low cost associated with this method	4.73
Effective method to get ideal employee	1.35
It is a good predictor for future applicants' behavior, job performance and success and job satisfaction	4.40
It is easy to get biodata information	1.11
Provides a database of candidates that can be used at any time	4.33
Overall mean	3.18

Regarding the disadvantages of the biodata system, the overall mean score for the statements which measure the disadvantages is 4.23. Data shown in table (4) reveal that human resource managers agree that "Theoretical method more than practical" (4.95), " It is a routine method and does not help us to measure candidates skills" (4.66), " Biodata cannot be generalized" (4.50), " The stability of biodata validity is limited" (4.28), and "Susceptibility to faking" (2.76). One of the disadvantages of biodata as a selection method is the difficulty of its generalization. Human resource managers think that when a biodata is designed to a specific organization, it does not fit another organization (Wilkinson, 1997). However, biodata instrument can be generalized between organizations and demographics such as race, gender, age, education, work experience and work tenure (Carlson *et al.*, 1999). Another disadvantage of biodata is the stability of its validity is relatively limited. In other words, the validity of biodata items drops by the time (Shaffer *et al.*, 2002; Mitchell& Klimoski, 2003). As a result, reevaluation and reweighting the scoring key should be conducted every 2 to 3 years (Reilly& Chao, 2000). Finally, some biodata items are more likely to be faked by the applicants (Ramsay, 2002). To prevent applicants to counterfeit biodata items, they should be aware that their responses will be checked and verified by human resource managers (Scharder and Obsurn, 2000).

Table (4): Disadvantages of biodata system

Disadvantages	Mean
Theoretical method more than practical	4.95
It is a routine method and does not help us to measure candidates' skills	4.66
Biodata cannot be generalized	4.50
Susceptibility to faking	2.76
The stability of biodata validity is limited	4.28
Overall mean	4.23

Table (5) shows that there is a significant negative relationship between the use of biodata system and staff turnover. In other words, when hotels use biodata system as a selection tool to select their employees, the staff turnover decreases. This result assured by Fleishman and Bass (2000) and Drakeley *et al.* (2001) who explained that biodata can reduce turnover rate and training cost and time. So, it is a useful selection method for any hospitality operation which is characterized by a high turnover rate.

Table (5): Relationship between biodata system and staff turnover

	Variable		Staff turnover
Spearman	Biodata system (application form)	Correlation	-0.432
		Sig. N	0.027 20

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine the differences between hotels according to their management pattern and their use of biodata system. Results indicated that there is no significant difference between hotels according to management pattern about the use of biodata system for employee selection, the independent hotels use the biodata more than the hotel with chain management as shown in table (6).

Table (6): Differences between hotels according to management pattern

		N	Mean rank	Sig
Biodata system	Chain management	25	20.81	0.139
	Independent	4	30.50	
			29	

5. Conclusion

Employees are valuable assets for their organizations upon whom their success depends. So, it is important to carefully select employees. The main objective of this study was to evaluate the use of biodata system for the hotel employee selection. From the research, it is concluded that hotels use biodata system as an effective method to select their employees. The study indicates that the main benefits of biodata are its low cost, its ability to predict future applicants behavior, job performance and success and providing a database of candidates that can be used at any time.

Also, the research revealed the main disadvantages of biodata as it is a theoretical method more than practical, a routine method that does not help to measure candidates' skills and it cannot be generalized. Additionally, it has been found that there is a negative significant relationship between the use of biodata system and the staff turnover. So, it is considered as a good selection method for hotels which are characterized by high staff turnover.

The study has some limitations. The small sample size and the study involved the five star hotels only make results generalization is difficult. So, future researches may be requested on a larger sample and different hotel categories.

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ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

تقييم استخدام نظام البيانات البيوجرافية لإنتقاء العمالة الفندقية

تهدف الدراسة إلى تقييم استخدام نظام البيانات البيوجرافية لاختيار العمالة الفندقية. ولقد اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي ولقد تم الحصول على بيانات الدراسة من خلال توزيع استمارة استقصاء على مديري الموارد البشرية بفنادق الخمس نجوم بالگردقة والمكونة من 33 فندق. ولقد تم استرداد 29 استمارة صالحة بنسبة (87,8%).

ولقد أوضحت الدراسة أن معظم الفنادق تطبق البيانات البيوجرافية في اختيار وتعيين موظفيها. كما أظهرت الدراسة لوجود علاقة عكسية بين استخدام نظام البيانات البيوجرافية ودوران العمالة حيث أدى استخدام الفنادق لنظام البيانات البيوجرافية الي انخفاض دوران العمالة بها. كما وجد أنه لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين فنادق السلاسل وفنادق ذات الإدارة المستقلة في استخدام نظام البيانات البيوجرافية حيث أظهرت الدراسة أن فنادق ذات الإدارة المستقلة تستخدم نظام البيانات البيوجرافية بصورة أكبر من فنادق السلاسل وذلك لاهتمامها بالتكلفة المالية في اختيار العمالة والتي تنخفض مع طريقة البيانات البيوجرافية.