

Employee recruitment: Current knowledge and important areas for future research

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ABSTRACT

Over the last forty years, research on employee recruitment has increased dramatically. In this paper, I review research on recruitment topics that have received considerable attention (e.g., recruitment methods, realistic job previews). I also address topics (e.g., targeted recruitment, the site visit) that have received relatively little attention but that have the potential to be quite important. In examining these topics, job applicant variables (e.g., self-insight), that should influence how an employer conducts the recruitment process but that have frequently been neglected, are discussed. Throughout the paper, important areas for future research are suggested.

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The attention given to the topic of employee recruitment by researchers has increased considerably in recent years (Billsberry, 2007; Breaugh, Macan, & Grambow, 2008). Given the importance of the recruitment process, such attention is clearly warranted. In addition to an increase in the number of studies being published, there has been an increase in the variety of recruitment topics being examined. For example, as discussed by Saks (2005), much of the early research focused on the use of realistic job previews (i.e., providing job applicants with accurate information about what a position with an organization involves), traditional recruitment methods (e.g., newspaper advertisements), and recruiter characteristics (e.g., their behavior). More recently, research has shifted from these three areas and has begun to explore such topics as the timing of recruitment actions, recruit site visits, and on-line recruiting (e.g., Boswell, Roehling, LePine, & Moynihan, 2003; Dineen, Ling, Ash, & DelVecchio, 2007).

Given the multitude of topics that have been addressed by researchers and the large number of studies that have been published, I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive review of the recruitment literature in this paper. Instead, in reviewing past research on a topic (e.g., a site visit), my goals are to provide the reader with a sense of the current state of our knowledge and to point out limitations of prior research that may have resulted in erroneous conclusions being drawn. Having noted such limitations, I highlight important directions for future research. In reviewing recruitment research, I have tried to be provocative. My hope is that such an approach will stimulate important needed research. For example, having examined research on realistic job previews (RJPs), I suggest that methodological weaknesses of past studies have resulted in the benefits of RJPs being underestimated. In addition, in a number of places in this paper, I cite research from fields that have largely been ignored in reviews of recruitment research but which offer promise in trying to better understand the recruitment process. For example, in reviewing research on the use of employee referrals as a recruitment method, I draw upon studies by sociologists which are not typically cited by human resource management (HRM) researchers. Before beginning my review of the recruitment literature, three issues need to be addressed: (a) the focus of this paper on external recruitment, (b) the relative importance of recruitment vis-à-vis position attributes, and (c) the influence of organizational characteristics.

In terms of the focus of this article, I primarily address the external recruitment of individuals. With regard to term external recruitment, I define it as encompassing an employer's actions that are intended to: (a) bring a job opening to the attention of

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potential job candidates who do not currently work for the organization, (b) influence whether these individuals apply for the opening, (c) affect whether they maintain interest in the position until a job offer is extended, and (d) influence whether a job offer is accepted. Although readers who are familiar with internal recruitment (e.g., supervisors nominating their employees for positions vs. current employees applying via a job posting system) should see immediate parallels to some of the external recruitment topics discussed herein (e.g., the use of employee referrals vs. job advertisements), space constraints do not allow for an adequate treatment of internal recruitment.

With regard to the relative importance of recruitment vis-à-vis position characteristics, conventional wisdom (Rynes & Cable, 2003) is that position attributes such as pay, job tasks, and work hours are more important to job applicants than such recruitment variables as the content of a job advertisement, the design of a company's employment web site, or a recruiter's behavior. Comparisons of the relative impact of recruitment variables and position attributes have resulted in some individuals questioning whether the manner in which an employer recruits is important. In this context, two factors should be considered. First, if an employer does a poor job of recruiting, it may not bring job openings to the attention of the type of persons it seeks to recruit (e.g., employed individuals who are not actively searching for new positions). Secondly, even if a position is brought to the attention of targeted individuals, poor treatment during the recruitment process (e.g., a poorly run site visit) may result in individuals withdrawing as job candidates before an employer has had a chance to even present a job offer (Boswell et al., 2003; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991).

The final topic meriting attention before beginning my review of recruitment research involves organizational characteristics (e.g., location, industry). As noted by Rynes and Cable (2003), organizational characteristics can be important in a recruitment context both because individuals may be more attracted to employers with certain characteristics (e.g., Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; documented that job applicants were more attracted to larger employers) and because certain types of organizations are more likely to recruit in certain ways (e.g., Barber, Wesson, Roberson, & Taylor, 1999; found that larger employers were more likely to have HR staff dedicated to the recruitment function than smaller ones). Although I agree with Rynes and Cable that more attention should be given to organizational characteristics, given their excellent review of the limited research that does exist, I will not review this research.

1. A model of the recruitment process

In most reviews of recruitment research, authors (e.g., Rynes & Cable, 2003) have offered organizing models of the recruitment process. Fig. 1 presents a model from a chapter by Breaugh et al. (2008). Given the detailed nature of this model, I will not provide a thorough discussion of all of its contents. However, a few components of the model do merit elaboration. Fig. 1 suggests that, before making decisions concerning such issues as what recruitment methods to use, an organization should thoughtfully establish its recruitment objectives. For example, until an employer decides upon the type of individuals it seeks to attract as job applicants

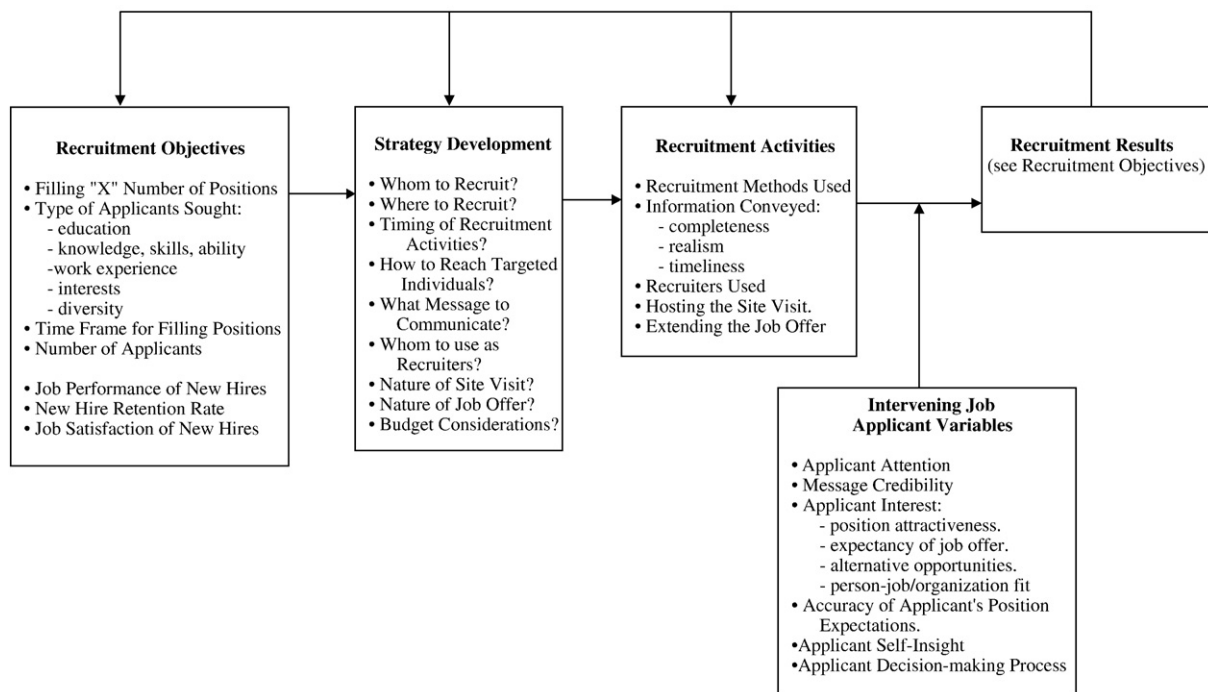


Fig. 1. A model of the recruitment process (reprinted with permission, from Breaugh et al., 2008).

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