Recruiter Effects on Job-Seeker Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

An examination of the relationship between recruiter behavior and job-seeker was studied at a medium-sized, western United States university. Data was collected through two surveys by students enrolled in an upper-division staffing course who were actively searching for a position (i.e., internship, permanent job). Two assignments related to the university career fair were used and analyzed using structural equation modeling in AMOS (SPSS version 22). The results of this study validate previous findings that attitudes toward the company is significantly and positively influenced by recruiter behavior, and that attitudes toward the company is positively correlated with job-seekers' word-of-mouth intentions.

Keywords: applicant reactions, candidate experience, well-being, self-efficacy, recruiter, job seeker

Introduction

Extant literature on applicant reactions has helped us conclude that an applicant's attitudes and intentions toward a potential employer are influenced during the recruitment and selection process by such factors as information about the company and its jobs, the applicant's perceptions of recruiter behaviors, and the applicant's beliefs about the fairness of the selection process. Applicants value organizations that exhibit a positive social environment (Rynes, Heneman III & Schwab, 1980) and organizations that have a reputation for treating employees fairly (Walker, Bauer, Cole, Bernerth, Feild, & Short, 2013). Additionally, they value jobs that offer opportunities and appear interesting (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey & Edwards, 2000; Irving & Meyer, 1994; Turban & Cable, 2003; Uggerslev, Fassina & Kraichy, 2012). Further, applicants value recruiters who exhibit warmth toward them and who are knowledgeable about the jobs and the company (Rynes, et al, 1980). While much of the reactions research has uncovered and studied these factors on how applicant reactions affect the organization – e.g., applicant's willingness to submit an application, accept an offer when given, say positive things about the company, exhibit citizenship behaviors when hired, tenure – less is known about consequences for applicants themselves (Schinkel, Vianen, & Dierendonck, 2013).

Discussion

In a recent review of human resource literature McCarthy, Bauer, Tuxillo, Anderson, Costa and Ahmed (2017) noted that applicant well-being should be "a core outcome" in future recruitment and selection research. We know that applicant well-being is related to numerous personal outcomes, such as career success, health, and job satisfaction (Diener, Tay, & Myers,

2011); therefore, better understanding the roles that recruitment and selection practices play in affecting applicant well-being is a worthwhile objective. In fact, Schuler (1993) has noted that selection systems have a social impact on job seekers, assessed by the extent to which each candidate is treated with respect and dignity. One specific well-being-oriented outcome is job-search self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy theory links an individual's cognitive state to a variety of affective and behavioral outcomes (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1986; Staples, Hulland, & Higgins, 1998). An individual's belief that he or she possesses the skills and abilities to successfully accomplish a specific task represents self-efficacy. Job search self-efficacy refers to a job-seeker's belief that he or she can perform the behaviors needed to obtain a desired employment outcome. Given what we know from previous applicant-reaction research, it is likely that applicants' perceptions of an interview or the interviewer would affect their job-search self-efficacy. When a task, such as an interview, is not under a person's complete control perceptions that the task did not go well often "lead to loss of belief in the efficacy of effort, withdrawal from the situation and negative affect" (Dweck & Leffett, 1988). Another component that has been investigated is self-compassion, the ability to adapt to failure; self-compassion is helpful for the job searcher to maintain a positive outlook on the job search process (Kreemers, van Hooft, & van Vianen, 2018). The recruiter can have an influence on job search self-efficacy and self-compassion of the job-seeker.

The purpose of this work is, therefore, to extend current thinking about the consequences of recruiter behaviors. While a significant amount of research has looked the effect that recruiter behavior, during such activities as an interview, has on organization-oriented outcomes, there remains a limited understanding about how recruiters affect job seekers' well-being. We suggest that in addition to the effect that recruiters have on job-seekers' attitudes and intentions towards the company that experiences with a recruiter will also affect a job seeker's job search self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four individuals participated in this study. Participants were students enrolled at a medium-sized university in western United States. All participants reported that they were currently seeking an internship position, a permanent position or either type of position, and thus, they were a particularly useful subject pool for a study on job-seeker reactions to recruiter behaviors. The average age of the subjects was 22 years; 43% were female and 57% were male.

As partial fulfillment of two homework assignments students enrolled in an upper-division staffing course recruited, and later debriefed, participants who were actively searching for a position, who planned to attend the university career fair, and who planned to speak with a recruiter from at least one specific company at the fair. Participants received a $5.00 gift card for participating in the study.

Each student sent his or her participant a link to a survey to be completed prior to the start of the career fair. Initial questions on the survey asked subjects to confirm their status as a job seeker, report demographic information about themselves, respond to job-search-oriented self-efficacy questions, and to identify a specific company that they planned to approach at the career fair. Participants were then asked to review the company's career-oriented website and report specific information from the website about the company and jobs that was of interest to them.

Participants then responded to questions about their initial attitudes towards the company and their perceived fit with the company.

Following the career fair participants were sent a link to a second survey. The survey included questions about the recruiter who they met at the fair and about their post-career-fair attitudes towards the company, their word-of-mouth intentions and their job-search-oriented self-efficacy. Of the 84 participants, data from four were dropped from the study. Two participants only completed the initial survey, one only completed the second survey and one participant responded to the post-career fair questions with their reactions to a different company than the one they referred to in the initial survey because the initial company did not attend the fair as planned.

Results

Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics and correlations for each variable. The correlations between variables represented by the hypothesized relationships were positive and significant, offering preliminary support for our expectations.

Table 1: Correlations and descriptive statistics for all variables

	Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	**Gender**	0.43	0.50								
2	**Age**	22.00	2.71	-.07							
3	**Self-Efficacy: Initial**	3.79	0.71	-.02	.31**						
4	**Perceived Fit**	3.88	0.61	-.01	.27*	.54**					
5	**Attitude: Initial**	4.24	0.55	.06	.26*	.26**	..58**				
6	**Recruiter**	4.22	0.72	.02	-.07	.21^{t}	.30**	.16			
7	**Self-Efficacy: Post**	4.20	0.59	-.02	.16	.45**	.35**	.07	.37**		
8	**Attitude: Post**	4.20	0.70	-.02	.07	.22^{t}	.41**	.44**	.48**	.14	
9	**Word-of-Mouth Intentions**	4.05	0.74	-.04	.11	.25*	.45**	.48**	.44**	.22*	.69**

Note: ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; ^{t}p<.10; gender is a dummy-coded variable that represents the percentage of females in the sample (0 = male, 1 =female).

The psychometric properties of each measure were evaluated with a confirmatory factor analysis using a structural equation modeling approach and maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS in SPSS version 22. The goodness of fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) were 0.80 and 0.72, respectively. The root mean square residual (RMR) was 0.04. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.08 with a 90% confidence interval of 0.06 to 0.10. The normed chi-square statistic was 1.49. Bentler's comparative fit (CFI) was 0.92 and the incremental fit indices (i.e., NFI & IFI) were 0.79 and 0.92, respectively (Bentler, 1990). Taken together, these values indicate an acceptable fit between the model and the data (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1992; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Rainer & Harrison, 1993).

The measures of the theoretical constructs in the model are shown in Table 2. The standardized path coefficients in the table were estimates from the confirmatory factor analysis. The items' standardized path coefficients ranged from 0.72 to 0.90, demonstrating satisfactory item reliability (Rainer & Harrison, 1993). Similarly, the composite reliability estimates ranged from .93 to .99, thereby showing preferred levels since all exceeded the generally accepted cutoff level of 0.70 (Rainer & Harrison, 1993; Nunnally, 1978). Additionally, all the shared variance extracted percentages were above 50%. The combination of these results indicates that the measures satisfy convergent validity (Rainer & Harrison, 1993; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Item	Item reliability	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Self-Efficacy: Initial	SE1	.80	.79	.93	.65
	SE2	.81			
Perceived Fit	F1	.70	.83	.96	.63
	F2	.83			
	F3	.85			
Attitude: Initial	A1	.80	.84	.97	.65
	A2	.75			
	A3	.86			
Recruiter	R1	.73	.85	.99	.62
	R2	.82			
	R3	.86			
	R4	.72			
Self-Efficacy: Post	SE1	.79	.81	.98	.73
	SE2	.90			
	SE3	.87			
Attitude: Post	A1	.80	.87	.96	.68
	A2	.84			
	A3	.83			
Word-of-Mouth Intentions	I1	.82	.87	.96	.70
	I2	.87			
	I3	.82			

Discriminant validity was examined by evaluating the correlations between each measure of interest. Acceptable discriminant validity is present when the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct is greater than the correlations between it and other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As can be seen in Table 3, there is adequate discriminant validity; and since convergent and discriminant validity are satisfied for all the measures, it can be concluded that construct validity is also satisfied (Hair et. al, 1992).

The model displayed in Figure 1 (see Appendix) was estimated using a structural equations approach with AMOS in SPSS version 22 and maximum likelihood estimation. The summary statistics for the fit of the model to the data are displayed in Table 4. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.98 and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) was 0.95. The normed chi-square statistic (X2/df) was 0.55. The root mean square residual (RMR) was 0.01. The root

mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was estimated to be 0.00 with a 90% confidence interval of 0.00 to 0.67. Bentler's comparative fit index (CFI) was estimated to be 1.00 and the incremental fit indices were 0.97 (NFI) and 1.00 (IFI). These summary statistics indicate an adequate fit between the data and the model (Hair, et al, 1992; Hooper, et al, 2008).

Table 3: Correlations between constructs with reflective measures

Variables	SEI	PF	AI	R	SEP	AP	WoW
Self-Efficacy: Initial	(.81)						
Perceived Fit	.66	(.80)					
Attitude: Initial	.31	.66	(.80)				
Recruiter	.22	.31	.22	(.79)			
Self-Efficacy: Post	.54	.39	.09	.39	(.85)		
Attitude: Post	.27	.48	.52	.55	.16	(.83)	
WoM Intentions	.31	.50	.57	.53	.24	.80	(.84)

Note: Square roots of the average variance extracted are in parentheses.

The estimation also produced estimated path coefficients from the exogenous latent construct and among the endogenous latent constructs. These estimates are shown on Figure 2. The paths from the perceived fit to the final attitudes (H5) and from recruiter to intentions (H7) were both statistically insignificant. Paths from initial self-efficacy to perceived fit and from initial self-efficacy to final self-efficacy were statistically significant (ß = .54, $p < .01$; ß = .39, $p < .01$, respectively), offering support for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. In addition, the paths from perceived fit to initial attitude and from perceived fit to recruiter were each significant (ß = .58, $p < .01$; ß = .30, $p < .01$, respectively), offering support for Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4.

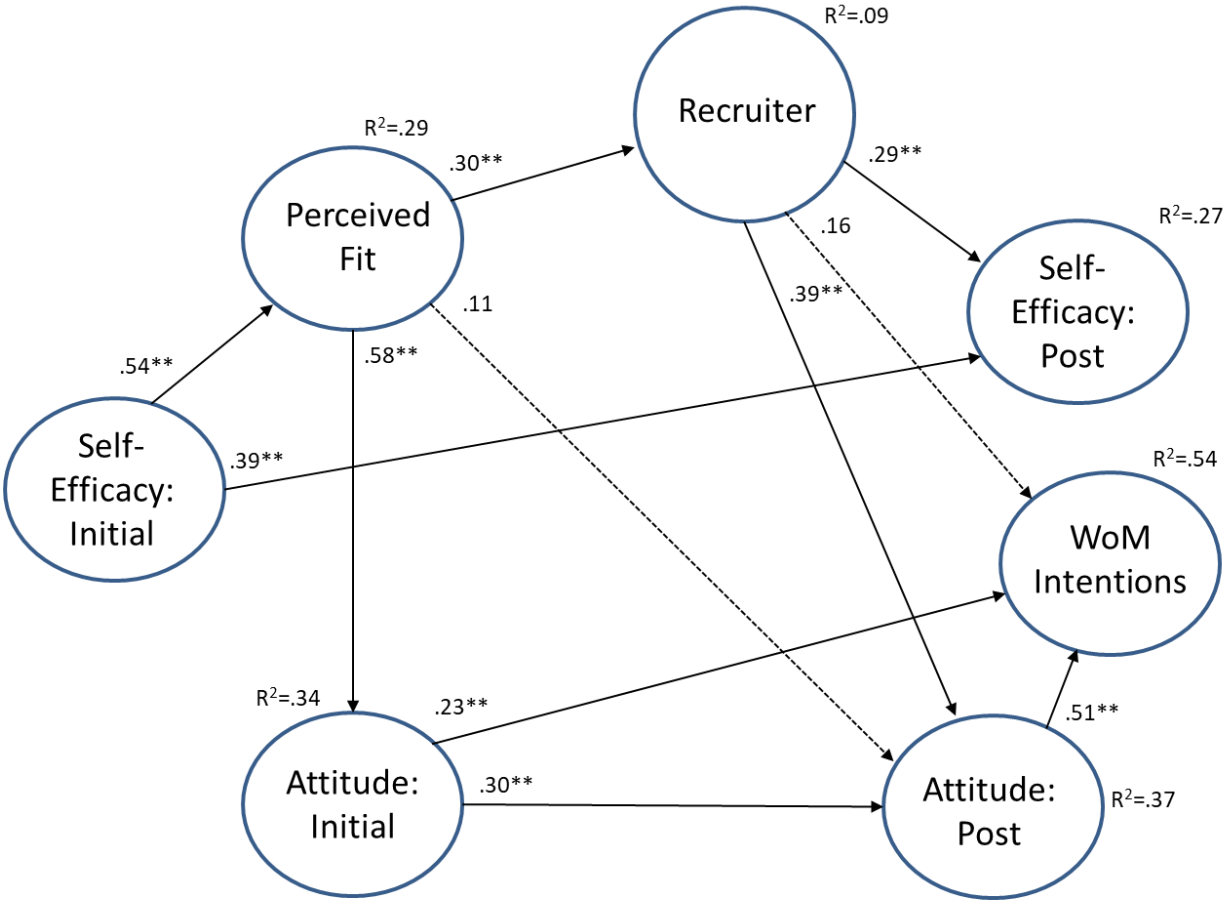
Table 4: Fit indices for the measurement

	GFI	AGFI	X^2/df	RMR	CFI	RMSEA	NFI	IFI
Results	.98	.95	0.55	.01	1.0	.00	.97	1.0
Criteria	>.95	>.8	<2.0	<.1	<.95	<.07	>.95	>.9
Criteria Sources	Miles & Shevlin, 2007	Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008	Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007	Bagozzi & Yi, 1988	Hu & Bentler, 1999	Steiger, 2007	Hu & Bentler, 1999	Bollen, 1990

Further, the paths from initial attitude to intentions and from initial attitudes to final attitudes were each significant (ß = .58, $p < .01$; ß = .30, $p < .01$, respectively), offering support for Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7. Finally, the paths from recruiter to final self-efficacy, from recruiter to final attitudes, and from final attitudes to intentions were each significant (ß = .29, $p < .01$; ß = .39, $p < .01$; ß = .51, $p < .01$, respectively), offering support for Hypothesis 8, Hypothesis 10 and Hypothesis 11. The R-square values for perceived fit, initial attitude,

recruiter, final self-efficacy, final attitude and intentions were .29, .34, .09, .27, .51 and .54, respectively.

.Figure 2: Estimated model using standardized path coefficients



** Significant at a 1% level.

Conclusion

In this study we examined the relationship between recruiter behavior and important outcomes. We found evidence that in addition to outcomes relevant to the recruiting companies (e.g., attitudes towards the company) there were meaningful outcomes for the job seekers. Specifically, there is a positive correlation between recruiter behaviors (e.g., warmth, knowledgeable) and job-seeker self-efficacy. A key, and potentially troubling takeaway of these findings is that a poor interaction with a recruiter can have a negative effect on a job-seeker's well-being, and thus, his long-term employment outcomes. A recruiter who is not perceived to be warm, approachable, or knowledgeable, for example, can have an effect on the job seeker's confidence in his ability to succeed in his job search, which can result in worse employment

outcomes for the job seeker. The results of this study also further validate previous findings that attitudes toward the company is significantly and positively influenced by recruiter behavior, and that attitudes toward the company is positively correlated with job-seekers' word-of-mouth intentions.

Managerial Implications

Organizations spend a considerable amount of time and effort thinking about customer satisfaction, creating a positive customer experience, and delivering high-quality service; and these efforts and attention make sense - i.e., customers matter. However, we continue to see evidence of companies who neglect, or at least short change, those 'customers' who come to them from the labor market – i.e., job-seekers. There is a significant amount of empirical evidence that points to benefits accrued to organizations who direct the same level of time and effort to job-seekers' experiences as they do to product-seekers' experiences. While more work needs to be done in this area, an aspect of the job-seeker-experience literature that is largely untapped is how recruitment and selection practices affect outcomes for the job seeker. We know, for example, that a job-seeker's confidence in her ability to perform job-search activities will affect such things as the number of applications she submits and the number of offers she receives. However, we know less about how recruitment and selection practices affect job-seekers' self-efficacy and other well-being-oriented outcomes. The results from the present study provide help in this area and offer some initial advice to managers. For example, if we know from past research that job seekers value recruiters who exhibit warmth toward them and who are knowledgeable about the jobs and the company (Rynes, et al, 1980), and if we know from this study that recruiter warmth and knowledge affects job-seeker self-efficacy, then managers need to take seriously the task of selecting and preparing those who interact with job seekers. Benefits will accrue to the organization and to the job seeker.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Proposed relationships