

# Applicant Attraction to Firms: Influences of Organization Reputation, Job and Organizational Attributes, and Recruiter Behaviors

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We develop and then empirically test a model of how organization reputation, job and organizational attributes, and recruiter behaviors influence applicant attraction to firms using data from 361 campus recruitment interviews in which applicants completed surveys before and after the interview. Results indicate that recruiter behaviors did not have a direct effect on applicant attraction, but influenced attraction indirectly through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes. As hypothesized, job and organizational attributes positively influenced attraction, and organization reputation positively influenced applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes and recruiter behaviors. Contrary to our hypotheses, however, organization reputation had a negative direct effect on applicant attraction. We discuss implications of our findings and suggest directions for future research. © 1998 Academic Press

The initial employment interview serves two purposes: (1) to evaluate applicants to determine their qualifications for the position, and (2) to attract applicants to the firm (Rynes, 1989). Although considerable research has investigated factors influencing interviewers' evaluation of applicants (Dipboye, 1992; Harris, 1989), there has been less research on how factors in the interview influence applicants' attraction to the firm. Nonetheless, attracting

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and retaining superior human resources can provide firms with a sustained competitive advantage (Cox & Blake, 1991; Pfeffer, 1994; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). Furthermore, as argued by Rynes (1991), applicant attraction is the immediate objective of recruitment and therefore should be accorded high priority in future research. Understanding factors that influence applicant attraction to firms is important because when top-quality applicants withdraw from the applicant pool during the recruitment process (e.g., after the campus interview), the overall utility of the selection system is reduced (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985; Murphy, 1986). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how factors in the initial employment interview influence applicant attraction to firms.

Although a few studies have investigated how interviews influence applicant attraction to firms, as noted by Wanous and Colella (1989) in their review, much of this research is atheoretical and as such provides few models to guide researchers. Further, although there is considerable agreement concerning the importance of job and organizational attributes for applicant attraction, there is some controversy concerning how recruiter behaviors influence attraction. Some evidence suggests that recruiters do not influence attraction when job and organizational attributes are considered (Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983). Other evidence suggests that recruiters have a direct influence on attraction beyond the effects of job and organizational attributes (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1991). Finally, other evidence suggests that recruiters have an indirect influence on attraction through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1991). In addition, although scholars have suggested that the firm's reputation may influence the interview process (Powell, 1991; Rynes, 1991; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), we are unaware of any study that has specifically investigated such processes. Therefore, we examine how the firm's reputation influences applicant perceptions of recruiter behavior, job and organizational attributes, and attraction to the firm.

We extend earlier recruitment research by proposing and then testing a model of how applicant perceptions of organization reputation, job and organizational attributes, and recruiter behaviors in the initial campus interview influence applicant attraction to firms. We examine such processes in the campus interview because college recruiting is one of the most common methods of filling professional, technical, and management trainee positions and is a large investment by firms (Breaugh, 1992; Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). Furthermore, because many firms attempt to establish a presence on campus in order to increase their recruitment effectiveness (Breaugh, 1992), it seems likely that subjects would have formed perceptions of the firms before the campus interview. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model that guides this research effort. In general, most of the recruitment research has focused on hypotheses 1 and 2, the direct effects of job and organizational attributes and recruiter behaviors on applicant attraction. We extend earlier efforts by

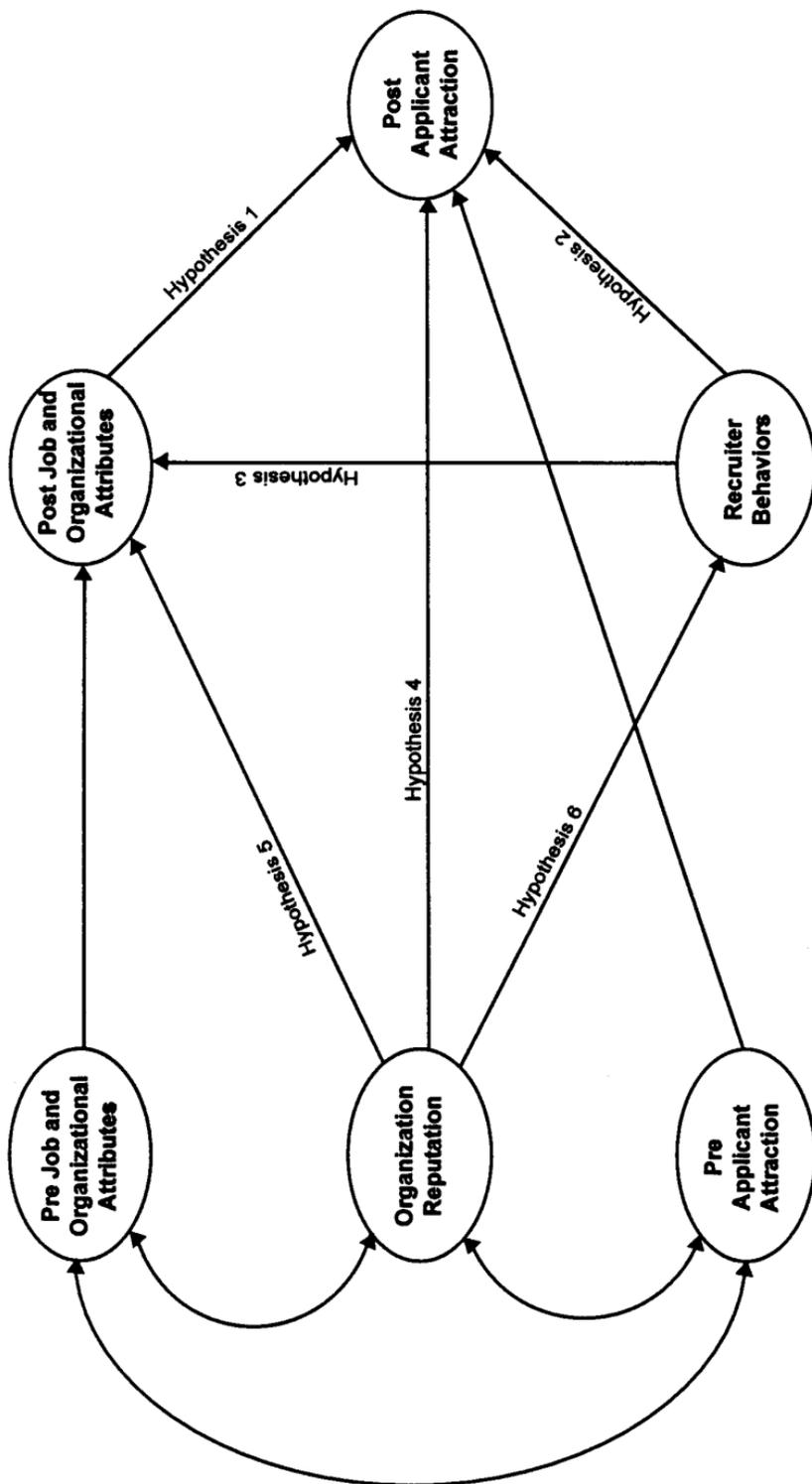


FIG. 1. Theoretical model.

explicitly examining whether recruiter behaviors influence applicant attraction through perceptions of job and organizational attributes (hypothesis 3), and by examining possible influences of organization reputation (hypotheses 4, 5, and 6). Further, because we measured applicant attraction to the firm and perceptions of job and organizational attributes before the interview, we control for the effects of these variables in our model, as shown in Fig. 1.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Based on propositions from expectancy theory, scholars have suggested that applicants will be more attracted to jobs that are perceived to provide more valent outcomes, and evidence from several studies indicates that applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes, such as compensation, the work environment, and the type of work, have a positive direct effect on applicant attraction to firms (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). Moreover, in her review of the recruitment literature, Rynes (1991) suggested that job and organizational attributes may be the dominant factors in applicant attraction. Therefore, we expect job and organizational attributes to have a positive, direct effect on applicant attraction.

HYPOTHESIS 1. Job and organizational attributes will have a positive direct effect on applicant attraction to the firm.

As discussed earlier, whether and how recruiter behaviors influence applicant attraction to firms are somewhat debatable. For example, several studies have investigated the effects of recruiter behaviors versus the effects of job and organizational attributes on applicant attraction to firms, labeled "the contest" by Wanous and Colella (1989), to determine whether recruiters influence attraction to firms beyond the effects of job information. For example, in a laboratory study, Rynes and Miller (1983) found that recruiters influenced attraction when only recruiter information was presented, but that when both job and recruiter information were presented, only job attributes influenced attraction to firms. Similarly, in an early study using structural equation modeling, Powell (1984) tested a model in which recruiter behaviors and job attributes each had a direct influence on applicant attraction (i.e., paths 1 and 2 in Fig. 1). Only job attributes influenced attraction; recruiter behaviors did not have a direct influence on attraction. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that recruiter behaviors influenced attraction indirectly through job attributes because such a model was not tested. In summary, some evidence suggests that recruiters do not have a direct effect on attraction to firms when job and organizational attributes are considered, although as noted by Wanous and Colella (1989), the relative effect of recruiter behaviors and job and organizational attributes on attraction probably depends upon the context.

Although some evidence indicates that recruiter behaviors do not influence attraction to firms when job and organizational attributes are considered, other evidence suggests that recruiters do influence attraction beyond the effects of job attributes. Rynes, Bretz, and Gerhart (1991) provided evidence, based on interviews of applicants, that recruiters may have a direct influence on applicant attraction. Additionally, two other studies found that recruiter behaviors explained unique variance in applicant attraction to firms after job attributes were entered in the regression equation, suggesting a direct influence of recruiter behaviors on attraction (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1991). Furthermore, based on premises of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasive communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), it seems likely that recruiters will have a direct influence on applicant attraction to firms beyond the effects of job and organizational attributes. Specifically, the elaboration likelihood model argues that when the ability to process information is low, in anxiety-producing situations such as employment interviews (Powell, 1991), a person may be more influenced by salient environmental cues, such as the attractiveness of the source of the information, than by the information presented, such as job and organizational attributes. This argument suggests that recruiters, who are salient environmental cues, will have a direct influence on attraction above the effects of job and organizational attributes. For example, a recruiter acting in a personable manner and showing an interest in the candidate may lead to positive direct effects on applicant attraction to the firm because the applicant feels a sense of positive affect toward the recruiter that is generalized to the firm. Several studies found a direct influence of applicant perceptions of recruiters on attraction to firms (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976; Turban & Dougherty, 1992), although because these studies did not measure job attributes they do not provide evidence concerning whether recruiter behaviors add unique variance in attraction beyond job attributes or whether recruiter behaviors influence job attributes. Nonetheless, Turban & Dougherty (1992) found that applicants were more attracted to the firm as an employer when they indicated that the recruiter was interested in them as a candidate. Taken in sum, such evidence suggests that recruiter behaviors will have a direct effect on applicant attraction to firms.

HYPOTHESIS 2. Recruiter behaviors will have a positive direct effect on applicant attraction to the firm.

In addition to the hypothesized direct effect of recruiter behaviors on applicant attraction, we expect recruiter behaviors to have an indirect effect on attraction through influencing perceptions of important job and organizational attributes. Signaling theory suggests that applicants interpret recruiter behaviors as signals of working conditions at an organization (Rynes, 1991). For example, recruiter behaviors may be interpreted by applicants as signals for unknown job and organizational attributes, such that an unfriendly recruiter

signals an unfriendly work environment (Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). Recently, Rynes et al. (1991) presented data suggesting that recruiter behaviors are perceived as signals for unknown organizational attributes. Further, some evidence suggests that recruiter behaviors influence perceptions of job attributes (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1991). Finally, in a laboratory study, Goltz and Giannantonio (1995) found that inferences regarding organizational characteristics mediated the relationship between applicant perceptions of recruiter behavior and attraction to the job. We extend such findings by investigating whether perceptions of job and organizational attributes mediate the relationship between recruiter behaviors and applicant attraction in a field setting. For example, recruiters who are perceived as unfriendly in the interview may signal an unfriendly work environment and therefore lead to less applicant attraction to the firm (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995). Analogously, when recruiters provide more information to applicants about the job and the organization, applicants will have more positive perceptions of the job attributes (assuming the information is positive) and therefore more attraction to the firm. In sum, based on premises from signaling theory, we hypothesize that recruiter behaviors will have an indirect influence on applicant attraction through influencing applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes.

**HYPOTHESIS 3.** Recruiter behaviors will have a positive indirect effect on applicant attraction to the firm through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes.

We extend earlier research by investigating influences of organization reputation on applicant attraction. Some evidence suggests that the organization's reputation prior to the interview has a direct effect on attraction to the organization. For example, Lawler, Kuleck, Rhode, and Sorenson (1975) found that firm attractiveness ratings obtained several months before interviews began were related to subsequent job choices. Specifically, for students with two or more job offers, 80% accepted a job with the highest rated firm. Similarly, Rynes et al. (1991) found that general company reputation was an important influence on applicant assessments of fit with firms. Finally, Powell (1991) suggested that although recruitment practices had a significant effect on applicant attraction to firms, attraction is not altered much by the interview. In sum, such results suggest that organization reputation prior to the interview will have a positive and direct effect on applicant attraction.

**HYPOTHESIS 4.** Organization reputation will have a positive direct effect on applicant attraction to the firm.

In addition to the direct effect, we expect that organization reputation will influence perceptions of job and organizational attributes and recruiter behaviors and thereby have indirect effects on applicant attraction to firms.

Analogous to how interviewers interpret and recall information that is consistent with their preinterview impressions (Dipboye, 1982, 1992), applicants may interpret information obtained in the interview to be consistent with the organization's reputation (Breugh, 1992; Liden & Parsons, 1989; Powell, 1991). For example, a recruiter who asks specific questions about a person's background may be seen as overly demanding when the firm has a poor reputation but as selective when the firm has a good reputation. Similarly, it seems likely that organization reputation will positively influence perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Therefore, we expect that organization reputation will be related positively to perceptions of recruiter behaviors and of job and organizational attributes.

HYPOTHESIS 5. Organization reputation will positively influence perceptions of job and organizational attributes.

HYPOTHESIS 6. Organization reputation will positively influence perceptions of recruiter behaviors.

In summary, we have described a theoretical model of processes through which organization reputation, recruiter behaviors, and job and organizational attributes influence attraction to a firm. Additionally, as shown in Fig. 1, we expect that the preinterview measures of job and organizational attributes and applicant attraction directly influence the postinterview measures. Furthermore, we expect that the three exogenous variables preinterview job and organizational attributes, organization reputation, and preinterview attraction are correlated. We use structural equation modeling to test the overall fit of the theoretical model in Fig. 1 and to test the statistical significance of each of the six hypothesized relationships.

## METHOD

### *Procedure*

Data were collected from applicants who participated in employment interviews through the placement center of a college of business at a large midwestern state university. In general, these interviews lasted approximately 25–30 min and were the initial contact between the applicant and the company. Research assistants solicited participation from applicants who were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were asked to complete a survey prior to and after their interview. The preinterview survey included applicant demographic information and measures of organization reputation, job and organizational attributes, and attraction to the firm. The postinterview survey also included measures of job and organizational attributes and attraction to the firm, as well as perceptions of recruiter behaviors.

Approximately 2250 interviews were conducted during the data collection period. Our unit of analysis was the campus interview, and research assistants attempted to collect data from applicants both before and after the interview.

The research assistants were unable to solicit participation from all applicants, however, because some applicants entered (and exited) the placement center at an entrance (exit) approximately 75 feet from where the research assistants were stationed. Additionally, some applicants arrived late for their interview and did not have time to complete a preinterview survey; applicants who did not complete a preinterview survey were not asked to complete a postinterview survey. Applicants completed 639 surveys prior to and 441 surveys after the interview; there were 406 campus interviews for which both pre- and postinterview surveys were both completed. The structural analyses were conducted using the 361 interviews in which there were no missing data. The data from these 361 interviews were collected from 201 applicants. The number of interviews per applicant varied from 1 to 11 with 61% of the applicants participating in only one interview.

To investigate possible response bias, we compared the responses of applicants who completed both pre- and postinterview surveys with applicants who completed preinterview surveys. These tests used study inclusion as an independent variable. The dependent variables were the measures of preinterview job and organizational attributes, preinterview applicant attraction, organization reputation, degree, major, grade point average, sex, age, and ethnic group. In general, applicants included in the study were very similar to applicants not included in the study; of 15 tests, the results of only one test were significant. Although  $\chi^2$  was significant for major, because 21% of the cell counts were less than 5 the test may not be valid. Such results suggest that our sample is representative of applicants who used the placement center during the data collection period.

### *Respondents*

Most of the applicants were marketing (26%), finance (18%), or management (11%) majors who were completing their bachelor's degrees (94%). The majority of the respondents were white (91%) and approximately 49% were female. The average age of the respondents was 22.

### *Measures of Latent Constructs*

*Applicant perceptions of the job and organizational attributes.* On both the pre- and postinterview surveys, applicants indicated their agreement (on 5-point scales) with 24 items describing job and organizational attributes. Some of the items were adapted from earlier research (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1984), whereas other items were developed specifically for this study. We conducted two separate iterated principal components analyses with varimax rotation using surveys completed before the campus interviews ( $n = 584$ ) and surveys completed after the interviews ( $n = 386$ ). Both factor analyses suggested similar factor structures. Specifically, for both factor analyses the scree test and the eigenvalues greater than 1.0 criteria suggested five factors. The factors accounted for 63% of the variance of the items for the preinterview

survey and 64% of the variance of the items for the postinterview survey. Scales were created by calculating the means of items that had a factor loading greater than .40 for that factor only for both the pre- and the postinterview surveys. The five scales and representative items are Supportive Work Environment (five items,  $\alpha = .88$  and  $.91$  for pre- and postinterview, respectively; "Warm, friendly, coworkers"), Firm Attributes (five items,  $\alpha = .86$  for both pre- and postinterview surveys; "Company with high ethical standards"), Earnings and Advancement Opportunities (five items,  $\alpha = .89$  for both pre- and postinterview surveys; "Excellent prospects for high future earnings"), Challenging Work (four items,  $\alpha = .85$  and  $.87$  for pre- and postinterview surveys, respectively; "Challenging and interesting work"), and Location (four items,  $\alpha = .88$  for both pre- and postinterview surveys; "A location with good opportunities for a social life").

*Applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviors.* Applicants indicated their agreement (on 5-point scales) with 27 statements describing recruiter behaviors. These items were adapted from earlier research (Harris & Fink, 1987; Liden & Parson, 1986; Powell, 1984; Turban & Dougherty, 1992). We conducted an iterated principal components analysis with varimax rotation using all surveys completed after the campus interview. The scree test and the eigenvalues greater than 1.0 criteria suggested five factors that accounted for 48% of the variance of the items. Scales were created as the mean of items that had loadings greater than .40 for only that specific factor. Because one factor had only two items and an unacceptably low coefficient alpha, it was dropped from further analyses. The four scales and representative items are Recruiter Personableness (six items,  $\alpha = .91$ ; "The recruiter had a warm personality"), Recruiter Incompetence (five items,  $\alpha = .73$ ; "The recruiter asked inappropriate questions"), Informing and Selling Behaviors (five items,  $\alpha = .78$ ; "The recruiter explicitly described the job's requirements") and Interview Structure (two items,  $\alpha = .70$ ; "The recruiter followed a definite pattern of questions"). Higher scores indicate a greater amount of the variable.

*Applicant perceptions of organization reputation.* Applicants indicated their agreement (on 5-point scales) with six items measuring perceptions of the organization on the preinterview questionnaire. In general, there are methodological advantages in having multiple indicators of a latent variable when conducting structural equation modeling. Therefore, although factor analyses of these items suggested one factor, we examined the content of the items to determine whether there might be multiple dimensions of reputation. This "content analysis" suggested that four items measured reputation of the firm (e.g., this company has a reputation as being an excellent employer) and two items measured knowledge of the firm (e.g., I know a lot about this company). Additionally, factor analyses that set the number of factors to two resulted in the four items measuring reputation loading on one factor and the two items measuring knowledge loading on a second factor. Therefore, for the structural analyses we used two indicators of organization reputation, reputa-

tion and knowledge, which were created by calculating the means of the items for each indicator.

*Applicant attraction to the firm.* We measured applicant attraction to the firm, in both the pre- and the postinterview surveys, through valence perceptions and intentions toward the firm. To measure valence perceptions, applicants indicated “how attractive is this company as an employer, for you?” and “how attractive is this job, for you?” ( $\alpha = .90$  and  $.91$  for pre- and postinterview surveys, respectively). To measure intentions, applicants indicated how likely it was that “if offered a job you would accept it” and “this company would be your first choice as an employer” ( $\alpha = .89$  for both pre- and postinterview surveys). These items are accepted measures of attraction used by previous researchers (Harris & Fink, 1987; Turban & Dougherty, 1992).

## ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Table 1 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables included in the study. In general, the bivariate correlations indicate that many of the pre- and postinterview job and organizational attributes measures and the measures of recruiter behaviors were related to the measures of postinterview applicant attraction.

We used structural equation modeling to investigate the proposed relationships among organization reputation, job and organizational attributes, recruiter behaviors, and applicant attraction. Structural equation modeling simultaneously estimates the proposed relationships among the variables and provides an overall assessment of the fit of a model to the data as well as tests of each hypothesized relationship. The maximum likelihood (ML) technique was used, and consistent with the statistical theory of structural equation modeling, a variance-covariance matrix was analyzed (Cudeck, 1989).

Following procedures discussed by various authors, we estimated several models and compared them to a null model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988). We estimated the following: (1) a null model, which estimates the variances of the variables without specifying any covariances among variables and was used as a baseline model; (2) a one-factor model, which specifies that all the variables load on one factor, was used to test for method variance (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Turban & Dougherty, 1994); (3) an uncorrelated latent variables model in which the manifest variables loaded on the latent constructs and there were no paths between the latent constructs; (4) an uncorrelated latent variables model with correlated error variances between the pre- and the postinterview measures of job and organizational attributes and of applicant attraction; (5) the theoretical model shown in Fig. 2. Various alternative models will be discussed in more detail below. We assessed the overall fit of the models to the data using the chi-square statistic, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the Bentler-Bonett (1980) normed fit index (NFI), and the Tucker-Lewis

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Organization reputation																						
1. Reputation	3.7	.64																				
2. Knowledge	3.5	.86	.52*																			
Pre job attributes																						
3. Pre work environment	3.6	.58	.57*	.40*																		
4. Pre firm attributes	3.8	.60	.61*	.48*	.65*																	
5. Pre earnings opportunities	3.9	.66	.56*	.45*	.67*	.62*																
6. Pre challenging work	4.1	.64	.52*	.44*	.60*	.63*	.66*															
7. Pre location	3.7	.74	.33*	.25*	.43*	.45*	.46*	.40*														
Pre applicant attraction																						
8. Pre intentions	3.4	1.02	.56*	.38*	.46*	.34*	.40*	.37*	.26*													
9. Pre valence	3.7	.92	.57*	.44*	.46*	.38*	.42*	.43*	.24*	.80*												
Recruiter behaviors																						
10. Personableness	4.1	.64	.23*	.06	.33*	.19*	.25*	.20*	.15*	.20*	.20*											
11. Incompetence	1.7	.63	-.17*	-.10*	-.17*	-.21*	-.24*	-.25*	-.20*	-.12*	-.11*	-.45*										
12. Informing & selling	3.3	.76	.10	.03	.19*	.10	.12*	.11*	.16*	.09	.10	.49*	-.22*									
13. Interview structure	2.3	1.01	.02	-.03	-.03	.15*	-.02	-.02	-.00	-.08	-.02	-.20*	.14*	-.13*								
Post Job Attributes																						
14. Post work environment	3.9	.67	.42*	.23*	.62*	.45*	.45*	.38*	.28*	.37*	.39*	.58*	-.35*	.43*	-.14*							
15. Post firm attributes	4.0	.61	.46*	.30*	.46*	.64*	.41*	.40*	.30*	.26*	.32*	.38*	-.32*	.34*	-.02	.62*						
16. Post earnings opportunities	4.1	.63	.40*	.24*	.45*	.42*	.58*	.40*	.28*	.33*	.37*	.45*	-.37*	.38*	-.10*	.65*	.60*					
17. Post challenging work	4.2	.61	.32*	.18*	.38*	.36*	.41*	.48*	.19*	.25*	.31*	.44*	-.44*	.32*	-.07	.62*	.66*					
18. Post location	3.9	.80	.21*	.05	.26*	.23*	.30*	.22*	.60*	.23*	.23*	.33*	-.26*	.36*	-.11*	.38*	.37*	.40*	.38*			
Post applicant attraction																						
19. Post intentions	3.5	1.07	.46*	.28*	.42*	.27*	.33*	.29*	.21*	.72*	.68*	.34*	-.29*	.28*	-.10	.56*	.38*	.46*	.45*	.35*		
20. Post valence	3.9	.93	.45*	.34*	.42*	.28*	.34*	.29*	.19*	.62*	.66*	.39*	-.29*	.29*	-.14*	.57*	.42*	.49*	.48*	.34*	.78*	

Note.  $N = 361$ .

$p \leq .05$ .

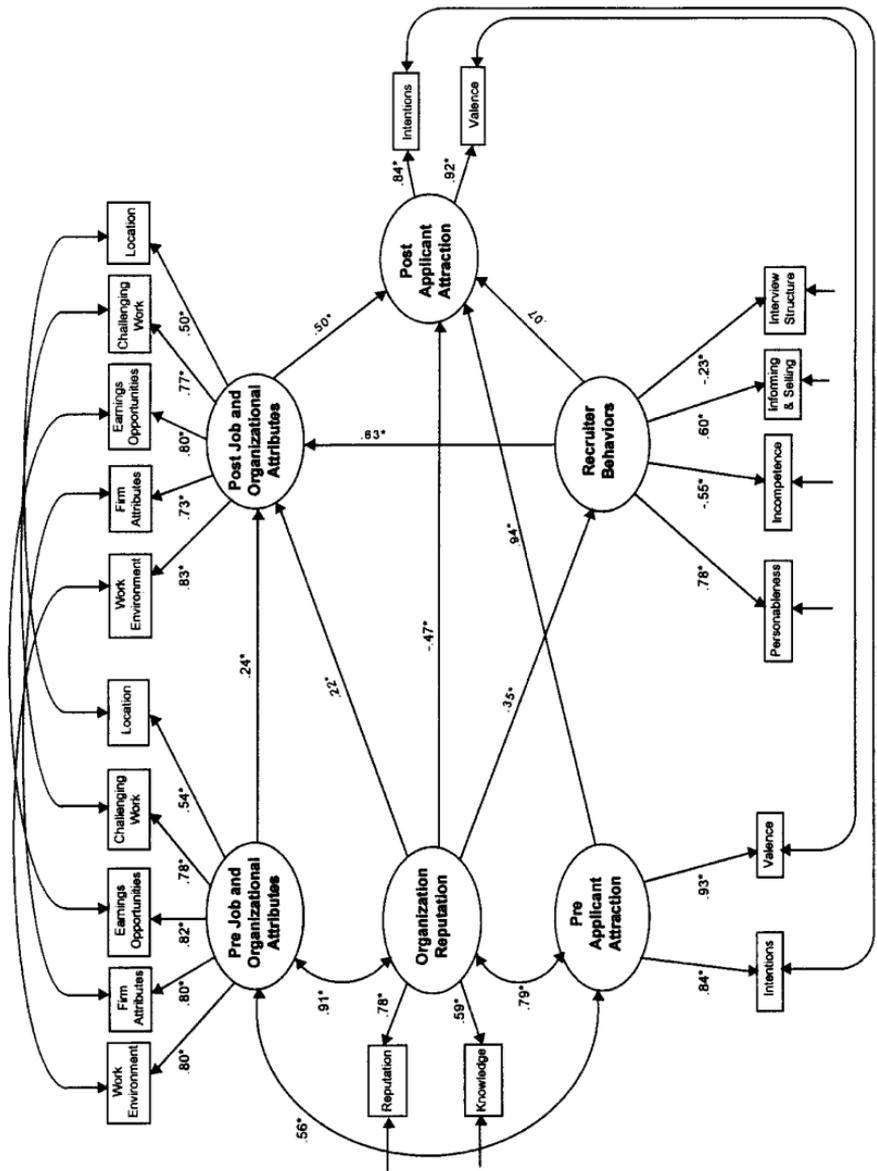


FIG. 2. Structural model with standardized coefficients. \* $p \leq .05$ , one-tailed test

TABLE 2  
Structural Model Fit Indices

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	GFI	NFI	TLI
Null model	4506	190	.26	—	—
One factor model	1984	175	.58	.56	.55
Uncorrelated latent variables model	1926	173	.64	.57	.55
Uncorrelated latent variables model with correlated error variances	1462	166	.68	.68	.66
Theoretical model (as in Fig. 2)	292	155	.93	.94	.96
Alternative models					
Theoretical model without path from recruiter behavior to post interview attraction	293	156	.93	.94	.96
Theoretical model without path from recruiter behavior to job attributes	437	156	.90	.90	.92
Indicators of organization reputation and pre-job attributes load on one factor	355	158	.92	.92	.95

*Note.* GFI, goodness of fit index; NFI, normed fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index (also called non-normed fit index).

(1973) index (TLI). Marsh et al. (1988) classified the chi-square statistic and the GFI as stand-alone indices, the NFI as a Type 1 incremental fit index, and the TLI as a Type 2 incremental fit index, and recommended the TLI over the stand-alone or Type 1 fit indices because it is less affected by sample size and provides a penalty for estimation of additional parameters. Nonetheless, because chi-square, GFI, and NFI are very popular fit indices, we followed a suggestion by Harris and Schaubroeck (1990) to report them. In general, values for the GFI, NFI, and TLI range from 0 to 1, with larger values indicating a better fit to the data.

Table 2 presents fit indices for the tested models, and Fig. 2 presents the standardized path coefficients for the theoretical model. (Although each interview was a unique interaction between an applicant and an interviewer, because some applicants participated in more than one interview a question arises concerning the independence of the 361 interviews. Although Turban and Dougherty (1992) presented evidence suggesting that from the applicant's viewpoint each interview is a unique interaction, we nonetheless conducted the structural equation modeling analyses using both 361 interviews and 201 interviews, i.e., the first interview for each applicant. Because the results were very similar and the substantive conclusions were identical using either the 361 or the 201 interviews, we report the analyses from the 361 interviews.) As presented in Table 2, results indicate that the theoretical model provides a relatively good fit to the data. Although the chi-square was significant, the GFI, NFI, and TLI all indicate a good fit to the data. As shown in Table 2,

the null, one-factor, and uncorrelated latent variables models did not provide a good fit to the data. Furthermore, the addition of the 11 paths from the uncorrelated latent variables model with correlated error variances to the theoretical model resulted in a significant improvement in model fit [ $\Delta\chi^2(11, N = 361) = 1170, p \leq .01$ ] (see Table 2). Examination of Fig. 2 reveals that all of the manifest indicators loaded on their respective latent variable. In addition, all of the hypothesized paths were significant except for the direct path from recruiter behaviors to postinterview applicant attraction (hypothesis 2). Recruiter behaviors did influence attraction indirectly, however, through job and organizational attributes. Finally, although we expected a positive relationship between organization reputation and postinterview applicant attraction (hypothesis 4), the standardized path coefficient was negative.

### *Alternative Models*

Although the results indicate that the theoretical model fit the data relatively well, because it is possible that other models would fit the data as well or better, we tested several alternative models. For example, we tested two alternative models of possible influences of recruiter behaviors. First, as discussed earlier, because some evidence suggests that recruiters will not have a direct influence on attraction when job and organizational attributes are considered, we removed the direct path from recruiter behaviors to postinterview applicant attraction. Removal of this path did not have a detrimental effect on the fit of the model to the data [ $\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 361) = 1, ns$ ] (see Table 2), suggesting that recruiters do not have a direct effect on applicant attraction. Second, signaling theory suggests that applicants interpret recruiter behaviors as providing information about job and organizational attributes. To investigate whether recruiter behaviors influence applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes we removed that path. As expected, the removal of the path from recruiter behaviors to job and organizational attributes resulted in a significant decrease in model fit [ $\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 361) = 145, p \leq .01$ ] (see Table 2).

Because of the strong correlation between the latent exogenous constructs of preinterview job and organizational attributes and organization reputation, we tested an alternative model with the two measures of organization reputation and the five measures of prejob and organizational attributes loading on one latent construct. Similar to the theoretical model, this alternative model included paths from this "new" latent construct to postinterview job and organizational attributes, to recruiter behaviors, and to postinterview applicant attraction. In terms of the hypothesized paths, results from this alternative model were identical to the theoretical model, although, as indicated in Table 2, this alternative model did not fit the data as well as the theoretical model. In summary, results from testing the various alternative models suggest that the theoretical model provides a good fit to the data, although the direct path from recruiter behaviors to applicant attraction is not significant.

The structural equation modeling analyses provide information about indirect effects and total effects, in addition to the direct effects shown as the path coefficients in Fig. 2. The indirect effect of one variable on another is the product of the coefficient estimates of the paths linking the variables (Hayduk, 1987). For example, the indirect effect of recruiter behaviors on postinterview applicant attraction is equal to the path from recruiter behaviors to postinterview job and organizational attributes (.63) multiplied by the path from postinterview job and organizational attributes to postinterview applicant attraction (.50), or .315. Interpretation of this indirect effect is that each standardized unit change in recruiter behavior results in a .315 change in applicant attraction, holding constant the other variables in the model. The total effect of one variable on another is the sum of the direct and the indirect effects. Therefore, the total effect of recruiter behavior on postinterview applicant attraction is .385.

## DISCUSSION

We extended earlier recruitment research by testing a model of how applicant perceptions of organization reputation, recruiter behaviors, and job and organizational attributes influence applicant attraction to firms. Our results confirmed the importance of applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes for influencing applicant attraction (Rynes, 1991). Further, our results provide some insight into how recruiters influence attraction to firms. Specifically, we found that applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviors did not have a direct effect on applicant attraction to firms, but did have an indirect effect through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Finally, as hypothesized, organization reputation positively influenced both applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviors and postinterview job and organizational attributes, but, contrary to our expectations, was negatively related to postinterview applicant attraction.

Prior research comparing the influences of recruiter behaviors and job attributes on applicant attraction to firms has produced mixed results (Harris & Fink, 1987; Powell, 1984, 1991; Rynes & Miller, 1983). We developed and then tested a theoretical model, based in part on signaling theory (Rynes, 1991), that hypothesized that recruiters might influence attraction through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Although other scholars have suggested such influences of recruiters (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995; Rynes et al., 1980; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), to our knowledge this was the first study to test such effects in a field setting. Applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviors did not have a direct effect on attraction to firms but did have a substantial indirect effect on attraction through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Such results are consistent with signaling theory, which suggests that applicants interpret recruiter behaviors as signals for unknown job and organizational attributes. For example, Rynes et al. (1991) reported that some applicants interpreted delays by organizations

in responding to them after the initial interview as a signal concerning the organization's interest in the applicant. Similarly, it seems likely that applicants interpret recruiter behaviors as signals about the job and the organization, although we know very little about how recruiter behaviors are interpreted. Future research might examine specific recruiter behaviors that serve as signals for unknown job and organizational attributes. For example, when recruiters display positive nonverbal cues such as eye contact and head nodding, do applicants perceive the work environment as more supportive?

Recruiters might also influence applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes by determining the amount and type of information provided to applicants during the interview. Several studies found that the amount of information provided to applicants positively influenced their attraction to the firm (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Rynes & Miller, 1983). Therefore, applicants might have more positive perceptions of job and organizational attributes and greater attraction to the firm when recruiters provide more information. An organizational implication of our results is the importance of training recruiters to communicate the appropriate information about jobs to applicants. Rynes and Boudreau (1986) found that most campus recruiters receive little or no training and that when recruiters are trained only 10% of the training time is spent instructing recruiters on what to tell job applicants about the job and the organization. Given the importance of job and organizational attributes to applicants, organizations should probably devote more time to training recruiters in effective techniques for communicating such information. Additionally, research is needed to investigate the effect of recruiter training on applicant attraction and other recruitment outcomes.

Although the study was designed to examine relationships among latent variables, we conducted additional analyses to investigate relationships among the indicators of our latent variables. Specifically, we conducted regression analyses to investigate (a) which recruiter behaviors were related to job attributes, (b) which recruiter behaviors were related to attraction, and (c) which job attributes were related to attraction. In general, these analyses indicated that the recruiter behaviors of personableness, incompetence, and informing and selling were unique predictors of job attributes and of attraction. The job attributes that explained unique variance in attraction were supportive work environment, challenging work, and location. Interestingly, the regression analyses using the indicators of attraction as the dependent variables and job attributes and recruiter behaviors as predictors indicated that personableness and informing and selling did not explain unique variance in attraction, suggesting that these variables influenced attraction through influencing perceptions of job attributes; however, incompetence explained unique variance in attraction even with the job attributes in the equation. Such results indicate a direct effect of incompetence on attraction beyond any indirect effect on job attributes. Future research is needed, however, to replicate this finding.

We extended earlier research efforts by examining the effects of organization reputation on recruiter behaviors, job and organizational attributes, and applicant attraction and found some interesting results. In support of our hypotheses, organization reputation positively influenced applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviors and job and organizational attributes. Such results suggest that similar to how interviewers' preinterview impressions influence perceptions of applicant behavior (Dipboye, 1992), organizational reputation influenced applicants' perceptions of recruiter behaviors and job and organizational attributes. Alternatively, another explanation for this finding is that for organizations with positive reputations, the job and organizational attributes were, in reality, more favorable and the recruiters behaved more positively. Therefore, future research is needed that manipulates organization reputation and controls recruiter behaviors to ascertain whether organization reputation influences applicants' perceptions of recruiter behaviors.

An unexpected finding was the negative relationship between organization reputation and postinterview applicant attraction. This negative relationship still occurred in an alternative model with a new latent variable that combined the indicators of organization reputation and preinterview job and organization attributes. Such results suggest a net suppression effect between organization reputation and preinterview attraction on postinterview attraction (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Suppressor effects are symmetrical and the theoretical context should dictate the interpretation of such effects, although in general suppressor effects are difficult to interpret (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is suggested by hedonic relevance theory (Carlsmith & Aronson, 1963; Hogan, 1987), which suggests that disconfirmation of an expectancy results in lower evaluations. Although speculative, perhaps applicants had high expectations for organizations with positive reputations and the interview may not have fulfilled applicants' expectations, such that after controlling for preinterview attraction there was a negative relationship between organization reputation and postinterview attraction. Another explanation for the negative relationship between organization reputation and applicant attraction is that applicants did not think there was much chance of receiving a job offer from organizations that had positive reputations and therefore reported less attraction to such organizations as a form of bolstering [i.e., reduced attraction toward alternatives not chosen, (Janis & Mann, 1977)]. Clearly, such explanations are tentative and future research is necessary to replicate this finding. Nonetheless, our results suggest that an organization's reputation is important and appears to influence applicants' attraction to the firm in a rather complex manner. We know very little, however, about factors that influence a firm's image, although some research has begun to investigate such issues (Gatewood et al., 1993). Additional research is needed to determine how a firm's reputation is formed and how it influences interview processes.

The strongest predictor of postinterview attraction was preinterview at-

traction. Such results are similar to those found by Powell (1991), who found that a preinterview measure of likelihood of job acceptance explained 58% of the variance in postinterview likelihood of job acceptance, although applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes and recruiter behaviors also were related to likelihood of job acceptance. We conducted a doubly multivariate analysis of variance to investigate whether the interview influenced the two measures of applicant attraction and the five measures of applicant perceptions of job and organizational attributes that were collected before and after the interview. Results indicated that for each measure of attraction and of job and organizational attributes, the postinterview measure was significantly larger than the preinterview measure, suggesting that the interview did influence perceptions of job and organizational attributes and attraction to the firm. Nonetheless, our results also indicate that postinterview attraction is strongly related to preinterview attraction and indicate the need for further research into factors that influence initial attraction to firms. If applicants follow a decision-making process in which they select an initial favorite and then compare alternatives to the favorite, as suggested by Soelberg (1967), then research is needed to determine what leads to organizations being chosen as initial favorites.

We acknowledge certain limitations of our study. Our sample consisted of applicants involved in the campus recruiting process at a college placement center. Because college recruiting is a large investment by firms, it is important to investigate how initial campus interviews influence applicant attraction to firms. Future research, however, might investigate the generalizability of our results by collecting data from more experienced job seekers in varied settings. Another limitation in our study is that we did not measure actual job choice decisions of applicants. Rather, we addressed calls in the literature to study applicant attraction, which is the primary objective of recruitment (Rynes, 1991). Applicant attraction is an important variable to study because applicants that are not attracted to a firm may withdraw from the recruitment pool, with negative impact on the firm's selection system. Additionally, some recent evidence suggests that measures of applicant attraction are related to job choice decisions (Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). Nonetheless, our findings can be extended by tracking applicants through the recruitment process to determine whether the campus interview does have an impact on applicants' final job choices. Although we collected data on surveys administered before and after the interview and in our analyses controlled for preinterview perceptions of job and organizational attributes and applicant attraction, same-source method bias may have inflated the relationships among the variables. It seems very unlikely, however, that method variance is an alternative explanation for our results. Although method variance may inflate the magnitude of relationships among variables, it does not account for the *pattern* of relationships found in this study (i.e., that recruiter behaviors did not have a direct effect on postinterview attraction). Further, the theoretical model fit the data signifi-

cantly better than the one-factor model, arguing against method variance as an alternative explanation for our results.

In summary, our results indicate that recruiters influence applicant attraction to firms indirectly through influencing perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Additionally, we found that organization reputation positively influenced perceptions of recruiter behaviors and job and organizational attributes, but had a negative direct effect on attraction to firms. Given the anticipated shortages in the labor market (Jackson & Schuler, 1990; Offermann & Gowing, 1990), such results have theoretical and practical implications for researchers and managers. For researchers, our findings suggest further study of which recruiter behaviors, in particular, influence applicants' perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Additionally, research is needed to investigate how applicants' perceptions of organization reputation develop and to replicate our results of the influence of organization reputation on interview processes. For managers, our results suggest the importance of selecting and training recruiters to communicate the appropriate information about jobs to applicants.

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Received: November 9, 1995