

ESTABLISHING THE DIMENSIONS, SOURCES AND VALUE OF JOB SEEKERS' EMPLOYER KNOWLEDGE DURING RECRUITMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies marketing concepts to the recruitment research literature in order to develop the concept of employer knowledge, or the beliefs that a job seeker holds about a potential employer. Job seekers' employer knowledge creates value for an organization because it determines how they pursue and process information about the organization, whether they accept jobs with the organization, what they expect from the organization as new employees, and whether they purchase products and services from the firm in the future. Drawing on the marketing literature, this paper: (1) differentiates the dimensions of employer knowledge, (2) describes the sources of employer knowledge and how these information sources are processed by job seekers, and (3) describes how and why job seekers' employer knowledge represents a valuable asset to organizations. The discussion illustrates the implications of the model for recruitment researchers and managers, and suggests new perspectives and research directions that emerge from integrating of marketing and recruiting literatures.

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INTRODUCTION

A small technology firm with 18 employees has been experiencing considerable business success in terms of attracting venture capital funding and launching successful product innovations. To date, the employees have been handpicked from the personal connections of the CEO, the president, and other employees of the firm. While this “personal reference” method of hiring has been successful so far (turnover is low), the CEO’s growth goals for the next year necessitate hiring more new programmers than current employees can bring on board through personal connections. The company decides to recruit applicants “formally” by putting job opening information on the firm’s web site, but nobody applies. The firm then invests a considerable amount of money to advertise the jobs in a publication targeted at computer programmers and technologists, but again very few applications result. Finally, the firm decides to recruit at the State University for new computer science graduates so that job seekers can learn directly about the tremendous opportunities that exist at the firm. Even though the CEO herself carves out the time to visit the campus and conduct the interviews, only two people sign up to interview with the firm. The CEO finds the lack of recruiting success in stark contrast to many other business successes to date. How can the firm grow when it cannot recruit qualified job applicants?

A large, established, international computer and technology services firm has very high brand recognition, and is quite well-known publicly for a corporate culture that is conservative and bureaucratic. To hit its growth goals, the firm needs to hire 10,000 software and hardware developers over the course of the next year. Perhaps due to its brand recognition and good reputation, the firm is very successful at attracting applicants to interview for jobs, and is usually able to extend job offers to the appropriate number of qualified applicants. However, top management is concerned that the firm continues to attract applicants that match “the old bureaucratic company culture.” Like many large technology organizations, the firm is trying to “re-invent” itself internally, and change its public image externally, to be more innovative and risk-taking and less conservative and bureaucratic. The more aggressive, innovative applicants that top management prefers to hire usually accept jobs at competitors who have established an image of being fast, innovative, and aggressive. How can the firm start attracting the “new blood” that will help them reinvent themselves from the inside?

Considerable evidence is beginning to accumulate that human resource management practices affect organizational performance (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Pfeffer, 1998), and that human resources can serve as a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1986). In fact, many firms' most valuable resource may be human capital, or the talent and knowledge residing in their workforces. However, a recent survey of over 6000 executives from large US companies showed that the majority of firms did not possess adequate human resources, and this talent shortage is limiting their growth opportunities (Chambers, Handfield-Jones & Michaels, 1998).

Because of the low unemployment rate and the lack of qualified applicants for many positions (Judy, 1999), recruiting the "best and the brightest" has become a war for talent. Moreover, recruitment represents the beginning of the employment relationship, and therefore affects the success of subsequent human resource management practices such as selection, socialization, and training (e.g. Boudreau & Rynes, 1985). Thus, many firms are increasing their recruitment budgets and now spend approximately 31% of the human resources budget on recruitment and retention (Leonard, 1999).

Recruitment research to date focuses on what organizations can do to *generate applicants, maintain applicant status, and influence job choice*, as is reflected in Barber's recent definition of recruitment: "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (Barber, 1998, p. 5). The present paper takes a decidedly different approach. Rather than starting with organizational processes, our starting point is inside the heads of potential applicants. That is, we begin with the assumption that how a given person responds to a given employer depends entirely on what that person knows, or thinks that she knows, about the organization. As noted by Highhouse and Hoffman (2001) in their review of the organizational attraction and job choice literature, although job seekers rely on a number of cues for gathering information about potential jobs, we know little about the role of the job seeker in receiving and interpreting such information. Therefore, our primary focus is job seekers' *employer knowledge*, or what individuals believe about potential employers. Until we understand the primary dimensions of people's employer knowledge, and how employer knowledge is converted into behaviors, such as "go to a recruitment information session" or "apply for a job," we cannot understand how, why, or when organizational recruitment practices work.

As reflected in the opening vignette, there is considerable evidence that people hold different types of knowledge about potential employers, and that their beliefs affect how they respond to the organizations. For example, research shows that job seekers are affected by how familiar an organization is

(Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993), the culture or image that an organization conveys (Cable & Judge, 1996), and how attracted other people (e.g. friends) are to the organization (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994).

By focusing explicitly on employer knowledge structures, our perspective makes several important contributions to the existing recruitment literature. First, as suggested above, most recruitment research has focused on some measure of applicant attraction or job choice as the dependent variable. However, it is obviously difficult to understand or manage applicant attraction when it is unclear what applicant attraction is rooted in, or based upon. Next, without the benefit of a common framework of employer knowledge, past recruitment research has been labeling similar concepts by different names, and has been labeling different concepts by the same name. For example, recruitment researchers often have used the terms "image," "culture," "reputation," and "familiarity" interchangeably, despite wide variance in what the terms signify (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1996; Gatewood et al., 1993; Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994). Naturally, confusion between terminology and concepts makes progress in recruitment research difficult. Finally, by focusing exclusively on applicant attraction, past recruitment research has ignored the longer-term effects of recruitment on organizational entry. Recent research suggests that the employer knowledge that people learn as applicants triggers anticipatory coping mechanisms and serves as anchors for evaluating organizations during organizational entry (e.g. Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000). Although it is clear that individuals do not enter organizations as "blank slates," little research has examined the content or basis of applicants' employer knowledge. In fact, Bauer et al. (1998, p. 166) noted that "the lack of research in this area is disappointing in light of the growing view of (recruitment and) selection as an important determinant of, and sometimes substitute for, socialization."

Perhaps the most general implication that emerges from our perspective of employer knowledge is that organizations must understand the beliefs of their targeted applicants before they can decide what types of recruitment interventions and investments will return the greatest value. As demonstrated by the opening vignette, a relatively unknown firm that is recruiting at a university career office for the first time faces a very different set of challenges than a large, well-known organization with a bad reputation or an "incorrect" image. Without mapping and understanding the concept of applicants' employer knowledge, it is difficult to advance theory regarding how, why, and when recruitment influences applicants, and what firm-specific recruitment strategies need to be enacted to maximize recruitment competitiveness. Thus, our research focus responds directly to Rynes' (1991, p. 436) recommendation that future research

“determine the major components of organizational image, and whether any of them can be cost-effectively modified or communicated to improve applicant attraction.” Our research focus also responds to Rynes and Barber’s (1990, p. 293) call to “identify the psychological processes involved in the processing of message content.” Finally, our focus extends past recruitment research that has focused on particular *jobs* to consider job seekers’ *organizational-level* beliefs. Previous research shows that organizational characteristics such as location, size, industry, and culture often are used as “pre-screens” before any specific job is even considered (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Turban, Eyring & Campion, 1993; Rynes & Cable, 2001). Unfortunately, recruitment researchers and managers have little guidance regarding what constitutes job seekers’ employer knowledge, or how different types of communication can be used to facilitate different dimensions of organization-level knowledge.

To summarize, the primary objectives of this paper are: (1) to describe and define the relevant dimensions of job seekers’ employer knowledge; (2) to describe the sources of employer knowledge and how these information sources are processed by job seekers; and (3) to describe how and why job seekers’ employer knowledge represents a valuable asset to organizations. To meet these objectives, we organize the paper as follows. First, we integrate the recruitment literature with the marketing literature, focusing on the specific research area of “brand equity.” We use the brand equity literature to propose a framework of the dimensions of job seekers’ employer knowledge. Second, we discuss the sources of information that are the basis of job seekers’ employer knowledge, and we consider the characteristics of the information sources that determine how different types of sources will affect job seekers’ employer knowledge. Third, we describe a process model of how job seekers’ employer knowledge develops and may return value to organizations. Finally, we consider the implications that our perspective has on the recruitment literature, and we suggest research questions and methodologies for gathering empirical evidence on the sources, content, and value of job seekers’ employer knowledge.

INTEGRATING THE RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING LITERATURES

Few people would argue that people’s beliefs determine their behaviors. In the context of recruitment, what a given job seeker knows or doesn’t know about a firm determines whether that job seeker is aware of a job opening, applies for a job, attends an information session, or accepts a position. Thus, job seekers’ employer knowledge is a primary source of a firm’s recruitment success or failure. Unfortunately, however, we know very little about the structure or content of

job seekers' employer knowledge, how job seekers' knowledge about potential employers is developed, or how people's employer knowledge affects their behavior as they go through the recruitment process (e.g. Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991).

While the existing recruitment literature has not focused on job seekers' employer knowledge, we propose that recruitment researchers can leverage knowledge and research from the marketing literature. The communication and persuasion inherent in both marketing and recruitment suggests the value of integrating these literatures (Maurer, Howe & Lee, 1992). For example, in both the marketing and recruitment functions, firms compete to attract a limited set of individuals. These individuals, in turn, expend resources to gather and process ambiguous information, and invest resources in a chosen alternative. Both practitioners and academicians have noted the parallels between the recruiting and marketing processes, and have encouraged organizations to consider qualified job seekers as consumers in a market of possible employers (e.g. Breaugh, 1992; Bruce, 1993; Hanigan, 1994; Mathews & Redman, 1994). As Martin and Franz (1994, p. 49) suggested: "The striking resemblance between planning an applicant attraction strategy and planning a marketing strategy suggests that the applicant attraction planning process can benefit from a marketing orientation, particularly as changes in the workforce create increasing competition for qualified applicants."

While many aspects of the marketing literature may be relevant to recruitment, we theorize that the concepts of "brand equity" and "brand knowledge" can provide recruitment scholars with guidance in understanding the structure and the role of organizational knowledge in recruitment. Keller (1993, p. 2) defined brand equity as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." Thus, brand equity refers to the value of consumers' brand knowledge, or the set of beliefs that consumers hold about a brand (Aaker, 1996; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble & Donthu, 1995; Feldwick, 1996; Keller, 1993). For example, Coca-Cola has brand equity because consumers are more responsive to Coca-Cola commercials and products than to a similar but unknown cola brand and commercials for that brand. As noted by Keller, conceptualizing brand equity from the customer perspective is important because "it is critical that managers understand how their marketing programs affect consumer learning and thus subsequent recall for brand-related information" (1993, p. 2). According to this perspective, the long-term success of a marketing program depends on the brand knowledge that *already* has been established with consumers. Thus, establishing the appropriate brand knowledge in consumers' minds is a primary objective of strategic marketing investments (Kotler, 1994).

Applying the concept of brand equity to recruitment, we propose that organizational images are analogous to brands, that particular jobs are analogous

to specific products, and that job seekers are analogous to consumers. Consistent with a brand equity perspective, job seekers' employer knowledge accrues positive or negative value to organizations because employer knowledge affects how job seekers react to a firm's recruitment activities relative to other firms that are hiring for similar types of jobs. Thus, we define *recruitment equity* as the value of job seekers' employer knowledge, which is derived from job seekers' responses to recruiting organizations during and after the recruitment process. For example, Coca-Cola derives value from the employer knowledge that job seekers possess regarding Coca-Cola, aside from the attributes and characteristics of any particular job. Specifically, a brand equity perspective on recruiting implies that job seekers' employer knowledge affects their interpretations and responses to Coca-Cola's recruitment attempts, the number and type of applicants that Coca-Cola receives, the number and type of applicants who accept jobs at Coca-Cola, and the feelings and expectations that new organizational entrants have as they join Coca-Cola. Because brand equity has such high value to firms (Dyson, Farr & Hollis, 1996; Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Swait, Tulin, Louviere & Dubelaar, 1993), marketing scholars have devoted considerable effort toward understanding the concept of brand knowledge, which is a determinant of brand equity. Therefore, we draw upon the marketing literature to delineate the concept of job seekers' employer knowledge. We first discuss the dimensions of job seekers' employer knowledge, then we discuss sources of information that influence such knowledge, and finally we discuss various outcomes of job seekers' employer knowledge.

Figure 1 presents our process model of recruitment equity that integrates the content, the sources, and the outcomes of job seekers' employer knowledge. In general, the model suggests that many sources of information are available in the environment about an organization, ranging from companies' recruitment advertisements to non-recruitment information such as word of mouth from friends. Organizational information may affect different elements of job seekers' employer knowledge, depending on the credibility of the information source and job seekers' motivation to process the information. The ongoing feedback loops imply that the level and content of job seekers' employer knowledge at any given time help determine how a job seeker will respond to future information from the environment. Thus, Fig. 1 indicates that the process of establishing and modifying employer knowledge is ongoing, because job seekers' existing employer knowledge affects how they respond to future recruitment interventions by influencing their motivation to seek out and process subsequent organizational information. Job seeker's employer knowledge also affects behaviors toward an organization, including job search outcomes (e.g. applying for a job or not), employee outcomes (e.g. what a job seeker expect

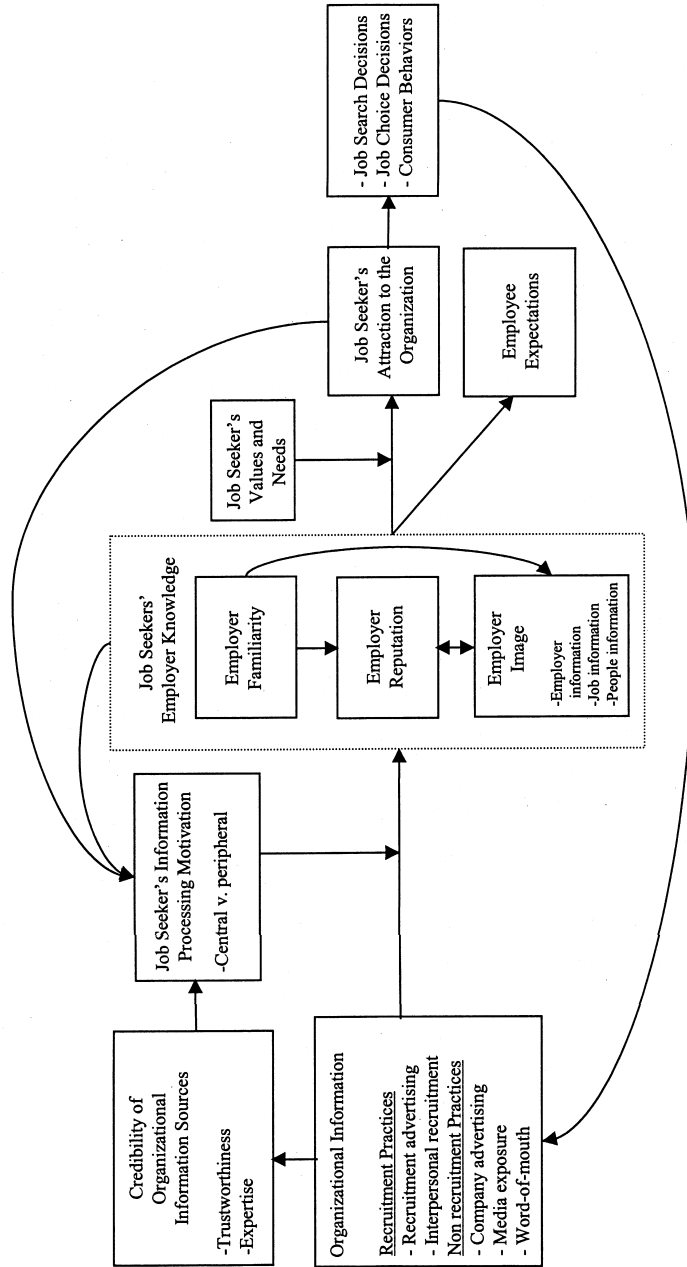


Fig. 1. Theoretical Model of Recruitment Equity.

from a firm after joining) and consumer outcomes (e.g. purchase decisions about products). Next, we review in detail the stages and relationships depicted in the model, beginning with job seeker's employer knowledge.

Job Seekers' Employer Knowledge

As noted by Keller (1993), understanding the concept and structure of brand knowledge is important because such knowledge influences how a consumer reacts to the brand. In describing brand knowledge, Keller (1993) drew upon widely-accepted associative models of memory (e.g. Wyer & Srull, 1989; Yi, 1990) that have conceptualized memory structure as associative networks comprised of nodes (stored information) and links (connections between nodes that vary in strength). According to this perspective, a node becomes a source of activation for other nodes when new information is being encoded or when stored information is being retrieved from long-term memory, resulting in "spreading activation" (Anderson, 1983; Ratcliff & McCoon, 1988; Yi, 1990). The strength of association between the activated nodes and all linked nodes determines how much spreading activation occurs, and how much information is retrieved from memory. Consistent with this conceptualization, Keller (1993) defined brand knowledge as a brand node in memory to which various associations are linked.

Consistent with social psychological research (e.g. Wyer & Srull, 1989) and marketing scholars (e.g. Keller, 1993), we define employer knowledge as a job seeker's memories and associations regarding an organization. We theorize that job seekers' employer knowledge influences how they process, and react to, information about the organization. For example, when a job seeker sees an organization's recruitment brochure in a career office, the job seeker recalls her memories that are most strongly related to that organization (e.g. use of products, interactions with interviewer), and she reacts to the brochure based on her stored memories. The expectation that a job seeker's existing knowledge about an employer will affect how she processes and reacts to future information about the employer is not particularly astonishing; however, this expectation has very important implications for understanding recruitment effectiveness, because it means that recruitment researchers need to understand: (1) what are the different dimensions of knowledge that a job seeker develops about employers? and (2) how do those dimensions of knowledge affect a job seeker's responses to information about an employer?

Consistent with both the brand equity literature and past recruitment research, we propose that job seekers' knowledge about an employer has three different facets, including the dimensions of employer familiarity (i.e. awareness),

employer reputation (i.e. affective evaluation), and employer image (i.e. attribute recall) (Aaker, 1996; Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Feldwick, 1996; Keller, 1993). As suggested in Fig. 1, we conceptualize these three domains of employer knowledge as a “template” that a job seeker uses to categorize, store, and recall information about the various employers that the job seeker evaluates and considers joining. Accordingly, a job seeker must create a new template, or associative network of memories, for each different employer they come across. Next, we briefly define each of the three facets that comprise job seekers’ employer knowledge. Then, we develop propositions regarding the relationships among the three facets. Finally, we conclude this section by developing propositions about how each facet affects job seekers’ motivation to process future information about an employer.

Employer Familiarity

Marketing scholars have noted that brand familiarity (also called brand awareness) is a fundamental dimension of brand knowledge (Aaker, 1991; Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Keller, 1993). Although different scholars have used different terms (both familiarity and awareness have been used) brand familiarity refers to the ease with which a brand name comes to mind (Keller, 1993). Marketing scholars have noted that brand awareness is necessary before a consumer can have any knowledge about the brand. Without brand awareness, there are no memory nodes in which to store associations and thus no knowledge about the brand.

In the context of recruitment, we define *employer familiarity* as the level of awareness that a job seeker has of an organization. Familiarity is necessary for the other dimensions of job seeker employer knowledge (i.e. image and reputation), because without a fundamental awareness of an organization’s existence there can be no employer knowledge. In other words, without familiarity, a job seeker does not even have a template to collect and store information about an employer. Thus, a job seeker cannot store knowledge about an organization without having some familiarity (awareness) of the organization’s existence.

Based on Aaker’s (1991) model of brand awareness, we conceptualize employer familiarity as consisting of various levels. The lowest level of employer familiarity is *unawareness* or a complete lack of familiarity (e.g. job seekers have not heard of the organization). A slightly higher level of familiarity is what has been labeled *recognition*, where a job seeker recognizes the name of the employer based on some minimal level of prior exposure to the employer. For example, job seekers might say “Yes, I’ve heard of a company called Coca-Cola, although I don’t know much about them.” A higher level of familiarity discussed by brand scholars is *recall* (Aaker, 1991). With brand

recall, a job seeker is familiar enough with an employer that they can recall the name of the employer when prompted with some salient fact about the firm (e.g. a firm in the soft drink industry). The first firm that is recalled by the job seeker has *top of the mind* awareness, which is the highest level of awareness.

Marketing scholars have noted that brand familiarity has considerable value in communicating information to consumers and in influencing consumer decision-making. Specifically, familiarity: (1) serves as an anchor to which other associations can be attached, (2) leads to liking because people like the familiar, and (3) can serve as a signal of substance based on the logic that people assume there is a reason why a company name is familiar (Aaker, 1991). By extension, we propose that employer familiarity adds value to firms during recruitment through similar mechanisms: (1) familiarity serves as an anchor (node) to which additional information about the employer is associated; (2) familiarity will lead to positive feelings towards the firm and will thus influence employer reputation; and (3) familiarity will serve as a signal about attributes associated with the firm and will thus influence employer image. Next, we conceptualize and define employer image and employer reputation, and then we describe the logic of the relationships between employer familiarity, image, and reputation.

Employer Image

Marketing scholars have recognized the importance of the concept of brand image, referring to people's perceptions, attributes, and associations connected with the brand in their memories (Aaker, 1996; Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993). Thus, brand image refers to information about the meaning of the brand for consumers. Brand image is therefore the root of brand equity, which is defined as the value of the brand *beyond* its physical assets (Biel, 1992). Given the importance of brand image to the marketing process, marketing scholars have focused on understanding the components of brand image, and Biel (1992) summarized that brand image consists of three images: image of the *maker*, image of the *product*, and image of the *users* (i.e. people who purchase the product).

Applying these principles from marketing to the recruitment context, we conceptualize *employer image* as the content of the beliefs held by a job seeker about an employer. Stated differently, employer image is the set of beliefs that a job seeker holds about the attributes of an organization (i.e. what type of organization is it?). Although there are innumerable ways to categorize the attributes that collectively determine a firm's image, a review of past job choice research suggests that three broad categories of employer image are important to job seekers: *employer information*, *job information*, and *people information* (see Fig. 1). Perhaps not surprisingly, these three categories of organizational information correspond closely to Biel's (1992) components of brand image.

More specifically, “image of the maker” corresponds with employer information; “image of the product” corresponds with job information; and “image of the users” corresponds with image of the people (i.e. potential co-workers). We briefly discuss each of these categories of employer image below.

Employer information. Employer information refers to objective aspects of organizations, ranging from factual or historical attributes to company policies, procedures, and norms. Examples of stable organizational characteristics that are important to job seekers include size, centralization, and geographical dispersion (Greenhaus, Sugalski & Crispin, 1978; Turban & Keon, 1993). Less objective organizational characteristics include firms’ concern for society and the environment (Turban & Greening, 1997), and organizational values and culture (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Cable & Judge, 1996).

Job information. Job information refers to job seekers’ knowledge about the attributes of a specific job at the firm that they might be interested in obtaining. For example, job information includes the type of work to be performed, the job title and job descriptions, the pay level, and opportunities for advancement (Harris & Fink, 1987; Jurgensen, 1978; Lacy, Bokemeier & Shepard, 1983; Powell, 1984, 1991; Turban, Campion & Eyring, 1995).

People information. People information refers to the type of individuals that comprise an organization and who would be potential co-workers to a job seeker. The individuals that currently reside in an organization send powerful signals to job seekers about how it would be to work in the organization, and how well they would fit in (Schwab, Rynes & Aldag, 1987; Turban & Dougherty, 1992). People are more comfortable with others perceived as similar to themselves than those viewed as dissimilar (Byrne, 1969), and research indicates that job seekers are particularly interested in the attributes of potential co-workers and supervisors, probably because these individuals will offer the most immediate input about the organization if the job seeker joins the organization (Breaugh, 1992; Jablin, 1987).

In summary, we conceptualize employer image as a job seeker’s beliefs about an organization that can be categorized in terms of beliefs about the employer, about attributes of the job, and about the people that work for the employer.

Employer Reputation

In general, organizational reputation refers to a public evaluation of a firm relative to other firms (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). More specifically, Fombrun (1996, p. 37) defined corporate reputation as the “affective or emotional reaction

– good or bad, weak or strong – of . . . the general public to the company’s name.” Following this conceptualization of corporate reputation, we define *employer reputation* 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* beliefs about the organization (in terms of information about the employer, job, and people in the organization). We believe that it is useful to distinguish among the concepts of employer image and employer reputation because, as noted by Barber (1998), there has been considerable variability in how recruitment researchers have conceptualized and operationalized image and reputation.

Theoretically, job seekers should be concerned about firms’ reputations because reputations are “bonding signals” that communicate an organization’s competitive position as an employer under conditions of imperfect information (Swait et al., 1993). Empirical research has confirmed that employers’ reputations are a distinct, important component of job seekers’ employer knowledge. For example, Kilduff (1990) suggested that friends’ evaluations of firms affect job seekers because they “validate” organizations as suitable employers, and Jacoby, Hoyer and Brief (1992) suggested that when peers evaluate an organization positively their opinions serve a legitimizing function.

Summary

In summary, based in part on the marketing literature, we conceptualize job seekers’ employer knowledge as consisting of these three components: employer awareness, employer image, and employer reputation. Next, we discuss the interrelationships among these components of employer knowledge.

Relationships among Dimension of Employer Knowledge

Employer Familiarity and Employer Image

Little recruitment research has examined how job seekers’ familiarity with a company affects their employer knowledge. This lack of research is somewhat surprising given that many recruitment activities are designed, in part, to influence applicants’ familiarity with a firm. It is possible that the lack of research in this area reflects the fact that much recruitment research has not identified familiarity, image, and reputation as separate constructs. On one level, the relationship between employer familiarity and employer image is quite direct: without a basic awareness of an employer, a job seeker cannot possess employer

knowledge. Thus, employer familiarity is a precursor to image and reputation. As noted above, without familiarity a job seeker does not even possess a template to collect and store information about an employer.

Moreover, we propose that a job seeker's familiarity with a given firm should affect the *content* of what they believe about that firm as an employer. For example, marketing scholars have argued that familiarity serves as a signal of substance or quality of the brand, and that consumers ascribe certain characteristics to a brand with which they are familiar (Aaker, 1991). Following the marketing literature, we propose that when job seekers are unaware of a firm, they question the legitimacy of the firm as an employer. Legitimacy refers to "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate" (Suchman, 1995). To the extent that a firm is unknown to a job seeker, the firm suffers a "liability of newness" such that the job seeker cannot assume that the basic conditions of employment will be upheld at that firm (Freeman, Carroll & Hannan, 1983). Conversely, we propose that when a job seeker is familiar with a given firm, she is more able to assume that the firm is a legitimate employer that offers "taken-for-granted" conditions of employment (e.g. that the firm will exist in the future, that the firm offers benefits consistent with most other employers, etc.). In a sense, we are proposing that familiarity with a firm gives job seekers a template to store information, and that their "default" template about a known firm will be based on beliefs about the employment terms of legitimate employers. Thus, as suggested by Rousseau and Parks (1993), non-members make attributions about firms' patterns of exchange with employees including "long-term reciprocal commitments, careers within companies, attractive and equitable wages, and job security."

Some recent empirical evidence substantiates our proposition that employer familiarity should affect job seekers' employer image beliefs. For example, Turban (2001) found that job seekers' familiarity with a firm was related positively to perceptions of job attributes and to other beliefs about the company. Likewise, evidence from a study conducted in the People's Republic of China (where firm familiarity was experimentally manipulated) indicated that firm familiarity was related to job seekers' perceptions of job and organizational attributes (Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow & Si, 2001). In summary, employer familiarity is a necessary condition for employer image. Furthermore, based on theory and the emerging empirical evidence it seems likely that employer familiarity will be related to employer image. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 1a: Employer familiarity is a precursor of employer image.

Proposition 1b: Employer familiarity is related to employer image.

Employer Familiarity and Employer Reputation

We argued above that employer familiarity would impact job seekers' employer image, referring to their beliefs about a firm's attributes. Here, we propose that employer familiarity should be related to employer reputation, referring to a job seeker's belief about the public's affective evaluation of the organization. First, we argue that employer familiarity is necessary for a job seeker to develop beliefs about employer reputation. That is, before a person knows that a firm exists, they cannot have a belief about how positively or negatively other people evaluate that firm. Next, as we argued above, we expect that when a job seeker is familiar with a firm, she is more likely to view that firm as a legitimate employer than when she has never heard of the firm. Because firms that are viewed as legitimate are also assumed to offer socially appropriate, taken-for-granted terms of employment (e.g. market-based pay, benefits, security), we expect that a job seeker's familiarity with an employer will make them more likely to believe that other people in society hold a positive evaluation of the employer.

Theoretical and empirical evidence also suggests that employer familiarity will be positively related to employer reputation. For example, the "mere exposure" research literature indicates that increased exposure to an entity results in more positive evaluations of that entity (Zajonc, 1968). In fact, marketing scholars have drawn upon the mere exposure literature and have argued that consumers' familiarity with a brand is so valuable because people like things that are familiar (Aaker, 1991). For example, Janiszewski (1993) found that exposure to a brand name encouraged consumers to have a more favorable attitude toward that brand even when the consumer could not recall the initial exposure to the brand. Finally, some evidence from the recruitment literature suggests that employer familiarity will be positively related to employer reputation. For example, Gatewood et al. (1993), Turban and Greening (1997), and Cable and Graham (2000) all found that job seekers' familiarity with firms was positively related to beliefs about the firms' reputations. Such results suggest that the more familiar the firm, the more positive the firm's reputation.

Proposition 2a: Employer familiarity is a precursor of employer reputation.

Proposition 2b: Employer familiarity is positively related to reputation.

Employer Image and Employer Reputation

Finally, we argue that there is a bi-directional relationship between employer image (a job seeker's perceptions of organizational attributes) and employer reputation (a job seeker's perceptions about how the public evaluates the organization). In other

words, we propose that employer image influences employer reputation *and* that employer reputation influences employer image.

First, we expect that employer image can influence employer reputation because certain organizational attributes have direct implications for how the firm is evaluated by society. For example, if a given job seeker believes that an employer is socially responsible and offers high pay levels, then the job seeker also is likely to believe that the firm has a good reputation (Cable & Graham, 2000; Ferris, Arthur, Berkson, Kaplan, Harrell-Cook & Frink, 1998; Turban & Greening, 1997). In tight labor markets, it is likely that organizations actively promote their positive characteristics, and therefore manage their reputations, in order to ensure an adequate number of job candidates (Berkson, Harris & Ferris, 1999). Conversely, if a job seeker believes that a firm is not profitable, or operates in a “sinful” industry such as tobacco or gambling, she is probably less likely to attribute a positive reputation to the firm (Frank, 1996; Fombrun, 1996). In fact, Cable and Graham (2000) recently confirmed that job seekers’ beliefs about profitability, the industry in which a firm operated, and pay level were related to reputation perceptions. The relationship that we propose between employer image and employer reputation beliefs seems particularly tenable in light of research on the “false consensus effect,” which suggests that people tend to believe that others share their beliefs (Gilovich, 1990). Accordingly, a job seeker should, in general, believe that other job seekers possess similar information about an employer’s image that they themselves possess, increasing the probability of a link between employer image and employer reputation.

Proposition 3a: Employer image beliefs affect employer reputation beliefs.

We also propose that employer reputation influences job seekers’ employer image beliefs. Organizational scholars have argued that one of the reasons why reputation is valuable to firms is because reputation serves as a signal of organizational attributes and behaviors (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanely, 1990; Swait et al., 1993). In other words, when a firm has a good reputation, external observers use this information to make inferences about the firm.

For example, it is difficult for job seekers to acquire substantial information about many aspects of jobs prior to actually starting the job (Rynes, 1991; Stigler, 1962). Job seekers’ difficulty in obtaining information is exacerbated in the earliest stages of recruitment (i.e. prior to interviews and site visits) when they must initially decide which jobs to apply for and which jobs to remove from consideration. The marketing literature shows that consumers make inferences about particular attributes of brands based on an overall evaluation of the brand (Dick, Chakravarti & Biehal, 1990; Keller, 1993). For example, consumers interpret brand images as signals about product quality (e.g. Shapiro,

1983). Likewise, in a recruitment context, some initial research suggests that applicants' perceptions of an employer's reputation are related to perceptions of organizational attributes (Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998). Thus, we propose that applicants make inferences about an employer's image based on their beliefs about the employer's reputation.

Proposition 3b: Employer reputation beliefs affect employer image beliefs.

Above, we described the components of job seekers' employer knowledge, and we discussed the relationships between the components. Next, we turn to the sources of job seekers' employer knowledge, focusing on where job seekers gather their information about employers and the effectiveness of different information sources.

THE SOURCES OF JOB SEEKERS' EMPLOYER KNOWLEDGE

Clearly, job seekers must obtain information about organizations in order to develop the dimensions of employer knowledge discussed above. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to understand how different sources of information are processed by job seekers. Also, because organizations can manage aspects of job seekers' employer knowledge, it appears beneficial for recruitment managers to strategically develop and maintain their organizations' recruitment images such that they complement and extend, rather than interfere with, their organizations' brand images (Aaker, 1996). As Jacoby et al. (1992, p. 418) noted in a recruitment context, "it would be in an organization's best interest if it could learn to use all channels of information to which it has access."

However, job seekers are not passive recipients of information about organizations. In fact, the marketing research literature suggests that individuals generally are skeptical about organizational claims, assigning different meanings to information derived from organizational sources versus other sources of information (e.g. Ford, Smith & Swasy, 1990). Also, the investments required from job seekers to gather employer information vary greatly depending on the source of the information, which affects the likely impact of any given information source on job seekers' beliefs (Schwab et al., 1987). For example, a very different type of information processing is required to attend an information session versus learning about an employer from other job seekers. Therefore, to understand the effectiveness of recruitment interventions, it is important to examine how job seekers interpret and utilize information from different sources (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990).

Unfortunately, decisions about how to present recruitment information to applicants, and the order of information presentation, have been relatively unexplored to date (Rynes, 1991). Although a series of investigations has examined the effects of recruitment activities on job seekers' *attraction* to organizations (e.g. Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), little research has examined how different sources of information affect different dimensions of employer *knowledge*, nor has research examined how job seekers interpret organizational information from non-recruitment sources (Breaugh, 1992). Even the well-known "signaling" approach to information search (e.g. Rynes, 1991) begs the question as to the origin of "observable" organizational information, and how information sources influence job seekers' employer knowledge (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001).

From this perspective, a primary contribution of this paper is to start broadly when considering the information sources that can affect job seekers' employer knowledge. While the existing recruitment literature generally has focused on recruitment-specific information sources (e.g. interviews, recruitment ads, and company brochures), a clear implication from the brand equity perspective is that job seekers already have developed employer knowledge long before they become "potential applicants." In other words, as suggested by Barber (1998), people are not blank slates that a recruiter can start writing information upon. For example, long before Intel comes to recruit for jobs at a university campus, students already have been exposed to a number of information sources about Intel and have already developed employer knowledge templates for Intel. As described later, preexisting employer knowledge will affect how people interpret and respond to Intel's recruitment attempts. Or, if a job seeker never has heard of Intel before, this lack of knowledge likewise affects how the job seeker will respond to information about Intel relative to other firms with which she is familiar.

Thus, a brand equity perspective implies that the recruitment literature must look beyond recruitment interventions as the sole source of job seekers' employer knowledge. Any information source, ranging from company's brand advertisement to friends' word of mouth, has the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge (Cable et al., 2000). Unfortunately, several sources of organizational information suggested by the marketing literature have been relatively ignored in past recruitment research, including organizations' products and services, advertising, and media exposure. This discussion leads to two general propositions that stem from a brand equity perspective, which we state to remind researchers about the holes that exist in the recruitment literature.

Proposition 4a: Individuals possess employer knowledge before they become job seekers.

Proposition 4b: All sources of information about organizations have the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge.

In the next section of the paper, we examine how job seekers' existing employer knowledge affects their motivation to process information, and thus affects the impact that organizational information has on their beliefs and behaviors. Then, we examine the characteristics of information sources that determine their effectiveness in changing job seekers' employer knowledge.

Job Seekers' Information Processing Motivation

From the perspective that we present in this paper, an organization's goal during recruitment is to influence job seekers' employer knowledge. In other words, the first step in recruitment success is making applicants aware of a firm and then convincing applicants of certain beliefs about the firm. Naturally, for a job seeker's beliefs to change, it is necessary for information to be processed by that job seeker. The next section of this paper focuses on how job seekers become motivated (or unmotivated) to process information about an employer, and how the characteristics of different information sources affect job seekers' motivation levels.

Perhaps the most widely accepted model of information processing and attitude change is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In general, the ELM suggests that individuals can process information through a central route or a peripheral route. A central route to persuasion involves expending resources to pursue and carefully consider the merits of information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the context of recruitment, for example, sources requiring central processing might include information sessions and interviews. A peripheral route, conversely, does not involve careful examination of the merits of the information presented, but rather the information is processed using simple informational cues that are a part of the message. Thus, a peripheral route does not require high search costs or close scrutiny of the information (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). Examples of information sources that might be peripherally processed include seeing a television ad about the company, or perhaps receiving visible company artifacts (e.g. pens or stationary with the company logo). While we focus on the ELM in the present paper, the basic distinction between central and peripheral processing is quite similar to distinctions made by other information processing scholars, such as "deep vs. shallow processing," "controlled vs. automatic processing," "systematic vs. heuristic processing," and "thoughtful vs. mindless processing" (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, p. 268).

In the context of developing job seekers' employer knowledge, the distinction between central and peripheral processing is important because when people use central processing, the information is more likely to lead to changes and enhancements in what they believe. Specifically, research shows that the active cognitive involvement of central processing results in knowledge that is longer lasting than knowledge obtained via peripheral processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). Therefore, we expect that whether job seekers engage in central or peripheral information processing will influence the extent to which information influences their employer knowledge, such that information that is centrally processed has a greater impact on knowledge than information that is peripherally processed.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) proposed that a person's ability and motivation to process information determines the route through which information is processed. Specifically, if an individual does not have the ability and motivation to process information through the central route (i.e. carefully considering the merits of the information presented) then the information will be processed through a peripheral route, resulting in less change in beliefs. In general, we assume that job seekers have the requisite ability to process information from the various information sources, and we next focus our attention to whether job seekers have the requisite *motivation* to process information from various sources of information.

We assume that, in general, job seekers are motivated to actively process information about potential employers, since a person's future job and employer is such an important aspect of their identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Thus, in general, information about potential employers has high personal relevance for job seekers (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Nonetheless, we theorize that job seekers will not be motivated to engage in central processing of information when the costs associated with central processing don't outweigh the expected benefits of such processing. As suggested in Fig. 1, we examine three contextual variables that should influence the extent to which job seekers are motivated to exert the effort required by central processing: credibility of the information source; job seekers' pre-existing employer knowledge; and job seekers' level of attraction to the employer. We discuss these three contextual variables next.

Credibility of Information Source

Information sources vary in the extent to which they are perceived by job seekers as credible sources of information about the organization (Fisher, Ilgen & Hoyer, 1979). Because job seekers are focused on obtaining information about how it would be to work at different organizations, they should be more

interested in obtaining information from credible sources. Credibility of a source is a function of two factors: the expertise and the trustworthiness of the source (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Tuppen, 1974).

In the recruitment context, expertise refers to the extent to which job seekers perceive a source as providing information that would be useful to their job search. For example, an information source that has direct relevance to what it is like to work as an employee in an organization (e.g. company information sessions) should be viewed as having greater expertise than an information source that does not provide direct information about employment at the organization (e.g. product advertisements).

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which an information source provides information that accurately, or truthfully, describes what it would be like to be an employee of an organization. For example, some evidence suggests that because job seekers believe that recruiters are expected to provide only positive information about their organizations, recruiters tend to be considered as less trustworthy than other sources of information (Fisher et al., 1979). Based on the above discussion, we propose that job seekers will be more motivated to invest the energy to centrally process information from a source when they perceive the source to have high expertise and high trustworthiness.

Proposition 5: Job seekers will be more likely to centrally process information from a source perceived to have high expertise and high trustworthiness.

Next, we examine two dimensions of information sources that we theorize will influence the expertise and trustworthiness of a source and thus job seekers' motivation to process information from that source.

Dimensions of Information Sources

We believe it is useful to conceptualize the various sources of information that may influence job seekers' employer knowledge along two dimensions: (1) an internal-external dimension, and (2) an experiential-informational dimension. These dimensions reflect past research indicating that the origin (i.e. source) of information and the channel (e.g. medium) by which information is conveyed influence the credibility of messages and how individuals react to the messages (e.g. Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Keller, 1993; McGuire, 1972). Accordingly, we use these dimensions to motivate propositions regarding the extent to which various information sources are perceived as credible, and the extent to which information from these sources influences job seekers' employer knowledge.

Internal versus external sources of information. The internal-external continuum represents the degree to which a source of information is an organization's

“self-presentation” created specifically for job seekers versus information that is available to the general public. For example, some information sources through which job seekers’ obtain employer knowledge results from the firm’s recruitment activities (e.g. recruitment advertisements, brochures, recruiters) whereas other sources of employer knowledge do not result from the firm’s recruitment activities (e.g. brand advertisements, media exposure, friends and family).

Although recruitment researchers have examined effects of information sources such as advertisements, brochures, and recruiters that are a component of the firm’s recruitment activities (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Bauer & Aiman-Smith, 1996; Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Highhouse, Stiewalt, Bachiochi, Elder & Fisher, 1999; Powell, 1984, 1991; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), surprisingly little research has investigated information sources that are *not* a component of the firm’s recruitment activities. Furthermore, the studies that examined recruitment activity information sources generally have focused on applicant *attraction* as the outcome, so that we have little evidence about how information sources influences the different components of job seekers’ employer knowledge (Barber, 1998).

Regarding the internal-external continuum, it is widely acknowledged that organizations have high incentives to manage the impressions that public audiences, especially job seekers, form about them (Cable et al., 2000; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Accordingly, trustworthiness of organizational information from internal sources sometimes may be low. For example, it is difficult to find any negative information in organizational recruitment brochures (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986), and research confirms that organizational representatives often describe unrealistically positive working environments (Wanous & Colella, 1989). Fisher et al. (1979) found that job seekers tended not to trust recruiters, since they were seen as job “sellers.” Not surprisingly, these findings are consistent with marketing research, which has demonstrated consumers’ skepticism regarding advertising claims (e.g. Ford et al., 1990; Nelson, 1974). On the other hand, research shows that internal sources *can* be perceived as trustworthy, in particular when such internal sources provide a balanced message of both positive and negative information (Jacoby et al., 1992). Thus, we propose:

Proposition 6: When internal sources of information (recruitment brochures, recruiters) present balanced information, they are more likely to be perceived by job seekers as trustworthy than when the information is one-sided.

While information from internal sources may sometimes be viewed as less trustworthy than external information, internal sources of information have far greater expertise than do external sources. In other words, organizational insiders

presumably know much more about the working environment in a firm, and the policies regarding employment with the firm, than outsiders. For example, evidence suggests that potential co-workers are seen as an important source of information by job seekers (Fisher et al., 1979), presumably because such co-workers have the necessary expertise about working conditions in the organization. Likewise, Cable et al. (2000) found that a firm's internal information (e.g. recruitment brochures) had rather dramatic effects on applicant beliefs about the organization's culture, while external sources (e.g. word-of-mouth) had little effects on their culture beliefs. Thus, we theorize that although internal sources of information may sometimes be perceived as less trustworthy than external sources, they nevertheless may be viewed as credible sources of information because of their greater expertise. Thus, we make the following propositions.

Proposition 7a: Job seekers view internal sources of information (recruitment brochures, recruiters) as possessing greater expertise than external sources of information (media exposure, company advertising).

Proposition 7b: Internal sources of information are more likely to be processed centrally by job seekers than external sources of information.

Proposition 7c: Internal sources of information will have a greater impact on job seekers' employer knowledge than external sources of information.

Experiential versus information continuum. The experiential-information dimension represents the degree to which a job seeker obtains organizational information by personally experiencing some aspect of an organization (e.g. internship, interviews) versus reading or learning information from media presentations (e.g. annual reports, recruitment brochure). For example, job seekers who have personally used the firm's products or who have learned about the organization from an information session have experienced some aspect of the organization. In other words, they have used their own experiences to make interpretations about the organization, and what it might feel like to work in the organization. In contrast, job seekers who have learned about the organization through reading annual reports or newspaper articles have learned about the organization indirectly, through "pre-processed" information that has been interpreted by someone else.

We theorize that the experiential-informational dimension influences the extent to which individuals actively, or centrally, process information from an information source. Specifically, we propose that individuals are more likely to engage in active, central processing of information from sources higher on the experiential dimension than the informational dimension. Past theory and

research suggests that job seekers' perceive information obtained through direct experience as more credible than information obtained through media presentations (e.g. Fazio & Zanna, 1981). Thus, Popovich and Wanous (1982) found that "live" recruitment communications are more persuasive to job seekers than audio forms of information, which in turn are superior to written messages. Similarly, Suchman (1995, p. 599) noted that the more "codified" a firm's image management strategies become, the more likely it is that audiences will cynically interpret such activities as clues that something is amiss.

Furthermore, both theoretical (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and empirical (Craik & Tulving, 1975) research indicate that the more meaning and personal relevance that is attached to information during encoding, the stronger the resulting associations will be linked. Because experiential sources of information are more personally relevant to job seekers than informational sources (Keller, 1993), experiential sources should lead to more central processing of that information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As Fazio and Zanna (1981) noted, knowledge based on direct, behavioral experience is more salient to individuals than is knowledge based on indirect, non-behavioral experience. In summary, we theorize that information from sources that are experienced by job seekers will be perceived as more credible and thus will result in greater information processing motivation than will information from informational sources.

Proposition 8a: Experiential sources of organizational information (e.g. interviews, information sessions) are more likely to be perceived as credible sources of information than will informational sources (annual reports, brochures).

Proposition 8b: Experiential sources of organizational information are more likely to be processed centrally than informational sources.

Proposition 8c: Experiential sources of organizational information will have a greater impact on job seekers' employer knowledge than information sources.

To summarize this section, we proposed that the information that job seekers receive about potential employers can be classified along two continuums, ranging from internal to external, and ranging from experiential to informational. We further proposed that the source of organizational information will affect how a job seeker processes the information, ultimately resulting in more or less change in their employer knowledge. We graphically present and summarize our proposed continua and their effects on central processing in Fig. 2.

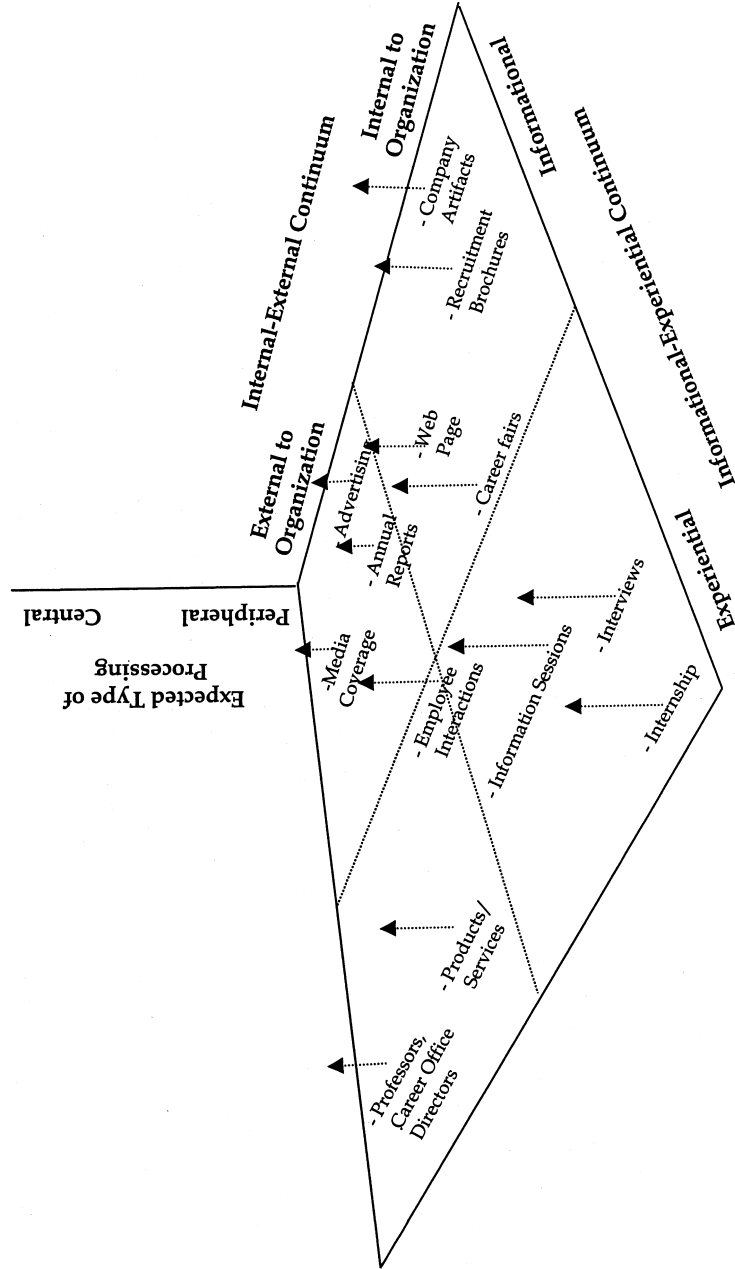


Fig. 2. Sources of Job Seekers' Employer Knowledge.

OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYER KNOWLEDGE

So far in this paper, we have concentrated on the concept of job seekers' employer knowledge. Specifically, we have introduced and defined the components of employer knowledge, we have discussed the relationships among the components, and we have examined the effects of different types of organizational information on job seeker's employer knowledge. The reason for our substantial focus on employer knowledge is that by understanding job seekers' employer knowledge, we understand what it is in their hearts and minds (Biel, 1992) that affects how they respond to employers during recruitment. To be specific, the knowledge that a job seeker currently possesses about an employer affects: (1) how she responds to future information about the organization, (2) how attracted she is to the organization, (3) how actively she pursues a job within the organization, and ultimately (4) whether or not she forms a relationship with the organization, either as an employee or as a consumer. Additionally, we theorize that job seekers' employer knowledge influences the expectations of individuals who subsequently accept job offers (i.e. new employees), and we therefore propose a relationship from employer knowledge to *employee expectations*. In this section of the paper, we discuss each of these different outcomes of employer knowledge.

Employer Knowledge and Information Processing

In the last section of this paper we suggested that job seekers are likely to process information about an organization differently depending on the source of the information. Here, we propose that whether a job seeker centrally or peripherally processes information about an organization also is a function of the job seeker's pre-existing employer knowledge. In terms of Fig. 1, we are referring to the feedback loop that goes from job seekers' employer knowledge to job seekers' information processing motivation.

As discussed earlier in the paper, employer familiarity is the level of awareness that a job seeker has of an organization and is a precursor to the other dimensions of employer knowledge (i.e. image and reputation) because job seekers cannot store knowledge about an organization without being aware of its existence. Therefore, at the risk of stating the obvious, we note that job seekers have no motivation to process information about potential employers of which they are unaware. Thus, firm awareness is necessary for job seekers' information processing motivation.

In addition to the theoretical importance of familiarity in affecting job seekers' motivation, the role of familiarity has important implications for organizations

– specifically, firms need to focus their recruitment interventions based on job seekers' employer knowledge. For example, the firm in the opening vignette of this paper, with little or no awareness among a targeted group of job seekers, needs to develop recruitment interventions that are focused on increasing awareness among potential applicants so that the firm will at least be considered as a potential employer. Once job seekers are aware of an organization's existence, they begin to develop beliefs about the firm's reputation and image. In other words, job seekers have a template of information to gather about each potential employer, and they can start processing information about a given employer once they are aware of the employer.

As discussed earlier, job seekers should be motivated to engage in the extra effort required by central processing only when there is some expected benefit from engaging in central processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). Following evidence from the marketing literature, we expect that when there is no expected benefit from central processing job seekers will process the information peripherally (i.e. pay minimal attention to the information) (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989; MacInnis, Moorman & Jaworski, 1991). We theorize that when job seekers are aware of an employer, but know very little about the employer's reputation or image, they will be motivated to attend to various sources of information about the organization because that information may have personal relevance. Thus, job seekers initially are motivated to process information from various sources about potential employers because they need to learn about the organization in order to determine the extent to which it may be a valid potential employer. As job seekers continue to learn about the firm (i.e. increase their employer knowledge), they become more selective in how they process information from various sources because the expected value of information from some sources is reduced. Based on the above logic we offer the following propositions.

Proposition 9: When job seekers are aware of a firm but have little knowledge of a potential employer's image or reputation, they will be more motivated to actively process information about the firm than when they have extensive knowledge of the firm's image or reputation.

Not all sources of information should have equal effects in terms of *maintaining* their relevance to a job seeker. In the last section of the paper, we proposed two continua of information sources (i.e. internal-external and experiential-informational). We propose that a job seeker's existing employer knowledge will cause a quicker decrease in central processing when an information source is external as opposed to internal. Specifically, we theorize that

as a job seeker's employer knowledge increases, the benefits of centrally processing external information decrease such that the benefits do not exceed the costs associated with such active processing. In other words, once a job seeker has developed a sophisticated employer knowledge structure about an organization, she will be less likely to view external information sources as providing additional useful information, and thus she will be less motivated to actively process information from external sources. On the other hand, information from internal sources should have value even when a job seeker already possesses considerable knowledge (i.e. assuming that the source is perceived as credible) because internal sources can offer a valuable perspective about what it is really like to work in the organization.

For example, company advertisements can influence employer knowledge when job seekers are relatively unfamiliar with the firm, but are less influential for job seekers who are relatively familiar with the firm, because the advertisement doesn't provide any new information about the firm as a potential employer. Similarly, annual reports can provide relevant information for uninformed job seekers, but they become less relevant for job seekers who are quite knowledgeable about the company. Thus, existing employer knowledge decreases the perceived relevance of information from some sources (e.g. company advertisements, annual reports) and thus reduces the motivation to actively process information from that source, which in turn reduces the impact of the source on employer knowledge. In contrast, internal sources of information can continue to provide relevant information even after the job seeker has considerable employer knowledge. For example, campus interviews and on-site visits are likely to provide job seekers with new information about subtle aspects of the employer even though the job seeker already possesses considerable employer knowledge.

To summarize, we propose that job seekers' existing employer knowledge influences the extent to which an information source is seen as relevant. As job seekers become more knowledgeable they become more selective in terms of what sources of information they will be motivated to actively process, based on their perceptions of the personal relevance of the information source. Thus, external sources (company advertisements) will lose their relevance as job seekers gain some initial employer knowledge whereas internal information sources (such as interviews or on-site visits) are slower to lose their relevance.

Proposition 10: Job seekers' employer knowledge will lead to peripheral processing of information from external sources of information sooner than it will lead to peripheral processing of information from internal sources.

Job Seekers' Attraction

One of the most important outcomes of job seekers' employer knowledge is their attraction to an organization. As shown in Fig. 1, job seekers' attraction initially is important because it affects whether a job seeker is willing to actively process future information about an employer. As discussed later in this section, attraction also affects individuals' decisions about organizations, including whether they pursue a job, whether they accept a job, what they expect from the firm if they do accept a job, and how they behave toward the firm as future consumers. Below, we discuss how the three facets of employer knowledge (i.e. familiarity, reputation, and image) affect job seekers' attraction to employers.

Employer Familiarity

Theoretically, familiarity only affects job seekers' attraction to employers through its effect on reputation and image beliefs. In other words, we propose that being aware of an employer has little value to a job seeker apart from the signals it provides about the employer, which we discussed earlier in the paper.

Proposition 11: Employer familiarity will not have a direct effect on attraction, but will only influence attraction and job choice decisions through employer image and reputation.

Employer Reputation

We defined reputation as a job seeker's beliefs about how other people evaluate an employer. We propose that, in general, employers with better reputations will be more attractive to job seekers. Our logic is that people are motivated to increase or maintain their self-esteem, and that people's employers are an important part of their self-concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). In fact, the connection between an organization's reputation and a person's identity should be particularly strong during the job pursuit process, because the act of pursuing and accepting a job highlights the volitional nature of the affiliation. Joining a particular organization is a concrete, public expression of a person's values and abilities (Popovich & Wanous, 1982).

Thus, a person's self-concept is, in part, influenced by the attributes that others may infer about them from their organizational membership (Dutton et al., 1994). When job seekers believe that an organization has a positive reputation, they can expect to "bask in the reflected glory" of the organization's social position (Cialdini et al., 1976). Conversely, membership in organizations with poor reputations can confer the negative attributes of an organization on

a member, replacing pride with embarrassment and discomfort (Dutton et al., 1994). Several empirical studies have confirmed that companies' reputation are associated with job seekers' attraction to those companies (Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Gatewood et al., 1993; Turban & Greening, 1997).

While we propose a positive relationship between an employer's reputation and job seekers' attraction to that employer, we also expect the effect of reputation on organizational attractiveness to be moderated by job seekers' self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to how favorably individuals evaluate themselves (Brockner, 1988). The well-accepted *behavioral plasticity hypothesis* posits that low self-esteem individuals are more susceptible to environmental and social cues than are high self-esteem individuals (Brockner, 1988; Campbell, 1990). In the recruitment context, the behavioral plasticity hypothesis suggests that organizational reputation should have a stronger effect on attraction to a firm for low (versus high) self-esteem individuals. Although few studies have investigated the effects of self-esteem in the applicant attraction process, Turban and Keon (1993) found that organizational characteristics accounted for more variance in attraction to a firm for low self-esteem individuals than for high self-esteem individuals, providing some support for the behavioral plasticity hypothesis in recruitment. Therefore, based on the above discussion, we propose:

Proposition 12a: Employer reputation positively affects job seekers' attraction to employers.

Proposition 12b: The effect of employer reputation on job seekers' attraction to employers is moderated by job seekers' self esteem.

Employer Image

Employer image refers to the content beliefs that a job seeker possesses about an organization, a particular job within the organization, and the people that work in the organization. Perhaps one of the most basic findings in psychology is that people select themselves into environments that fulfill their personal values and needs, a process resulting in person-environment fit (Chatman, 1989; Pervin, 1989; Schneider, 1987). Likewise, the job choice literature shows that job seekers evaluate potential employers based on the fit, or match, between their values, wants and needs and the characteristics that they learn about an employer (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Kristof, 1996; Tom, 1971; Turban & Keon, 1993). Thus, as suggested in Fig. 1, we propose that job seekers' beliefs about an employer's image affect their attraction to the organization, based on the fit between the employer's image and their personal values and needs.

Proposition 13: A job seeker's employer image beliefs affect their organizational attraction based on their personal values and needs.

Attraction and Motivation to Process Information

A job seeker must develop a minimal level of attraction to an organization or she will become unmotivated to process information about the organization. One way to think about the fundamental importance of attraction during recruitment is the concept of a "consideration set." In the marketing literature, a consideration set refers to a subset of the total possible group of brands available to a consumer that will be considered for the purchase decision, because this subset of brands meets a consumer's most basic, fundamental buying criteria (Hauser & Wernerfelt, 1990; Kotler, 1994; Tybout & Artz, 1994). Similarly, recruitment scholars have noted that a potential employer must enter a job seeker's consideration set before it is even considered as an employment option (e.g. Power & Aldag, 1985).

However, because different job seekers are interested in different types of employers (Schneider, 1987; Tom, 1971), an employer that many job seekers include in their consideration sets may nevertheless be excluded from other job seekers' consideration sets based on their personal values. For example, some job seekers simply will not consider employment in a firm in the military or tobacco industry because it is against their values. When an employer is excluded from job seekers' consideration sets, we propose that they have no motivation to process future information about that organization. For example, a job seeker might learn about an organization of which she was previously unaware, but if a minimal level of attraction does not develop, the organization will not be included in the job seeker's consideration set, and there is no motivation to process subsequent information about that employer.

Proposition 14a: A minimal level of attraction is necessary for a job seeker to be motivated to actively process information about a potential employer.

Proposition 14b: A job seeker's consideration set of potential employers is contingent on the employers establishing a minimal level of organizational attraction.

Proposition 14c: A job seeker will not actively process information about an employer that is not in her consideration set of potential employers.

Attraction and Decision Making

As shown in Fig. 1, we propose that job seekers' attraction to a firm affects the decisions that they make regarding organizations. First, we propose that job seekers' attraction to an organization affects their job search behaviors. Job search behaviors include whether or not they will expend the time and energy required to pursue additional information about an organization, such as attending the company's information sessions, signing up for an interview with the company, or talking with a company representative at a career fair. Job search behaviors also include applying for a specific position within the organization. Naturally, these job search behaviors ensure that additional information about the company will need to be processed by the job seeker, such that a feedback loop is created that restarts the process shown in Fig. 1. After several loops through this process of learning about an organization, comparing their organizational knowledge to their own needs and values, we propose that job seekers' attraction to an organization affect their ultimate decisions about whether to accept a specific job at the organization (assuming that a job is offered).

Proposition 15a: A job seeker's attraction to an employer affects her job search decisions, including decisions to gather additional employer information and to apply for a specific position.

Proposition 15b: A job seeker's attraction to an employer affects her job choice decisions.

Finally, we propose that job seekers' attraction to organizations will affect the way that they respond to organizations as consumers. In many cases, job seekers are also potential consumers of organizations' products and services and "spillover" is likely (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Spillover of attraction from the applicant role to the consumer role is especially likely for firms that recruit large segments of their future customer base (e.g. consumer products firms, consulting firms). Thus, if a job seeker is turned off by an organization because she meets with rude recruiters, or is exposed to selection methods that are unfair or invasive, the organization may be damaging its future brand equity. To the extent that individuals are highly attracted to an employer during job search because of the match between their personal values and an employer's culture, in the future they may be more likely to purchase the organization's products and services over its competitors (even if they do not receive a job offer).

Proposition 16: A job seeker's attraction to an employer affects her future decisions to purchase products or services from the organization.

Employer Knowledge and Employee Expectations

The last relationship that we discuss is the linkage between job seekers' employer knowledge and *employee expectations* (i.e. the expectations of individuals who have accepted a job offer from the firm). Naturally, the ultimate goal of recruitment from an organizational perspective is to convince certain applicants to accept a position in the organization. Thus, some job seekers will become employees. Little past research has focused on the fact that newcomers do not arrive at organizations as "blank slates" without prior conceptions or expectations about the organization (Barber, 1998). We propose that the employer knowledge that job seekers gather prior to and during recruitment transcend organizational entry, and filter newcomers' perceptions of their experience as employees. Thus, consistent with the realistic job preview literature, the messages that organizations send to job seekers during recruitment presocialize newcomers before they even accept positions (Bauer et al., 1998; Cable et al., 2000).

Given that job seekers carry their knowledge forward into employment, organizations face an interesting competing tension when informing job seekers about what it would be like to work there (Cable et al., 2000). Organizations should communicate accurate, realistic information because when newcomers enter a firm with accurate beliefs and realistic expectations, their behavior is guided in ways that transcend the objectives of a particular job. Moreover, when applicants join organizations based on inaccurate expectations and find their expectations to be unmet, they experience dissatisfaction and are likely to quit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Wanous & Colella, 1989). On the other hand, firms have more immediate incentives to provide applicants with positive, rather than accurate, beliefs about organizational culture because openly discussing unfavorable attributes can turn applicants away. Thus, managers are motivated to communicate a desirable image to applicants rather than the actual attributes that exist in the organization (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Based on this discussion, we propose:

Proposition 17a: Job seekers' employer knowledge affects their expectations and beliefs about organizations after they join as employees.

Proposition 17b: The greater the accuracy and realism of job seekers' employer image beliefs, the easier the transition during organizational entry, and the lower the "reality shock" and turnover.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Brand equity research demonstrates that consumers' brand knowledge enhances (or detracts from) the value of a product well beyond its functional value.

Marketing managers are acutely aware of the importance of brand knowledge, and regularly make strategic investments in creating, measuring, and managing consumers' brand knowledge (Kotler, 1994). Ultimately, these investments can generate a competitive advantage for firms because they initiate consumers' purchase decisions, increase brand loyalty, and improve the efficiency of future marketing programs (Aaker, 1996). Applying the equity research literature to recruitment suggests that job seekers' employer knowledge creates value for an organization because it determines how applicants pursue and process information about the organization, whether they accept jobs with the organization, what they expect from the organization as new employees, and whether they purchase products and services from the firm in the future.

Unfortunately, the recruitment research has not focused explicitly on job seekers' employer knowledge. Thus, the present paper integrated brand equity research with the recruitment literature in order to: (1) differentiate and define the facets of job seekers' employer knowledge, (2) examine how different information sources facilitate different dimensions of job seekers' employer knowledge, and (3) discuss the outcomes of job seekers' employer knowledge. These contributions are important because theoretical recruitment models to date have focused on job seekers' *evaluative* reactions to organizations (e.g. organizational attractiveness) with little emphasis on the *content* of job seekers' organizational beliefs. The evaluative approach, albeit important, appears to be incomplete because it fails to reveal what it is "in the hearts and minds" of job seekers that is actually driving recruitment image equity (Biel, 1992). Furthermore, the majority of recruitment research that has discussed the antecedents of job choice decisions has focused on *job* attributes, with a minority of attention devoted to job seekers' knowledge about organizations (Schwab et al., 1987). A job-based approach to recruitment is analogous to emphasizing product attributes (which other firms can replicate) over brand image, and therefore appears to be incomplete from a marketing perspective.

Perhaps the most important implication of this paper is that recruiters must understand job seekers' existing employer knowledge structures before they can decide what types of recruitment interventions and investments will return the greatest value. In other words, there does not appear to be a set of "best recruitment practices" that are beneficial for all firms, because different firms have established different levels, and types, of employer knowledge. Instead, our perspective implies that employers must carefully measure their existing position in the minds of their target market before developing their recruitment strategy and interventions.

An overview of the recruitment stages to consider when managing job seekers' organizational knowledge is provided in Fig. 3, which follows the logic of the propositions described above. For example, as suggested by the opening vignette,

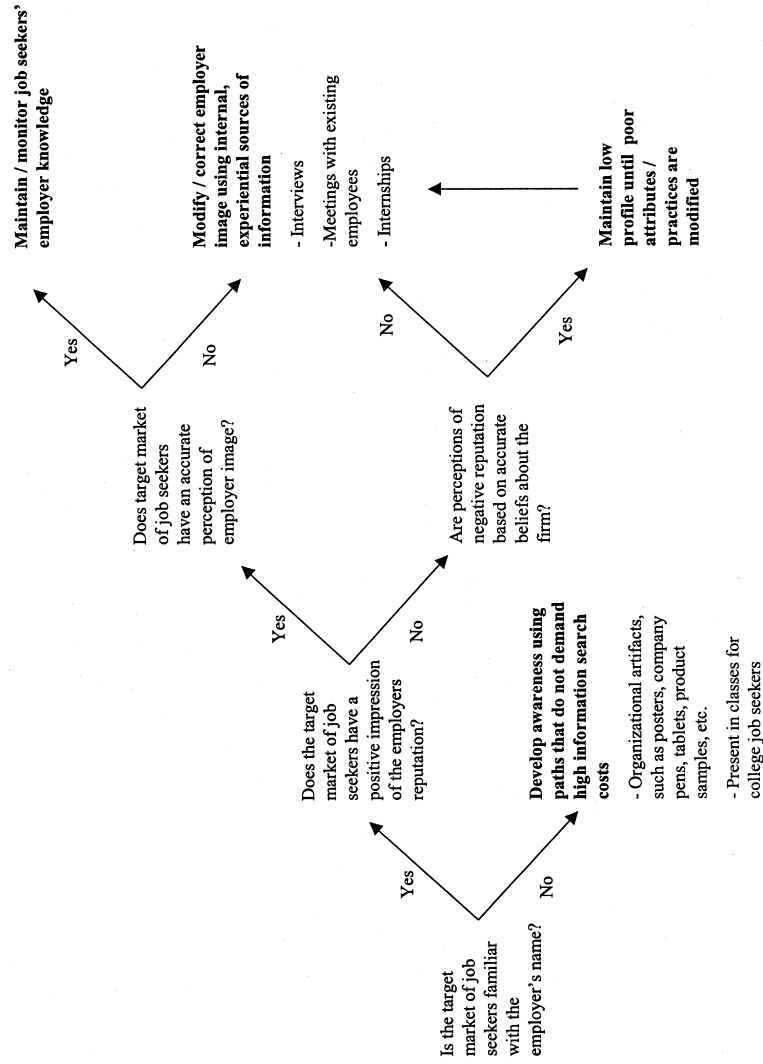


Fig. 3. Recruitment Decision Tree.

a relatively small firm that is recruiting at a university career office for the first time faces a very different set of challenges than a large, well-known organization that is misperceived in term of its corporate culture. As suggested in Fig. 3, our model suggests that after the first firm assesses and recognizes its recruitment position (i.e. low familiarity), the firm should focus its immediate investments on developing awareness with its target market of job seekers. For example, firms with low (or no awareness) might distribute pens or bookbags with their company logo at career fairs, work with professors to give presentations in college classes, and/or distribute product samples in a career office.

On the other hand, Fig. 3 suggests that when a firm is well-known but misperceived in terms of its culture, the firm should concentrate recruitment resources on modifying the specific aspects of its image that are misunderstood by job seekers. Because job seekers are familiar with the firm and have already developed employer knowledge structures, the firm can expect job seekers to actively process information from internal, experiential sources of information such as information sessions, interviews, or perhaps even internships. These information sources should be used to actively confront the misperceptions and relay accurate information about the firm's cultural values. Thus, the firm's negative image may force organizations to engage in defensive image management strategies in order to rectify their position among job seekers.

Figure 3 suggests that the goal of recruitment is to build job seekers' employer knowledge so that a firm is very familiar to its targeted job seekers, possesses a positive reputation, and has established a strong, accurate image. A firm in this enviable position can focus its recruitment resources on strengthening job seekers' existing beliefs through consistent repetition across multiple recruitment sources. In fact, firms that have established familiarity and an accurate image may be able to exploit their competitive position by using informational sources that are less expensive means of recruitment (e.g. web pages, recruitment videos), which should prove less effective for competitors that have not developed job seekers' employer knowledge templates as effectively.

Suggestions for Future Research

Below, we use our model to reveal future research questions and domains that may help advance the recruitment literature regarding information sources and employer knowledge.

Information Sources

In this paper, we've argued that any and all sources of information have the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge. Unfortunately, little is

known about how information sources other than recruitment practices influence jobs seekers' employer knowledge. Nonetheless, some recent research has begun to investigate traditionally "non-recruitment" information sources that may influence perceptions of a potential employer. For example, Scheu, Ryan and Nona (1999) found that applicants' perceptions of a company changed after viewing its web-site, and that independent ratings of web-site quality were related to potential applicants' perceptions of the company. As suggested by Scheu et al. (1999), it seems likely that potential applicants used the web site in forming impressions of the company, which in turn influenced how they thought they would fit at the company. More broadly, such results suggest the importance of designing web sites that help a company achieve various objectives including recruitment goals.

Furthermore, as noted by Breugh and Starke (2000) in their review of the recruitment literature, although firms devote considerable resources to job advertising, little research has investigated recruitment advertisements. Thus, Breugh and Starke (2000) called for research investigating the inferences that job seekers draw from recruitment ads. We agree with this recommendation and also suggest that recruitment scholars investigate how corporate and brand advertisements influence job seekers' perceptions of a firm as an employer. Because the major purpose of corporate advertising is to build or maintain a corporate image (Biehal & Sheinin, 1998), it seems likely that corporate advertising influences job seekers' employer knowledge, more specifically job seekers' employer image perceptions. Evidence from a meta-analysis suggests that individuals' reactions to an advertisement influence their cognitions and attitudes toward the company (Brown & Stayman, 1992). Based on such evidence, we suggested that company advertisements might influence job seekers' employer knowledge.

A recent study by Cable et al. (2000) indicated that company and product advertisements were related to actual job seekers' beliefs about a company's culture. Of additional interest, however, was the finding that applicants relying heavily on company and product advertisements for information about the company were *less* accurate in their perceptions about the company than were applicants who did not rely on company and product advertisements for information about the company. We urge researchers to continue to investigate how recruitment and corporate advertisements influence job seekers' employer knowledge. On a managerial level, it seems appropriate to suggest that recruitment managers attempt to collaborate with their firm's advertising and marketing managers to develop advertisements that are consistent and synergistic with the firm's recruitment activities. Likewise, recruitment managers should ensure that their recruitment activities portray an image that reinforces the firm's organizational and brand images.

Thus, the model that we present in this paper is consistent with the *realistic information hypothesis* (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). The realistic information hypothesis proposes that certain recruitment sources provide more accurate job and organizational information than other sources, allowing job seekers to make better decisions about their fit with the company, and resulting in met expectations and reduced turnover (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991). For example, employee referrals are thought to provide job seekers with more realistic information about the job than newspaper advertisements because incumbents have greater expertise about the position and thus can provide more accurate information. Although the realistic information hypothesis has received some support, recruitment scholars have noted that most studies investigating recruitment source effects have sampled from employees, not job applicants, and have measured post-hire outcomes (e.g. met expectations) rather than pre-hire variables (e.g. beliefs about the organization) (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Therefore, little is known about how different recruitment sources influence job seekers' employer knowledge, which presumably is the underlying mechanism for the realistic information hypothesis. We urge recruitment researchers to investigate whether and how different recruitment sources influence job seekers' employer knowledge, perhaps using a longitudinal data collection strategy that tracks changes in job seekers' beliefs about an employer across time. In such longitudinal research, it would be interesting to examine how initial impressions of firms (either positive or negative) might be susceptible or resistant to change. It is possible that negative initial impressions might be harder for firms to change than positive impressions.

Earlier in the paper, we discussed how individuals who currently work, or have previously worked, in a given firm are an important source of information for job seekers about that firm because the information is both experiential and internal. Thus, firms that recruit on college campuses should consider how to use internship and co-op experiences to increase potential job seekers' employer knowledge. In addition, individuals who have had an internship with a company are also a valuable information source for other job seekers who have not been employed by the company, particularly in a college setting where social networks are tight (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994). Therefore, individuals with internship experience (or, more broadly, work experience in the company) who are seen as a credible source of information about the company serve as an important word-of-mouth source of information for job seekers who have not worked for the firm.

Interestingly, Cable et al. (2000) found that job seekers were *not* more accurate about company culture when they based their beliefs on prior work experience (mostly internships) with the organization. In fact, their results

suggested that internships were either unrelated or *negatively* related to the accuracy of job seekers' beliefs about culture. These results may imply that the nature of applicants' prior experiences and relatively low levels of power (i.e. internship grunt work) were not challenging enough or did not sufficiently expose interns to the values of the company. Given the salience of internships to job seekers' beliefs about an employer, and their ability to broadcast these beliefs widely, firms need to ensure that interns have meaningful experiences so that they provide positive, yet realistic, information about the organization to other job seekers.

We've argued in this paper that internal and experiential information sources are more likely to be processed centrally and will have a greater impact on job seekers' employer knowledge than will external and experiential sources of information. We urge researchers to empirically test these propositions. Although we believe there is value in conceptualizing information sources as varying along the continua of internal-external and experiential-informational, we also realize that categorizing information sources using only these two continua may be too broad. For example, Fisher et al. (1979) found that individuals differentiated between recruiters and job incumbents, both internal sources of information, such that incumbents were seen more positively than were recruiters. Similarly, using a firm's products and services is an experiential source of information, but it seems likely that this source of information has different effects on job seekers' employer knowledge than does an interview or internship, which also are experiential sources of information. Thus, although we categorized information sources along the continua of internal-external and experiential-informational in order to link our propositions to previous "source and channel" research, future research may reveal differences in the credibility of information sources within a given continuum.

Employer Knowledge

Above, we noted that employer knowledge is comprised of employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image. One direct implication of our employer knowledge model is that familiarity is necessary before a job seeker can develop image and reputation beliefs about an employer. Thus, although the decision to apply is typically seen as the first step in the recruitment process (Barber, 1998), the logic of our model suggests that the first hurdle in the process of attracting applicants is to create applicant awareness. Although many firms have cleared the awareness hurdle, it seems likely that some firms, particularly newer, smaller firms, have not. Thus, recruitment managers might follow the lead of marketing managers and investigate the level of awareness of their firm by potential applicants. Interestingly, recruitment researchers have not

devoted much effort to understanding the factors that influence potential applicants' awareness of an employer. Based on previous research we expect that organizational characteristics such as the type of industry in which the firm operates (Cable & Graham, 2000), the size of the firm (Barber, Wesson, Roberson & Taylor, 1999), and the firm's corporate social performance (Turban & Greening, 1997) are related to applicants' awareness of a firm. Future research is necessary to continue to investigate these and other factors, such as information sources, as they relate to applicants' awareness of firms.

As discussed above, familiarity can be conceptualized at four levels: unawareness, recognition, recall, and top of mind (Aaker, 1991). *Recognition* refers to a company that a job seeker has heard of, *recall* means that a job seeker can generate the name of the employer when prompted, and the *top of mind* employer is the first firm that is named. Given that the goal of many firms is to be "the employer of choice" among job seekers (e.g. Breugh, 1992), it seems likely that firms strive to be the top of mind employer; that is, they want to be the first firm that is recalled when a job seeker thinks about potential employers. Future research may reveal that the *top of mind* position results from sponsoring events to targeted groups of applicants, providing speakers for classes, or funding scholarships (Breugh, 1992).

Earlier in the paper we theorized that job seekers' existing employer knowledge will influence applicants' reactions to subsequent recruitment activities. While there is little direct empirical evidence regarding such relationships, evidence from social psychological research (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) suggests that job seekers will process new information about an employer based on the schema that the employer is placed in their existing cognitive framework. For example, a recruiter who asks a number of difficult questions may be interpreted by a job seeker as "selective" when the recruiter is a member of an organization with a positive reputation, but interpreted as "intrusive" or "pushy" when the recruiter is a member of an organization with a less positive reputation. Likewise, an applicant's perceptions of the fairness of selection procedures may be influenced by her prior knowledge of the employer, such that a given procedure is seen as more fair when the firm has an excellent versus a poorer reputation.

Paradoxically, however, it also is possible that recruiting organizations can be hurt when they are viewed very positively by job seekers during the early stages of recruitment, because applicants expect too much. Thus, Turban et al. (1998) found that organizational reputation, measured prior to a campus interview, was *negatively* related to post-interview attraction to the firm (i.e. opposite to what they hypothesized). One potential explanation for this unexpected finding is from hedonic relevance theory (Carlsmith & Aronson,

1963; Hogan, 1987) which suggests that disconfirmation of an expectancy results in lower evaluation. Therefore, when applicants possess high expectations for firms with positive reputations, firms may find it difficult to fulfill applicants' high expectations. Because this explanation was developed post-hoc by Turban et al. (1998), additional research is needed to determine how job seekers' employer knowledge, specifically image and reputation beliefs, influence reactions to recruitment activities.

Summary

The overarching goal of this paper is to use the brand equity perspective from the marketing literature to help provide a new way of thinking about recruitment, such that recruitment success hinges on the organizational beliefs that job seekers possess. There are several important implications of this perspective on the recruitment literature, and we hope that these implications will help researchers ask new types of questions about recruitment and may therefore promote new forms of recruitment research. Below, we highlight a few of the most important new directions that a brand equity perspective promotes in the recruitment context.

- **Shift focus of recruitment research from the job to the organization.**

Regardless of their job titles, individuals' employers are an important element of their identities (Dutton et al., 1994). Both theoretical and empirical research indicate that job seekers view organizational attributes to be at least as important as job attributes (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Schneider, 1987; Turban & Keon, 1993). Furthermore, job seekers must make many critical decisions about organizations prior to learning specifics about any particular job, including their overall attraction to the organization and their decision of whether or not to pursue a job with the organization (Breaugh, 1992; Gatewood et al., 1993; Powell, 1984; Rynes, 1991). Indeed, some organizations do not find it necessary to advertise specific job vacancies because they receive so many unsolicited applications from job seekers. To date, recruitment researchers and managers have little guidance regarding which organizational attributes constitute job seekers' employer knowledge, how different types of communication can be used to facilitate different dimensions of organizational knowledge, or how different dimensions of employer knowledge affect job seekers' attitudes and behaviors during organizational entry.

- **Shift focus from job seekers' "affective" reactions to the beliefs that underlie their affect.**

The existing literature has concentrated primarily on how recruitment interventions influence job seekers' *affective* responses to organizations (e.g. organizational attraction, job choice intentions) rather than examining how recruitment interventions influence the *beliefs* that job seekers hold about an organization (e.g. company culture beliefs). Although job seekers' beliefs about an organization presumably are the source of their affective reactions to the organization, surprisingly little recruitment research has focused on the content of job seekers' beliefs (Barber, 1998, p. 59). To help illustrate the importance of measuring the content of job seekers' organizational beliefs, consider as an example a group of job applicants who attend an information session and learn the same information about an organization's cultural values. Applicants with congruent values are more attracted to the organization as a result of the information session while applicants with incongruent values are less attracted due to a lack of fit. Researchers who only examine the relationship between the information session and job seekers' attraction would draw the invalid conclusion that information sessions are not effective (i.e. holding an information session was not reliably related to organizational attraction) even though the information session helped develop accurate organizational entry beliefs and facilitated effective self-selection decisions by applicants. By focusing on the beliefs that precede affective reactions, this paper suggests new dependent variables for recruitment researchers, including the stability, consistency, and accuracy of job seekers' organizational knowledge.

- **Elucidate different types of beliefs that applicants possess about employers (i.e. familiarity, reputation, and image), the relationships between these beliefs, and the different effects of these beliefs.**

To date, researchers have not used a common framework of employer knowledge. As a result, we often have labeled similar concepts by different names, and we have labeled different concepts by the same name. In this paper, we tried to elucidate the terms and types of employer knowledge (e.g. familiarity, reputation, image), which have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature despite wide variance in what the terms signify.

- **Move beyond "traditional" recruitment sources of information as predictors of applicants' beliefs and decisions.**

Most of the existing recruitment literature has, perhaps not surprisingly, focused on recruitment-specific information sources (e.g. interviews, recruitment brochures). However, our paper implies that *any* information source, ranging from using a company's products to news stories in the paper, can affect job seekers' employer knowledge. The specific sources of organizational

information that appear to be the most fertile for research from the perspective of the marketing literature include organizations' products and services, their product and brand advertising, and media exposure and attention.

- **Focus on individuals' pre-recruitment beliefs as predictors of how they interpret and process subsequent recruitment information about organizations.**

This paper implies that job seekers already have developed employer knowledge about many companies long before they become "potential applicants" of those companies. Thus, we highlight the fact that people are not blank slates when they begin the recruitment process. Given that people have already developed employer knowledge structures prior to recruitment, their preexisting structures (or lack of structures) can affect how they interpret and respond to future recruitment attempts. Research is needed to examine how pre-recruitment beliefs affect the ways that individuals perceive, process, and recall recruitment interventions.

- **There are not recruitment "best practices" across firms.**

This paper implies that recruiters must understand job seekers' existing employer knowledge structures before they can decide what types of recruitment interventions and investments will return the greatest value. From this perspective, there is not a set of best recruitment practices that are beneficial for all firms, because different firms have established different levels and types of employer knowledge. Thus, we conceptualize recruitment success in terms of "stages" or hurdles that firms must pass in order to successfully attract the right types of applicants. Recruitment success according to our model means that employers must carefully measure their existing position in the minds of their target market before developing their recruitment strategy and interventions.

- **The effects of recruitment do not end at a job choice decision.**

Job seekers' organizational knowledge has several important long-term implications for the firms that recruit them. First, since job seekers self-select into firms where they perceive a match between their personal values and the organizational attributes, their knowledge affects the types of applicants that firms attract. Thus, to the extent that job seekers' organizational beliefs are accurate, their self-selection activity can complement organizations' efforts to develop values congruence through selection and socialization. Conversely, if job seekers join organizations based on inaccurate organizational beliefs and find their expectations to be unmet, they experience negative work attitudes that

hinder organizational effectiveness including psychological contract violations, low organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Finally, even if an applicant does not accept a job with a given firm, their organizational knowledge does not vanish after their job search, but continues to affect what they tell others about the firm, how they interpret future marketing attempts by the firm, and whether they purchase products and services from the firm.

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