

# Managing Applicant Reactions in the Selection Process

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# Main Topics

- Applicant reactions to specific types of tests
- Applicant preferences in the selection process
- Effects of applicant reactions on organizational variables
- The variables comprising “applicant reactions”
- Methodological issues in measuring applicant reactions

# Applicant reactions to specific types of tests

## ■ Interviews

- Interviews tend to be rated favorably by applicants in comparison to other types of selection tests (Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, & Stoffey, 1993; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996). Some research suggests that applicants prefer unstructured interviews over structured interviews (Gilliland & Honig, 1994; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998; Latham & Finnegan, 1993) and that they prefer general questions over situational or behavioral questions (Conway & Peneno, 1999). One reason applicants may prefer unstructured interviews over structured interviews is that applicants perceive structured interviews as providing little feedback (Gilliland & Honig, 1994).

## ■ Work sample tests/simulations

- Work samples/simulations tend to produce positive reactions from applicants (Robertson & Kandola, 1982; Smither et al., 1993; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996). Applicants tend to perceive work samples/simulations as having high face validity (Robertson & Kandola, 1982; Schmidt, Greenthal, Hunter, Berner, & Seaton, 1977; Smither et al., 1993). It is hypothesized that part of the positive reactions to work samples/simulations may be due to the fact that work sample tests allow applicants to make self-assessments of their ability to perform the job, which also could help reduce turnover (Downs, Farr, Colbeck, 1978; Casio & Phillips, 1979).

# Applicant reactions to specific types of tests (continued)

## ■ Personality tests

- Personality tests tend to be viewed less positively than interviews, work sample tests, and cognitive ability tests (Smither et al., 1993; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996). To increase applicants' perceptions of job-relevance for personality inventories, employers should choose tests that include job-relevant items as opposed to using derivatives of clinical assessment tests (Jones, 1991). Rosse, Miller, & Stecher (1994) found that applicants reactions were more positive when personality tests were used in conjunction with cognitive ability tests.

## ■ Biodata

- Biodata is often regarded as being overly invasive of applicants' privacy (Mael & Connerly, 1996). Perceptions of invasiveness may be reduced if items regarding personal events that if recalled by applicants could cause applicants to feel traumatized or stigmatized; religious items, especially denomination-specific items; political affiliation items, and items relating to intimate behavior are avoided (Mael & Connerly, 1996). In their study on the invasiveness of biodata, Mael and Connerly (1996) found that participants who understood the concept of test validity were less likely to judge biodata items as invasive. For individuals who are less familiar with concepts of validity, providing informative instructions prior to giving the test can have a dramatic effect in reducing the perceived invasiveness of items (Mael & Connerly, 1996).

# Applicant reactions to specific types of tests (continued)

## ■ Situational judgment tests

- Situational judgment tests are generally perceived as face valid and appropriate (Motowidlo, Dunnette, & Carter, 1990). Video-based situational judgment tests get even higher face validity ratings than their paper-and-pencil counterparts (Chan & Schmitt, 1997).

## ■ Cognitive ability tests

- Cognitive ability tests or written ability tests tend to be perceived less favorably than interviews and work sample tests but more favorably than personality tests and honesty tests (Steiner & Gilliland, 1996). In a study by Smither et al. (1993), recruiting managers perceived cognitive ability tests with concrete items, such as math problems and standard written English, as highly job related. They perceived cognitive ability tests with more abstract items, such as quantitative comparisons and following directions as having lower job relatedness.

## ■ Physical ability tests

- A study of firefighters, for which physical ability testing (PAT) is common, shows that the most common PATs are perceived as being job related and that simulation types of PATs are seen as more job-related than non-simulation types of PATs (Ryan, Greguras, & Ployhart, 1996).

# Applicant preferences in the selection process

- Tests with a clear and strong relationship to the job (Jones, 1991; Rynes & Connerly, 1993; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996)
- Scoring systems that ensure accuracy (little room for error or bias) (Rynes, 1993)
- Tests that require less cognitive demand (Kluger & Rothstein, 1993)
- Use of selection procedures that are perceived to be actually needed (Rynes & Connerly, 1993)
- In relation to computer-based testing (Parshall, Spray, Kalohn, & Davey, 2002):
  - Applicants generally like them because they increase the frequency of test administration, allow for immediate feedback, and require less testing time.
  - However, applicants can be suspicious of CBTs under operational conditions.
    - General computer anxiety
    - Some items are more difficult to complete (e.g. math items)
    - Can't skip or preview items
    - Immediate, item-level feedback may influence performance on subsequent items.

# Effects of applicant reactions on organizational variables

## ■ Recruitment

- Spillover effects of recruitment activities may influence recruitment outcomes
  - Occurrences during the recruitment and selection stage can have varying effects on the organization by shaping the applicant's perceptions of the recruiting organization (Perkins, 2001)
- Organizational attractiveness
  - Positive affect towards an organization
  - Attraction is an important determinant of job acceptance (Rynes & Barber, 1990)
    - Applicant's attraction to an organization is positively correlated to their reactions to the selection tests (Smither et al., 1993).
    - Applicant's willingness to recommend the employer to others is positively correlated to their reactions to the selection tests (Smither et al., 1993).
- Organizational image
  - Image is a set of attributes that are perceived about a particular organization that is induced from the way the organization deals with employees, customers, applicants, and society (Rynes, 1998; Belt and Paolillo, 1982)
  - Image is malleable
  - It has been demonstrated that image has a direct influence on an individual's intent to apply (Tom, 1971)

# Effects of applicant reactions on organizational variables

- Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Job Performance and Turnover
  - Procedural justice perceptions predict job satisfaction, commitment, turnover, and performance (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991).
  - A meta-analytic study (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) shows that procedural justice has a corrected correlation of:
    - .62 with job satisfaction
    - .57 with organizational commitment
    - .36 with job performance
    - -.46 with turnover.
  - Applicant reactions are often operationalized using procedural justice dimensions (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen & Campion, 1998; Bauer, Truxillo, Sanchez, Craig, Ferrara, & Campion, 2001; Gilliland & Honig, 1994; Ployhart & Ryan, 1998)



# The variables comprising “applicant reactions”

## ■ Organizational justice

- What is it?
  - **Procedural justice** – fairness of procedures used to make a decision.
  - **Distributive justice** – fairness of decision outcome
  - **Interactional justice** – fairness of how information is provided about test procedures or outcomes
- Perceived likelihood that selection procedures are accurate was a key driving force of applicant reactions (Rynes & Connerly, 1993)
- However, these factors are highly correlated (Hauenstein, McGonigle, & Flinder, 2001; McGonigle & Hauenstein, 2000)
- Thus, it is difficult to tease apart the effects of one from the other.

# The variables comprising “applicant reactions” (continued)

## ■ Job relatedness

- One of the most common variables in the study of applicant reactions
- Considered part of procedural justice
- Defined as “the extent to which a test either appears to measure content relevant to the job situation or appears to be valid” (Bauer, Truxillo, Sanchez, Craig, Ferrara, & Campion, 2001)
- Has two dimensions:
  - **Face validity** – perceptions of the extent to which the content of the test is related to the content of the job
  - **Predictive validity** – perceptions of the extent to which the tests predicts future job performance
  - Perceptions of face validity and predictive validity may differ for the same test (Smither et al., 1993).

# Methodological issues in measuring applicant reactions

- Points in time to measure reactions (pre, post, post results)
  - To determine applicants' reactions to the actual selection process, it is important to control for applicants' perceptions of the organization and the job prior to testing (Bauer et al., 1998).
    - Research has shown that applicants with previous experience with testing and a belief in testing tend to view selection procedures more favorably (Chan, Schmitt, Sacco, & DeShon, 1998; Ryan, Greguras, & Ployhart, 1996). Therefore, the optimal research design would include a pre-testing measure of applicant reactions and a post-testing measure of applicant reactions.
  - To determine applicants' reactions to the actual selection process, it is also important to control for test performance and the outcome favorability of the selection process.
    - Test performance and outcome favorability have been shown to affect perceptions of the fairness of the selection process (Bauer et al., 1998; Chan et al., 1998; Elkins & Phillips, 2000). And, although research suggests that the outcome of the selection process is a more important determinant of organizational outcomes than the perceptions of the fairness of the process, procedural justice perceptions still predict organizational outcomes beyond selection process outcomes (Bauer et al., 1998). Therefore, the optimal research design should also include a post-results measure of applicant reactions.

# Methodological issues in measuring applicant reactions

(continued)

## ■ Incumbents vs. applicants

- Measuring actual applicants' reactions to a selection procedure may not always be feasible. Adding a questionnaire to an already lengthy selection procedure may produce negative reactions in itself.
- Alternative may be to assess the reactions of incumbents during test development.

## ■ Confidentiality/anonymity

- Administering a reaction questionnaire immediately after the selection procedure but before the outcome decision may encourage applicants to respond in a way that they think will lead them to a good outcome.
- Instructions to the questionnaire should emphasize that responses will be used for research purposes only.
- Organizations may want to consider having an external company administer the questionnaire.