

TRUST AND RECRUITING: AN EXTENSION OF THE MEANS-END MODEL OF DECISION MAKING

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ABSTRACT

Recruiting and staffing are critical to all organizations. This paper will introduce trust to the means-end model of recruiting. The role of applicant trust in his/her decision making process and how trust impacts the selection process via Attributes -> Consequences -> Personal Values model will be specified.

INTRODUCTION

In today's organizations, there are few functions as important as staffing. Any organizational mantra or philosophy that has people at its core explicitly or implicitly recognizes the importance of this function. The centrality and criticalness of staffing has long been established. Organizations are always striving for improvement and excellence in this area.

Despite the almost universal agreement as to the importance of staffing, there are significant gaps in the research literature. A common criticism has been the inability of researchers to capture the complexity of staffing (e.g., the treatment of staffing as an event rather than a process). It is also apparent that while quite a bit of attention has been focused on identifying "desirable characteristics" of recruiters as well as the reaction of applicants to recruiters, little work has addressed the role of trust in the relationship between the applicant and the recruiter.

Many scholars consider trust to be central to any relationship. This alone makes the lack of attention to trust in the recruiting literature a significant issue. Trust has been approached from many different angles. There are numerous definitions of trust, many involving a dimension of vulnerability or recognition of dependence of one party. Other writers focus more on the sources or bases of trust. Finally, there is quite a bit a literature on types of trust (e.g., deterrence-based) that marries both of the above approaches.

Of interest in the current paper is how the applicant's level of trust in the recruiter/organization impacts his/her decision making during the staffing process. Specifically, the final paper will explore how trust influences the applicant's reaction to the staffing process when viewed through the lens of means-end theory.

Means-end theory is primarily concerned with examining the meaning that individuals attach to choices or alternatives. It is a popular theory in marketing and there are scholars who have applied its concepts and theories to the study of staffing. In one of these studies the authors used means-end theory to look at the recruiting of student-athletes by college coaches [1]. In this particular study the authors sought to understand why student-athletes chose the college they did. Using an interview technique known as laddering, Klenosky, Templin and Troutman (2001) sought to discover the link between the attributes of the college, the consequences associated with each attribute and the personal values that the consequences are connected to. The resulting A -> C -> PV model was used to understand how the student-athletes made their college decision.

The final paper will attempt to build on the above by introducing the variable of applicant trust to the above model. The degree to which the applicant trusts the recruiter/organization will no doubt impact the applicant's construction of the A -> C -> PV model, in turn having a critical impact on the final decision.

The relationship between applicant trust and the A -> C -> PV model will be examined from a number of different perspectives. First, applicant trust will impact the applicant's perception of the attribute under consideration. This should be especially true if the attribute under consideration is more intangible than concrete. For example, an "objective" attribute like an organization's benefits package can be easily confirmed by an applicant. Thus, applicant trust may not be important in this case in part because the applicant is not completely dependent on the recruiter for this information. It is substituted for by objectivity, i.e., the ability of the applicant to easily confirm the attribute. An attribute built around a recruiter's statement like "this is a great place to work" is inherently more subjective. Thus the applicant's feelings about such an attribute may be more impacted by the level of trust the applicant feels toward the recruiter. Greater trust in the recruiter should result in a stronger feeling that the attribute is true. When it comes to attributes the final paper will specify not only when applicant trust is important but also how it impacts attributes when it is. Second, consequences and personal values are also inherently subjective, both because they are future-oriented in both cases and in the case of personal values, almost always intangible. For example, an applicant may be told that a particular attribute (on-the-job training) will lead to a specific consequence (the acquisition of more skills) which is connected to a personal value (sense of achievement). In order for this specific A -> C -> PV model to work from the recruiter's perspective (i.e., help the applicant decide to move forward in the staffing process) the applicant must "buy into" what s/he is being told. A failure to believe in these relationships would be consistent with a lack of trust on the part of the applicant.

In sum, the final paper will introduce trust to the means-end model of recruiting. The paper will examine the role of applicant trust in his/her decision making process and will specify how trust impacts the A -> C -> PV model.

REFERENCES

[1] Klenosky, D., Templin, T., & J.A. Troutman. Recruiting student-athletes: A means end investigation of school-choice decision making. *Journal of Sport Management*, 2001, 15, 95-106.