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Toward a Unifying Framework of Recruiter Performance and Organizational Effectiveness

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Abstract: Recruiting qualified employees is a challenge for organizations. As researchers we need to help practitioners by synthesizing research on recruiter training to develop a starting point in which to frame ideas for recruiter training. In this article I propose a unifying framework for looking at recruiter performance in relationship to organizational effectiveness. A review of the literature on applicant impressions of recruiter behaviors and recruiting activities and recruiter goals and training, identified opportunities for recruiter training and performance. Implications and future research directions pertaining to recruiter training are also reviewed.

Introduction

In terms of attraction strategies, recruitment practices have received the most attention in the management and organizational behavior literatures. Rynes and Barber (1990) describe four dimensions of recruitment that may influence applicant attraction: organizational representatives, recruitment messages, recruitment sources, and recruitment timing. Organizational representatives are the focus of this paper. Rynes and Barber (1990) discuss personality, informedness, and credibility as characteristics hypothesized to affect applicant's impressions and decisions. Rynes and Boudreau (1986) suggest that if recruiters have important effects on job applicants, it would seem logical to train or select recruiters to ensure that they have the right characteristics for positively influencing applicants.

Rynes (1991) defines recruitment as "all organizational practices and decisions that affect either the number, or types, of individuals that are willing to apply for, or to accept, a given vacancy" (p. 429). For this discussion recruiter is defined as individuals internal to the organization who are responsible for the recruiting function (Barber, 1998) and excludes external agents such as agencies and headhunters. Also, I distinguish, as Rynes and Gerhart (1991) do, between staff and functional representatives focusing on staff representatives as recruiting agents as opposed to functional recruiters such as managers and line supervisors. Recruiter research has been of little use to organizations because most research has focused on campus recruiters limiting the generalizability and it has focused on attitudes rather than behaviors. According to Barber (1998), little attention has been given to recruiter goals, training, and motivation or other factors that could predict recruiter behavior. Rynes and Boudreau (1986) found that even large U.S. corporations provide minimal training to recruiters and so they lack the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to effectively perform their jobs.

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Literature Review

The following literature review examines applicant research including impressions, recruiting activities, and signaling theory and recruiter research including agency theory, recruiter training, and interviews.

Applicant Focused Research

Applicant impressions. Applicants form strong impressions of recruiters (Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Gerhart, 1991). Studies have focused on the influence of traits, demographic characteristics and behaviors of recruiters on applicant impressions and decisions. Rynes and Miller (1983) found a significant relationship between recruiter warmth and attraction to the job. Taylor and Bergmann (1987) found that recruiter warmth was related to company attractiveness and likelihood of job acceptance.

Recruiting activities. Rynes, Heneman, and Schwab (1980) conclude that both recruitment contacts and organizational evaluation procedures might affect applicant's decisions and attitudes. Stevens (1997) found that applicant's pre-interview expectancies correlated positively with their perceptions of recruiters. Rynes and Boudreau (1986) surveyed directors of corporate college recruiting and found low emphasis on program evaluation and low top-executive involvement.

Signaling theory. Signaling theory suggests that when decision makers are lacking information they will use the information that they do have to make inferences regarding missing information. Since job applicants often have limited information about jobs and companies, they may rely on recruiter traits and behaviors as signals of important attributes of the job. Thus, an unprepared recruiter may become a signal of organizational inefficiency (Rynes, 1991). Rynes and Gerhart (1991) found applicants interpreted recruitment practices including recruiter competence, sex composition of interview panels, and recruitment delays as associated with organizational characteristics. Twice as many applicants form negative impressions based on recruitment versus those forming positive impressions and a majority of applicants who lost interest in organizations mentioned recruiters or recruitment practices as the reason.

Recruiter Focused Research

Agency theory. Barber (1998) describes recruiter motivation in terms of the goals of initial recruitment. The assumption of the initial interview is that the recruiter will carry out the goals of the organization. Yet, little is known about how organizations determine goals for recruitment and how these goals are passed on to recruiters. Eisenhardt (1989) defines agency theory as the conflict that arises when principal and agent have different goals. Barber (1998) states that we cannot assume that recruiters agree or share organizational goals because they may have their own goals and objectives that may or may not coincide with those of the organization. It's difficult to monitor recruiter's behavior due to the variation and flexibility of their job tasks including conducting initial interviews away from the job site. Barber (1998) suggests that if recruiters do not understand their goals then training is needed and if goals are misaligned then methods for realigning recruiter goals with organizational goals need to be implemented. One way to do this might be to provide incentives as suggested by Asch (1990) in her study on providing incentives to Navy recruiters. She found that recruiters produced more as they became experienced and as their eligibility date became closer. This could apply also to organizational recruiters.

Recruiter training. Research on recruiter training is scarce because there is little recruiter training being done in organizations. Rynes and Boudreau (1986) found most recruiters received no training and others only a minimal amount averaging thirteen hours even in large, successful companies. When training is provided it tends to focus on administrative tasks such as filling out forms rather than on more critical skills such as proper interviewing techniques. Keenan (1978) found recruiter training can have positive outcomes and that training and experience were both positively related to the interviewer's level of confidence in the accuracy of their assessments of candidates. Candidates were more likely to accept a job offer from a trained interviewer.

Interviews. Rynes (1991) define two purposes of interviews: recruitment and screening. During the recruitment interview more time is spent on attracting applicants to the organization thus interviewers are more likely to discuss organizational information and to digress to non-job related topics. Conversely, during screening interviewers spend more time screening out unqualified applicants so they tend to stay focused on job-related topics. Stevens (1998) found that recruitment oriented interviewers spend more time talking with interviewees, volunteer more organizational information, and discuss more often non-job related topics than screening oriented interviewers. However, interview orientation was not related to applicant attraction to the organization. He also found that trained interviewers ask more open-ended questions, and had a more dominant screening orientation than untrained interviewers. There are several implications of this study for recruiter training. Training was important in determining how interviewers used their time, what types of questions they asked, how they rated applicants, and how they adapted their interaction styles based on the purpose of the interview. Untrained interviewers were harsher in their evaluations as they switched from recruitment to screening. This is important because it could cause organizations to eliminate qualified candidates at the initial interview phase.

Discussion and Implications

Rynes and Barber (1990) describe research on organizational representatives as being too narrow focusing on attitudes rather than behaviors, and they claim that employers who want to attract more qualified applicants will not find support for the idea that improving recruiter performance will positively impact job acceptance rates. However, they contradict this conclusion by stating that prior research has not tested the possible benefits of better selection and training programs for recruiters. Furthermore they explain that prior research methods such as one-shot, cross-sectional designs may be limited in detecting small but important effects of recruiter behavior such as influencing interviewees to convey positive messages to potential applicants, which may increase the number of individuals who apply.

A lack of recruiter training has both organizational and individual implications. From an organizational perspective recruitment activities are expensive. It is estimated that thousands of dollars can be spent per hire on advertising, interviewing and screening processes. There are legal implications regarding recruitment practices. Rynes and Gerhart (1991) found that women continue to experience "offensive" recruitment interactions such as inappropriate comments about a woman's appearance and negative comments about minority groups. This type of recruiter behavior could cost companies large amounts of money from potential lawsuits as well as negative effects on reputation and image. Recruitment also has important consequences for

individuals. Since the purpose of recruitment is to influence a person's job choice and because work is a critical component of a person's life, recruitment has the potential to impact a person's well being.

Several opportunities for recruiter training content have been identified including inter-personal skills training. One area mentioned often in the literature is recruiter "warmth" and its impact on an applicant's perception of the organization. Inter-personal skills are also important from a customer service perspective such as the importance of establishing rapport and showing an appropriate level of empathy. Another training opportunity is interviewing techniques. This could include proper questioning techniques such as utilizing open-ended questions, effective listening skills, proper decision-making and problem solving, and effective ratings analysis. Additional content could include proper note taking.

Several directions for future research emerge from this discussion. Rynes (1991) suggests tracking applicants' through different time periods to assess later changes in attraction that could be linked back to recruitment strategies. Another idea is to probe the underlying factors that influence differences in variables such as trust in recruiters and attitudes toward the job search process.

The framework presented below in Table 1 provides some ideas for training content such as inter-personal skills training and interviewer techniques training. Establishing content areas is necessary so that specific training objectives can be established and programs can be evaluated. This framework can also serve as a basis for new research questions. Hopefully practitioners will find value in this framework as a starting point for conducting a needs analysis to assess their current recruitment practices.

Table 1: A Framework of Recruiter Performance and Organizational Effectiveness

Recruiter Performance	Organizational Effectiveness
Demonstrates appropriate Inter-personal skills Demonstrates appropriate Customer Service Skills	Company attractiveness Recruiter Evaluations Hiring Expectancies Likelihood of Job Acceptance
Provides accurate information	Company attractiveness Recruiter Evaluations Hiring Expectancies Likelihood of Job Acceptance
Understands and can use effective interviewing techniques	Company attractiveness Recruiter Evaluations Hiring Expectancies Likelihood of Job Acceptance
Maintains professionalism to enhance recruiter status	Executive support Program evaluation
Is proficient on rating strategies	Avoids eliminating qualified candidates
Uses tools effectively for assessing personality and values	Organizational fit and image
Displays appropriate traits and behaviors	Avoids inaccurate signals
Understands Recruitment Goals	Goals are consistent and shared

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