REVIEW ARTICLE

The Employment Interview –A Recruitment Device

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INTRODUCTION

The employment interview is an interactive process through which organizations and individuals mutually assess and select one another. Despite this fact, interview research has focused mainly on its function as an organizational selection and screening device. In comparison, the interview's role in recruitment (i.e., in attracting applicants and influencing their job choices) has received far less attention. In part, the dominance of selection over recruitment research probably reflects the generally loose labor markets of the past fifteen years. Blessed with large numbers of first-time workers and rising female labor force participation rates, employers have typically been in the enviable position of choosing among large numbers of applicants. Now, however, demographics are changing and employers are expected to confront long-term labor shortages in many sectors (Bernstein, 1987; Hanigan, 1987; Johnston, 1987).

As applicants become scarce, employers devote increased attention to applicant attraction and retention (Malm, 1954; Merrill, 1987). Accordingly, recognition of the interview's role in recruitment is likely to grow in future years. The present paper considers the implications of viewing the interview from recruitment, rather than a selection, perspective.

Employment interviews are both recruitment and selection devices. Several factors are believed to influence the extent to which recruitment versus selection objectives predominate *in* any given interview. In general, the relative emphasis placed on recruitment versus selection is hypothesized to flow from labor market (e.g., relative supply and demand) and vacancy characteristics (e.g., job and organizational attractiveness). These variables are hypothesized to have both direct and indirect effects on the extent to which recruitment is emphasized in the employment interview. In general, recruitment emphasis is hypothesized to increase when applicants are scarce, and vacancies unattractive.

However, vacancy and market characteristics influence not only the interview, but other recruitment activities as well (e.g., number and type of recruitment sources, selection and training of organizational representatives). These, in turn, may exert an independent effect on interview objectives through their impact on applicant and interviewer characteristics. For example, to the extent those only exclusive recruiting sources are used (e.g., executive search firms or top-tier universities), recruitment would be expected to become more important in the interview, relative to screening. Similarly, to the extent that tight labor markets lead to increased recruitment training, recruiters and other organizational representatives would be expected to be more sensitive to the recruitment aspects of selection procedures.

More directly to the point of this paper, differences in the relative importance of recruitment versus selection are hypothesized to influence the conduct, and outcomes, of the employment interview. This can occur in several ways. For example, interviewers can change either their nonverbal (e.g., body language) or verbal behaviors (e.g., time spent talking), as well as the content of what is discussed (e.g., applicant qualifications versus vacancy characteristics). Interviewer behaviors are further hypothesized to influence applicant behaviors (e.g., Dipboye, 1982; Eder & Buckley, 1988), which in turn can either reinforce the interviewer's initial emphasis, or cause a readjustment toward a greater emphasis on either recruitment or selection.

Following the interview, the applicant makes a number of judgments and decisions that determine the success of the recruiting effort. Specifically, based on the interview and other recruitment experiences, applicants assess the likelihood of receiving an offer (expectancy), and the probable attractiveness of

that offer (valence). These assessments, in turn, are believed to influence job choices (Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987; Vroom, 1966; Wanous, 1977).

However, the extent to which recruitment activities are able to influence recruitment success (particularly job choice) is limited by other factors, most notably the attractiveness of the applicant's other alternatives. Generally speaking, an applicant's alternatives are likely to be a function of labor market conditions and the applicant's particular qualifications (Thurow, 1975). This implies that there are inherent limits to the ability to attract candidates through conventional recruitment activities, including the interview.

Determinants of the Balance between Recruitment and Selection
Generally speaking, the importance of the recruitment function increases as demand for labor outpaces supply. However, changes in aggregate vacancy or unemployment statistics will imperfectly reflect the importance of recruitment to any given organization. For example, well-known and highly attractive companies like IBM are likely to generate thousands of unsolicited applications even in full employment economies.

Thus, the importance of recruitment also depends on characteristics of the particular vacancy. In general, attraction seems to be most difficult when there *is* a poor organizational image, low pay, or few *opportunities* for advancement. Not surprisingly, then, industries such as retailing and food *service* are currently placing considerable emphasis on innovative *recruiting* (e.g., Axon Group, 1987; Commerce Clearing House, 1987; Merrill, 1987).

Recruitment activities (other than the interview)
Market and vacancy characteristics are likely to affect a wide range of recruitment activities. Although a full review of these activities is beyond the scope of this paper,
it is useful to consider a few examples and their potential impact on then *interview.*

As applicants become scarce, organizations implement a number of changes in their recruiting procedures. For example, they may turn to more (or more expensive) applicant sources (Malm, 1954; Commerce *Clearing* House, 1987), set lower position specifications (Merrill, 1987), recruit earlier and more frequently (Hanigan, 1987; Schwab, Rynes & Aldag, 1987), or select and train *recruiters* to make a better impression on applicants (Hanigan, 1987; Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). In general, these decisions will affect both the quantity, and quality, of applicants available for selection.

To the extent that these activities increase the size of the applicant pool, organizations would be expected to increase the attention given to screening and selection in the employment interview. Conversely, to the extent that they increase the general level of applicant qualifications, a greater recruitment emphasis would be expected, as the typical applicant would be both more difficult to attract, and less in need of screening.

The general point is that the nature and scope of other recruitment activities is likely to have an impact on characteristics of the applicant pool and, hence, the relative emphasis placed on selection versus recruitment in the interview. In addition, characteristics of interviewers themselves may be influenced by general recruitment activities (e.g., extent of interviewer training, selection of line versus staff recruiters).

Recruitment priorities may also lead to more favorable (not just more frequent) discussion of vacancy characteristics. It has long"been alleged that interviewers tend to downplay the negative, and emphasize the positive, features of vacancies (Schneider, 1976). What is not clear, however, is whether this tendency is correlated with the relative urgency of recruitment versus selection needs. Although such a relationship seems plausible, there is little evidence to substantiate it. Indeed, the practitioner literature suggests that the so called "marketing" approach (as opposed to "realistic" recruiting) is favored by most recruiters, regardless of market tightness or vacancy attractiveness (e.g., Krett & Stright, 1985; stoops, 1984).

In summary, as the importance of the recruitment function increases, employment interviewers are hyPOthesized to: (1) exhibit more positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors, (2) place relatively more emphasis on vacancy rather than applicant characteristics; (3) describe vacancies in more favorable terms, (4) ask questions that are less likely to lead to candidate disqualification, and (5) pursue more aggressive post-interview followup policies.

Effects of Recruitment on Applicants

Effects on applicant behavior within the interview. Several researchers have speculated that the initial orientation of the interviewer can have an effect on the applicant's subsequent performance in the interview (e.g., Dipboye, 1982; Eder & Buckley, 1988; Schmitt, 1976). Specifically, it *is* hypothesized that the positive (or negative) orientation of an interviewer is quickly conveyed to the interviewee, who in turn responds with similar affective and behavioral responses.

Thus, in a sort of "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Dipboye, 1982), applicants who receive positive early treatment are hypothesized to respond with greater confidence and more effective verbal and nonverbal presentations. Moreover, Dipboye (1982) hypothesizes that these effects are likely to be strongest in cases where the interview is unstructured, the interviewer is very confident of his initial impression, and the applicant is unsure of how well he is likely to perform. However, the important point is that the post-interview reactions of both the interviewer and interviewee are likely to be influenced by the results of these social interaction processes.

Effects on applicant's post-interview impressions and decisions. Although it has been widely assumed that recruitment practices are indeed capable of influencing applicants I decisions (e.g., Glueck, 1973; stoops, 1985), most theories of job choice ignore recruitment as a relevant variable. Economists, for example, view choices as driven by market distributions of job attributes (e.g., salaries) and individual job search patterns (e.g., search intensity, systematic versus random search; see Lippman & McCall, 1976). Vacancy characteristics have also dominated most expectancy theory (e.g., Vroom, 1964) and policy capturing (e.g., Zedeck, 1977) research.

Thus, it is not immediately obvious how recruitment practices contribute to applicants I decisions, over and above the impact of vacancy characteristics per se. The present paper addresses two possibilities, each of which depends on the presence of uncertainty in the job search and choice process (Schwab, 1982). Specifically, it is hypothesized that recruitment influences job choices through its impact on applicants' expectancy and valence perceptions. (Expectancy effects). The first hypothesis *is* that recruitment practices influence job seekers' expectations of receiving job offers (Vroom, 1964; Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980). Because job seekers are frequently uncertain about their marketability, they have been hypothesized to grasp at any available information that might help them estimate their chances of receiving offers.

Thus, interviewer behaviors may become a source of clues as to whether or not a job offer is likely to be forthcoming. There *is* some evidence that interviewers do in fact influence applicants' expectations of receiving job offers. For example, Schmitt & Coyle (1976) collected college students' descriptions of recruiter behavior in their most recent campus interviews. These descriptions were then correlated with a variety of dependent variables, including applciants' expectations of receiving a job offer. Perceived likelihood of receiving an offer was significantly associated with recruiter personality and recruiter informed about the applicant and the job in question. These same variables were also correlated with applciants' self perceptions of performance in the interview, as well as the likelihood that they would further explore job possibilities with the company. Interpretation of these results is complicated, however, by the fact that all measures were based on applicant perceptions. As such, common method variance may account for many of the observed correlations. Additionally, the data do not permit causal inferences.

Interviewer characteristics were significantly associated with applicant perceptions of organizational attractiveness in each of the above studies. However, they did not explain a high proportion of overall variance, particularly at later stages of the recruitment process (Taylor & Bergmann, 1987) and in studies where the impact of job attributes was also examined (Rynes & Miller, 1983; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). In addition to possible signalling effects, interviewers may also exert a more deliberate influence on valence perceptions through their choice of recruitment "marketing" strategies. Specifically, decisions about what (and what not) to tell applicants, in combination with applicants' lack of detailed organizational information (e.g., Reynolds, 1951; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), may cause job seekers to make choices they might not otherwise make. Indeed, the whole "realistic job preview" literature is predicated on this assumption. Thus, the opportunity exists for manipulation of applicant decisions through selective interviewer presentation, interpretation, or withholding of organizational information.

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