RECRUITMENT PROCESS OUTSOURCING: ONE SIZE FITS ALL? RECRUITER COMPETENCE AND FIRM REPUTATION EFFECTS

By Karen M. Landay

Though the use of recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) has increased in recent years, little research has examined the impact that RPO may have on applicants. This is particularly relevant as extant findings suggest that negative experiences during the recruitment process may be detrimental to organization attraction and job acceptance. Thus, this study uses signaling and critical contact theory to examine the main and interactive effects of RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived firm reputation on organization attraction.

I presented undergraduate students with hypothetical job application scenarios in which I manipulated RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived firm reputation. Results showed that respondents were more attracted to an organization when a recruiter was competent rather than incompetent and when perceived hiring firm reputation was positive rather than negative. There was no main effect of RPO use on organization attraction. However, I did find support for an interactive effect of RPO use and recruiter competence on organization attraction. Organization attraction was greater when RPO was not used than when it was used when the recruiter was competent, but the opposite was true when the recruiter was incompetent. This suggests that the relationship between RPO use and organization attraction may be dependent on other factors.

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Introduction

The use of recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), defined by Wehner, Giardini, and Kabst as "outsourcing of any activity concerning recruitment and selection," (2012: 604) has increased in recent years (Bailey, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005; Lawler, Ulrich, Fitz-Enz, & Madden, 2004; Syedain, 2008). For instance, in 2014 Kelly Outsourcing & Consulting Group conducted a global survey on RPO use with firms from a diverse group of industries (e.g., financial and business services, food and beverage, and manufacturing) that varied in size from under 500 employees to more than 5,000. According to their findings, 36% of respondent firms outsourced HR functions, and of those, 49% outsourced recruitment activities (Berklich, 2014). Overall, 40% of firms said that they would consider outsourcing a portion of the recruitment process in the future (Berklich, 2014). These findings demonstrate that RPO is currently being utilized fairly extensively in firms across the globe, and that its use will likely continue to increase (Berklich, 2014).

Despite its widespread adoption, many firms are using RPO without knowing much about the effects it may have on those who are arguably their most important stakeholders: applicants (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Chapman & Webster, 2006; Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). It is commonly accepted that employees are an important resource for an organization, as they can provide a source of competitive advantage (e.g., Pfeffer, 1994). Thus, the applicants who will become those assets must be treated with care. Numerous researchers have indicated that applicant perceptions affect how the applicant views the

organization and thus whether to accept an offer, recommend the firm to others, or even to purchase the firm's products or services in the future (Hausknecht et al. 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, & Stoffey, 1993).

This raises two important questions: First, does RPO have an effect on applicants, and second, if yes, what other factors might modify that effect? Both critical contact theory (Behling, Labovitz, & Gainer, 1968) and signaling theory (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhardt, 1991) suggest that RPO would negatively impact applicants. These theories propose that, particularly for inexperienced job seekers with limited firm information, the use of RPO would cause applicants to feel less valued during the recruitment process. For instance, if a hiring firm is tasking a third party recruiter with making initial assessments of qualifications, an applicant may feel that the hiring firm is not showing much real interest, and so the applicant may experience reduced attraction to the firm. Thus, RPO may signal that the employer does not feel their employees are important.

There is little research to date that has explored whether RPO would in fact have a negative effect on organization attraction. Wehner and colleagues (Wehner et al., 2012; Wehner, Giardini, & Kabst, 2014) found evidence of a negative relationship between the extent of RPO use – how much of the recruitment process is performed by an outside agency – and organization attraction. However, outside of the work by these researchers, there appears to be little additional research to confirm this effect. Further, only Wehner et al. (2014) have attempted to explore other factors that may be involved. Thus, more research is needed to see if organization attraction does vary depending on the use of RPO and to identify other factors that may be involved. In the current study I use an

experimental design to investigate the main and interactive effects of RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived reputation of the hiring firm on organization attraction.

My study contributes to the existing research on RPO in three ways. First, it adds to the limited studies that examine applicant reactions to RPO (Wehner et al., 2012, 2014). Second, it extends the research of Wehner and colleagues by specifically examining competence as a recruiter behavior, rather than as an implied part of the hiring firm's or RPO provider's image. Third and finally, this study sheds further light on the effects of applicant perceptions of the hiring firm, highlighting its importance.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Human Resource Outsourcing

The practice of human resource outsourcing (HRO), defined by Greer, Youngblood, and Gray as "the performance, by outside parties on a recurring basis, of HR tasks that would otherwise be performed in house," (1999: 85) has been in use since the mid-1990s (Greer et al., 1999). HRO has seen an explosion of growth since then, with Cook (1999) reporting that 90% of US firms outsource at least one HR activity. Research to date has focused on either antecedents to the use of HRO such as firm size, cost pressures, and type of HR practices (Klaas, McClendon, & Gainey, 1999; Klaas, McClendon, & Gainey, 2001), or outcomes resulting from the use of HRO such as firm performance, firm satisfaction with HRO vendors, and perceived firm benefits (Gainey & Klaas, 2003; Gilley, Greer, & Rasheed, 2004; Klaas et al., 1999). However, these studies have examined only internal stakeholders – the question of the impact of use of HRO on external stakeholders, such as applicants, has been left relatively untouched.

Ordanini and Silvestri (2008) argued that the accelerated growth rate of HRO is resulting in changes in the type of HR activities being outsourced. HRO covers a broad area, from administrative functions such as payroll to more strategic functions such as HR system design (Klaas et al., 2001). There is a general consensus in the literature, however, that non-strategic or transactional activities should be outsourced (Ordanini & Silvestri, 2008), but that core strategic activities or practices should be retained in-house (Fang, Shen, & McBride, 2005; Lepak & Snell, 1998). Yet, classifying tasks like

recruitment and selection remains contentious, as some consider them non-strategic

functions (e.g., Hall & Torrington, 1998) while others classify them as strategic (e.g.,

Gainey & Klaas, 2003; Klaas, Yang, Gainey, & McClendon, 2005), leaving recruitment

and selection in a gray area.

Recruitment process outsourcing. While HRO in general has been studied to some

extent, the specific issue of RPO has received little research attention (Wehner et al.,

2012), despite calls to examine the ramifications of outsourcing staffing and recruitment

(Ployhart, 2006; Wehner et al., 2012). Few studies have addressed RPO in isolation (e.g.,

Dasborough & Sue-Chan, 2002; Klaas et al., 2001; Lever, 1997; Ordanini & Silvestri,

2008), and fewer still have examined how the use of RPO affected applicants (e.g.,

Carless & Wintle, 2007; Wehner et al., 2012; Wehner et al., 2014). Thus, despite its

potential importance, as yet little is known about the use or outcomes of RPO.

Lever (1997) touched on the topic of RPO, finding in a survey of HR executives

that higher levels of RPO corresponded to greater numbers of complaints about the

recruitment process. However, it was unclear whether the complaints reported were from

internal sources, such as line managers, or external sources, such as applicants, and so

these results are not very generalizable. More recently, Carless and Wintle (2007)

examined young job seekers, surveying undergraduate and graduate students under the

age of thirty. In a study of work-life balance and career paths, respondents were asked to

evaluate two hypothetical job ads – which specified the contact person as either an

internal HR representative at the hiring firm or an external recruiter – and rate their initial

attraction to the organization. Their results showed that the use of an external recruiter had no effect on initial organization attraction.

Similar to Carless and Wintle (2007), Wehner et al. (2012) focused on inexperienced job seekers and presented master's level business students in Germany with hypothetical scenarios of a four-step application and recruitment process consisting of advertisement, pre-selection, telephone interview, and in-person interview, and manipulated the extent of RPO, assuming that the use of RPO would be apparent to the applicants. Wehner et al.'s (2012) results showed a negative relationship between RPO and organization attraction, with the most pronounced effect due to differences between the lowest and highest levels of RPO. Consistent with Carless and Wintle's (2007) results, these authors argued that outsourcing of advertising and the pre-selection process likely has no detrimental effect compared to performing those functions in-house. However, Wehner et al.'s results demonstrate that use of RPO later in the application process can result in a negative effect on organization attraction.

In a follow-up study using very similar experimental methodology, Wehner et al. (2014) again found evidence of a negative relationship between extent of RPO use and organization attraction; however, when the effects of employer and RPO provider image were considered simultaneously this effect disappeared. These authors also began to explore whether factors such as employer image and RPO provider image moderate the relationship between the extent of RPO use and organization attraction. They found no evidence of these moderating effects. However, they did find that for higher levels of

RPO provider image, the negative indirect effects of RPO on job acceptance intentions were weaker.

Wehner and colleagues (2012, 2014) have suggested that this negative relationship between extent of RPO use and organization attraction may be explained by critical contact and signaling theories. Critical contact theory specifically focuses on recent college graduate job seekers and states that these applicants are "incapable of differentiating among firms" (Behling et al., 1968: 17). The theory argues that due to 1) the limited duration and depth of contact with the hiring firms, 2) the similarities between firm actions such as salary offers, and 3) the general level of inexperience of young job seekers, applicants are left with evaluating critical contact elements in order to make their decision (Behling et al., 1968). These elements might include recruiter behaviors or appearance, impressions of the firm's offices, or even the efficiency with which application paperwork is processed (Behling et al., 1968). However, as shown by Wehner and colleagues, the use of RPO may disrupt these critical contacts, as the applicant may feel less connected to the hiring firm, leading to feelings of being less valued by the firm, and thus lower organization attraction.

Additionally, signaling theory suggests that, lacking concrete information on the hiring firm, applicants interpret the recruitment process and experience as signals of organizational characteristics (Rynes et al., 1991). The influence of signaling is highest when applicants have little information about the firm (Rynes et al., 1991), which raises concerns when recruiting recent college graduates who, having little experience or information to draw on, likely lean heavily on information gleaned from signaling. The

use of RPO may be interpreted as "impersonal behavior" on the part of the employer

giving applicants the impression that the employer does not have a strong interest in the

process, their employees or may be more concerned with cutting costs (Wehner et al.,

2014). An inexperienced job seeker might experience decreased organization attraction

as a result.

Due to the limited number of studies that have examined the effect of use of RPO

on organization attraction (Carless & Wintle, 2007; Wehner et al., 2012, 2014), it appears

that further empirical work is needed. Hence, based on critical contact theory (Behling et

al., 1968) and signaling theory (Rynes et al., 1991), I hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 1. Applicants will be more attracted to an organization when RPO is*
>
> *not used than when RPO is used.*

Recruiter Characteristics and Behaviors

The issue now becomes whether firms that use RPO will always be less attractive

to applicants than those who do not, or if this effect can be ameliorated by other factors.

If these factors were known, firms could then make more educated decisions on when to

use RPO, and if using RPO, what actions might help to combat any negative effects.

Barber (1998) noted evidence showing that recruiter characteristics, sometimes known as

behaviors, are related to both applicant impressions of the hiring firm and applicant

intentions of pursuit. Wehner et al. also suggested that "the perceived *professionalism*

[emphasis original] of the external provider" (2012: 614) could act as a positive signal

about the hiring firm and may partially compensate for the negative effect of use of RPO.

Thus, the impact of the recruiter should be considered in the context of RPO.

However, the topic of recruiter behaviors is a challenging one, in part "Because applicants infer recruiter traits [personality characteristics] from their behaviors, the two are difficult to disentangle" (Barber, 1998: 55). Thus, research to date has examined a variety of recruiter traits inferred from behaviors, including competence (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Carless & Imber, 2007; Harris & Fink, 1987; Liden & Parsons, 1986), warmth or friendliness (Carless & Imber, 2007; Harris & Fink, 1987; Liden & Parsons, 1986; Powell 1984; Powell, 1991; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976; Taylor & Bergman, 1987), informativeness (Carless & Imber, 2007; Harris & Fink, 1987; Liden & Parsons, 1986; Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976), and aggressiveness (Carless & Imber, 2007; Harris & Fink, 1987). Research has also been conducted generically on recruiter behaviors without even defining the term (e.g., Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998).

This lack of consensus in the literature leads to Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy's broad definition of recruiter behaviors as "behaviors that recruiters may engage in during the recruitment process" (2012: 599). Empirically, there is disagreement as to the effects of recruiter behaviors on applicants. For instance, a few studies found that recruiter behaviors have no impact on applicants (e.g., Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983). However, several provide evidence of direct relationships with organization attraction (e.g., Liden & Parsons, 1986; Powell, 1991; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), while others show only an indirect relationship through job and organizational attributes (e.g., Rynes

and Miller, 1983). There is even some limited evidence that recruiter behaviors have both direct and indirect effects on organization attraction (e.g., Harris & Fink, 1987; Turban et al., 1998), leaving researchers to draw their own conclusions.

Recruiter competence. Given the broad nature and conflicting results in the existing research on recruiter traits and behaviors, it appears that specific traits, as inferred from behaviors (Barber, 1998), should be examined in isolation, rather than as a whole. In examining findings on the effects of various behaviors, Turban et al.'s (1998) results on recruiter competence stand out. Their analysis indicated that recruiter competence, unlike other behaviors considered, explained unique variance in organization attraction even when the effect of job attributes (e.g., supportive work environment, challenging work, location) was taken into account. This result is somewhat unusual, as previous work has often negated any impact of recruiter behaviors once job and organizational factors were considered (Turban et al., 1998). Thus, based on Turban et al.'s (1998) finding, Wehner et al.'s (2012) recommendation that future research examine the competencies of external recruiters, and Barber's (1998) identification of competence as an important recruiter trait, in present study I will focus on recruiter competence specifically.

Critical contact theory applies to recruiter competence much the way it does to use of RPO. If, as the theory states, young or inexperienced applicants, lacking information on the organization, utilize critical contact elements such as recruiter competence as proxies for unknown firm attributes (Behling et al., 1968), a recruiter

(either internal or external) perceived as incompetent could have a negative effect on organization attraction. For instance, an applicant may feel that the use of an incompetent recruiter indicates that other firm employees are similarly incompetent. Signaling theory (Rynes et al., 1991; Spence, 1973) also applies similarly to recruiter competence. Again, lacking information about the hiring firm, applicants could interpret recruiter competence as a signal regarding the overall competence of the organization. Thus, applicants might experience lower organization attraction as a result of recruiter incompetence.

Research has found positive relationships between recruiter competence and variables such as applicant expectations of receiving a job offer (Alderfer & McCord, 1970), evaluations of the job and interview (Liden & Parsons, 1986), and likelihood of joining the firm (Harris & Fink, 1987). However, fewer studies have examined organization attraction specifically. Turban and colleagues (1998) found some post hoc evidence to suggest that competence has a direct positive effect on organization attraction. Additionally, Carless and Imber (2007) surveyed people applying for positions at a financial firm and asked about job, organization, and recruiter characteristics, as well as anxiety, attraction and job acceptance levels. Their results showed that recruiter characteristics, and specifically competence, had a direct, positive effect on organization attraction. Carless and Imber also found that recruiter characteristics in general indirectly predicted organization attraction through perceptions of job and organization characteristics. Hence, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. Applicants will be more attracted to an organization when the recruiter (either internal or external) is competent than when the recruiter is incompetent.

Given that critical contact and signaling theory argue that applicants utilize tangible attributes, such as recruiter characteristics, to infer unknown information about the hiring firm (Behling et al., 1968; Rynes et al., 1991), it seems plausible that recruiter competence may moderate the relationship between use of RPO and organization attraction. After all, during the recruitment process, a recruiter (internal or external) is a very salient representative of the employer. If applicants interpret their recruitment experience as signals of other, unobservable traits of the hiring firm (Rynes et al., 1991), a competent recruiter will likely provide a positive signal regardless of his or her actual employer. Thus, in this case use of RPO will likely have little negative effect on organization attraction. Conversely, an incompetent recruiter may serve as a signal of general incompetence in the firm, and doubly so if RPO is being used. After all, if the hiring firm cannot hire a competent recruiter, the applicant may view that as a signal of the firm's tendency to hire other incompetent employees. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3. For competent (incompetent) recruiters, the use of RPO will result in a smaller (larger) decrease in organization attraction from when RPO is not used.

Perceptions of Firm Reputation

Barber (1998) suggested that firm image, or reputation, is a factor in understanding the response of potential applicants to recruitment, arguing that applicants may be more receptive to recruitment messages from firms they perceive as having a positive reputation. Gatewood, Gowan, and Lautenschlager (1993) found that ratings of corporate image by job applicants and executives differed, leading to Cable and Graham's call for research to investigate firm reputation "from the perspective of specific types of stakeholders and their idiosyncratic concerns" (2000: 942-43) in order to determine the source of variance more precisely. Additionally, Wehner et al. argued that, "Graduates eventually do not mind RPO if the desired employer has a positive image or reputation," (2012: 616) and called for future research to examine whether the impact of perceptions of firm reputation can compensate for use of RPO. Thus, perceptions of firm reputation should be considered as an additional factor in the use of RPO.

Despite the need for this research, studying perceptions of firm reputation is difficult for a number of reasons. First, there is not a generally accepted definition of the word reputation (Cable & Turban, 2001). Though several reviews have attempted to address this issue, (e.g., Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006; Highhouse, Brooks, & Greguras, 2009; Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011; Walker, 2010), authors have defined and operationalized reputation in a number of ways (Lange et al., 2011). Turban et al. (1998), for instance, in measuring reputation, assessed both reputation of the firm and knowledge of the firm. In later work, Cable and Turban (2001) argued that knowledge of a firm, or familiarity, is actually separate from reputation, which in turn is distinct from employer

image. Yet, though Lievens, Van Hoye, and Schreurs (2005) utilized Cable and Turban's (2001) employer knowledge framework, they used Aaker's (1997) trait inferences for the reputation construct, a different direction entirely. Wehner and colleagues (2014) also referred to Aaker's work in examining the effects of image and found a positive relationship between employer image and organization attraction. However, Wehner et al. argued that applicants regard employer image as a signal of familiarity, which then influences organization attraction. This type of inference further confuses the issue of what is meant by the word reputation.

Indeed, many authors fail to provide a definition of reputation at all – Walker (2010) noted that, out of 43 articles in his review sample, only 19 defined the term. Of those who do define reputation, many (e.g., Cable & Graham, 2000; Turban and Cable, 2003) follow Fombrun and Shanley's (1990) definition of reputation being the affective evaluation of a firm by the public, relative to other firms. However, familiarity (Cable & Turban, 2001) or being known (Lange et al., 2011) have also been used as definitions for reputation (e.g., Saxton & Dollinger, 2004; Shamsie, 2003), as has specifically being known for something (e.g., Fischer & Reuber, 2007; Milgrom & Roberts, 1986). In fact, authors even use terms such as image, familiarity, and knowledge interchangeably with reputation, creating further confusion (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Walker, 2010; Wehner et al., 2014) and leading Highhouse, Broadfoot, Yugo, and Devendorf to state that, "The bulk of the confusion…is around distinguishing between organizational identity, corporate image, and corporate reputation" (2009: 782).

Second, there is miscommunication in the literature regarding whether authors are examining individuals' perceptions of firm reputation, which is an individual-level variable or firm reputation, which is an organizational-level variable. In many cases, there is inconsistency in language used in studies, which makes it unclear what authors are focused on. For example, Turban et al. (1998) referred to perceptions of reputation in their discussion section, but in their hypotheses they simply used reputation. Based on their survey instruments, it appears that they did indeed measure perceptions of reputation, but for the sake of expediency, perhaps, confined certain references to the construct simply as reputation, rather than the more specific identifier –perception of reputation. Highhouse, Broadfoot, et al. (2009) occasionally referred to reputation judgments, but more commonly to reputation, though their measures were based partly on those of Turban et al. (1998). Turban & Cable (2003) used objective measures of reputation, such as rankings from *Fortune Magazine*, and again generally confined themselves to referring to reputation, with infrequent mentions of perceptions. Conversely, Cable and Graham (2000) rather unusually explicitly focused on job seekers' perceptions of reputation. While it can be argued that references to reputation may in fact refer to perceptions of reputation (Lange et al., 2011) or beliefs regarding reputation (Cable & Turban, 2001), a lack of precision in the way reputation has been discussed has created further confusion in an already complex literature stream.

Despite these conflicting interpretations, two recurring themes appear somewhat consistently in proposed definitions of reputation. The first is the idea that corporate reputation is a global, relatively stable judgment held collectively by multiple

constituencies (Barnett et al., 2006; Highhouse, Broadfoot, et al., 2009), described by

Highhouse, Brooks, and Greguras as "A shared impression: the resulting average of all

individual impressions" (2009: 1484). The second shared theme is the presence of

prestige (Highhouse, Broadfoot, et al., 2009; Lange, et al. 2011), defined by Highhouse,

Lievens, & Sinar: "A company is prestigious if it inspires thoughts of fame and renown in

the minds of those who hear of it" (2003: 989).

These collective observations of prestige are by definition filtered through the

perceptions of an individual job seeker. As Cable and Turban stated:

> We define *employer reputation* [emphasis original] as a job seeker's beliefs about
>
> the public's affective evaluation of the organization. To be clear, employer
>
> reputation is distinguished from employer image in two important ways: (1)
>
> image does not include an affective evaluative component whereas reputation
>
> does; and (2) employer reputation is a job seeker's belief about how the
>
> organization is evaluated by others, while employer image consists of a job
>
> seeker's *own* [emphasis original] beliefs about the organization. (2001: 127)

Thus, building on these commonalities and Cable and Turban's (2001) differentiation, in

the context of the present study, I define perceived firm reputation as a collective and

affective multiple stakeholder view of firm prestige, *as perceived by an individual job

seeker*.

There is reason to believe that an applicant's belief about a firm's reputation

affects organization attraction. Social identity theory, per Terry, Hogg, and White,

"conceives of the self as being socially defined: Social identity is a construct that

mediates the relationship between the self and the broader social structure of groups and categories" (1999: 228-29). Thus, since the self is defined socially on some level, individuals attempt to build self-esteem by associating with groups that they believe have a good reputation (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Hence, as proposed by Cable and Turban (2001) and shown empirically by Turban & Cable (2003), applicants will experience higher levels of attraction to a firm with a more positive reputation. Though Turban and Cable arguably focus on reputation rather than perceptions of reputation, it seems reasonable that these generally held beliefs about a firm's reputation would influence an individual's perception of reputation as well. For example, job seekers would likely find Google a more attractive employer than Best Buy due to the difference in their perceptions of commonly held beliefs about (or general perceptions of) these firms' reputations. Hence I hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 4. Applicants will be more attracted to an organization when their perception of the hiring firm's reputation is positive than when their perception of the hiring firm's reputation is negative.*

Given empirical evidence that suggests that firms with more positive reputations both attract more applicants and are able to select applicants of higher quality (Turban & Cable, 2003; Turban et al., 1998), it seems possible that the use of RPO may not cause a decrease in organization attraction in all cases or organizations. Perceived reputation could potentially have a significant buffering effect, allowing firms perceived to have positive reputations to utilize RPO without a major decrease in organization attraction.

Essentially, applicants would likely be more forgiving of a firm they perceive to have a good reputation because of a great desire to work for that firm (Wehner et al., 2014).

As social identity theory suggests, working for a firm perceived as having a positive reputation would increase self-esteem (Terry et al., 1999). Thus, applicants will be more likely to accept what could be perceived as negative characteristics of the recruitment process – such as the use of RPO – due to their desire for the enhanced self-esteem that would stem from obtaining the position. In short, organization attraction would likely decrease very little due to use of RPO when the hiring firm has a perceived positive reputation. Conversely, a firm perceived as having a negative reputation would cause applicants to fear a reduction in self-esteem, and thus applicants would experience a greater decline in organization attraction due to recruitment process characteristics such as the use of RPO. Hence I hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 5. For firms perceived to have a positive (negative) reputation, the use of RPO will result in a smaller (larger) decrease in organization attraction from when RPO is not used.*

Given that applicants in the field generally will have information related to use of RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived firm reputation, it seems worthwhile to explore how these variables may work together. I argue that the extent to which perceived reputation moderates the relationship between use of RPO and organization attraction varies as a function of recruiter competence. Recruiter competence is arguably a more proximal variable than perceived firm reputation – for instance, Rynes et al. (1991) found that 38 of their 41 subjects felt that the recruiters they interacted with had a

strong to moderate influence on them, and Wehner et al. argued that the recruiter conducting the interview "is a salient agent" (2014: 6) for the applicant. Thus, it seems likely that if a recruiter is competent, the applicant will not be overly concerned with either the perceived reputation of the hiring firm or whether or not recruiting has been outsourced. In the presence of a positive signal – a competent recruiter – the applicant is satisfied and will not seek further signals.

Conversely, if recruiter competence is low, applicants would likely seek additional signals to confirm their attraction to the organization. Applicants may seek this information because the company is showing a significant interest in them, leading them to have positive feelings about the organization. However, they might be alarmed by an incompetent recruiter. Therefore, applicants might seek further information in order to place those negative signals into context. This is also supported by Rynes et al., who found that, "negative recruitment experiences…raised a 'red flag' that caused applicants to apply more scrutiny than they otherwise would have" (1991: 515). In this case – an incompetent recruiter – the interaction of perceived firm reputation with the use of RPO would play a greater role in explaining organization attraction. If a job seeker, already anxious due to an incompetent recruiter, then considers that the recruiter is not a firm employee and also perceives the firm to have a negative reputation, these factors will cause attraction to decrease further. Hence, I hypothesize the following three-way interaction:

Hypothesis 6. The interactive effect of perceived hiring firm reputation and use of RPO on organization attraction will be most pronounced when a recruiter (internal or external) is incompetent.

Methods

Sample

Participants were undergraduate students taking upper-level business courses at a medium-sized university in the Midwest United States. A total of 309 valid responses were recorded. Including students with multiple majors, the sample was 9.09% accounting, 9.94% economics, 18.18% finance, 13.74% HR management, 9.09% management, 19.45% marketing, 2.75% management information systems, 9.73% operations, and 8.03% some other major. The sample was 58.2% male and 92.3% Caucasian. The mean age was 21.93 (SD = 2.78). The majority of the sample was seniors (58.2%) and juniors (37.9%). Average GPA of the sample was 3.17. Respondents were generally already involved in the workforce in some manner. With an average of 1.83 semesters remaining until graduation, 77.8% were currently employed (working an average of 18.56 hours per week), 58.8% had worked an internship, and 41.5% were currently seeking a job.

Scenarios

The survey was administered during regular class time. I randomly assigned students to one of eight conditions and asked them to read through one recruitment process scenario, placing themselves in the role of the job applicant as closely as possible.   I manipulated RPO use (no RPO use or the entire recruitment process was outsourced), perceived firm reputation (positive or negative), and recruiter competence

(competent or incompetent). I modified the scenarios used by Wehner et al. (2012), and following their procedure, all scenarios were the same except for the manipulations. For instance, for the RPO manipulation, I only changed the company name between scenarios to indicate who was performing the recruitment process (both company names were clearly fictitious). I have placed all of the scenarios in Appendix B. After reading the scenario, participants rated their attraction to the firm and responded to manipulation check and demographic questions. Given that students could potentially be enrolled in multiple courses in which I administered the survey, they were asked to provide the last two digits of their cell phone number and their month of birth so I could eliminate any duplicate responses.

As a preliminary manipulation check prior to principal data collection, I conducted a pilot study (N = 24). This ensured that respondents correctly understood the manipulations as they were written. Based on the results of the pilot study, I changed the RPO manipulation check question from a four-item question to a one-item question, and I modified the scenarios to be shorter and clearer.

For the principal study, as a manipulation check for RPO respondents were asked to think about the scenario and indicate who performed the recruitment process, the hiring firm or the external recruiter. A "don't know" option was also available. I coded each scenario 0 or 1 depending on the level of RPO present in the scenario (0 = no RPO, 1 = RPO), and I coded responses to the manipulation check question the same way, with the addition of the "don't know" response (2 = "don't know"). I used SPSS to filter the data to eliminate mismatches between the respondent's assigned condition and his or her

response to the manipulation check question. Of 409 initial responses, I eliminated 28 for

mismatching and a further 72 for failing to respond to the question. This resulted in an

overall usable response rate of 75.55%.

Respondents also rated the competence of the recruiter for a manipulation check.

I used Turban et al.'s (1998) six-item measure of recruiter incompetence with a 5-point

Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A representative item is

"The recruiter was a poor representative of this company." In the interest of simplifying

the interpretation of results, the measure was reverse coded to become a measure of

competence. The measure was reliable ($\alpha = .92$). The results confirmed the manipulation

worked. There was a significant pointbiserial correlation between the recruiter

competence condition assigned (0 = incompetent and 1 = competent) and the scale score

for recruiter incompetence ($r_{pb} = 0.89$, $p < .01$).

Finally, respondents rated their perception of the reputation of the hiring firm for

the final manipulation check. Based on my definition of firm reputation as a collective

judgment filtered through the perception of an individual, I used Highhouse et al.'s

(2003) five-item measure of perceived firm prestige to measure perceived reputation of

the hiring firm. I asked students to respond to these items using a 5-point Likert-type

scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A representative item is "This

company probably has a reputation as being an excellent employer." This measure was

also adequately reliable ($\alpha = .95$). Results confirmed this manipulation worked. There

was a significant pointbiserial correlation between the perceived reputation condition

assigned (0 = negative reputation, 1 = positive reputation) and the scale score for perceived reputation ($r_{pb} = 0.79$, $p < .01$).

Measures

Organization attraction. I used Highhouse et al.'s (2003) five-item measure with a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A representative item is "This company is attractive to me as a place for employment." The scale proved sufficiently reliable ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Control variables. I also collected demographic information to be used as controls, including job search status, number of semesters remaining, and years of work experience. I asked respondents to indicate whether they were currently looking for a job (yes/no), to indicate the number of semesters after their current one until their expected graduation, and to fill in their number of years of work experience. I selected these three variables as controls because they all may be related to organization attraction. For instance, Judge and Bretz (1992) suggested that respondent job seeking status be used as a control due to the potential for applicants currently seeking positions to rate jobs as more attractive. Wehner et al. similarly offered the explanation that "We accounted for the involvement and personal importance of the participants" (2012: 609) by using job seeking status as a control. Judge and Bretz also recommended that the time at which a respondent intended to begin looking for a job – in this case analogous to a respondent's number of semesters remaining – be used to control for potential differences in attraction due to his or her interviewing status. Finally, Cable and Judge (1994) proposed using

work experience as a control, arguing that respondents' previous work experience would

likely have a negative impact.

Results

Means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations, and Cronbach's alphas are

reported in Table 1. I used OLS hierarchical regression in SPSS to analyze the collected

data. I first performed manipulation checks as previously described. To predict the

dependent variable of organization attraction, I entered controls for number of semesters

remaining, years of work experience, and job search status (coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes) in

Model 1. After controls, I then entered each of the independent variables – use of RPO,

perceived hiring firm reputation, and recruiter competence – in Model 2, coded according

to the manipulated condition (e.g., for recruiter competence, 0 = incompetent and 1 =

competent). Next, I entered the interaction of RPO and recruiter competence, RPO and

perceived reputation, and perceived reputation and recruiter competence (i.e., the two-

way interaction terms) in Models 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Finally, I entered the

interaction of RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived reputation (i.e., the three-way

interaction term) in Model 6.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job search status	0.42	0.49							
2. Number of semesters remaining	1.83	1.52	-0.33^{a}*						
3. Years of work experience	5.21	3.14	0.09^{a}	-0.02					
4. RPO manipulation	0.49	0.5	0.07^{b}	-0.07^{a}	-0.00^{a}				
5. Perceived reputation manipulation	0.5	0.5	0.03^{b}	0.01^{a}	0.02^{a}	-0.04^{b}	0.95		
6. Recruiter competence manipulation	0.51	0.5	-0.07^{b}	-0.09^{a}	0.04^{a}	0.00^{b}	0.38^{b}	0.92	
7. Organization attraction	2.89	1.02	-0.02^{a}	-0.04	0.05	-0.04^{a}	0.56^{a}*	0.39^{a}*	0.93

Note. N = 309; internal consistency estimates reported along the diagonal.

[a] Pointbiserial correlation. [b] Phi correlation.

*p<.01

Surprisingly, the correlation between RPO and organization attraction was not significant (r_{pb} = -.04, p>.05), so Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Table 1 does show support for Hypothesis 2, which predicted that applicants would be more attracted to an organization when the recruiter is competent rather than incompetent (r_{pb}=.39, p<.01). Model 3 in Table 2 displays partial support for Hypothesis 3, which predicted an interaction between RPO and recruiter competence. The regression coefficient associated with this interaction term was statistically significant (B=-.54, p<.01) and the interaction explained significant incremental variance in organization attraction (Δr^2 = .02, p<.01). However, as illustrated by Figure 1, the nature of this effect was different than hypothesized. Table 1 also provides support for Hypothesis 4, which predicted that applicants would be more attracted to an organization when their perception of the firm's reputation is positive than when their perception of the firm's reputation is negative (r_{pb} = .56, p<.01). Model 4 in Table 2 demonstrates that the regression coefficient associated with the interaction term for RPO and perceived reputation was not statistically significant (B=.09, p>.01). The interaction did not explain significant incremental variance in organization attraction, and thus Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Finally, Hypothesis 6 predicted a three-way interaction between RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived reputation. Model 6 in Table 2 shows that the regression coefficient associated with this interaction term was not statistically significant (B=.15, p>.01) and the interaction did not explain significant incremental variance in organization attraction, so Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

TABLE 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Exploring Interactions Between RPO, Recruiter Competence, and Perceived Firm Reputation
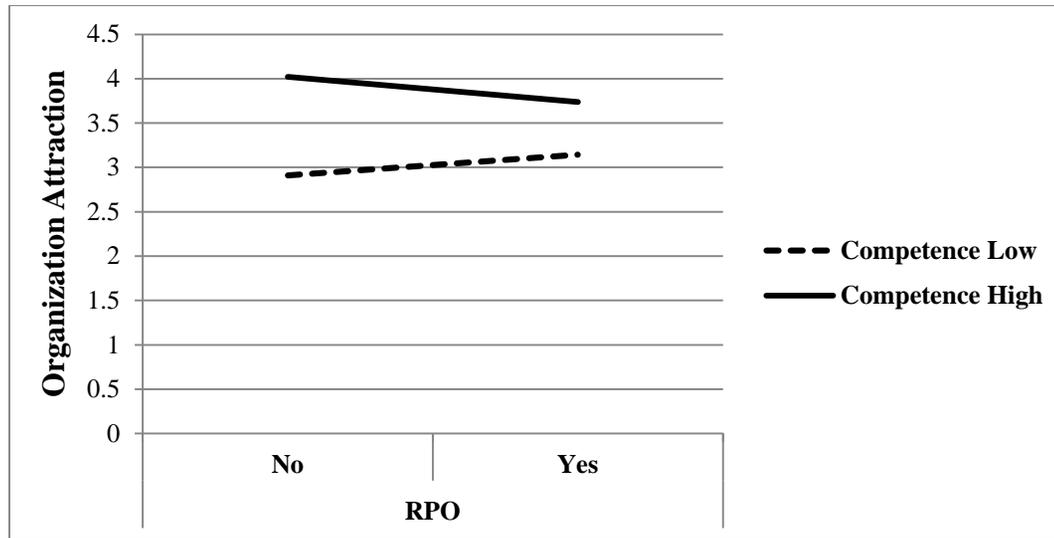
	Variables entered	Organization Attraction				
		B		SE B	R^2	ΔR^2 Step
Model 1	Semesters remaining	-0.4		0.4	0.01	0.01
	Years of work experience	0.02		0.02		
	Job search status	-.09		0.13		
Model 2	Semesters remaining	-.01		0.03	0.49***	0.49
	Years of work experience	0.01		0.01		
	Job search status	-.02		0.09		
	RPO manipulation	-.04		0.09		
	Perceived reputation manipulation	1.19***		0.09		
	Recruiter competence manipulation	0.86***		0.09		
Model 3	Semesters remaining	.02		0.03	0.51**	0.02
	Years of work experience	0.01		0.01		
	Job search status	-.02		0.09		
	RPO manipulation	0.23		0.12		
	Perceived reputation manipulation	1.19***		0.09		
	Recruiter competence manipulation	1.12***		0.12		
	RPO x Competence	-.54**		0.17		
Model 4	Semesters remaining	-.02		0.03	0.51	0.00
	Years of work experience	0.01		0.01		
	Job search status	-.02		0.09		
	RPO manipulation	0.19		0.15		

	Perceived reputation manipulation	1.15***	0.12		
	Recruiter competence manipulation	1.12***	0.12		
	RPO x Competence	-.54**	0.17		
	RPO x Reputation	0.09	0.17		
Model 5	Semesters remaining	-.01	0.03	0.51	0.001
	Years of work experience	0.01	0.01		
	Job search status	0	0.09		
	RPO manipulation	0.18	0.15		
	Perceived reputation manipulation	1.02***	0.15		
	Recruiter competence manipulation	0.98***	0.15		
	RPO x Competence	-.53**	0.17		
	RPO x Reputation	0.09	0.17		
	Reputation x Competence	0.27	0.17		
Model 6	Semesters remaining	-.01	0.03	0.51	0.00
	Years of work experience	0.01	0.01		
	Job search status	0	0.09		
	RPO manipulation	0.22	0.18		
	Perceived reputation manipulation	1.05***	0.17		
	Recruiter competence manipulation	1.02***	0.17		
	RPO x Competence	-.61*	0.24		
	RPO x Reputation	0.01	0.24		
	Reputation x Competence	0.2	0.24		
	RPO x Competence x Reputation	0.15	0.34		

Note. N = 309

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

FIGURE 1

RPO x Recruiter Competence Interaction Predicting Organization Attraction

Discussion

The present study used experimental scenarios to explore the main and interactive effects of RPO, recruiter competence, and perceived firm reputation on organization attraction. Consistent with signaling (Rynes et al., 1991) and critical contact theory (Behling et al., 1968), I found that respondents reported greater attraction to an organization when the recruiter was competent rather than incompetent (Hypothesis 2). This result (r_{pb}=.39, p<.01) is consistent with several studies that have shown that recruiter behaviors are related to organization attraction (e.g., Chapman et al., 2005; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), further demonstrating the importance of how recruiting is done. This finding also serves to emphasize the usefulness of examining specific recruiter behaviors, since different behaviors may have different effects on organization attraction.

This study also showed partial support for an interactive effect of RPO and recruiter competence on organization attraction (Hypothesis 3). However, the nature of this interaction was not entirely as suggested by my hypothesis. As hypothesized, there was a small difference in organization attraction between the RPO and no RPO groups when a competent recruiter was presented, with higher attraction occurring in the no RPO group. I hypothesized a larger difference between the RPO and no RPO groups when an incompetent recruiter was used, again expecting higher organization attraction in the no RPO group. However, the results showed the opposite – attraction was actually higher in the RPO group. Critical contact and signaling theory suggest that in the absence of more

information, applicants interpret recruiters and their behaviors as representative of the organization (Behling et al., 1968; Rynes et al., 1991). However, if the recruiter in question is not actually a direct employee of the hiring firm, but rather a third party, this may delineate a boundary point of signals. Instead of the incompetent third party recruiter serving as a signal of the hiring firm's general incompetence or tendency to hire incompetent employees, the fact that the incompetent recruiter works for a third party may signal to the applicant the limited usefulness of that critical contact, leaving him or her to evaluate attraction based on other more salient signals.

In short, the use of RPO seems to mitigate the decline in attraction caused by an incompetent recruiter. This finding extends theory by suggesting that applicants consider signals and critical contacts within certain contexts and limits, and that use of RPO may fall outside those limits. Given this effect, it seems clear that hiring firms should be particularly careful when selecting and training internal hiring personnel, as both the signaling mechanism and critical contacts play a greater role in that context.

In terms of the effect of perceived reputation on organization attraction, there is currently little consensus in the literature on what the nature of that effect is. This lack of consensus is likely in part driven by the general lack of an accepted definition of the term (Walker, 2010). For instance, Turban et al. (1998) unexpectedly found a negative relationship between reputation and organization attraction. Yet, Turban and Cable (2003) found that firms with better reputations attracted larger applicant pools. Turban et al. measured applicant perceptions of reputation, while Turban and Cable used corporate reputation ratings assessed by magazines such as *Business Week*. However, as social

identity theory would suggest, I found strong support that respondents were more attracted to an organization when their perception of its reputation was positive than when their perception of its reputation was negative (r_{pb}=.56 p<.01). Since this correlation was the strongest observed in this study, hiring firms should likely be mindful of how applicants perceive their reputation (as defined here) and be prepared to potentially take action if those perceptions are negative.

The lack of support for Hypothesis 1 contradicts several published studies that used similar methodology (i.e., Wehner et al., 2012, 2014). The most notable difference between the present study and the results found by Wehner and colleagues is the levels of RPO involved – two in this case, versus four used by Wehner et al. However, Wehner et al. reported that "Negative effects are due to the differences between scenario 1 and scenario 3 as well as scenario 1 and scenario 4" (2012: 610-12), providing rationale for the use of only two levels of RPO. Given the successful manipulation checks in the current study, there clearly must be other explanation for differences in the results.

The most plausible and likely reason for the null result are cultural differences due to a disparity in the general usage of RPO between the US and Germany. Though respondents in the present study correctly identified that Personnel, Inc. was carrying out the recruitment process, use of this company might have had no effect on their thought processes due to familiarity. Currently the highest worldwide demand for RPO is in the US, with the European market only slowly beginning to catch up (Segrestin, 2015). Due to more stringent existing labor laws and opposition from workers' groups, ("RPO," 2005) German respondents may have more negative feelings toward RPO than similar

respondents in the US, who may view RPO simply as a necessary factor in obtaining employment.

For instance, German labor law guarantees the right of employees to organize a works council – a committee of workers elected by their fellow employees (the number determined by the size of the firm) – that works with the employer, or what is generally referred to as the establishment (Jung, 2001). These works councils have extensive rights, including participation, or right to both be informed of decisions by the establishment and make recommendations regarding those decisions, and co-determination, or the ability to potentially block decisions by the establishment that require the agreement of the works council (Jung, 2001). Additionally, German labor law stipulates that full time employees have the right to request part time work, and part time workers must be considered first for any available full time position (Jung, 2001). Furthermore, employee termination in Germany is much more complex than in the US, with a minimum notice of four weeks, and if there is a works council, it must be consulted prior to any employee termination (Jung, 2001).

Given these extensive worker rights, it appears that recruitment is a much more vital issue in Germany than in the US, as its end consequences may be much more detrimental to the hiring firm. Establishments must consult with works councils regarding their staffing needs (Fulton, 2015) and consider the requests of current employees to switch between full and part time status as well as changing staffing needs due to accommodating legally-mandated maternity and sick leave (Jung, 2001). Therefore, handing over even a portion of the recruitment process to a third party

provider would likely both add to the overall complexity of the recruitment process (e.g., complying with works council restrictions on the establishment's use of personal data; Fulton, 2015) and contribute to applicants' concerns that the hiring firm's legal obligations are not being adequately looked after. It thus seems reasonable to believe that most German workers would perceive the introduction of RPO negatively, and so the negative relationship found by Wehner et al. (2012, 2014) might only be applicable in countries in which there is less use of RPO or countries that have more negative feelings toward its use.

Limitations

Due to the nature of research, there are certain limitations to the current study. First, the sample consisted of undergraduate students, of which the majority was Caucasian, and thus the generalizability of the results may be limited. However, numerous authors (e.g., Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1981; Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Highhouse & Gillespie, 2009; Wehner et al., 2012) suggest that a student sample is suitable or acceptable, and even arguably preferable, due to respondents' likely involvement in the job application process either in the present or the near future. Highhouse (2009), for instance, stated that experimental studies are meant to facilitate the application of theory, and thus whether the sample is strictly representative of the general population is not as critical. Additionally, some authors (e.g., Chapman et al., 2005) have argued that a student sample is appropriate for exploring initial organization attraction, as job seekers with more experience are likely more limited in the scope of employers they will consider (DeArmond & Crawford, 2011).

Second, the limitations of the use of hypothetical scenarios must be taken into account, as they can possibly show more significant results than studies done in the field (Hausknecht et al., 2004). Manipulated scenarios can also limit the potential scope of results, since, due to the nature of experimental design, only a limited number of strictly defined conditions can be used. For instance, in order to achieve the best possible statistical power, I used only dichotomous manipulations for each variable, rather than three or four levels that might have provided additional insight. However, an effect must

be established in a controlled environment prior to conducting research in the field, and if participants consider scenarios realistic, they are appropriate for the testing of theory (Maute & Dube, 1999; Schmitt, Dube, & Leclerc, 1992; Thaler, 1985). Thus, I have followed Wehner et al.'s (2012) scenarios as closely as possible and ensured participant understanding of manipulations by conducting a pilot study and conducting manipulation checks within the main study.

Third, following the procedure established by Wehner et al. (2012), the present study assumes that the use of RPO is apparent to applicants, and thus makes it explicit in the scenarios. Wehner et al. argued that, in the experience of HR professionals, applicants are aware of the use of RPO. Given that RPO is being increasingly used across many industries (Berklich, 2014), for the purposes of the study, this assumption seems reasonable.

Practical Implications and Directions for Future Research

The results of the present study suggest that further examination of RPO is needed. The limited previous research (Wehner et al., 2012, 2014) found that high levels of RPO resulted in decreased organization attraction, while these findings do not. Thus, a recommendation to managers regarding appropriate use of RPO seems somewhat premature. Future research on RPO should address perhaps the most important difference between the present study and previous research – the factor of general usage of RPO in a given country or region, and thus respondents' existing knowledge and views of RPO. Future studies measuring applicants' awareness and perceptions of RPO are warranted. Also, whether respondents are actual job applicants can affect results (Breaugh & Starke, 2000), since attraction or intentions may not correspond to actual pursuit behaviors, so future research might progress to field studies in order to determine the influence of RPO on actual applicants. A longitudinal study would be ideal to follow applicants through the recruitment process to see if the method of hiring has any impact on future performance or turnover, similar to research done on referral hiring outcomes (e.g., Pieper, 2014).

Additionally, the present findings on recruiter competence demonstrate the importance of this trait. Firms may find it beneficial to pursue further training of recruiters so that applicants perceive them as competent, regardless of whether they are internal or external. Future research might address various types of competence in order to more precisely identify what types of recruiter incompetence affect organization

attraction. For instance, discovering what competencies matter most to applicants, such as basic courtesies like being on time to the interview or being prepared for the interview and allowing time for questions, could help firms determine how to allocate training time. Given the noted importance of recruiter qualities (Chapman et al., 2005), close attention should be paid to this facet of recruitment.

Finally, given the strength of the correlation between perceived reputation and organization attraction, future research should examine this direct effect in more detail. Of particular concern is the lack of any general or accepted definition of the term itself (Cable & Turban, 2001) or consistency in defining it in the context of any given study (Walker, 2010), leading to difficulties in comparing results. For instance, as Fombrun and Shanley (1990) suggested, a firm's recruitment reputation may not be the same as its overall reputation. Knowing which facet or perception of reputation applicants rely on would yield greater insight for companies attempting to attract top candidates (Turban & Cable, 2003). Thus, given the complexity of perceived reputation and its apparent importance to the recruitment process (e.g., Turban & Cable, 2003; Williamson, King, Lepak, & Sarma, 2010), further study of firm reputation seems advisable in order to more clearly define and measure both the construct and its impact on applicants.

APPENDIX A

Measures

Organization attraction:

1. For me, this company would be a good place to work.

2. I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort.*

3. This company is attractive to me as a place for employment.

4. I am interested in learning more about this company.

5. A job at this company is very appealing to me.

Recruiter competence:

The recruiter:

1. Was unable to answer my questions.*

2. Was not prepared for the interview.*

3. Asked inappropriate questions.*

4. Was confrontational.*

5. Was a poor representative of this company.*

6. Set aside time for me to ask questions.

Reputation of hiring firm:

1. Employees are probably proud to say they work at this company.

2. This is a reputable company to work for.

3. This company probably has a reputation as being an excellent employer.

4. I would find this company a prestigious place to work.

5. There are probably many who would like to work at this company.[*]

APPENDIX B

Hypothetical Scenarios

Scenario 1: No RPO/Negative Reputation/Incompetent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that *XYZ Firm* will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@XYZFirm.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *XYZ Firm*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *XYZ Firm*. You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *XYZ Firm*. During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *XYZ Firm*. You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm*.

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *XYZ Firm* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm*.

The recruiter does not seem prepared and first tries to explain the process of the job interview. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths. The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you

would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

Some of the questions the recruiter asks do not seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you are not given the opportunity or time to ask questions as well. When you do try to ask questions, the recruiter is not able to satisfactorily answer them, and becomes confrontational.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Worst Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they only did so because they had no other options, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is not known as a great employer.

Scenario 2: No RPO/ Negative Reputation/Competent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that *XYZ Firm* will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@XYZFirm.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *XYZ Firm*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *XYZ Firm*. You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *XYZ Firm*. During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *XYZ Firm*. You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm*.

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *XYZ Firm* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm*.

The recruiter does not seem prepared and first tries to explain the process of the job interview. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths. The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you

would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

Some of the questions the recruiter asks do not seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you are not given the opportunity or time to ask questions as well. When you do try to ask questions, the recruiter is not able to satisfactorily answer them, and becomes confrontational.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Best Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they were very excited to do so, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is known as a great employer.

Scenario 3: No RPO/ Positive Reputation/Incompetent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that *XYZ Firm* will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@XYZFirm.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *XYZ Firm*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *XYZ Firm*. You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *XYZ Firm*. During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *XYZ Firm*. You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm*.

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *XYZ Firm* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm*.

The recruiter seems prepared and first explains the process of the job interview. Next, you are given information about *XYZ Firm* and details of the job. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths.

The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

All the questions the recruiter asks seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you have the opportunity and time to ask the recruiter questions as well. The recruiter is able to satisfactorily answer all of your questions.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Worst Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they only did so because they had no other options, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is not known as a great employer.

Scenario 4: No RPO/ Positive Reputation/Competent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that *XYZ Firm* will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@XYZFirm.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *XYZ Firm*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *XYZ Firm*. You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *XYZ Firm*. During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *XYZ Firm*. You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm.*

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *XYZ Firm* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm.*

The recruiter seems prepared and first explains the process of the job interview. Next, you are given information about *XYZ Firm* and details of the job. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths.

The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

All the questions the recruiter asks seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you have the opportunity and time to ask the recruiter questions as well. The recruiter is able to satisfactorily answer all of your questions.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *XYZ Firm* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Best Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they were very excited to do so, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is known as a great employer.

Scenario 5: RPO/ Negative Reputation/Incompetent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that a third-party firm, *Personnel, Inc.*, will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@Personnel.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *Personnel, Inc.*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications on behalf of *XYZ Firm*.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *Personnel, Inc.* You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *Personnel, Inc.* You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm.*

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm.*

The recruiter does not seem prepared and first tries to explain the process of the job interview. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths. The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you

would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

Some of the questions the recruiter asks do not seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you are not given the opportunity or time to ask questions as well. When you do try to ask questions, the recruiter is not able to satisfactorily answer them, and becomes confrontational.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Worst Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they only did so because they had no other options, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is not known as a great employer.

Scenario 6: RPO/ Negative Reputation/Competent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that a third-party firm, *Personnel, Inc.*, will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@Personnel.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *Personnel, Inc.*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications on behalf of *XYZ Firm*.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *Personnel, Inc.* You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *Personnel, Inc.* You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm.*

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm.*

The recruiter does not seem prepared and first tries to explain the process of the job interview. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths. The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you

would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

Some of the questions the recruiter asks do not seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you are not given the opportunity or time to ask questions as well. When you do try to ask questions, the recruiter is not able to satisfactorily answer them, and becomes confrontational.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Best Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they were very excited to do so, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is known as a great employer.

Scenario 7: RPO/ Positive Reputation/Incompetent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that a third-party firm, *Personnel, Inc.*, will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@Personnel.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *Personnel, Inc.*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications on behalf of *XYZ Firm*.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *Personnel, Inc.* You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *Personnel, Inc.* You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm.*

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm.*

The recruiter seems prepared and first explains the process of the job interview. Next, you are given information about *XYZ Firm* and details of the job. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths.

The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

All the questions the recruiter asks seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you have the opportunity and time to ask the recruiter questions as well. The recruiter is able to satisfactorily answer all of your questions.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Worst Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they only did so because they had no other options, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is not known as a great employer.

Scenario 8: RPO/Positive Reputation/Competent Recruiter

You have seen an ad for a position at *XYZ Firm* that exactly matches your abilities and expectations. Therefore, you decide to apply for this job. The ad indicates that a third-party firm, *Personnel, Inc.*, will be handling the recruitment process and directs you to send your job application and resume to the following e-mail address: *recruiting@Personnel.com*. Three days after sending your job application, you receive an e-mail from *Personnel, Inc.*, confirming that your application has been received and asking for your patience while they review applications on behalf of *XYZ Firm*.

Two weeks later, you receive a call from *Personnel, Inc.* You agree on a date for a telephone interview with a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* During this telephone interview, you are asked questions referring to your resume and your motivation for applying for this job.

One week later, you receive another call from *Personnel, Inc.* You are told that all telephone interviews of potential job applicants have been evaluated and that you have been placed on the short list. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* invites you to a job interview at the headquarters of *XYZ Firm.*

On the following Wednesday, you drive to *XYZ Firm's* headquarters where you are welcomed by a recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* and the manager you would be reporting to at *XYZ Firm.*

The recruiter seems prepared and first explains the process of the job interview. Next, you are given information about *XYZ Firm* and details of the job. You are asked why you think that you are suitable for the position and your weaknesses and strengths.

The manager from *XYZ Firm* describes the team that you would be working with as well as your future tasks, and asks questions about your expertise.

All the questions the recruiter asks seem appropriate for the job you are interviewing for, and you have the opportunity and time to ask the recruiter questions as well. The recruiter is able to satisfactorily answer all of your questions.

One hour later, the job interview is finished. The recruiter from *Personnel, Inc.* says goodbye and walks you to the door.

On your way home, you think about whether you could imagine working for *XYZ Firm.* You also reflect on all your impressions of the company. You recall that *XYZ Firm* was included on a recent "Best Employers" list in the local newspaper. Fellow students who interned at *XYZ Firm* said that they were very excited to do so, and your favorite professor suggested that *XYZ Firm* is known as a great employer.

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