Three Ways Social Media and Technology Have Changed Recruitment

Prior to the introduction of social media and technology, recruiters focused on face-to-face networking and cold calling candidates. Since the introduction of online job boards, social media websites, and other related technologies, the recruiter’s job has changed immensely. Recruitment today is more strategic, personalized, and targeted than ever (Sunderberg, 2014b). Eight-three percent of organizations are now using social media as part of their recruitment process (Sunderberg, 2014b)! Although LinkedIn is the network of choice for recruiters, Facebook and Twitter are used as well (Sunderberg, 2014b). This article will discuss three ways social media and technology have begun to evolve the recruitment process and the role of the recruiter, followed by some potential research avenues to better understand the transformation.

Easy and Quick Access to Qualified Applicants

Recruitment is a dynamic and complex process that includes advertising a job opening to qualified applicants, enticing them to apply for the job, maintaining the candidate’s interest throughout the process, and influencing their decisions until an offer is officially extended (Breaugh, 2013). In the past, organizations relied on agencies, campus recruitment, job boards, and print advertisement to reach applicants with the idea that the larger the pool of candidates, the more selective recruiters could be. However, social media are now enabling recruiters to search for qualified applicants who were not necessarily searching for a job, says Matt Reider, president of Reider Research and VP at Campion Recruiting Services. This is huge change, as in the past, organizations found it very hard to reach
an individual if they were not actively seeking employment.

Organizations and recruiters can promote jobs to their targeted applicants by filtering data from applicants’ social media profiles like LinkedIn (Kutik, 2013). For instance, if a job applicant logged onto LinkedIn, he or she may be provided suggestions based on your interests and skills. Asynsley Trudeau, a senior technical recruiter for STS Technical Services with over 8 years of experience in recruiting, says that he now has to be “creative in the ways he finds passive talent.” For instance, he has found Google+ to be a great tool because he can conduct a key word search on resumes that applicants are posting to the site. New technologies also use search engines and social media site data to keep track of where the best sources of applicants are and track the number of qualified individuals who apply, the number of applicants interviewed, and also the number that were hired. This information is extremely useful for recruiters when determining where to best spend their time.

Despite the introduction of many other technology methods of recruitment, employee referrals are still seen as an ideal recruitment method. Organizations view employee referrals as one of their preferred methods and research has provided evidence that this method can be quite beneficial in terms of hiring high performers (Breaugh, 2013). The great news is social media has also provided resources through which employees can quickly reach their network in one simple click or post online. One study demonstrated that on average 60% of employees are willing to post a job opening on Facebook in order to share it with their friends (Sunderberg, 2014a).

Challenges

These new means of recruitment require that recruiters build personal relationships with applicants. With the increased ability to quickly and directly contact applicants comes an increased importance for organizations to have the right tools and recruiter in position to develop those relationships (Sullivan, 2013). Recruiters can no longer broadcast or advertise a job opening in one place, but rather they need to regularly participate in ongoing conversations on various social media websites (Sullivan, 2013).

More Compelling Content Required

There are an increasing number of avenues and methods through which organizations can increase awareness and brand among job seekers. In the past, it was hard for organizations to provide information outside of advertisements, career websites, and personal contact with employees working for the organization of interest. Now, applicants can view videos and webinars, access websites
that provide information from other applicants and employees, and read blogs or other forms of personal communication that provide insider information about an organization of interest. For example, many websites such as Glassdoor provide job applicants the ability to post about their experiences in the recruitment process and learn about the internal realities of a potential employer from current or former employees.

Applicants are likely to place heavier weight on information they deem as credible compared to secondary sources of information they receive about an employer through advertising and corporate websites (Sullivan, 2013). The information applicants view as authentic typically comes from primary sources; applicants want to hear firsthand what it is like to work in that organization, and social media is often where they start. For instance, LinkedIn makes it very easy for applicants to scour their extended network to determine whom they might know that works for the organization to which they have applied. Reider explains that applicants are also using LinkedIn to bypass the recruitment process and speak directly to the hiring manager. This can be a smart tactic for an applicant, as they will get more attention than if they simply submitted an application online, but the recruiter is also not there to advocate for the applicant or help in the negotiation process.

Organizations are now taxed with designing and monitoring an abundance of content in various forms. The lines between recruitment and selection are blurring; applicants may perceive the hiring process as an indication of what it might be like to work in that particular organization, depending on the methods used. For example, many organizations are adopting virtual simulations as a way to not only assess whether the applicant can do the job but also provide applicants with a realistic job preview (Winkler, 2006). Other organizations, such as the Army, provide assessments and tools online that can help applicants make decisions about whether they fit in the organization and, if so, where they would be best placed. This gives applicants a better understanding of whether they think they might enjoy working in the organization and either self-select into or out of the recruitment pipeline.

**Challenges**

The multitude of spaces where organizations must place recruitment content, along with the sheer number of individuals that come into contact with an applicants, introduces several new challenges for organizations. First, organizations have to ensure to that the recruitment messaging is consistent across all sources. Also, every employee in the organization should be treated as a recruiter and be well equipped to describe the organization to any applicant in a positive and realistic manner. Organiza-
tions also have to rigorously manage their online presence and pay attention to what is being said about them and manage the conversation.

**Issues of Fairness**

Organizations have long recognized that they need to consider how applicants react to the recruitment and selection processes (Breaugh, 2013). Recruitment is not a one-way conversation but rather a mutual negotiation between an employee and employer. Organizations need to worry about how they treat applicant just as much as the applicant has to ensure they are providing a good impression to the organization.

With the use of new technologies and social media in the recruitment process, organizations have introduced new forms of potential bias or new components of the process to which applicants may view as unfair. For instance, the use of social networking sites such as LinkedIn gives recruiters access to information that could lead to discrimination (e.g., race, gender, age, religion, etc) whether intentional or unintentional. Research is beginning to understand how social profiles are perceived and found that applicants who place pictures on LinkedIn are preferred over those who choose to omit pictures (Salter, Poeppelman, & Miglaccio, 2014).

Caution is also warranted about potential bias, or new factors affecting hiring outcomes, introduced by placing a large focus on recruiting online. Though still unknown, there is a possibility that certain methods of recruitment may lead to a biased sample of applicants. For illustration purposes, we’ll provide some hypothetical examples. LinkedIn provides specialized access to employers if the job seeker pays a certain amount per month, potentially giving more affluent applicants a leg up. In addition, LinkedIn is designed such that the more people you are connected to, the more people you have access to or have access to your account. If an organization places all efforts on LinkedIn it may be reasonable to determine if they are actually reaching more talented applicants or simply those who are very well socially connected.

**Challenges**

Organizations will need to implement several policies and interventions to ensure they are always being fair to their job applicants. For example, there is a large portion of individuals who do not use social media websites for one reason or another. Organizations need to consider how they will continue to reach out to this portion of the population, ensuring that they are also alternative methods that do not require Internet access. Recruiters must also be aware of common issues arising from these new media
in order to overcome them. For instance, Trudeau explains that some older candidates may perceive that they are being discriminated against and therefore build an online résumé that omits decades of their work experience in order to make them look younger. The way individuals job search and the way recruiters leverage these technologies likely varies extensively across individuals and organizations; a richer understanding of how they are being used will be needed to address issues of fairness.

Given that all employees are also recruiters in the sense that they can post a job opening or spread information (e.g., Glassdoor) through the Internet about the employment experience at their organization, organizations must also ensure that they provide the necessary training and tools to their employees. Messages to applicants should be consistent, positive, and aligned with the organization’s goals for the future. This will likely evolve to be an ongoing form of communication between the employee and the organization.

**A Widening Practice—Research Gap**

Recruitment research has long been lagging behind the practice, but the gap is likely widening at a much faster pace than ever before. Based on our conversations with recruiters in the field and a review of the literature, we suggest some areas of research that should be pursued in order to close the gap.

**Theory (Re)Development**

The recruitment literature has traditionally been fragmented based on specific topics (e.g., messaging, method, sourcing), which are treated individually rather than as a combination of variables that interact with one another (Breaugh, 2013). Hence, recruitment researchers lament the lack of theory and comprehensive understanding of the process and how those affect recruitment outcomes. This is the case even more so with online communication between applicant and recruiter and the introduction of new technologies. A recruiter may send LinkedIn messages, email, have a phone call, and videoconference with in the process of recruiting one applicant. Understanding the interaction among messaging, methods, and sourcing is crucial to capture the essence of the process and its outcomes. Researchers have been calling for an integrated theory for a while, and it is still greatly needed (Breaugh, 2013).

Furthermore, some theories may be outdated. For example, many theories or empirical approaches make the assumption that applicants are generated by presenting advertisements or posting about a job (which very much used to be the case). However, Reider explains that this is shifting; organizations can now be the first to initiate contact, as they are seeking out the talented passive candidates. When developing an integrated theory, researchers should consider
whether previous theories are still sufficient to explain the nomological network. Furthermore, many of the theories focus on one aspect, such as messaging, in isolation from the other processes (Breaugh, 2013). From what we have learned from recruiters in the field, the way a message is said may be less important than who delivers the message and that it is very much an ongoing process rather than a moment in time.

**Understanding Increased Importance of the Recruiter**

Previous research has not been successful in finding effects on recruitment outcomes due to recruiter characteristics (Breaugh, 2013). However, with the increased emphasis on relationship building in the recruitment process, this research may need to be revisited. Research has found that recruiter behaviors do matter in terms of an applicant’s probability of accepting a job offer. This line of research should continue as some researchers may be viewed as more competent than others as the role is changing, and also, all employees could possibly be seen as a recruiter. It may also be the case that applicant and recruiter personalities interact, making some dyads more successful than others.

**Targeted Recruitment**

The introduction of social media in recruitment further highlighted the importance of targeted recruitment. Sullivan (2013) predicts that targeted recruitment will be the next trend; organizations will adopt market research practices by identifying and targeting their specific pool of desired applicants. This calls for a need to integrate work analysis research and recruitment. Organizations need to design their recruitment strategy to align with their hiring strategies. Recruitment literature has often been treated as a separate body of work from selection research. However, the utility of selection systems relies on an organization’s recruitment practices. It is essential that organizations are recruiting the same KSAOs they use to identify qualified applicants.

Most recruitment research is conducted using college students, and researchers have been willing to assume that the results of those studies will generalize to individuals with more job search and work experience (Breaugh, 2013). However, the targeted recruitment research has shown that applicants across varying roles and with different characteristics have differential preferences when applying for jobs. This suggests that one cannot assume that experienced job applicants are seeking the same thing as a job applicant fresh out of college. Researchers should consider revisiting some studies and replicating them with different populations of job applicants to assess generalizability.
Reactions to New Methods and Processes

Applicant perceptions and reactions have been a fruitful avenue of research in recruitment and should become increasingly prosperous with the various new methods and processes in recruitment. For instance, organizations are now using virtual reality in their recruitment. In addition, many social media sites allow organizations to promote tailored advertisements to individuals. There is no research that we are aware of that has evaluated applicant reactions to these types of promotional content on personal sites. Another issue that has surfaced is the question of whether or not organizations are invading applicant privacy by accessing their personal profiles. Research should investigate how and when applicants may view this type of recruitment as an invasion of privacy and what kind of effects it may have on recruiting outcomes.

The recruitment landscape is changing and research has some catching up to do. Although this article only covers a few gaps or areas of concern, there are far more that are not covered here, and we want to hear from you, the experts. Tell us about your job search experiences as a recruiter or job applicant! How has social media and technology helped or hindered your ability to find the right job or ideal applicant? In addition, tell us about your research on these areas so we can highlight it for readers. Tweet your thoughts to @themodernapp or post your comments on my.siop! Be sure to join The Modern App Group and tell us what you think!

References

Sunderberg, J. (2014b). How LinkedIn has changed recruitment in the UK. The Under-


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