11-1-1990

The Importance of Recruitment in Job Choice: A Different Way of Looking

Sara L. Rynes
University of Iowa

Robert D. Bretz Jr.
Cornell University

Barry A. Gerhart
Cornell University

The Importance of Recruitment in Job Choice: A Different Way of Looking

Abstract

Recent literature reviews have called into question the impact of recruitment activities on applicants' job choices. However, most previous findings have been based on cross-sectional ratings obtained immediately after initial screening interviews, thus raising questions about the degree to which prior conclusions are bound to that particuJar methodology. In contrast, the present study used longitudinal structured interviews to let job seekers explain, in their own words, how they made critical job search and choice decisions. Interview transcripts revealed that recruitment practices played a variety of roles in job seeker decisions. For example, consistent with signalling theory, subjects interpreted a wide variety of recruitment experiences (recruiter competence, sex composition of interview panels, recruitment delays) as symbolic of broader organizational characteristics. In addition, a number of "contingency" variables emerged that seemed to affect the perceived signalling value of recruitment experiences (e.g., prior knowledge of the company, functional area of the recruiter). Also notable were the strongly negative effects of recruitment delays, particularly among male students with higher grade point averages and greater job search success. Finally, our results suggest that certain applicant reactions may be systematically related to sex, work experience, grade point average, and search success. The article concludes with practical and research implications.

Keywords

Disciplines

Human Resources Management

Comments

Suggested Citation

The Importance of Recruitment
in Job Choice:
A Different Way of Looking

Sara Rynes
College of Business Administration
University of Iowa

Bob Bretz & Barry Gerhart
Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies
Cornell University

Working Paper #90-24

Abstract

Recent literature reviews have called into question the impact of recruitment activities on applicants' job choices. However, most previous findings have been based on cross-sectional ratings obtained immediately after initial screening interviews, thus raising questions about the degree to which prior conclusions are bound to that particular methodology. In contrast, the present study used longitudinal structured interviews to let job seekers explain, in their own words, how they made critical job search and choice decisions. Interview transcripts revealed that recruitment practices played a variety of roles in job seeker decisions. For example, consistent with signalling theory, subjects interpreted a wide variety of recruitment experiences (recruiter competence, sex composition of interview panels, recruitment delays) as symbolic of broader organizational characteristics. In addition, a number of "contingency" variables emerged that seemed to affect the perceived signalling value of recruitment experiences (e.g., prior knowledge of the company, functional area of the recruiter). Also notable were the strongly negative effects of recruitment delays, particularly among male students with higher grade point averages and greater job search success. Finally, our results suggest that certain applicant reactions may be systematically related to sex, work experience, grade point average, and search success. The article concludes with practical and research implications.

Recent research findings have cast doubt on the importance of recruitment in applicants' job choices. For example, a recent meta-analysis concluded that the presentation of "realistic" versus "inflated" recruitment messages has little, if any, effect on applicants' job acceptance rates (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Similarly, it has been argued that recruiters have little effect on job choices, once job characteristics are taken into account (Powell, 1984; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). Recruitment delays and other administrative aspects have also been reported to have little apparent impact on applicants' decisions (e.g., Rynes & Boudreau, 1986; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987).

However, these recent findings are at odds with earlier research which suggested that recruiters, recruitment timing, and other aspects of the job search process might have substantial effects on the allocation of applicants to vacancies (Rynes, Heneman & Schwab, 1980). For example, using an interview methodology, Glueck (1973) concluded that "in over a third of the cases, the recruiter was the major reason the applicant chose a particular company" (p. 78). Additionally, on the basis of archival data, Arvey, Gordon, Massengill & Mussio (1975) found that delays between recruitment phases had substantial effects on the size and composition of the applicant pool. Similarly, Soelberg's (1967) longitudinal tracking of job-seeking business students suggested that recruitment timing (e.g., getting to an applicant before other employers do) might have substantial effects on eventual choices.

The popular press also appears to attach greater importance to recruitment than do recent academic findings. Professional and business journals continue to assert that applicants can be wooed not only through improved job attributes, but also through better-planned and more attentive

recruitment procedures (e.g., Bureau of National Affairs, 1989; Marcus, 1982; Stoops, 1984). Recent job acceptees also stress the importance of competent recruitment practices in securing applicants' acceptances (Gerstner, 1966; Luck, 1988).

In sum, although recent academic research has tended to conclude that little variance in applicants' decisions is accounted for by recruitment practices, earlier academic research and the practitioner literature suggest that recruitment experiences can be very important in job choice. Hence, two questions arise: What factors account for these different views, and is one "more correct" than the other?

Neither question, particularly the second, can be answered definitively on the basis of current evidence. However, following an extensive review of the job search and choice literatures, Schwab, Rynes and Aldag (1987) concluded that "different results were clearly associated with substantial differences in the methodology employed" and that, as a result, "judgments must be made about the likely sources of invalidity of the various approaches" (pp. 153-154).

Accordingly, Schwab et al. (1987) examined likely sources of invalidity for the two most common job choice methodologies: cross-sectional questionnaire rating research (the dominant recent method) and longitudinal interview research. Although strengths and weaknesses were acknowledged for both approaches, Schwab et al. concluded that, on balance, open-ended longitudinal research was likely to give a truer picture of applicants' search and choice processes:

> "Although previous studies of sequential search have left some
> unanswered questions, we nevertheless believe that the
> methodologies used by these researchers are likely to prove

more useful....For one thing, sequential methodologies have
traced job seekers' reactions over time. This would seem to be
a prerequisite for observing the full range of search and
evaluation behaviors, as well as the great variation in
strategies that may be employed by different
individuals".....Demand characteristics (in questionnaire rating
research) may cause subjects to provide expectancy,
instrumentality, and valence estimates for multiple attributes,
even though they do not actually make their decisions on the
basis of those attributes" (p. 154-155).

Similar conclusions were reached by Rynes and Barber (1990), who

reviewed previous recruitment research from an organizational

strategy perspective:

"In most cases, existing studies are extremely simplistic when
evaluated against real-world attraction complexities. In
particular, most studies have examined single strategies and
limited dependent variables at single phases of the attraction
process. For example, recruiter research has been dominated
by applicant impressions at the campus interview...with few
exceptions, our present knowledge of actual practices is
insufficient to provide much guidance...as such, we recommend
that would-be prescriptive researchers begin by becoming
more 'informed' by solid descriptive findings" (Rynes & Barber,
pp. 305-307).

In light of the preceding comments, we felt there was a potentially

major contribution to be made by letting job seekers tell us, in their own

words, how they made the various decisions leading up to job choice. One

anticipated benefit of this approach was to obtain a better understanding of

the underlying "psychology" of job choice and its relationship to

organizational recruitment practices. Another was its potential for generating

future research questions by getting "closer" to the subjects of investigation:

"One finds many instances where closeness to sources of data
made key insights possible -- Piaget's closeness to his children,

Freud's proximity to and empathy with his patients, Darwin's closeness to nature, and even Newton's intimate encounter with an apple. In short, closeness does not make bias and loss of perspective inevitable, and distance is no guarantee of objectivity" (Patton, 1990, p. 48).

The present research is based on structured, open-ended interviews conducted at two points in the job search process. According to Patton (1990), interviews are the most basic form of qualitative inquiry in that subjects' responses are unconstrained by "writing skills of the respondents, the impossibility of probing or extending responses, and the effort required of the person completing a (written) questionnaire." Although findings from this method are "longer, more detailed, and more variable in content" and "analysis is difficult because responses are neither systematic nor standardized," the method is regarded as valuable because it "enables the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, p. 24).

In adopting this methodology, we are moving in a direction consistent with recent developments -- both empirical and theoretical -- in a wide variety of decision contexts (e.g., capital investment decisions, strategic business decisions; group decision processes). Empirically, for example, there has been a steady increase in qualitative, small-sample observational or interview studies that seek to determine how decision makers "construe reality" in particular environmental contexts (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989a; Gersick, 1989; Isabella, 1990; Saunders & Jones, 1990). Theoretically, researchers have called for methodologies that would lead to a better balance between search and choice, process and outcome, and induction and deduction (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989b; Lord & Maher, 1990; Tsoukas, 1989; Yin, 1989). The

present study represents an attempt to nudge the current balance in job search and recruitment research toward a greater concern for search, process, and contextual fidelity.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 41 graduating students from four colleges (arts and sciences, engineering, industrial relations, and business) of a major northeastern university. Because we wished to identify a wide range of recruitment experiences and reactions, the sample was chosen to be as broadly diversified as possible within size limitations.[1]

Diversity was achieved with the help of the four placement directors, each of whom was asked to nominate ten job seekers who, taken as a set, would maximize variability on factors such as race, sex, academic performance, articulateness, self-insight, and likely employability.[2] Although certain "objective" elements of diversity (e.g., race, sex, grade point) could have been obtained through formal records, these characteristics often show little relationship to applicant reactions (e.g., Harris & Fink, 1987) or job search outcomes (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Smith, 1990). Because of their close contact with job-seeking students, placement directors were in the best position to identify less tangible -- but perhaps more important (see Rynes & Gerhart, 1990) -- determinants of job search experiences such as interpersonal skills, articulateness, self-confidence and goal orientation.

The end result of this nomination process was a sample that was, in fact, highly diversified in terms of background characteristics, job search and interview timing,[3] search intensity, and search success (table 1). Moreover, the fact that "objective" qualifications (i.e., grade point averages, internships, work experience)[4] were uncorrelated with any of the measures of search

success (e.g., site visits or job offers) suggests that our strategy to sample students with a wide range of intangible as well as observable characteristics was a wise one.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

There also were several statistically significant relationships among subjects' background characteristics. For example, those with full-time experience were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and internships (Table 1). This makes sense because internships and extracurricular activities are often pursued as substitutes for full-time experience, prior to a first job search. In addition, males and graduate students began thinking about search earlier than did women and undergraduates, while students with higher grade point averages (GPAs) took later interviews.

The colleges sampled were also quite diverse (see Table 2). For example, colleges ranged from undergraduate only (arts and sciences) to mixed graduate-undergraduate (engineering and industrial relations) to graduate only (business). Colleges also differed in terms of the amount of prior work experience of their students ($F = 6.07$), the number of extracurricular activities ($F = 2.47$), and the number of campus interviews ($F = 3.71$).

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Procedure

In order to capture decision dynamics, each student was interviewed at two points in the job search process. Initial interviews were conducted in the first few weeks (late January-early February) of the second semester of 1990. At this point, most students had spent somewhere between 1-3 months in the campus interview process. A resume was also collected as part of the

interviewing procedure; this was used to generate information about work experience, grade point average, extracurricular activities and offices held.

The second round of interviews began in late March and continued until early May. The intent was to wait long enough to produce substantial variation in search experiences, but not so long that subjects became unavailable or unwilling to complete second interviews (final exams began in the second week of May). Within this range, attempts were made to schedule second interviews 8-10 weeks after the first, such that those who interviewed earlier in the first round also interviewed earlier in the second. However, scheduling was constrained to some extent by subject availability, given that subjects were still full-time students and traveling to anywhere between 1-20 site visits.

Interviewers were research assistants of the principal investigators and placement directors. All interviewers were given identical training prior to each interviewing round. Prior to finalizing interview content, all interviewers, the principal investigators, and the industrial relations placement director gathered together to discuss the entire interview, question-by-question. Any ambiguities about question wording or intent were resolved, and a revised interview prepared.

Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to more than an hour. Given that there were substantial differences in length across interviews conducted by the same interviewer, length appeared to be mainly a function of the articulateness and task involvement of the subject. Although longer interviews resulted in more numerous and/or elaborate "critical incidents," there is no evidence that length was systematically correlated with differences in response *content* (e.g., whether particular factors such as delays or recruiters were mentioned as being important to a decision).

Interview Questions

The data described in this paper were derived from a broader investigation of recruitment and job search processes. The principal investigators (and two of the placement officials) had long been intrigued by the frequency with which both recruiters and applicants mentioned the importance of "fit" in their decisions, often without being able to articulate precisely what they meant by the term (e.g., Bretz, Ash & Dreher, 1989; Ricklefs, 1979; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Given this interest, a decision was made to investigate how job seekers (and recruiters) assess fit over the course of the job search and recruitment process.

Given our limited understanding of both the fit construct (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990) and job choice processes in general (see Schwab, et al, 1987), the use of researcher-generated rating questionnaires seemed premature. Accordingly, a decision was made to use structured, open-ended interview questions based on a "critical incidents" approach (questions are reproduced in the appendix).

Although our methodology was not precisely identical to the critical incidents technique outlined by Flanagan (1954), both interviews were designed to elicit information about reactions to specific companies and specific decisions made with respect to those companies (e.g., not to accept a site visit). Hence, most of the data reported here do in fact refer to "critical" components of judgments and decisions, rather than to abstract impressions about recruiters, fit, or job choice in general. By having subjects focus first on particular organizations, events, or decisions, it was then easy for most of them to recall specific incidents that led to those impressions and decisions.

Within this general framework, the two interviews were segmented to tap different phases of the job search process. The first focused primarily on

how applicants form initial impressions of fit with various organizations. This question is of critical importance in filling interview schedules, but has been largely ignored in previous recruitment research (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Questions asked for three specific examples of good (perceived) fit, three examples of poor fit, examples of good fit and bad fit that ran counter to peer opinions, and positive and negative changes in assessments of fit since beginning job search. In each case, named examples were probed to determine the beliefs, incidents, or causes underlying the initial or changed fit assessment.

The second interview focused more on later phases of the search process (e.g., site visits and job choices) and general impressions of recruitment practices *per se*. These latter questions were added because, although the study had initially been conceived as a "fit" rather than a "recruitment" study, casual inspection of first-round transcripts suggested a large role for recruitment variables in general fit assessments. For this reason, several specific questions about recruitment (questions 12-14 in the appendix) were added to the second interview.[5]

Analyses

All 82 interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read in their entirety by the three principal investigators, who independently designed alternative coding schemes for summarizing the data. After developing a consensus scheme and instructions, actual coding was performed by one of the investigators and a research assistant. The two coders agreed in 93% of the cases; the final 7% were resolved by a different principal investigator. On no question did interrater agreement fall below 85%. To facilitate reader comprehension, the specific coding of each question is discussed concurrently with the results.

Because the main point of this study was to gain insight into the cognitive processes associated with job search, statistical findings were supplemented by a considerable amount of content-based interpretation. That is, after reviewing the descriptive statistics pertaining to a particular question, transcripts were re-examined for insight into the incidents, judgments, and processes underlying the quantitative results. In most cases, content analysis added substantially to our understanding of the psychology and emotion (Lopes, 1987) of job search and choice decisions. Sample quotations are provided throughout the results section to illustrate this point.

Additional analyses (e.g., t-tests, one-way analyses of variance) were performed to detect potentially important relationships between applicants' personal characteristics and their search and choice behaviors. Although these analyses are clearly exploratory, they are nevertheless conservative in at least three ways. First, some real relationships are likely to go undetected due to our modest statistical power.[6] Second, two-tailed significance tests were used throughout, despite the fact that reasonable directional hypotheses could have been offered in some cases (e.g., sex, work experience, search success), but were not due to space limitations. Third, the bulk of our questions were very nondirective, which probably led to underreporting of recruitment incidents by subjects with limited self-insight, articulateness, or motivation to be interviewed.

Results

On average, subjects attended 18.0 campus interviews, 6.6 site visits, and received 3.0 job offers. As such, the results that follow are based on a total of 738 campus interviews and 271 site visits.

First Interview: Assessments of Initial Fit and Early Changes in Fit Assessment

At the beginning of the first interview, subjects were asked to name three companies they thought would provide the best fit to their employment objectives (question 2 in appendix), as well as three that would produce the worst fit (question 3). In addition, they were asked to name companies for which their personal assessments of good fit and poor fit ran counter to general impressions among their peers (questions 4 & 5).

Preliminary analyses of these questions revealed that three distinct sets of variables were responsible for early fit perceptions: (a) perceived job and organizational characteristics (hereafter shortened to "job characteristics"), (b) interactions with formal organizational representatives, and (c) contacts with other people (besides recruiters) already in the organization. Six variables were created to reflect these categories (three variables for positive fit responses, three for negative). Responses were coded "1" if the category was mentioned as a reason for inferring fit, and "0" otherwise. Thus, a subject who mentioned job characteristics and organizational acquaintances as reasons for positive fit assessments, but only recruitment experiences as a reason for negative fit assessments, would be coded "1,0,1,0,1,0."

Analyses revealed that every single subject mentioned job characteristics as important factors in positive assessments of initial fit (table 3, item 1). Although a full content analysis of job characteristic responses is beyond the scope of this paper (footnote 5), commonly mentioned characteristics included general company reputation, attitude toward the product or industry, perceived status of the subject's particular functional area (e.g., marketing, design, human resources) in the company, perceived training or advancement opportunities, and geographic location. Press

coverage appeared to play a considerable role in some subjects' impressions, particularly coverage concerning environmental sensitivity, business ethics, and personnel practices (e.g., laying off senior workers while hiring new ones; failure to give notice regarding impending layoffs).

In addition, 12 subjects specifically mentioned that initial contacts with company representatives had been responsible for early impressions of good fit:

> "I was really impressed by __. They interviewed about a hundred people in a day. Then, based on the initial interview, people were asked to re-interview the next day in different divisions. So instead of just putting resumes in a pile and having people look at them, they were on the ball. Before we went through this process, they had a nice reception, they talked to us about it and explained how it worked...I was really impressed by that" (female engineering undergraduate).

> "The woman from __ was top-notch and did a great job of recruiting. She was a real big factor in my decision to do the on-site with them and to follow through (female graduate in industrial relations; ultimately accepted this offer).

Exploratory analyses also revealed two background characteristics associated with the tendency to mention recruitment experiences as a basis for initial assessments of positive fit assessments. Specifically, those who mentioned recruitment had less full-time work experience ($t = 2.01$; $p < .05$) and began thinking later about job search ($t = 2.38$; $p < .05$).

Having friends or acquaintances already in the organization was at least partially responsible for positive assessments among nine subjects. All nine of these subjects were female, a significant difference at $p < .01$.

Turning to reasons for negative initial assessments of fit, 39 subjects mentioned job characteristics, 23 mentioned recruitment or recruiters, and one mentioned a disliked acquaintance. Note that the number forming

negative impressions on the basis of recruitment is nearly double the number forming positive impressions on this basis. Consider the following examples:

> "_____ has a management training program which the recruiter had gone through (sic). She was talking about the great presentational skills that _____ teaches you, and the woman was barely literate. She was embarrassing. If that was the best they could do, I did not want any part of them. Also, ___ and ___'s recruiters appeared to have real attitude problems. I also thought they were chauvinistic." (female arts undergraduate)

> "One firm I didn't think of talking to initially, but they called me and asked me to talk with them. So I did, and then the recruiter was very, very rude. Yes, *very* rude, and I've run into that a couple of times." (female engineering graduate)

On average, those mentioning recruitment as a reason for negative impressions of initial fit had lower GPAs than those who didn't (t = 2.85; p < .01).

Following questions about initial impressions, subjects were asked to consider whether they had *changed* their impressions of specific companies in either a positive or negative direction (questions 6-7 in appendix). Here, changes fell into two categories: changes due to acquisition of more detailed job information, and those due to recruitment representatives or practices. Again, these categories were not mutually exclusive; a subject could attribute a changed assessment to both reasons (coded "1,1") or only one ("1,0" or "0,1").

Ten subjects reported no negative changes in impressions regarding early favorites. Among those who did, 23 cited revised information about job characteristics, while 16 mentioned recruiters or recruitment experiences:

"For example, the ___ companies (specific industry) wouldn't
put even one woman on my schedule. That scares me. I would
ask to have a woman put on my schedule and at best, maybe
there would be one" (female industrial relations graduate).

"The guy at the interview made a joke about how nice my nails
were and how they were going to ruin them there due to all
the tough work" (female engineering undergraduate).

There were also some differences in background characteristics among those who reported negative changes in assessment due to recruitment. Those who attributed negative changes to recruitment had lower GPAs ($t = 2.19$; $p < .05$); more internship experience ($t = 1.90$; $p < .10$), and were more likely to be female ($t = 2.04$; $p < .05$).

In terms of positive changes in fit assessments (table 3, item 4), 20 attributed these changes to improved information about job characteristics, while 16 mentioned recruitment or organizational representatives:

"I wasn't sure of the fit at first. But after talking with people there, I
feel there is a pretty good fit. I have talked to seven people there and
liked all of them. They also hired a lot of people from (this program)
last year. I look for sincerity and good followup when trying to assess
fit" (female MBA).

"They invited me to a closed schedule, and I wasn't really sure. I didn't
know enough about the company to decide whether I liked them or not.
But I loved the people who came to interview me. I thought it was a
really good sign that the company sent two women recruiters to
interview. And then when I went down to my plant visit, probably half
the people I saw on my schedule were female managers, and to me
that's a big plus for the company" (female MBA, ultimately accepted this
offer).

There were no discernible differences in background characteristics between those who mentioned recruitment as a reason for revised perceptions of fit in a positive direction, and those who didn't.

Second Interview: Later Changes in Assessments, Site Visits & Job Choices

The second interview began with general questions about the number of interviews, site visits and job offers acquired, and whether or not subjects had accepted an offer. These were followed by other questions concerning changes in impressions since the first interview.

One way of assessing changed evaluations was to ask whether the jobs accepted by subjects (or, in the case of the 10 without acceptances, the job they hoped or expected to accept) had been among their initial favorites. More than half our subjects (n = 23) said that it was not (table 3, item 5a). In addition, a cross-check of responses from the earlier interview revealed an additional two subjects who, although they said they had chosen an initial favorite, had not mentioned the chosen company as one of their three "best-fitting" companies in the first interview. In short, these findings suggest that more than half our subjects were open to a substantial amount of positive influence during the search and choice process.

Given the large proportion of individuals who took (or expected to take) jobs with companies that were not initially favored, it is instructive to examine the reasons behind the changes (item 5b). Nineteen of the 23 self-reported changers cited new information about the job or organization. In addition, 14 explicitly mentioned recruitment and/or the treatment they had received on site visits. Of particular importance were the status of the people met during recruitment, the extent to which applicants felt "specially" treated, the organization's flexibility in scheduling visits, and the professionalism of the site visit (e.g., amount of "down time"). Also, it is interesting to note that although we did not explicitly track all job offers, only one subject seemed to have changed favorites involuntarily. The rest all seemed to be genuinely enthusiastic toward their choices, consistent with earlier arguments that by

the time job-takers announce their decisions, they have adjusted their attitudes to be cognitively consistent with their decisions (Soelberg, 1967; Vroom, 1966).

In terms of individual differences, those who were positively influenced by recruitment treatment were more likely to be female ($t = 2.93$; $p < .01$), to have interviewed later ($t = 1.95$; $p < .10$), to have taken more site visits ($t = 1.88$; $p < .10$), and to have engaged in fewer extracurricular activities ($t = 2.30$; $p < .05$).

It is also instructive to look at changes in the opposite direction -- that is, why subjects lost interest in organizations that were once initial favorites (items 6a-b, table 3). Of the 35 subjects indicating that they had lost interest in at least one initial favorite, 20 mentioned improved information about job characteristics. However, 20 also mentioned organizational representatives and/or recruitment practices:

> "_____ had a set schedule for me which they deviated from regularly. Times overlapped, and one person kept me too long which pushed the whole day back. They almost seemed to be saying that it was my fault that I was late for the next one! I guess a lot of what they did just wasn't very professional. Even at the point when I was done, where most companies would have a cab pick you up, I was in the middle of a snowsorm in Chicago and they said, 'You can get a cab downstairs.' There weren't any cabs. I literally had to walk 12 or 14 blocks with my luggage, trying to find some way to get to the airport. They didn't book me a hotel for the night of the snowstorm so I had to sit in the airport for 8 hours trying to get another flight...they wouldn't even reimburse me for the additional plane fare" (female industrial relations graduate student).

> "I had a very bad campus interview experience...the person who came was a last minute fill-in...I think he had a couple of "issues" and was very discourteous during the interview. He was one step away from yawning in my face...The other thing

he did was that he kept making these (nothing illegal, mind you) but he kept making these references to the fact that I had been out of my undergraduate and first graduate programs for more than ten years now..." (female MBA with 10 years experience).

Another nine volunteered that delays caused their loss of interest. On average, those who mentioned delays as a reason for losing interest had more job offers than those who did not (t = 2.79; p < .01).

A more behaviorally-based question pertaining to loss of interest concerned whether (and why) job seekers had turned down any invitations for site visits (items 7a-b, table 3). Twenty-eight subjects turned down at least one visit, the most frequent reason being that the invitation came too late in the process (20 cases). Fifteen refused visits because they perceived the job to be less attractive than their other alternatives, while six cited a combination of timing and perceived job attractiveness.

On average, experienced workers (t = 2.19; p < .05) and graduate students (t = 2.18; p < .05) were less likely to reject site visits due to lateness. These findings suggest greater tolerance for prolonged job search among applicants who have worked before.

Three respondents turned down site visits because of negative experiences with campus recruiters. This is a fairly dramatic response to a poor recruiter, although the numbers involved are quite small. Because negative reactions of one interview party probably "infect" the other party as well (Dipboye, 1982; Eder & Buckley, 1988), it seems likely that many applicants who had negative reactions to particular recruiters did not receive any further invitations to "reject."

Second Interview: Reactions to Recruitment Practices

Up to this point, all reported results were obtained in response to questions that did not ask anything about recruitment practices *per se*. In the sections that follow, we report on responses to direct questions about recruiters, delays, and general recruitment practices.

Recruiters. Previous research has suggested that recruiters do not have much impact on job choices, particularly when compared against characteristics of the vacancy itself (e.g., Rynes, in press; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Wanous & Colella, 1989). However, these findings have typically been obtained with respect to subject ratings of the most recent interview experience. As such, they are likely to underestimate the extent to which "extreme" recruiter behaviors might influence decisions. For this reason, we asked subjects how much their willingness to accept job offers was influenced by either "very good" or "very poor" recruiters (question 13; appendix).

Open-ended responses to this question fell into three categories: strong influence (coded "2"), some or "qualified" influence (e.g., "It depends on whether I have other offers" or "It depends on how much I know about the company," coded "1"), and little or no influence (coded "0"). As table 3 indicates (item 8), the vast majority of subjects felt that they were either strongly or somewhat influenced by recruiters. The only background characteristic that differentiated the degree of reported influence was the number of offices held ($r = .27$; $p < .05$).

Content analysis was very revealing in terms of the psychological mechanisms underlying the degree of influence. Generally speaking, influence seemed to depend almost entirely on the extent to which recruiters were seen as reliable signals of what it would be like to work for the company:

"There were a lot of companies that I had little or no
information about, other than what they make. I generalize a
lot about the company from their representative. If that
person is not very sharp, does not seem to be particularly
interested in me, or asks the same questions as every other
recruiter, it does not impress me" (male undergraduate with
four job offers).

"It's a real big factor....I guess it's an impression I get of what
the entire organization is like, and whether that's right or
wrong, it's real. I would assume that the company would want
to send the best person they possibly could to represent them.
If they're sending a person who is not very good, that tells me
something about how they view this whole process -- that
they're not aware of the impression these people make."
(female graduate student with three job offers).

Conversely, those who accorded the recruiter less influence did so

because they believed recruiters were *not* representative of the

organization:

"If they are very bad, it just leaves me where I was. I just
chalk it up; there are always going to be bad apples and that is
just a bad apple" (female arts undergraduate).

"Interviewers aren't necessarily representative of the company
at all, so even if I have a bad first interview, if I like the
company or the position, I'll take a second interview regardless
of whether I liked the person, because I don't necessarily
connect them with the company" (*sic;* female MBA).

Some of the responses also included clues as to*why* certain recruiters

were regarded as more valid signals than others. For example, signalling

influence was greater when subjects knew little about the organization:

"If I didn't know much about the company, (the recruiter)
probably influenced me a lot. If I did know about it, probably
less so" (male industrial relations undergraduate).

"If they're very good and being very encouraging, then they
make me' want to work for the company. If they're very bad, it
would be just the opposite, unless the company had a really big
name. One of my ___ interviews was rotten, but I already
knew enough about ___ to know what ___ was like. They have
such a huge name (that) I knew this guy was just a jerk"
(female engineering undergraduate).

On the other hand, signalling influence was lower when the

representative was not from the applicant's functional area.   As one engineer

put it, "I don't really care how personnel people treat me...personnel people

really don't understand anything about me or my work."   Finally,

representatives seemed to be scrutinized more closely once applicants began

to experience success in the labor market.   At that point, recruiters had to

work very hard to get their organizations into the applicant's "feasible choice

set," while a poor representative often sealed the organization's fate.

Curiously, many subjects who reported being completely unaffected by

recruiters volunteered that the people they met on site visits (potential

managers, coworkers, and incumbents from different areas) were very

important to their choices.   Many subjects were highly suspicious about the

motives of campus recruiters (but, curiously, almost never about the motives

of on-site representatives), while others had misgivings about the extent to

which campus recruiters actually understood the vacancy and its

requirements.

Another (small) group of applicants seemed to recognize the self- and

social desirability elements involved in questions about recruiter impact.

These people believed that it was somehow "irrational" to be influenced by

recruiters, but worried that they might have been anyway:

"Consciously, the recruiter doesn't matter, but I'm sure that
subconsciously it does. If the person makes you feel more

comfortable, then you'll feel more comfortable about the job"
(male engineering undergraduate).

"I usually *try* not to let it affect me because you can't really let
one person represent an entire organization." (But subject -- a
male arts undergraduate -- goes on to say that two recruiters
made him so angry he only completed the interviews so as not
to embarrass the placement director).

Finally, consistent with self-fulfilling prophecy arguments by Dipboye

(1982), a number of subjects indicated that recruiter behaviors probably had

subtle effects on their own interviewing performances:

"If a recruiter is not that good and things don't click, you don't
get past that (first interview) stage anyway because you don't
make a good impression" (female arts undergraduate).

"I don't think it affects the job choice as far as actual offers go,
but it affects your first impression and it affects how you go
into your second interview, and (that) can really alter how
(well) the second interview goes" (female MBA).

Recruiting Delays. Previous studies have reported mixed results as to

whether or not applicants are adversely affected by delays. For example,

using archival data, Arvey, Gordon, Massengill & Mussio (1975) found that

delays reduced the size of the available applicant pool, particularly among

minorities. In contrast, neither Rynes and Boudreau (1986) nor Taylor and

Bergmann (1987) found evidence of an adverse effect on applicants.

However, Rynes and Boudreau's results were based on perceptions of

recruitment administrators, while Taylor and Bergmann's sample suffered

from severe attrition (and, hence, possible selection bias) over the course of

the study.

In the present study, 39 of the 41 subjects named at least one

organization that was very late (subjectively interpreted) in getting back to

them (Table 3, items 9a-c). Presumed causes of late followups fell into two

distinct categories: inferences about self, and inferences about the organization.

The largest group (n = 28) attributed delays to personal rejection or relegation to second-choice status. These subjects differed from those who did not mention possible rejection by having begun interviewing later in the season (t = 2.00; p < .05) and having received fewer job offers (t = 2.10; p < .05). In general, the impression created by subjects inferring rejection was one of lower self-confidence and qualifications:

> "I assumed I was going to get a ding letter, which is what usually happens when you don't hear from a company within a few weeks. So I started to look at other options and I didn't take that company as a serious option" (female arts undergraduate with no honors, no leadership positions, no experience, and no job offers).

> "Companies who were late, I did not think that the initial interview had been very well" (sic; female industrial relations undergraduate with lowest grade point average in the sample).

On the other hand, 21 subjects made organizationally-based attributions (rather than, or in addition to, personal ones). Generally speaking, subjects who attributed delays to organizational characteristics appeared to be more highly qualified than those who did not: they had higher GPAs (t = 1.91; p < .10), started thinking earlier about job search (t = 4.24; p < .01), and had experienced greater search success (t = 2.26 for campus interviews, p < .05; t = 3.15 for site visits, p < .01; t = 2.19 for job offers, p < .05). They were also more likely to be male (t = 2.97; p < .01) and graduate students (t = 1.85; p < .10). The greater tendency of more qualified applicants to attribute delays to organizational characteristics can be seen in the following examples:

> "Being very confident, and with my background, ... I felt pretty sure I would be chosen. For me, it was more a sign of (their) not being on the ball, or (being) administratively inept. I didn't

look at it as a personal thing, their not getting back to me; I looked at it as a negative on the company." (male Hispanic graduate student with three years of work experience and eight job offers).

"I would think that within 2-3 weeks they should be giving some response; my assumptions were either a disorganized staff, or else they were pulling my chain. In either case, I was not impressed....I had indicated at the beginning that I had a pretty busy schedule, and the fact that they got back to me late meant I had already committed to others. I just eliminated them from my list." (male undergraduate with Japanese language skills and six job offers).

"If they work (the schedule) with your needs in mind, it can really work to their advantage. But they don't realize that... They don't look at it as them competing with 45 other companies for 17 of us (industrial relations graduate students). They just think, 'Everyone *must* want to work for *us!*'" (female graduate student with four years experience and four offers).

It should be noted that a few of the subjects who attributed delays to organizational factors made inferences that were less negative than those quoted above. Some said generally forgiving things like, "They're running a business, and a lot of things happen in business that we don't know about," while others had more specific reasons for giving a charitable interpretation (e.g., they had been warned about the delay, the organization had never done college recruiting before). Still, these examples were in the minority, as most delay-related attributions were decidedly negative in tone.

Finally, subjects who had experienced delays were asked to indicate whether those delays had affected their willingness to take jobs. Responses fell into four categories (item 9c, table 3), with the largest number (n = 20) saying either that delays had "definitely" affected their willingness, or offering specific examples of organizations whose followup came too late to

matter. Relatively speaking, males were more affected by delays (t = 1.81; p < .10), as were those with higher grade point averages (r = .34; p < .05).

Content analysis of subjects' reponses suggested that even when delays did not have direct effects on job choices, they might have had *indirect* effects, either by triggering more elaborate information processing or by allowing the individual to generate alternative offers in the meantime:

> "I think (the delay) caused me to look deeper at certain parts of the company, to look more at the planning, to see if there was something I missed, or if it was something that just happened in my case...So it didn't necessarily affect my willingness to take a job with the company, but it did suggest that I *had to look at certain things about the company a little more closely than I might otherwise have done"* (male industrial relations graduate).

> *"Especially after I had an offer, I started judging more.* In the beginning, it was just, 'Like me, *please* like me'" (male industrial relations undergraduate).

Overall recruitment practices. The final question asked subjects to indicate the extent of their agreement with the following statement: "When it comes right down to it, recruitment practices are not very important because people choose jobs on the basis of things like pay, location, and reputation rather than recruitment" (1=strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). This was the only question in the entire interview that required an explicit numerical rating. Its negative phrasing was designed to avoid "mom and apple pie" responses (e.g., "Yes, of *course* recruitment is important!")

The mean rating (3.5) indicated that subjects disagreed slightly with this statement; that is, they found recruitment to lean toward being "important." However, the actual distribution was skewed around a modal response of "2" (table 3, item 10). As such, the "typical" respondent thought

recruitment was considerably more important than suggested by the mean rating.

A one-way analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences in reported importance by college (p < .05), with industrial relations students rating it most highly ($\bar{x}$ = 2.7), followed by engineering (3.2), business (3.8), and arts (4.2). Two things are potentially interesting about this result. First, most of the industrial relations students were looking for jobs in human resources. As such, one would expect recruitment experiences to have more signalling value for these students than for any others. Second, on average, industrial relations students had the most job offers while arts students had the least. According to Rynes, et al. (1980) and Breaugh (1983), recruitment's importance would be expected to increase in situations where individuals have more freedom of choice.

Interestingly, differences in importance were also significantly related to whether or not subjects had experienced delays in the recruitment process (the average rating of those who did not experience delays was 6.5, as compared with 2.8 for those who did; p < .01). This suggests that out-of-the-ordinary recruitment experiences may increase recruitment's salience to applicants. Finally, rated importance was higher for those with more internship experience (r = -.28; p < .10), but lower for those with more extracurriculars (r = .26; p < .10) and higher grade point averages (r = .29; p < .10; scale reverse-scored).

Explanations of the more "extreme" responses to this item (1 or 2, 6 or 7) were very illuminating. As with the question about recruiter impact, the biggest differentiator between high and low-importance groups was the extent to which they viewed recruitment practices as valid indicators of what it would be like to work for the company. Consider the following examples:

"I think a lot of people look at recruiting practices as reflective of the company, and in many cases that's absolutely accurate. Despite the fact that other factors matter, people do make choices based on how they're treated and how they feel about what's happening. If someone feels they've been treated badly, even if it's just one person who is screwing up all the way, I think that would sway their decision......You don't have a real perspective on the world of work" ("2" response; female industrial relations graduate student with highest grade point average in the sample).

"Recruiting doesn't really matter at all; only the job itself" ("6" response, female arts undergraduate)

In addition to revealing a difference in the perceived signalling value of recruitment experiences, content analysis revealed another interesting finding: that most (if not all) of the "6" and "7" responses could arguably be classified as rating errors. This conclusion is based on the fact that these subjects' justifications of their ratings seemed to contradict the rating *per se*, as indicated in the following examples.

First, several "low-importance" respondents used an extremely narrow conceptualization of "recruitment practices" in assigning their ratings. In particular, there was a tendency to define recruitment as consisting solely of campus recruiters from personnel departments: "When it comes right down to it, the people who really sell the company are not the human resources people, but rather the people students are actually going to work with" (male arts undergraduate). The engineering undergraduate who said he didn't "pay attention to personnel because personnel doesn't know the job" also fit into this category, even though he contradicted himself in the very next sentence: "Of course, if the interviewers really give me a bad opinion, then it's totally over."

The rest of the low-importance respondents either restricted their vision to effects on ultimate job choices (ignoring earlier effects on job search), or based their ratings only on "typical" recruitment practices, ignoring the influence of extreme experiences:

> "Recruitment is just the means to get that far (to the job choice). If you go through recruitment and you get a job offer, recruitment doesn't have an impact on the job choice, *but you had to like the recruitment and agree with it to get that far*" (female arts undergraduate).

> "Recruiting doesn't really matter at all; only the job itself. (Two sentences later): I suppose recruitment does play a secondary role in that if the person really ticks me off, *my enthusiasm goes way down and I start wondering what kind of people they have in the company*" (female arts undergraduate).

Finally, two of these respondents seemed to be saying that recruitment "shouldn't" be important, although it might be (to someone else):

> "It didn't affect me at all, (although it probably does affect)... those who are looking shorter term, or those who were not considering taking a job, but were swayed by recruitment" (male industrial relations undergraduate).

> "Recruitment doesn't mean anything...it's a game and I think a *lot of people get screwed by it*" (male arts undergraduate; only "7" rating).

In conclusion, these responses do not seem to support ratings of recruitment as "very unimportant." Rather, they seem to suggest that a number of people think that it either shouldn't be important, or wish that it weren't. In any event, the divergence between the ratings per se and their justifications raises some interesting methodological questions.

Discussion

The primary objective of this research was to generate new insights about recruitment dynamics through use of a less structured, more intensive methodology than has commonly been employed in the job choice area. In this section, we discuss the major areas in which our results shed new light or raise new questions about prior recruitment research.

Timing and Delays. One of the major revelations of this research concerns the extent to which timing (particularly delays) was mentioned as an important factor in applicants' impressions and decisions. To recap, our results suggest that: (1) long delays between recruitment phases are not uncommon; (2) negative inferences are usually drawn in response to delays; (3) the inference that something is "wrong" with the organization is more likely to be made by the most marketable job seekers, and (4) regardless of the inferences made, candidates take other offers if delays become too extended.

These results are in conflict with recent findings using other methodologies (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), but are highly consistent with earlier longitudinal job choice research (e.g., Reynolds, 1951; Soelberg, 1967). Soelberg, for example, argued that job seekers' anxiety and their desire to get the choice "settled" causes them to perceptually distort evaluations in favor of early rather than late alternatives. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which "perceptual distortions" were operating in this study, preferences for quick followup and the tendency to tire of extended job search characterized a majority of our subjects as well.

Regardless of the psychological mechanisms, the fact remains that late market entries and delayed followups often cost job acceptances (see also Arvey, et al., 1975). This suggests that organizations pay particular attention to getting applicants' attention early, and then keeping it through prompt followups and feedback.

Individual Differences. A second important finding in our study concerns the vast differences in individual search and choice strategies. Subjects varied widely in terms of when they started search, how many interviews they pursued, whether they turned down site visits, the credibility they attached to campus recruiters, the attributions they made concerning delays, and so on. Moreover, at least some of these differences appeared to be systematically related to identifiable background characteristics and to job search success. A summary of observed differences in search and choice behaviors is presented in table 4.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

Turning first to sex differences, women seemed to be more affected than men by their interactions with recruiters and potential coworkers. Women were more likely to mention acquaintances as reasons for initial interest in organizations, and recruitment interactions as reasons for unfavorable changes in fit assessments and for decisions to take jobs in companies that were not initial favorites.

Relatedly, it is interesting to note that many women continue to experience what they regard as "offensive" recruitment interactions. A *post hoc* content review revealed that fully 50% of our female subjects described at least one negative gender-related experience. This would seem to be a very high figure, considering that no explicit questions were asked about bias. Examples of offensive incidents included inappropriate comments about

women's personal appearance, negative comments about other "minority" groups (e.g., elderly workers), being asked to interview in a man's hotel room, and receiving correspondence addressed to "Mr." even after an initial interview. Other negatives for women (though not necessarily "offensive") included failing to meet any managerial women on site visits, getting the feeling that things were run according to an "old boys' network," or being explicitly told that women tend not to advance as fast as men.

Moreover, research suggests that it may well be "rational" for women to attach credence to such signals. For example, sociological studies have shown that promotion and pay prospects are in fact more favorable for women in organizations that already have larger proportions of women and minorities, particularly at high levels (e.g., Fierman, 1990; Konrad & Pfeffer, in press; Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987). As such, not being able to get an interview with a woman, seeing no women at high levels, being told that the organization is "pretty macho," or feeling that the organization is run like a men's club *is* a cause for concern, on average.

On the other hand, although women were more seriously affected by recruiters and recruitment interactions, men were more greatly affected by delays and more likely to attribute delays to organizational causes. These findings are consistent with a large body of prior research suggesting that men are less likely than women to attribute negative outcomes to their own shortcomings (e.g., Deaux, 1984; Hansen & O'Leary, 1985; Lenney, 1977). Moreover, because men received significantly more job offers than women in our study, they would have had both less reason to question their own marketability and greater freedom to "write off" late respondents.

A number of differences were also observed with respect to previous work experience. Specifically, more experienced subjects were more likely to

pursue all site visits, and less likely to mention campus recruiters as reasons for positive fit assessments. Conversely, subjects with more internship experience (on average, those with less full-time experience; $r = -.49$) were more likely to mention recruitment as a reason for negative changes in perceived fit and to rate overall recruitment practices as more important. Generally speaking, then, experienced subjects appeared to be less affected by recruitment practices and more focused on acquiring information about the job itself. Although this pattern was predicted more than a decade ago (Rynes, et al., 1980), it has not previously been detected in ratings-based studies. Of course, additional research is necessary to replicate the present findings.

Additionally, subjects with higher grade point averages seemed to display greater confidence in their search strategies than lower-GPA subjects. For example, high-GPA subjects took later first interviews, were less likely to be negatively swayed by recruitment experiences, were more likely to attribute delays to organizational causes, had more negative reactions to late-responding organizations, and rated recruitment practices as less important than low-GPA subjects.

Finally, evidence suggests that applicants who were more successful in job search were also more affected by recruitment experiences. For example, students who received more site visit invitations were more likely to mention recruitment as a reason for accepting a job with an initially non-favored organization; those who had more offers were more likely to lose interest following delays, and those with more interviews, site visits, and job offers were more likely to make negative organizational inferences following delays.

Signalling Theory and Contingency Variables. It has been proposed that because job choice takes place under imperfect information, recruitment

experiences frequently serve as signals of unobservable organizational characteristics (e.g., Rynes, et al., 1980 or Rynes & Miller, 1983; following Spence, 1973). Our results not only provide strong support for signalling theory, but also reveal some of the contingency variables associated with variations in signalling strength.

For example, content analyses suggest that recruitment experiences have stronger signalling value when little is known about the organization prior to job search, when organizational representatives are in the same functional area as the applicant, and when experiences occur during the site visit as opposed to the campus interview. If generalizable, these observations have some interesting implications for organizations.

For example, the finding that functional representatives have a bigger impact than staff representatives suggests that it is doubly important to select and train these representatives to create positive impressions. And yet functional-area recruiters, hiring managers, and potential coworkers are probably least likely to receive such training because recruitment is viewed as something they do "alongside" their "real" jobs. Similarly, the fact that site visits transmit stronger signals than campus interviews suggests that improving overall recruitment impressions will be far more difficult (but also more important) than improving campus interviews.

Continued Existence of Unimpressive Recruitment Practices. Despite recent concern about dwindling supplies of qualified new entrants to the labor force (e.g., Deutschman, 1990; Johnston, 1987), despite increased awareness of the implications of recruitment and attraction for overall selection utility (e.g., Boudreau & Rynes, 1986; Murphy, 1986), and despite more than 25 years' worth of EEO enforcement (e.g., Scovel, 1991), our study suggests that poor recruitment practices continue to exist, even in Ivy League

placement offices. For example, in addition to the quotations presented earlier, campus recruiters in our study were variously described as "rude, boring, obnoxious, full of themselves, incompetent, barely literature, and just plain ___holes."

In some cases, negative recruitment experiences were enough to completely eliminate the organization from further consideration. In other cases, recruitment merely raised a "red flag" that caused applicants to apply more scrutiny than they otherwise would have. Recently, researchers using an elaboration likelihood framework (Petty & Cacioppo, 1988) have speculated about how to get applicants to process recruitment information in a "core" (i.e., attentive) rather than "peripheral" (superficial) fashion (e.g., Harris, 1989; Powell, 1991). The present research suggests that core processing often sets in when organizations least desire it -- that is, after very negative recruitment experiences!

Importance of Social Factors in Job Choice. Although social effects have been mentioned only briefly to this point, it is important to indicate that they were evidenced in a variety of ways in this research. For example, nearly a quarter of our sample chose at least one initial favorite on the basis of information from friends or acquaintances already inside the organization. Social effects were also seen in terms of common interviewing and bidding patterns, as well as exchanges of information about what occurred during interviews and site visits. For example, several applicants turned down visits to a particular organization when it became known that an entire day was "wasted" (subjects' words) flying to the organization, providing a urine specimen, and being put through a psychological assessment.

Another common topic of information-sharing concerned whether delays were being experienced by all interviewees, or only by oneself.

Finally, networks often revealed that an applicant's recently acquired job offer had already been rejected by someone else (usually a decidedly negative influence on perceived valence).

The prevalence of social exchange networks in campus recruiting has several implications for organizations. For example, organizations cannot count on interview questions or testing procedures remaining unknown over the course of a campus visit (see also Sackett, Burris & Ryan, 1989). Moreover, information about disliked recruiters or selection procedures is likely to set a negative tone for subsequent applicants.

On the more positive side, building strong recruitment networks through internships and multi-year hiring relationships can have beneficial effects, particularly in terms of enhancing applicant willingness to attend a first interview. More generally, our results support Granovetter's (1974) and Kilduff's (1988) contentions that social considerations merit additional attention in future job choice research.

Future Research

Although our study has some unique advantages over prior research in terms of data richness and contextual fidelity, the method could usefully be extended in future investigations. For example, one potentially important contribution would be to begin interviewing applicants earlier in the search process, and/or to track them through additional time periods. Another would be to keep a complete record of every contacted company (from campus receptions onward) so that applicant impressions and decisions can be more clearly separated from (or interpreted in light of) organizational actions and decisions. Still another improvement would be to track sufficiently large numbers of subjects to permit multivariate analyses. This would be particularly useful because certain characteristics tended to cluster

together in our sample (e.g., graduate status, more work experience and fewer extracurriculars; higher grade point averages and later job search; maleness and job offers).

The discrepant responses we observed between ratings and open-ended responses to the overall importance question suggests that additional research be conducted to understand the properties of each method as applied to job choice, as well as the relationships between them. On the basis of present results, we tentatively hypothesize that individuals are less guarded while "telling stories" in interviews than when responding to rating scales. If so, this reduced guardedness may translate into greater variability in responses which, in turn, may result in a greater ability to detect systematic sources of individual variation.

In addition, however, we suspect that some of the frankness of our transcripts was due to the fact that subjects were interviewed by student peers rather than professors or placement directors. We suspect that this arrangement provided benefits in terms of closer interviewer-subject rapport and reduced concerns about naming organizations and relaying negative incidents.

Additional contributions could be made by using methodologies that more closely mirror the way job choices are actually made. Although longitudinal interviews reveal more of job seekers' decision processes than do correlations among rating scales, they nevertheless capture those processes in a very loose way. More structured methods of longitudinal tracking would almost certainly shed new light on the relationships between recruitment and job choice processes.

It would also be interesting to probe the factors underlying the vast observed differences in such variables as trust in recruiters and enjoyment

(versus dread) of the job search process. Although some underlying factors emerged in this study, others remain a mystery.

Another useful type of research would be studies that seek to determine the cost-effectiveness of programs designed to improve recruitment image and outcomes. For example, field experiments could be used to monitor the improvement in yield rates and/or applicant quality when organizations implement recruiter training or improved systems for tracking followup delays. In a sense, this approach argues that the value of recruitment programs is "in the pudding": recruitment is important if greater investments in it pay off in terms of better yields, higher quality, or improved retention. Nevertheless, given that the strongest recruitment signals occur at very decentralized levels among functional-area employees, large organizations in particular would seem to confront major obstacles in trying to improve their recruitment outcomes. Practical research is sorely needed in this area (Rynes & Barber, 1990).

Conclusion

To the extent that our findings are even moderately generalizable, they suggest a somewhat different picture of recruitment than has emerged from ratings-based research. Although most researchers are more comfortable with the apparent precision (not to mention the ease and speed) of collecting large-sample ratings data, the present methodology has considerable advantages in terms of contextual fidelity and "feel" for the job seeker's decision task.

Recently, there has been a renewed call for intensive longitudinal research, both in general decision making and in job choice contexts (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989b; Lord & Maher, 1990; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, et al., 1987). Again, the objective is to supplement, rather than supplant,

conventional quantitative methods. Knowledge of job choice and recruitment processes might be strengthened considerably by adding a more in-depth perspective to the accumulating array of inferential statistics. We hope the present research will inspire others to apply similar methodologies in under-researched areas of recruitment and job choice.

Authors' Notes

Footnotes

1   Sample size was limited by the labor-intensiveness of the data collection process, the time constraints of interviewers and subjects (who were both carrying full academic loads while searching for jobs), and the labor-intensiveness of content coding and analysis procedures.

2   The industrial relations placement director nominated eleven subjects instead of ten. Although none of the original 41 nominees refused participation, two proved unreachable and were replaced by new nominees.

3   Subjects were asked when they first started thinking about job search. Fourteen subjects thought about search in the academic year prior to graduation (coded "0"); seven in the summer before the final year (coded "1"), and 16 in fall of the final year (coded "2"). Four responses were missing. Subjects were also asked when they took their first interview. Two took first interviews prior to fall of the final year (coded "0"), nine in September ("1"), nineteen in October ("2"), seven in November ("3") and one in January (coded "4"; three responses were missing).

4   Job offers were correlated with sex, however: men averaged 4.4 offers vs. 1.9 for women (p < .01). Although sex is typically observable, it is not a job-related qualification *per se.*

5   Because of the study's broad objectives, more data were collected than can feasibly be discussed in a single paper. Our decision rules for inclusion in this paper were: (1) to focus only on the applicant's perspective (recruiter data are not reported), (2) to summarize only the most general questions with fewest demand characteristics (these questions were also placed earliest in the interviews to avoid priming effects), and (3) to emphasize content analysis of recruitment-related responses to a greater extent than other kinds of responses (e.g., those concerning job characteristics).

By following these rules, recruitment effects appear as "findings" in this paper only to the extent that they were important enough to be mentioned, without prodding, in response to general questions about fit, preferences, and changes of preference. However, additional information (gathered subsequent to the information discussed within) was collected concerning more specific areas of interest to participating placement officials (e.g., incidence of and applicant reactions to drug testing, behavior description interviews, and psychological assessments; career intentions; usefulness of campus receptions or dinners). These data have not yet been formally analyzed by the authors. Additional information about study questions and coding is available upon request from the authors.

6   For example, with a sample size of 41, the power to detect a true correlation of .2 is only .25 at α = .05, or .35 at α = .10 (two-tailed test). For a correlation of .4, power is substantially improved: .75 at α = .05, and .84 at α = .10. In terms of t-tests, power to detect a difference (d) of .3 is .26 at α = .05 (two-tailed). Analogous figures are .43, .61, and .76 for d's of .4, .5, and .6, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Due to limited power and the exploratory nature of this research, we report findings that are significant at $p < .10$ or better.

References

Arvey, R.D. , Gordon, M., Massengill, D. & Mussio, S. (1975). Differential dropout rates of minority and majority job candidates due to time lags between selection procedures. Personnel Psychology, 38, 175-180.

Boudreau, J.W. & Rynes, S.L. (1985). Role of recruitment in staffing utility analysis. Journal of Applied Psychology, 70, 354-366.

Breaugh, J. A. (1983). Realistic job previews: A critical appraisal and future research directions. Academy of Management Review, 8, 612-619.

Bretz, R.D., Ash, R.A. & Dreher, G.F. (1989). Do people make the place? An examination of the attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis. Personnel Psychology, 42, 561-582.

Bureau of National Affairs. (1989). Now hiring: An employer's guide to recruiting in a tight labor market. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs.

Cohen, J. (1988). Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd edition). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Deaux, K. (1984). From individual differences to social categories: Analysis of a decade's research on gender. American Psychologist, 39, 105-116.

Deutschman, A. (1990). What 25-year-olds want. Fortune, 122, 5, 42-50.

Dipboye, R.L. (1982). Self-fulfilling prophecies in the selection interview. Academy of Management Review, 7, 579-586.

Eder, R.W. & Buckley, M.R. (1988). The employment interveiw: An interactionist perspective. In G.R. Ferris & K.M. Rowland (eds.), Research in personnel and human resources management (Vol. 6, 75-107). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989a). Making fast strategic decisions in high-velocity environments. Academy of Management Journal, 32, 543-576.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989b). Building theories from case study research. Academy of Management Review, 14, 532-550.

Fierman, J. (1990). Why women still don't hit the top. Fortune, 122, 3, 40-62.

Fisher, C., Ilgen, D. & Hoyer, W. Source credibility, information favorability, and job offer acceptance. Academy of Management Journal, 22, 94-103.

Flanagan, J.C. (1954). The critical incident technique. Psychological Bulletin, 51, 327-358.

Gerhart, B. & Rynes, S. (1991). Determinants and consequences of salary negotiations by male and female MBA graduates. Journal of Applied Psychology, 76, #2, forthcoming.

Gersick, C.J.G. (1989). Marking time: Predictable transitions in task groups. Academy of Management Jouranl, 32, 274-310.

Gerstner, L.V. (1966). College recruiting: Why the good ones get away. Management Review, 55, 4-12.

Glueck, W.F. (1973). Recruiters and executives: How do they affect job choice? Journal of College Placement, 34, 77-78.

Granovetter, M.S. (1974). Getting a job: A study of contacts and careers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hansen, R.D. & O'Leary, V.E. (1985). Sex-determined attributions. In V.E. O'Leary, R.K. Unger & B.S. Wallston (eds.), Women, gender and social psycholoy. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Harris, M.M. (1989). The recruitment interview as persuasive communication: Applying the elaboration likelihood model. In J. Breaugh, M. Harris & M.S. Taylor (Chairs), Organizational recruitment research: Taking stock and setting future directions. Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Washington, D.C.

Harris, M.M. & Fink, L.S. (1987). A field study of employment opportunities: Does the recruiter make a difference? Personnel Psychology, 40, 765-784.

Isabella, L. A. (1990). Evolving interpretations as a change unfolds: How managers consture key organizational events. Academy of Management Journal, 33, 7-41.

Johnston, W.B. (1987). Workforce 2000: Work and workers for the 21st century. Indianapolis: Hudson Institute.

Kilduff, M. J. (1988). Decision making in context: Social and personality correlates of choices of organizations. Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Konrad, A. & Pfeffer, J. (In press). Understanding the hiring of women and minorities: How gender and ethnic composition is produced and reproduced in educational organizations. Forthcoming in Sociology of Education.

Lenny, E. (1977). Women's self-confidence in achievement settings. Psychological Bulletin, 84, 1-13.

Lopes, L.L. (1987). Between hope and fear: The psychology of risk. In L. Berkowitz (ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 20, 155-295.

Lord, R.G. & Maher, K.J. (1990). Alternative information-processing models and their implications for theory, research, and practice. Academy of Management Review, 15, 9-28.

Luck, R. (1988). How industrial recruiters sell themselves short. Wall Street Journal, Manager's Journal, Sept. 26.

Marcus, R. (1982). The lavish wooing of legal whiz kids. Washington Post, Sept. 22, Outlook section, C1-C5.

Murphy, K.R. (1986). When your top choice turns you down: Effect of rejected offers on the utility of selection tests. Psychological Bulletin, 99, 133-138.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.). Newberry Park, CA.: Sage.

Petty, R.E. & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 19, 123-205.

Pfeffer, J. & Davis-Blake, A. (1987). The effect of the proportion of women on salaries: The case of college administors. Administrative Science Quarterly, 32, 1-24.

Powell, G.N. (1984). Effect of job attributes and recruiting practices on applicant decisions: A comparison. Personnel Psychology, 37, 721-732.

Powell, G.N. (1991). Applicant reactions to the initial employment interview: Exploring theoretical and methodological issues. Personnel Psychology, 44, 67-84.

Premack, S.L. & Wanous, J.P. (1985). A meta-analysis of realistic job preview experiments. Journal of Applied Psychology, 70, 706-719.

Reynolds, L.G. (1951). The structure of labor markets. New York: Harper and Row.

Ricklefs, R. (1979, September 19). The hidden hurdle: Executive recruiters say firms tend to hire "our kind of person." Wall Street Journal, pp. 1W, 1E.

Rynes, S.L. (In press). Recruitment, job choice, and post-hire consequences: A call for new research directions. In M.D. Dunnette & L. Hough (Eds.), Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2nd ed.). Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists' Press, forthcoming 1991.

Rynes, S.L. & Barber, A.E. (1990). Applicant attraction strategies: An organizational perspective. Academy of Management Review, 15, 286-310.

Rynes, S.L. & Boudreau, J.W. (1986). College recruiting in large organizations: Practice, evaluation and research implications.

Rynes, S.L. & Gerhart, B. (1990). Interviewer assessments of applicant "fit": An exploratory investigation. Personnel Psychology, 43, 13-35.

Rynes, S.L., Heneman, H.G. III & Schwab, D.P. (1980). Individual reactions to organizational recruiting: A review. Personnel Psychology, 33, 529-542.

Rynes, S.L. & Miller, H.E. (1983). Recruiter and job influences on candidates for employment. Journal of Applied Psychology, 68, 147-154.

Sackett, P.R., Burris, L.R. & Ryan, A.M. (1989). Coaching and practice effects in personnel selection. In C.L. Cooper & I. Robertson (eds.), International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Saunders, C. & Jones, J.W. (1990). Temporal sequences in information acquisition for decision makings: A focus on source and medium. Academy of Management Review, 15, 29-46.

Scovel, K. (1991). Testers to expose illegal hiring practices. Human Resource Executive, 5, 3, 10.

Schwab, D.P., Rynes, S.L. & Aldag, R.J. (1987). Theories and research on job search and choice. In K. Rowland & G. Ferris (Eds.), Research in personnel and human resource management, Vol. 5, 129-166. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Smith, C.L. (1990). Job search strategies: Their effects on job placement success. Unpublished master's thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Soelberg, P.O. (1967). Unprogrammed decision making, Industrial Management Review, 8, 19-29.

Spence, M. (1973). Job market signalling. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 87, 355-374.

Stoops, R. (1984). Reader survey supports market approach to recruitment. Personnel Journal, 63, 3, 22-24.

Taylor, M.S. & Bergmann, T.J. (1987). Organizational recruitment activities and applicants' reactions at different stages of the recruitment process. Personnel Psychology, 40, 261-285.

Tsoukas, H. (1989). The validity of idiographic research explanations. Academy of Management Review, 14, 551-561.

Vroom, V.H. (1966). Organizational choice: A study of pre- and post-decision processes. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 1, 212-225.

Wanous, J.P. & Colella, A. (1989). Organizational entry research: Current status and future directions. In K.M. Rowland & G.R. Ferris (Eds.), Research in personnel and human resources management, vol. 7, pp. 59-120. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Yin, R.K. (1989). Cast study research: Design and methods (revised edition). London: Sage Publications.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Male	.41	.50	0-1	1.00											
2. Grad students	.46	1.16	0-1	.17	1.00										
3. GPA	3.33	.32	2.7-3.8	.00	.39**	1.00									
4. Intern/Summer (Mo.)	6.31	5.25	0-20	-.12	-.25	.09	1.00								
5. Experience (Mo.)	19.77	29.82	0-120+	.20	.66***	.07	-.49***	1.00							
6. Extracurriculars	4.49	2.32	0-9	.11	-.09	-.09	-.03	-.49***	1.00						
7. Offices	1.44	1.29	0-4	.15	-.02	-.03	.02	-.03	.36**	1.00					
8. Think About Search	1.05	.91	0-2	-.36**	-.28*	-.10	.19	-.54***	.11	-.18	1.00				
9. Date of First interview	1.83	.81	0-4	-.09	.21	.31*	-.27	.14	-.09	.10	.16	1.00			
10. Campus interviews	18.03	8.64	2-40	.23	.22	.03	-.01	.02	-.02	.20	-.17	-.07	1.00		
11. Site Visits	6.63	4.78	1-20	.30*	.25	.21	-.07	.21	-.02	.01	-.36**	-.04	.36**	1.00	
12. Job Offers	3.00	2.85	0-15	.43***	.18	.18	-.02	-.02	.17	-.03	-.22	-.11	.16	.64***	1.00

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01 (two-tailed); N=41

Table 2: Sample Characteristics By College

Variable	College			
	Arts & Sciences	Engineering	Industrial Relations	Business
Male	.30	.40	.36	.60
Graduate Students***	.00	.20	.50	1.00
GPA	3.29	3.17	3.42	3.36
Intern/Summer (mo.)	5.88	6.70	8.42	3.44
Experience (mo.)***	.50	8.60	20.50	48.33
Extracurriculars*	5.50	5.50	3.83	3.33
Offices	1.13	1.50	1.50	1.56
Think about Search	1.38	1.38	1.73	2.22
Date of First Interview	2.00	1.38	1.73	2.22
Campus Interviews**	12.30	19.70	17.17	24.38
Site Visits	3.80	7.30	7.67	7.67
Job Offers	2.44	3.11	3.25	3.13

*p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01   (Omnibus F-test; N=41)

Table 3: Responses to Interview Questions*

First Interview:

1. Reasons for judging companies to be good initial fits and/or good initial fit even though peers are not attracted:

Job characteristics	4 1
Recruitment/representatives	12
Friends/acquaintances	9

2. Reasons for judging companies to be poor initial fits and/or poor initial fit even though peers are attracted:

Job characteristics	3 9
Recruitment/representatives	2 3
Friends/acquaintances	1
Not applicable: No poor fits	1

3. Reasons companies that were once perceived as good fits are now perceived as poor fits:

Job characteristics	2 3
Recruitment/representatives	1 6
N/A (No negative changes)	1 0

4. Reasons companies not perceived as good fits initially are now perceived as good fits:

Job characteristics	2 0
Recruitment/representatives	1 6
N/A (No positive changes)	1 3

Second Interview:

5a. Position accepted (or intended to accept) was favorite at beginning of job search:

No (self-report)	2 3
No (cross-check)	2 5
Yes (self-report)	1 8

Table 3 (Continued)

Recruiting Importance
51

5b. For initially non-favored positions, what happened to make them favorites?

Job characteristics   1 9
Recruiters/representatives   1 4
N/A (chose a favorite)   1 8

6a. Number reporting companies that were once attractive, but no longer:

Yes   3 5
No   2
Missing   4

6b. Reasons companies that were once attractive are no longer attractive:

Job characteristics   2 0
Recruitment   2 0
Delays   9

7a. Turn down any offers for site visits?

Yes   2 8
No   1 2
Missing   1

7b. Reasons for turn-downs:

Job characteristics   1 5
Delays/timing   2 0
Characteristics + timing   6
Recruiters   3
Not applicable   1 3

8. Extent to which very good, or very bad, recruiters influenced willingness to accept offers:

Strong influence   1 9
Some/it depends   1 9
Little/ no influence 3

9a. Number experiencing very long delays after first interview:

Yes   39
No   2

9b. Assumed reasons for delays:

Not favorite candidate   28
Disorganized organization   21
Both   12
Not applicable (no delays)   2

9c. Delays affected willingness to accept offers:

Yes, definitely   20
Somewhat/"depends"   11
No, not at all   8
N/A (No delays)   2

10. Extent of agreement that recruitment practices are *not* very important ("7" = very strong agreement):

"7" = 1 (recruitment not at all important)
"6" = 5
"5" = 4
"4" = 6
"3" = 9
"2" = 15
"1" = 1 (recruitment very important)

*   Figures represent number of subjects providing each response (overall N = 41). Data are presented in raw (rather than percentage) form because for some questions there are "not applicable" or missing responses.

Table 4: Significant Differences in Background Characteristics Associated with Job Search Behaviors, Impressions and Decisions

Male vs. Female:

Males began thinking about job search earlier (p < .05); Women more likely to mention acquaintances in organization as reason for positive fit assessment (p < .01); Women more likely to mention recruitment experiences as reason for negative change in fit assessment (p < .05); Women more likely to mention recruitment as reason for taking job with company not initially favored (p < .01); Males were more likely than females to make organizational attributions for recruitment delays (p < .01); Males were more likely to report being negatively affected by delays (p < .10).

Graduate vs. Undergraduate:

Graduates began thinking about search earlier than undergraduates (p < .10); Grads were less likely than undergrads to turn down site visits due to timing (p < .05); Grads were more likely than undergrads to attribute delays to organizational characteristics (p < .10).

Full-time Work Experience:

Less experienced were more likely to mention recruiters as reasons for positive fit assessments (p < .05); More experienced were less likely to reject site visits due to timing (p < .05).

Summer or Internship Experience:

More internship experience associated with more mentions of recruitment experiences as reasons for negative changes in fit assessment (p < .10); Those with more internship experience rated recruitment as more important (p < .10).

Extracurriculars and Offices:

Those with fewer extracurriculars were more likely to mention recruitment as a reason for taking job with organization not initially favored (p < .05); Those with more offices reported higher importance for recruiters (p < .05); Those with more extracurriculars rated recruitment as less important (p < .10).

Table 4 (Continued)

Recruiting Importance
54

Grade Point Average:

Students with higher GPAs took later first interviews (p < .10); Students with lower GPAs were more likely to form negative initial fit assessments on the basis of recruitment (p < .01) and more likely to change assessments in a negative direction due to recruitment (p < .05); Higher GPAs were more likely to make organizational attributions for recruitment delays (p < .10); Those with higher GPAs were more negatively affected by recruiting delays (p < .05); Those with higher GPAs rated recruitment as less important (p < .10).

Early vs. Late Job Search:

Those who thought about search earlier were less likely to mention recruiters as reasons for positive fit assessment (p < .05); Those who interviewed later were more likely to mention recruitment as a reason for taking jobs with organizations not initially favored (p < .10); Those who interviewed later were more likely to infer personal rejection from recruitment delays (p < .05); Those who thought about search earlier were more likely to attribute delays to organizational characteristics (p < .01).

Job Search Success:

Those with more site visits were more likely to mention recruitment as a reason for accepting jobs with organizations not initially favored (p < .10); Those with more job offers were more likely to lose interest in initially favored organizations due to delays (p < .01); Those with fewer job offers were more likely to infer personal rejection from delays (p < .05); Organizational attributions for recruitment delays were more likely to be made by more successful job seekers (those with more campus interviews, p < .05; more site visits, p < .01; and more job offers, p < .05).

Appendix

Content-Analyzed Interview Questions

First Interview:

1.   When did you first start thinking about your job search? When was your first interview?

2.   What three companies do you feel would provide the best fit with your employment objectives?   (Probe for specific reasons, incidents).

3.   What three companies do you feel would provide the worst fit with your employment objectives? (Probe).

4.   Are there other companies that most students are interested in, but where you do not feel you would fit well? (Probe).

5.   Are there other companies that most students are not interested in, but where you feel you would fit well? (Probe)

6.   Are there companies where you once thought you would fit well, but now don't think so?   (Get names; then probe to find specific reasons why not).

7.   Are there companies where you did not think you would fit well, but now do?   (Get names, probe for specifics).

Second Interview:

8.   To this point, how many on-campus interviews have you participated in?   How many on-site visits have you gone on? Did you turn down any offers for site visits?   If so, why?

9.   Have you received any job offers?   If so, how many? Have you accepted one?

10. **Think about the position you have accepted. Was it one of your favorite companies at the beginning of your job search?** If not, what specific things happened to change your mind? (An alternative form of the question was asked about the current "favorite company" for the ten subjects who had not accepted offers).

11. Are there any companies that were attractive to you earlier in the search process, but that you no longer find attractive? (Name them). If so, what happened to change your opinion?

12. Have you had any companies that were very late in getting back to you after the first interview? If "yes": What assumptions did you make about why they weren't getting back to you? Did the delay affect your willingness to take a job with them? Explain why/why not.

13. When on-campus recruiters are either very good or very bad, relative to other recruiters, to what extent does it affect your willingness to accept an offer? (Probe as to why it does/doesn't affect willingness).

14. This last question asks you to respond in terms of a 7-point scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." Having gone through the job search and choice process for some time now, to what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the following statement?: "When it comes right down to it, recruitment practices are not very important because people choose jobs on the basis of things like pay, location, and reputation rather than recruitment." (Get the number, then probe for explanations).