

**The Employment Interview as a
Recruitment Device**

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Sara L. Rynes

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The Employment Interview as a Recruitment Device

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 a recruitment, rather than a selection, perspective.

Interviews and Applicant Attraction: A Model

Efforts to understand, evaluate, and improve recruitment have been hampered by inadequate conceptualization of the applicant attraction process (Guion, 1976; Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980). Fortunately, the relationship between recruitment activities and applicant attraction has received increasing attention in recent years (e.g., Rynes, in press; Schwab, 1982; Wanous, 1980).

Figure 1 presents a model of the relationship between the recruitment process and applicant attraction, with particular emphasis on the employment interview. The model is first outlined briefly, then discussed in more detail.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Model Overview

Employment interviews are both recruitment and selection devices. However, as the model shows, 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 that 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, as the model indicates, 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

Market and vacancy characteristics. 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 the 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).

Hypothesized Differences between "Recruitment" and "Selection" Interviews

Although the issue has received little direct attention, it seems likely that interviews designed primarily for recruitment purposes might differ substantially from those intended to screen or select. Specifically, interviewers are expected to modify both their nonverbal, and verbal, behaviors in accordance with changes in recruitment versus selection priorities.

Evidence for these propositions comes from research on the effects of initial impressions of applicants on interviewer behaviors (Dipboye, 1982). Interviewers with favorable first impressions have been found to talk more (Anderson, 1960), to interrupt more frequently and respond more quickly (Matarazzo & Weins, 1972), and to exhibit fewer long pauses (Feldstein, 1972) and errors of speech (Word, Zanna & Cooper, 1974) during the interview. In a slightly different context, teachers were found to lean farther forward, nod and smile more frequently, and display more consistent eye contact when

interacting with students whom they had been led to believe were bright (Chaiken, Sigler & Derlega, 1974).

In general, the preceding studies suggest that interviewers are likely to modify their behaviors in line with prior impressions of specific candidates. Whether they similarly adjust their behaviors in response to other, less personal, conditions hypothesized to increase the importance of recruiting (e.g., general labor shortages, less attractive vacancies, use of sources with minimal pre-screening) remains to be demonstrated.

The content of what is discussed in the interview may also change in response to recruitment priorities. One plausible prediction is that as recruitment increases in importance, interviewers spend relatively more time discussing the vacancy rather than the applicant (e.g., Dipboye, 1982; Taylor & Sniezek, 1984). Consistent with this hypothesis, Sydiaha (1961) reported that the interviews of eventual selectees were characterized by fewer interviewer questions and more attempts to solve candidate problems.

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).

A third hypothesis is that the type of screening questions asked of applicants may change as interview priorities change. For example, it is possible that interviewers who are under strong recruitment pressures may ask fewer questions that are likely to disqualify applicants from further consideration. Although this hypothesis has not been directly tested, Carlson, Thayer, Mayfield, & Peterson (1971) reported that inexperienced managers who were instructed to assume they were "behind quota" evaluated applicants less stringently than those who were ahead of quota or had no quotas.

A final prediction is that interviewers who place a high priority on recruitment give the applicant more explicit information about the organization's post-interview decision processes, and initiate earlier contacts following the interview (Hanigan, 1987). Although research has suggested that earlier contacts and repeated followups may favorably influence applicant decisions (e.g., Arvey, Gordon, Massengill, & Mussio, 1975; Invancevich & Donnelly, 1971; Soelberg, 1967), there is no firm evidence that organizations with a strong recruitment orientation adopt these practices to a greater extent than others.

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' 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' 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 applicants' expectations of receiving a job offer. Perceived likelihood of receiving an offer was significantly associated with recruiter personality and recruiter informedness about the applicant and the job in question. These same variables were also correlated with applicants' 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.

In an attempt to circumvent these problems, Rynes and Miller (1983) obtained college student reactions to a series of experimentally controlled videotaped interviews. Tapes were varied in terms of recruiter affect, specificity of

recruiter-provided job information, and attractiveness of job attributes. Recruiter affect had a sizeable impact on subjects' perceptions of the applicant's performance and whether or not the applicant would receive a second interview.

It should be noted that in the preceding study, applicant behaviors were held constant across videotapes. As such, the study did not address the self-fulfilling prophecy prediction that interviewer behavior may also affect applicants' objective interview performance (e.g., Dipboye, 1982; Schmitt, 1976).

Even if interviewers do affect applicant expectancies, however, additional processes are required to explain how differing expectancies might translate into different job choices. One possibility is that applicants with high expectancy perceptions are more motivated to actively pursue alternatives (Vroom, 1964). Increased pursuit, in turn, increases the likelihood of actually receiving an offer (Schwab, et al., 1987), which in turn enhances the probability that the job will ultimately be chosen.

Another possibility is that expectancy perceptions may have a direct impact on perceived job valence. Indeed, there is some evidence that jobs that are perceived as attainable may benefit from cognitive distortions that increase their perceived attractiveness (Soelberg, 1967). Conversely, jobs that are viewed as unattainable may suffer from a "sour grapes" phenomenon.

(Valence Perceptions). Interviewers may influence job choices not only through their effect on applicant expectancies, but also through their impact on perceived job attractiveness. Previous research suggests that valence perceptions may be altered either through indirect (signalling) or direct (marketing) processes.

The signalling hypothesis suggests that interviewer behaviors are interpreted by applicants as "cues" concerning unknown organizational or job characteristics (Rynes, et al., 1980). Although attributes such as starting salary or location may be quite obvious at the time an offer is extended, other characteristics (e.g., promotion opportunities, considerate supervision) can only be inferred or estimated. Thus, for example, interviewers might be viewed as symbolic of the "typical" company employee in terms of friendliness, competence, formality, and other characteristics.

There is some evidence that interviewer behaviors do affect applicant perceptions of organizational attractiveness, at least at early stages of the recruiting process. For example, Schmitt and Coyle (1976) found significant relationships between recruiter personality and informedness on the one hand, and perceived increase (or decrease) in organizational favorability and likelihood of offer acceptance on the other. However, interpretation is clouded by the correlational nature of the data, as well as the inability to determine precisely which recruiter behaviors are associated with what organizational characteristics.

These difficulties were at least partially overcome in Rynes and Miller's (1983) laboratory experiment. There, manipulations of recruiter affect (eye contact, nodding, smiling) were found to have a positive effect on perceptions of how the company treats employees, but not on overall job attractiveness or beliefs about how well the company rewards employees.

Finally, Taylor and Bergman (1987) correlated three sets of interview characteristics (recruiter descriptions of interview processes, applicant descriptions of recruiter behaviors, and recruiter demographics) with applicant perceptions of job attractiveness and probability of job offer acceptance.

The degree of interview structure (as reported by recruiters) was significantly associated with applicants' probabilities of accepting job offers. In addition, applicants' (but not recruiters') perceptions of recruiter empathy were positively associated with perceived organizational attractiveness and likelihood of accepting an offer.

Several recruiter demographic characteristics (being older, female, and from the personnel department) were negatively associated with perceived organizational attractiveness. In addition, being interviewed by a recruiter with a bachelors (rather than masters) degree decreased the stated probability of job offer acceptance. These results, combined with similar experimental findings (for age and job title) by Rogers and Sincoff (1978), suggest that there may be a "status" element associated with certain interviewer demographics.

In sum, 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.

Meta-analytic evidence suggests that "realistic" recruiting messages (those that include larger proportions of negative and neutral information) do in fact have a negative effect on applicants' propensities to accept job offers (Premack & Wanous, 1985). However, realistic recruiting has also been associated with longer tenure among those who do accept offers (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985).

Methodological difficulties preclude precise understanding of the processes responsible for these findings, as well as the net utility to employers of providing realistic rather than marketing treatments. For example, one possible explanation for the higher retention of "realistic" recruits is that the most marketable applicants disproportionately self-select out of the recruiting process when confronted with negative information. If so, the higher retention rates of acceptees who receive realistic previews may be due to the fact that they reflect a less marketable subset of the original applicant pool.

Apart from the issue of accuracy and detail, applicants may also be influenced by the relative attention devoted to various attributes in the recruitment process. Unfortunately, scores of "attribute importance" studies have not yet provided definitive answers as to which attributes are of greatest concern to applicants in job choice (e.g., Lawler, 1971; Schwab et al, 1987).

Schwab et al. (1987) and Rynes (in press) have hypothesized that a number of general factors are likely to influence the relative importance of attributes in the job choice decision. These include the extent to which the attribute can be known with certainty prior to choice (e.g., location versus promotional opportunities), the extent of attribute variability across alternatives (e.g., high variability in hours but low variability in pay for nurses), and the extent

to which the attribute is directly comparable across alternatives (e.g., pay versus developmental opportunities). Others hypothesize that the relative importance of different attributes varies as a function of applicant demographics (e.g., Lawler, 1971), personality characteristics (e.g., Whyte, 1955) or work experience (e.g., Ullman & Gutteridge, 1973).

The professional literature suggests that recruiters believe they could recruit much more effectively if they only knew "what applicants are really looking for" (e.g., Krett & Stright, 1985, Stoops, 1985). Unfortunately, little is known about how recruiters answer this question, how their answers affect what they tell applicants and, finally, how variations in those messages influence applicants' decisions.

Other Influences on Applicant Decisions

As Figure 1 illustrates, there are a variety of factors other than the interview that influence recruitment success. These include the state of the labor market (e.g., Schwab, 1982), vacancy characteristics (e.g., Hanssens & Levien, 1983; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), applicant characteristics (Thurow, 1975), and recruitment practices other than the interview (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985).

A full review of the impact of these factors on applicants' attitudes, job choices, and post-hire behaviors is outside the scope of this paper (for more detailed treatments see Rynes, in press, or Schwab et al., 1987). However, it is important to keep in mind that some of these factors, particularly vacancy characteristics, have been shown to have strong effects on applicant attitudes and decisions.

Indeed, in cases where vacancy and recruitment variables have been studied simultaneously, vacancy characteristics have strongly dominated recruitment in terms of variance explained in job attractiveness, likelihood of job

acceptance, and actual job choice (e.g., Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). The implication, of course, is that recruitment practices in general, and the interview in particular, are limited in the extent to which they can influence job acceptance and post-hire behaviors.

Future Research

If correct, the model suggests that the recruitment effects of employment interviews cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. As a practical matter, it makes little sense to scrutinize the impact of interviewers' nonverbal behaviors on applicants' post-interview impressions, if applicant decisions are "swamped" by labor market conditions and vacancy characteristics. Thus, researchers are urged to follow the lead of Taylor and Bergmann (1987) in studying multiple aspects of recruitment at various recruiting phases.

A good deal of basic descriptive research is needed to validate, modify, or disconfirm the model. For clarity of exposition, research questions suggested by the model will be categorized according to content and process issues.

Content Questions

1. **Do labor market variables and vacancy characteristics influence the perceived importance of recruitment?** The model hypothesizes that factors such as general labor shortages, low wages, or high turnover rates increase the priority attached to recruitment. If true, these conditions should be associated with (a) higher recruiting priorities among organizational executives (both line and human resource managers) and (b) increased expenditures on recruitment (e.g., per cent headcount or budget devoted to recruiting).

Therefore, future researchers might attempt to establish relationships between hypothesized exogenous variables (e.g., labor market conditions, organizational characteristics) and the degree of emphasis placed on recruitment.

Measurement of these exogenous factors would benefit from the use of data bases not generally associated with recruitment research (e.g., IRS Statistics of Corporate Income, Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment and Earnings Data, Bureau of the Census Population Industrial Characteristics, and consulting firm data). By using sources such as these, researchers can avoid the common method variance associated with typical recruitment surveys, where all data are obtained from the same (subjective) sources (e.g., organizational recruiters or placement directors).

2. Does perceived importance of recruitment influence organizational recruitment practices? The model suggests that a strong recruitment emphasis should translate into such activities as careful selection and training of organizational representatives, increased scrutiny of applicant decision processes, and more extensive evaluation of recruiting outcomes. Future researchers should attempt to determine whether strong recruiting priorities do in fact translate into the kinds of practices believed to improve recruiting effectiveness (e.g., Boudreau & Rynes, 1985; Rynes & Boudreau, 1986).

3. Do the recruiting priorities of top-level executives "filter down" to individual recruiters and hiring managers? Presumably, recruiting effectiveness will not improve unless those involved in actual recruitment and hiring procedures also adopt a recruitment priority mentality. Research is needed to determine whether, and how, recruitment priorities can be successfully instilled in operating managers and recruiters. Possibilities include increased communications regarding recruitment objectives and successes, or special training to sensitize interviewers as to how their actions might influence applicant decisions.

4. **Do recruiters and hiring managers who place a high priority on recruitment behave any differently than those who do not?** The model suggests that interviewers who place a high priority on recruiting will display a more positive affect toward applicants, be better informed concerning vacancy and applicant characteristics, spend more time trying to solve applicant problems, and pursue applicants more aggressively, both prior to and following the initial interview. To date, little is known about whether this is actually the case. A related question concerns whether or not recruiters are able to implement these tactics on their own, or whether specific training is required to induce these behaviors.

5. **Do recruiters induce "self-fulfilling prophecy" behaviors on the part of applicants?** Although there is evidence that prior information about applicants can exert a biasing effect on interviewer behaviors and decisions, there is no direct evidence that interviewer behaviors cause distortions of applicant behavior. Such evidence might be obtained by confronting applicants with different kinds of interviewer behaviors (e.g., positive versus negative nonverbal cues, little versus extensive knowledge of the applicant's resume), and observing how applicants respond under the various conditions (e.g., effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal presentation, time spent talking, etc.). At least initially, such research would probably best be pursued in experimental settings, where close control can be exerted over recruiter behaviors.

At issue is the question of how much information interviewers should have at their disposal prior to the interview. On the one hand, research has shown that recruiters who demonstrate more knowledge of an applicant's background leave a better impression on the applicant (e.g., Schmitt & Coyle, 1976). On the other hand, Dipboye (1982) and others have suggested that unfavorable

information about an applicant could cause a recruiter to exhibit negative, rather than positive, behaviors.

To date, most of the evidence suggesting positive reactions to extensive interviewer information has come from field studies. As such, it is possible that selection bias may partially account for the results. That is, recruiters may only take the time to address questions of applicant-vacancy "fit" when the applicant's resume has already created a favorable impression.

6. What interviewer characteristics are most likely to "signal" organizational attributes? The model hypothesizes that recruiter characteristics and behaviors (e.g., attire, affect, question content) may signal general organizational characteristics (formality, employee relations climate, attitudes toward minorities and women) to applicants. To date, little is known about which interviewer characteristics create inferences about particular organizational characteristics.

8. To what extent is the information that applicants receive about organizational and job characteristics accurate? Previous research has clearly shown that perceived job and organizational attributes dominate applicant job choices. However, this research has relied almost exclusively on applicants' self reports of perceived vacancy characteristics. It should be recognized that these perceptions are, at least in part, a function of interviewers' marketing "pitches" as well as actual vacancy characteristics. Research has shown that new employees consistently experience reductions in perceived valence once they actually begin working (e.g., Vroom, 1966). To the extent that interviewer recruiting strategies exert an independent influence on valence perceptions, over and above true vacancy characteristics, some of the variance

previously attributed to job characteristics might more appropriately be attributed to recruitment.

Process Questions

A general contribution future researchers might make is to disentangle the processes responsible for a number of commonly observed empirical findings. For example, most field research has found significant correlations between subjects' descriptions of recruiter behaviors, perceptions of job attractiveness, and behavioral intentions. However, these studies have not determined the extent to which perceptions of attractiveness arise from: true vacancy characteristics, interviewer representation of those characteristics (marketing effects), or subject inferences or assumptions about those characteristics (signalling or halo effects). Similarly, despite two meta-analyses of realistic job preview research, the processes through which pre-hire information affect post-hire attitudes and behaviors are still not well understood (Premack & Wanous, 1985).

A second process contribution would be to delineate the likely effects of selection bias and sample attrition on recruitment research findings. For example, it is not known whether differences in results across early versus late recruitment stages (e.g., Taylor & Bergmann, 1987) reflect differences in the effects of recruitment variables, or selection biases due to nonresponses from sample "drop-outs."

Similarly, most realistic job preview research has been based only on "selectees". Even where differences in job acceptance rates have been reported across conditions, no attempt has been made to correct for potential selection and self-selection biases. Thus, there is a need for more careful tracking of applicant pools over time, and more extensive measurement of applicant

characteristics (beyond basic demographics) so that appropriate adjustments can be made for sampling bias.

This kind of research would appear to be particularly important in that the practical implications of good versus poor recruitment may not be well reflected in measures such as "change in R^2 " or " ω^2 ". The detrimental effects of poor recruitment (e.g., negative applicant self-selection) will be underestimated to the extent that only volunteers from the "survivor" population are represented in results.

Finally, experimental research in field settings would be particularly helpful in delineating the potential benefits of improved recruitment practices. There is a great need to determine whether recruiting effectiveness can in fact be improved by following normatively prescribed practices. For example, large organizations could train recruiters in the use of applicant-sensitive interview techniques, and then measure whether or not any improvements are noted in applicant feedback, second interview acceptances, and the like. Similar studies could be done for other aspects of recruitment as well (e.g., choice of recruiting sources, modified timing of campus visits). Studies of this type are already well-developed in the armed services, where attempts have been made to determine what effects recruitment activities and expenditures have on enlistments, holding other factors (e.g., unemployment rates, military to non-military pay ratios) constant (e.g., Hanssens & Levien, 1983).

In sum, much work remains to be done before we will fully understand the recruitment aspects of employment interviews. However, these effects cannot be examined in isolation from a variety of other factors (other recruitment practices and labor market, applicant, and vacancy characteristics) that are likely to have an impact on both interview processes and outcomes.

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Author Notes

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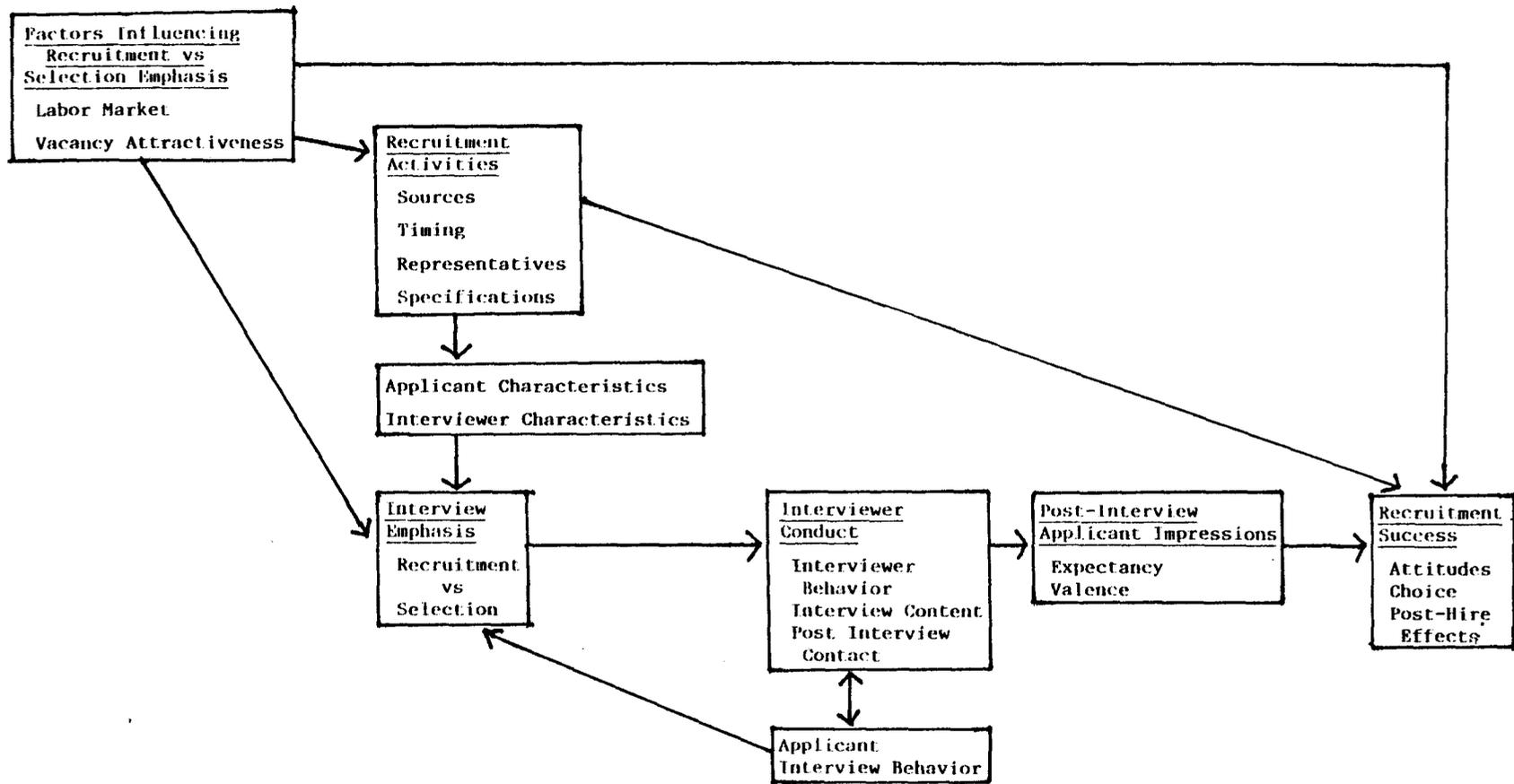


Figure 1. The Employment Interview as Part of the Applicant Attraction Process