



## SIOP White Paper Series

### What We Know about Applicant Reactions on Attitudes and Behavior: Research Summary and Best Practices

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## Abstract

The goal of this white paper is to bridge the gap between research on job candidate attitudes and behavior and applied practice. We accomplish this objective by highlighting why candidate reactions matter, outlining the key research findings, reporting on international similarities as well as differences, and sharing a list of best practices.



## What We Know about Applicant Reactions on Attitudes and Behavior: Research Summary and Best Practices

The process of recruiting and selecting top candidates is central to organizational success. From a recruitment perspective, a key goal of selection systems is to increase candidates' interest in the employer as a place to work. From a selection perspective, a key goal is to predict which employees will be successful on the job. As a result, it is critical to consider selection systems from the perspective of both the employer and the job candidate. Organizational decision makers may, however, be unfamiliar with how to predict, understand, and influence job candidates' reactions to the selection system. Fortunately, researchers have developed and tested models of this process. In the current paper, we outline why candidate reactions matter, discuss the key findings of the research about job candidates' attitudes and behavior, comment on notable



international similarities and differences, and provide a list of best practices for employing organizations.

## **Why Should Employers Care about the Attitudes and Behaviors of Job Candidates?**

There are a number of convincing economic, legal, and psychological reasons for organizations to pay attention to how candidates react to selection systems (Hülshager & Anderson, 2009). We outline five of these below:

- 1) Disgruntled candidates may develop a negative view of the organization and may communicate this perception to individuals in both their professional, and their social networks (Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman & Stoffey, 1993). This may have the detrimental effect of discouraging potentially strong candidates from applying, and has direct implications for organizational image (Murphy, 1986). In fact, it is even possible that consumer behavior may be affected if organizational image is tarnished (Hülshager & Anderson, 2009).



2) Candidates who view the selection procedure as invasive may choose to withdraw from the selection pool (Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994). This is more likely to occur when candidates are highly qualified and have competing offers. As a result, organizations may lose top employees to their competition.

3) It has been theorized that negative reactions may influence the attitudes, performance, and work behaviors of candidates once they are hired on the job (Gilliland, 1993). To compound matters, negative reactions may have an immediate effect on work outcomes because many organizations use standardized selection procedures for employee promotion (Ford, Truxillo, & Bauer, 2009; McCarthy, Hrabluik, & Jelley, 2009). This has direct implications for organizational productivity, morale, staff turnover/retention, counterproductive behaviors at work, and culture.

4) Inappropriate selection procedures may cause candidates to file complaints or take legal action (Anderson, 2011). Not only can this be



extremely costly, it can also severely harm an organizations' reputation, which is particularly damaging in the Internet age.

5) Negative experiences during the selection process have been argued to have detrimental effects on candidate well-being (Ford et al., 2009; Truxillo & Fraccaroli, 2011). Not only is this a concern for the long-term health of applicants, but it is also at odds with the goals of socially responsible organizations.

### **What Are the Key Aspects of the Selection Process from the Candidate's Viewpoint?**

In recent years, a large body of research has emerged on candidate perceptions and reactions to selection systems. This research has tended to center on how candidate reactions impact organizations, focusing on outcomes such as organizational attractiveness, intentions to recommend the organization to others, and propensity for litigation. The framework for this has primarily revolved around procedural and distributive justice rules. Procedural justice rules focus on





the fairness of how decisions get made while distributive justice focuses on the perceived fairness of the outcomes which are received. So, do I agree with the decision (Distributive Justice) and do I think the steps taken to make the decision are fair (Procedural Justice) are the key questions applicants ask themselves.

Much of this work has been driven by Gilliland's (1993) summary model of candidate reactions. Gilliland's model predicts that the fairness of the selection system can influence candidate attitudes (e.g., organizational attractiveness), intentions (e.g., to recommend the selection process to others), and behaviors (e.g., interview performance). Gilliland further proposed a total of ten rules that enhance the experience of fairness from the candidate's perspective. These rules provide employers with a way of thinking about the selection process from a candidates' perspective and include the following:

- (1) ensure the system is clearly job-related
- (2) give the candidate an opportunity to perform and to show what they know



- (3) give candidates the opportunity to challenge their results
- (4) ensure that procedures are consistent across all candidates
- (5) provide candidates with informative and timely feedback
- (6) provide explanations and justification for the use of a procedure or a decision
- (7) ensure that administrators are honest when communicating with candidates
- (8) ensure administrators treat candidates with warmth and respect
- (9) support a two-way communication process
- (10) ensure that questions are legal and not discriminatory in nature.

Bauer and colleagues (2001) developed a comprehensive measure to assess Gilliland's rules that may be used in organizational surveys to assess the relative fairness of selection practices in actual organizations. This measure is included in Appendix A.



A number of studies have tested Gilliland's (1993) propositions, and meta-analytic findings indicate the perceptions of procedural fairness are, indeed, related to organizational attractiveness, intentions to recommend the selection process to others, and job acceptance intentions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004). In terms of specific rules, the most consistently proven strategies for improving applicant reactions are ensuring that the procedure is job related, providing candidates with the opportunity to show what they know, ensuring the procedure is consistent across candidates, providing feedback and explanations to candidates, and ensuring that administrators demonstrate positive and respectful interpersonal treatment throughout the process (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Yonce, 2009).

In contrast to the North American perspective on candidate reactions, European research has adopted a broader framework that places more emphasis on how the *individual candidate* is personally affected by the selection process



(e.g., Anderson, Salgado, & Hülshager, 2010). This line of research highlights the fact that selection systems can have far-reaching implications for candidates that extend beyond acquiring a job – they may influence candidate levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, stress, dignity, and perceived self-worth (Truxillo & Fraccaroli, 2011). Indeed, some European work has been driven by Schuler's (1993) *Social Validity Theory*, which focuses on the extent to which candidates are treated with dignity and respect. Specifically, *Social Validity Theory* contains four components:

(1) informativeness, or the degree to which candidates perceive the information is useful

(2) participation, or the extent to which candidates feel that they can be involved and participate

(3) transparency, or the extent to which candidate feel that the selection methods are unambiguous



(4) feedback, or the amount of information provided to candidates regardless of whether or not they secured the job

Many European researchers have used Schuler's (1993) theory as a foundation for their work. For example, Klehe, Konig, Richter, Kleinmann, and Melchers (2008) examined the effect of interview transparency on interview performance, and found an improvement in candidate performance under transparent conditions. Klingner and Schuler (2004) used social validity theory as the basis for comparison of a traditional intelligence test and a hybrid intelligence-work sample test. Participants reported higher levels of social validity for the hybrid test.

Taking these North American and European approaches together suggests the importance of the following elements in selection systems from the candidate's perspective:

1. Providing informative explanations to applicants.



2. Giving applicants a chance to show what they know.
3. Using selection methods that are job related.
4. Using selection methods based on sound scientific evidence.
5. Giving timely feedback.
6. Giving informative feedback.
7. Treating applicants with due respect throughout the selection process.

### **International Similarities and/or Differences**

A considerable amount of research has examined candidate *preferences* for specific selection techniques. When overall favorability ratings are considered, meta-analytic findings indicate that interviews are the most preferred selection tool, followed by work samples, résumés, and tests (Hausknecht et al., 2004). A similar pattern emerges when candidate perceptions of fairness are considered. Anderson, et al. (2010) meta-analyzed fairness reactions with respect to 10 selection methods across 17 countries with quite diverse cultures and employment legislative frameworks. Findings indicated a three-tier clustering of



method favorability: Interviews and work sample tests were judged the highest in fairness; résumés, cognitive tests, references, biodata, and personality inventories were judged moderate in fairness; and honesty tests, personal contacts and graphology were judged lowest in terms of applicant preferences. Further, this three-tiered structure was generally supported across countries. Two additional findings by Anderson et al. (2010) that are especially relevant are (a) that there is a large correlation between the justice dimensions and the operational validity of the selection methods and, (b) that the perceptions of justice did not correlate with the frequency of use. In other words, selection methods that are the most valid are to some extent viewed positively by applicants, and applicants do not necessarily prefer selection procedures that are used a lot in practice.

Nevertheless, some cross-country variability did emerge. This suggests that differential reactions may exist cross-culturally if additional factors, such as cultural dimensions or environmental factors (e.g., the current economy) were considered. For example, candidates may demonstrate more positive reactions to



panel, structured interviews and/or group interviews in highly collectivistic countries, and some recent empirical evidence supports this suggestion (Salgado, Gorriti, & Moscoso, 2008).

This possibility is also supported by a large-scale study of 959 organizations across 20 countries which was conducted by Ryan, McFarland, Baron, and Page (1999). Findings did, indeed, reveal that differences in cultural dimensions explained some of the variability in selection techniques. For example, cultures high in uncertainty avoidance were found to use more test types, conduct more interviews and were more likely to audit their processes. There was also some evidence that power distance explained the variability in selection methods. Since this time, few studies have examined cross-national applicant reactions using a cultural framework (for an exception see Phillips & Gully, 2002). This leaves open the issue of to what extent applicant reactions are common across countries, or alternatively, are influenced extensively by local, cultural norms in each country.





## Best Practices for Positive Candidate Reactions

In summary, research into applicant reactions has made notable advances over the last two decades. Prior to this, relatively little research had been conducted compared to the vast amount of research examining selection decision making from the organizations' and/or recruiters' point of view. However, as discussed above, relatively recent developments in theory and research have provided us with valuable insight into the selection process from the perspective of job candidates. We know that applicants' perceptions are largely a function of how well they did in the selection procedure (e.g., passed or failed; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). The question now is what organizations can *actually do* in order to maximize features and benefits of their selection methods for producing favorable applicant reactions (Ryan & Huth, 2008).

The goal of this section is to bridge the gap between empirical knowledge and applied practice by outlining how organizations can ensure that their selection system is well received by candidates. We accomplish this objective by



outlining specific recommendations that are connected to empirical research findings. These recommendations are presented in Table 1. The first column of Table 1 presents Gilliland’s procedural justice rules, along with Schuler’s corresponding components. In the second column we offer our corresponding recommendations for practice. We detail each rule below and the corresponding recommendations below.

**Table 1.** Procedural Justice Rules, Descriptions, and Recommendations for Selection

Procedural Justice Rule	Rule Description	Recommendation
1. Job Relatedness	Extent to which a test either appears to measure the content of the job or appears to be a valid predictor of job performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the selection system based on a job analysis to identify the KSAO’s that are relevant for the job. Use the list of KSAO’s in the selection and design of test and/or interview questions.</li> <li>• Base the selection system on sound scientific evidence.</li> <li>• If the selection method is not obviously job-related to candidates (e.g., certain types of personality tests), explain it to them.</li> </ul>
2. Opportunity to Perform	Having adequate opportunity to demonstrate one’s knowledge, skills and abilities in the testing situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the selection system is comprised of multiple components – interview, standardized test, work sample.</li> <li>• Ensure that each test is long enough to enable a comprehensive assessment of candidate KSAO’s.</li> <li>• Ensure that the selection process is monitored and modified over time to keep it relevant.</li> </ul>
3. Consistency	Uniformity of content across test sittings, in scoring, and in the interpretation of scores. Assurance that decision-making procedures are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and use standardized tests and interviews based on extensive job analysis.</li> <li>• Ask the exact same questions of each candidate.</li> <li>• Ensure scoring procedures are also standardized.</li> <li>• Provide extensive training to test/interview administrators to ensure that</li> </ul>



	consistent across people and over time.	<p>standard procedures are followed for all candidates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all materials (online and elsewhere) are consistent messages regarding your organization.</li> </ul>
4. Feedback	Providing candidates with informative and timely feedback on aspects of the decision making process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a computerized application system, or program, whereby the candidate can track their progress and view results of the decision-making process.</li> <li>• Make timely feedback a priority and track time to feedback for each selection hurdle.</li> </ul>
5. Explanations & Justification	The provision of justification for a selection decision and/or procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give candidates as much information as possible.</li> <li>• Put the information in context such as the number of applicants.</li> <li>• Provide candidates with information regarding future job applications.</li> </ul>
6. Honesty	The importance of honesty and truthfulness when communicating with candidates, and in particular, in instances when either candidness or deception would likely be particularly salient in the selection procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the process is transparent.</li> <li>• Train administrators to be honest with candidates and reward administrators for honesty.</li> <li>• If providing negative results, focus on the facts and not personal characteristics. Don't make it personal and keep it simple.</li> <li>• Ensure all materials (online and elsewhere) are accurate messages regarding your organization.</li> </ul>
7. Treat Candidates with Respect	The degree to which candidates feel they are treated with warmth and respect by the test administrator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat candidates with respect.</li> <li>• Provide interpersonal training for all administrators.</li> <li>• Highlight the importance of ensuring that the organization is perceived in a positive light.</li> </ul>
8. Two-way Communication	The interpersonal interaction between candidate and test administrator that allows candidates the opportunity to give their views or have their views considered in the selection process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train interviewers to be good listeners.</li> <li>• Include open-ended questions as part of the standardized test process that allow candidates to ask questions at various points during the selection process.</li> </ul>

Interestingly, the best practices for engendering positive candidate reactions are directly aligned with best practices for ensuring that the selection process can



identify the top candidates for the job. This consistency is encouraging for candidates and organizations alike, as it suggests that properly conducted selection systems can serve the best interest of both parties. It is important to acknowledge, however, that candidates may not always want the methods that are the most valid and useful to organizations, and that in the end, validity and utility are the primary criteria for employers to consider in choosing selection methods.

**Recommendation #1: Use job related selection procedures.**

First, Gilliland recommends that the selection procedure should be job-related. This rule is directly aligned with Shuler's (1993) recommendation that selection systems be transparent. It is also aligned with Anderson et al. (2010), who found that applicants prefer valid over less valid selection systems, and thus strongly recommended that selection procedures be based on sound scientific evidence. This fits with the desire of organizations to assess applicants using the best methods, as well as with the desire of applicants to be assessed with valid



methods. Note that this recommendation can also be useful in connection with other recommendations (e.g., consistency, feedback, and explanation and justification).

A considerable amount of research has found support for this rule (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; 1994). The corresponding recommendation for practice is to ensure that the system is based on a comprehensive job analysis that details the knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAO's) required on the job (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1987). This process helps to ensure that the questions are directly related to the content of the job. An important point is that if a valid selection method does not look job related to applicants, consider explaining this to applicants (Truxillo et al., 2009).

**Recommendation #2: Provide candidates with an opportunity to perform.**

Gilliland also recommends that candidates have adequate opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities. This recommendation is aligned with Schuler's (1993) participation dimension of social validity. It can be



accomplished by first ensuring that the selection system is comprised of multiple components, such as a selection interview, work sample, personality inventory, and cognitive ability test. This enables candidates to demonstrate their abilities across a broad range of areas and increases the chances that more competencies are assessed. Further, it is essential that tests/interviews are comprised of multiple items and that the full range of relevant competencies is assessed. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the changing nature of jobs and to ensure that the program is monitored and modified over time to keep it relevant.

**Recommendation #3: Treat candidates with consistency.**

Gilliland's fourth rule is that the content and scoring of the test, or more generally, selection method, must be consistent across all candidates. This can be accomplished by first using standardized tests, procedures, and interviews, which ask the exact same questions of candidates (Campion et al., 1987). Standardized testing also ensures that scoring procedures are uniform across candidates. It is also important to provide extensive training to test administrators in order to



ensure that standard procedures are followed. Finally, all materials must convey consistent messages about the organization and the position. These techniques can help to ensure that candidates do not perceive any blatant violations of the consistency rule.

**Recommendation #4: Provide feedback to candidates about their status.**

The fourth rule is to provide informative and timely feedback to candidates. This rule is derived from both Gilliland (1993) and Shuler's (1993) models of fairness. The most efficient way that this can be achieved is to use computerized application systems that track candidate progress and provide them with updates at various stages of the selection process.

**Recommendation #5: Provide explanations and justifications about the selection procedures.**

While employers may be hesitant to provide an explanation to candidates, providing a good explanation showcases good organizational practices and makes good business sense. In fact, providing information about the decision used



should become a standard practice for organizations. When providing explanations, give the candidates as much information as possible and be sure to put it in context, such as the number of applicants. Again, this can be accomplished through a computerized system. It is also important to provide explanations regarding the procedures used (Truxillo et al., 2009). Finally, candidates should be treated with respect when providing explanations.

**Recommendation #6: Use honesty in dealing with applicants.**

This rule stresses the importance of ensuring that administrators are honest when communicating with candidates. Practical recommendations for achieving this goal are to first ensure that the entire process is transparent. A properly designed selection system will have nothing to hide, and as such, should be portrayed honestly and openly to candidates. Relatedly, it is important to train administrators to be honest and to reward them for treating candidates in an open manner. In cases where administrators must provide negative feedback (e.g., to communicate that an candidate did not get the job), it is essential that





they are trained to focus on the facts, such as the strong candidate pool, as opposed to commenting on idiosyncratic characteristics of the candidate. Such honesty does not, however, imply that organizations need to reveal all aspects of selection processes or decision-making procedures to applicants. Rather, it suggests that candidates should be treated with honesty at each stage in the selection procedure and that wherever possible should be provided with information in order to allow openness and transparency.

### **Recommendation #7: Treat candidates with respect.**

Gilliland (1993) also highlighted the importance of ensuring administrators treat candidates with warmth and respect. Training programs for HR managers can be particularly useful in this regard. These programs should highlight to administrators the rationale for ensuring the organization is viewed in a positive light. Techniques to put candidates at ease should also be covered.



## **Recommendation #8: Encourage two-way communication.**

The eighth rule focuses on enabling candidates to communicate their views during the selection process. From a practical perspective, this can be accomplished by training interviewers to develop strong listening skills. Ensuring that opportunities for candidates to ask questions throughout the selection process is also critical, and can be accomplished by including open-ended questions for candidate feedback (e.g., “Do you have any questions or comments at this point?”) at regular intervals during the testing.

In addition to the aforementioned rules, we offer two additional suggestions. Note that we refrain from labelling these as formal rules, as they do not boast the strong level of empirical support as the rules outlined above. Nevertheless, they are important considerations.

### **Important Consideration 1: Content appropriateness.**

Organizations should carefully consider the extent to which test questions and other selection method items are appropriate in content. This can be



accomplished by first ensuring that questions are derived from properly conducted job analysis (Campion et al., 1987). In line with this recommendation, it is important to avoid ambiguous questions and to avoid those that have weak relations to job performance. It is also useful to ensure that there is more than one recruiter administering each tests/interview in order to increase accountability and reduce the likelihood of biased and/or illegal questions.

### **Important Consideration 2: Opportunity to review/appeal.**

Organizations should consider allowing candidates the opportunity to review their performance at each stage and their scores on tests and be eligible for reconsideration at a later point if not selected at the current time. The corresponding recommendation is to incorporate a standardized appeal process into the selection system. This rule has the potential to be important for reducing the possibility of litigation by disgruntled applicants (Anderson, 2011).



## Conclusion

Applicant reactions research has advanced substantially but is still a developing area. Key principles established from empirical research have been offered in this white paper along with implications for practice, and potential future research directions. Treating applicants well is not just good practice – it is likely translate into better job performance and has the potential to benefit utility paybacks to organizations.



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## Appendix A

Source: Bauer, T. N., Truxillo, D. M., Sanchez, R., Craig, J., Ferrara, P., & Campion, M. A. (2001). Development of the Selection Procedural Justice Scale (SPJS). *Personnel Psychology, 54*, 387-419.

Strongly Disagree = 1

Disagree = 2

Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3

Agree = 4

Strongly Agree = 5

### Selection Procedural Justice Scale

#### Structure Higher-Order Factor Subscales

##### **Job Relatedness - Predictive**

Doing well on this test means a person can do the insert job title job well.  
A person who scored well on this test will be a good insert job title.

##### **Information Known**

I understood in advance what the testing processes would be like.

I knew what to expect on the tests.

I had ample information about what the format of the tests would be.

##### **Chance to Perform**

I could really show my skills and abilities through this test.

This test allowed me to show what my job skills are.



This test gives applicants the opportunity to show what they can really do.  
I was able to show what I can do on this test.

### **Reconsideration Opportunity**

I was given ample opportunity to have my test results rechecked, if necessary.

There was a chance to discuss my test results with someone.

I feel satisfied with the process for reviewing my test results.

Applicants were able to have their test results reviewed if they want.

The opportunities for reviewing my test results were adequate.

### **Feedback**

I had a clear understanding of when I would get my results.

I knew when I would receive feedback about my test results.

I was satisfied with the amount of time it took to get feedback on my test results.

### Social Higher-Order Factor Subscales

#### **Consistency**

The test was administered to all applicants in the same way.

There were no differences in the way the test was administered to different applicants.

Test administrators made no distinction in how they treated applicants.

#### **Openness**

I was treated honestly and openly during the testing process.

Test administrators were candid when answering questions during the tests.



Test administrators answered procedural questions in a straightforward and sincere manner.

Test administrators did not try to hide anything from me during the testing process.

### **Treatment**

I was treated politely during the testing process.

The test administrators were considerate during the test.

The test administrators treated applicants with respect during today's testing process.

The testing staff put me at ease when I took the test.

I was satisfied with my treatment at the test site.

### **Two-way Communication**

There was enough communication during the testing process.

I was able to ask questions about the test.

I am satisfied with the communication that occurred during the testing process.

I would have felt comfortable asking questions about the test if I had any.

I was comfortable with the idea of expressing my concerns at the test site.

### **Propriety of Questions**

The content of the test did not appear to be prejudiced.

The test itself did not seem too personal or private.

The content of the test seemed appropriate.



## Plus

### **Job Relatedness - Content**

It would be clear to anyone that this test is related to the insert job title job.

The content of the test was clearly related to the insert job title job.

