



The candidate experience: Is it damaging your employer brand?

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Abstract The importance of the candidate experience has only recently gained attention as the war for talent ensues. Despite its importance, there is a paucity of research examining the exchange relationship between the job candidate and the organization during the recruitment process. This article presents a model—illustrating the connections and exchanges made among an organization, the job candidate, and the organization's recruitment process—that forms the candidate experience and, in turn, affects the employer's brand either positively or negatively. Based on this framework, guidelines are presented to assist organizations in ensuring a positive candidate experience that will result in the strengthening of the employer brand and improving recruitment and business outcomes. Some of these business outcomes include strengthening relationships with customers and investors, referring friends to the company, and participating in future searches conducted by the organization.

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1. Significance of the candidate experience

In 2016, nearly 60% of job candidates reported a bad candidate experience, with 72% indicating they shared their negative experience online (CareerArc, 2016). An annual survey conducted by the Talent

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[Board \(2016\)](#) revealed that 41% of global candidates who reported a negative candidate experience indicated they intended to halt their alliances, product purchases, and/or relationships with that organization. For instance, Virgin Media, a British television, telephone, and internet services provider, quantified the costs of a poor candidate experience and determined it costs its brand \$6 million in lost revenue annually ([Adams, 2016](#)). Some of these costs are attributed to lost relationships and a damaged employer brand, which ultimately compromises a firm's ability to attract top talent. The candidate experience stems from both the recruiter and recruitment process, which forms the candidates' perception of the employer brand and influences the candidates' decision to continue a relationship with the organization. A positive candidate experience accurately reflects the desired brand of the organization, while a negative experience may result in desired talent opting out of the process and going to work for a competitor. A negative experience may also cause the candidate to disengage as a customer or stakeholder, or damage the employer's brand by posting negative comments on social media sites.

Considering the number of applicants moving through the pipeline for any one job, the impact of a negative candidate experience could be exponential and may indeed determine whether the candidate would apply for another open position or recommend the organization to a friend. For example, if 100 people apply for one position and one person is hired, 99 other people do not get the job but have encountered the organization and experienced the people and recruitment practices. Applying the statistics previously reported, 59 people would have had a negative experience and, of those, 42 would have posted negative comments online on social media or career websites. With career sites such as [Glassdoor \(2016a\)](#), the second largest job site in the U.S. with 48 million unique visitors monthly, the impact is exponential. Negative postings negatively affect the employer brand, increasing the likelihood of derailing other applicants from applying for open positions. On the other hand, candidates posting a positive experience strengthens the organization's employer brand in the marketplace and enhances the organization's recruitment efforts. In essence, cumulative encounters between the organization and candidate define the candidate experience and shape the employer brand for each subsequent candidate, potentially impacting current and future talent pools.

The importance of the candidate experience has only recently gained attention. The genesis, in

2010, occurred when the Talent Board—a nonprofit organization—was first to measure the business value of the job candidate experience. At that time, the Talent Board initiated the Candidate Experience Awards, which recognize organizations that create a positive candidate experience. Among the award recipients are Volkswagen, KPMG, and Johnson & Johnson ([Talent Board, 2017](#)). While other research has acknowledged the recruitment process and the employees responsible for engaging job candidates as key components of an organization's employer brand ([Miles & Mangold, 2005](#); [Russell & Brannan, 2016](#)), a systematic framework integrating the candidate experience and the organization's recruitment process is lacking. Hence, an understanding of the relationship and touchpoints (i.e., points of interface or engagement) between the candidate and the organization is necessary to develop a comprehensive positive candidate experience that reinforces and strengthens the employer brand in the marketplace. The purpose of this article is to present a dual-focused integrative model for recruitment that illustrates the connections made among an organization, the job candidate, and the organization's recruitment process. Based on this framework, this article then provides a comprehensive guide to assist organizations in ensuring a positive candidate experience occurs that strengthens the employer brand, improves recruitment outcomes, and builds stakeholder relationships.

2. The candidate experience: A closer look

The candidate experience emanates from an exchange between job seekers/candidates and the organization to which employment is being considered. The job candidate is seeking employment and the organization is seeking (recruiting) talent. The candidates' focus is on securing desirable employment for themselves. Subsequently, they engage in activities that present themselves in a manner that is desirable to their targeted organizations. Candidates invest an enormous amount of time preparing for and assembling materials to assist in moving from decision point to decision point during their job-search process, purposefully encountering organizations—sometimes even before the candidate has the requisite knowledge to qualify for a position. Subsequent decision points made by the candidate include whether to apply, to go through assessments if invited, to continue the process, or to disengage from the search with a particular organization. The job candidate evaluates information and experiences to form perceptions regarding

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