Employee recruitment and job search: Towards a multi-level integration

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ABSTRACT

This study describes an attempt to develop an integrative model of job search and employee recruitment. Inevitably multi-level in nature, the model demonstrates the interplay between organizational-level factors and individual-level factors in influencing the outcomes of employee recruitment and job search activities. According to the model, influenced by job seeker and organizational characteristics, job search and recruitment activities jointly create job awareness, which is the first step in organizational attraction. Next, depending on the job seeker's current job situation, this attraction leads to job pursuit intention and behavior. The model also emphasizes the longitudinal nature of the process by which individuals gain employment. Finally, since each organization's applicant pool consists of job seekers with some common characteristics attracted to the same position, the model proposes that recruitment and job search can be examined by utilizing a multilevel framework.

1. Developing a multilevel and integrative model of employee recruitment and job search

Since an organization's success is confined within the limits of its human capital, employee recruitment is a critical function for organizational survival (Phillips & Gully, 2015). Potentially as a result of this importance, many researchers have sought to examine and reveal the factors associated with successfully filling job openings. This has led to mountains of research examining predictors of applicant attraction to a job (e.g., Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). In a related vein, several other researchers have examined the process from the job-seekers' perspectives and strived to find the predictors of job search success. Thanks to this research, we now have a good amount of information about the predictors of success for organizations and individuals in reaching their employment goals. However, despite this research interest, the available literature has been criticized for lacking a bonding theory to organize the findings and guide future research (e.g., Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Ployhart, 2006). Although we know several linkages within the process such as some of the factors leading to job search success or predictors of applicant attraction to a job opening, no attempts have been made to integrate this vast amount of research into one integrative model, which delineates both the process by which individuals search for jobs and the process by which organizations search for employees.

Employee recruitment can be defined as activities that influence the number and types of applicants who apply for a position, stay in the applicant pool, and accept a job offer (Breaugh, 2008). A distinction can be made between types of recruitment efforts in terms of the targets of these activities. Specifically, while some recruiting practices are aimed at attracting individuals who are looking for jobs (i.e., active job-seekers), others target individuals who are currently employed by other organizations or are not interested in participating in the workforce but would potentially be open to job opportunities if offered (i.e., passive job-seekers). The main difference between these two groups is that active job-seekers can be attracted by relatively passive methods of recruiting such as posting information about a job opening on an online job board or a company website. However, these methods are not likely to work...
for the second group because these individuals are not likely to be searching for jobs. Accordingly, the way to reach those individuals is by specifically targeting them through more active approaches.

Traditional methods of recruitment (i.e., recruitment sources) include advertisements, employee/friend/relative referrals, employment agencies, internal job postings, walk-ins, campus visits, and job fairs (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Advertisements can also be divided into different types based on the medium (e.g., TV, internet, billboards, etc.) used to advertise about the job openings. In addition to these more traditional sources, online recruitment has also become an established practice for organizations in the last two decades as official company websites, online job boards, and more recently social networking sites are frequently used for this purpose (Acikgoz & Bergman, 2016). Social networking sites are especially useful for targeting passive job seekers given the vast number of individual profiles they contain. In fact, LinkedIn is a social networking site specifically designed for professional networking, and thus it is largely used by recruiters to locate and approach those individuals who are potentially good candidates for the job openings they are seeking to fill (Jobvite, 2016).

As can be inferred from the definition above, the ultimate goal of the employee recruitment is to fill job openings with individuals who possess the desired attributes. There are a few models of employee recruitment process in the literature which describe factors associated with an increased likelihood of reaching this goal (e.g., Breaukh, 2008; Celani & Singh, 2011; Schreurs & Syed, 2011). One common limitation of these models is the limited discussion of job search behaviors by potential applicants. However, any model which attempts to illustrate the recruitment process must take into account those activities performed by job seekers in search of an employment opportunity. Job search can be defined as goal-directed activities initiated by an individual in response to a real or perceived discrepancy between an employment goal and current state of affairs (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Commonly examined topics in the literature on job search include antecedents of different types of job-seeking behaviors and the extent to which these behaviors lead to the desired employment outcomes. According to one taxonomy, job search behaviors include preparatory and active job search behaviors (Blaau, 1994). Preparatory job search behaviors include the actions aimed at gathering information about potential job openings, while active job search behaviors include actually acting upon the information gathered in the first phase by sending out resumes, contacting potential employers, and interviewing with those employers.

Another distinction is generally made between job-search effort and job-search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search effort refers to the overall amount of effort spent by job seekers when looking for jobs, while job-search intensity involves the frequency with which specific job-seeking behaviors are performed. The literature on job search has generally examined the types, antecedents, and outcomes of job search behavior. The types of job search behaviors frequently examined in the literature include job source usage, job search intensity, and job search effort (Saks, 2006). As Kanfer et al. (2001) note, the extent to which individuals perform these job search behaviors has been found to be influenced by several antecedents including applicant personality characteristics, locus of control, optimism, self-esteem, job-search self-efficacy, motives (e.g., financial need), social support, and other demographic variables (age, gender, education, etc.). Finally, while the most frequently studied outcome is employment status after the job search, other outcomes such as number of job interviews, number of job offers, duration of job search, and perceptions of person-organization (P-O) fit and person-job (P-J) fit have also been studied (Saks, 2006).

Literatures on employee recruitment and job search, although from different perspectives, are in fact both examining the factors that lead to a job opening being filled by an appropriate candidate. While the research on employee recruitment examines the issue from the organizational perspective and thus is aimed at predicting factors which influence the quality and quantity of the applicant pool, the literature on job search examines the issue from the job-seeker perspective and thus investigates factors which influence whether or not an individual successfully lands a position which meets his or her expectations. Accordingly, in both research areas, the goal is to ensure that the right candidate fills the right job opening. Despite this deep connection, anyone who conducts a review of the studies published in both fields would realize that the literatures on job search and employee recruitment have followed their own paths without making a clear reference to one another. As an example, available meta-analyses on the subject limit their scopes to either job search activities by individuals (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001) or employee recruitment activities by organizations (e.g., Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Uggerslev et al., 2012).

This state of affairs is neither new nor unique to employment research. For example, in their update to the ASA framework, Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith (1995) emphasize this phenomenon by eloquently pointing to the “fundamental difference in paradigms between studies of people who work and studies of the attributes of organizations in which people work” leading to “a scholarly bifurcation characterized by two parallel, yet largely non-overlapping literatures (p.747)”. Schneider and colleagues further posit that because of the reasons pointed above, “… there has been a general failure to integrate the individual and organizational foci of theory and research inhibiting a full understanding of the reciprocal relationships that exist between individuals and their employing organizations (p.747)”. In the context of employment research, job search researchers whose goal is to offer practical implications to job seekers and career consultants have to take into account the ways in which organizations recruit in order to increase the chances that their recommendations are useful. Similarly, researchers examining how organizations can generate the applicant pool they desire have to have a clear understanding of the job search processes employed by potential applicants. This warrants that, unlike the current state of affairs, a comprehensive and integrative approach to the employment process, which takes both the applicant perspective and the organizational perspective into account, is needed to improve our understanding of the mechanisms through which a job opening is being filled.

With the lack of a comprehensive and integrative approach to job search and employee recruitment, it seems that the danger eloquently stated by Ployhart (2006) has actually become a reality for both streams of research. Specifically, the literatures on employee recruitment and job search are both fragmented into very complex micro theories, which are aimed at explaining the relationships between pairs of a large number of variables. This becomes evident after a review of the literature, as it appears that comprehensive models of job search and employee recruitment are scarce and were developed independently of each other (e.g.,
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