Examining the Relationship between Job Search Behaviors and Personality

Taylor Parkins

Appalachian State University
Abstract

Employee recruitment is a critical process in which organizations actively utilize recruitment sources in order to attract the best potential candidates to fill open positions. Previous research into recruitment sources have increased significantly in the past several years but have primarily focused on post-hire outcomes. Research on pre-hire outcomes may lend opportunities for corporate recruiters to be able to predict the quality of potential job candidates before being hired. Drawing on the importance of recruitment sources and pre-hire outcomes, this study investigates the possibility of predicting applicant personality traits from their job search strategies. A total of 226 participants completed an online survey that measured both their personality traits and their job search behaviors. Results found that several job search strategies did indeed correlate with certain personality traits but did not support all hypothesized correlations.
**Introduction**

Employee recruitment is described as the activities an organization applies in order to find potential employees and convince these employees to accept a job offer (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). This process can be described in three different phases. These phases include generating applicants, maintaining applicant status, and influencing job choice decisions (Barber, 1998). An organization begins the process by first establishing recruitment objectives in order to determine the type of candidate they want to recruit. This involves investigating how many positions need to be filled, education levels, and the type of work experience the applicant may possess. This process is critical in order to develop a clear strategy for filling open positions (Breaugh, 2008). These organizational strategies typically address when and where to start recruiting. The next step in the recruitment process involves the organization’s recruitment activities, where they post job openings on different recruitment sources. Employers will then acquire candidates through internal or external hiring sources.

Internal hiring sources refer to the utilization of existing resources within an organization such as in-house job postings, referrals from current employees, or rehiring past employees. Internal recruitment allows organizations to hire employees who possess current knowledge of their business or acquire someone who can be vouched for by a current trusted employee. When organizations focus their recruitment process through external hiring sources, job openings will be posted on job boards, social media platforms, or the company’s website. This approach requires an organization to actively reach out and find potential candidates outside of the company. The organization promotes itself to the job market in order to attract job seekers.

In 1976, the first edition of the *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* was published. In this handbook, there was only one page devoted to recruitment research. Over
the past thirty years, the focus on recruitment sources has increased significantly (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Early research on recruitment sources investigated how potential job candidates searched for jobs. This research concluded that job candidates primarily relied on friends or acquaintances for acquiring jobs and were oblivious to the recruitment process. Since then, the research has transitioned by accentuating the importance of comparing employees hired from different sources and their on-the-job effectiveness (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Researchers are focusing on which sources employees are hired from and its relationship with how they perform, with job performance as well as retention being used as indices of employee performance. For understanding why certain recruitment sources may lead to different recruiting outcomes, researchers have focused on two theoretical explanations.

The first explanation for the differences in the observed outcomes among hiring sources can be described as the realism hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that certain recruitment sources provide candidates with a realistic job preview (RJP). For example, applicants tend to gain a more accurate perception of a job when they are rehires or when they are sourced through employee referrals (Taylor & Schmidt, 1983). When candidates are hired through these sources, they have a better understanding of what the job involves (Rynes, 1991). It is believed that RJP's have the potential to decrease employee turnover within organizations. The main argument in support of RJP’s propose that to better inform employees, employers should provide both positive and negative aspects of a job opening from sources such as booklets or information guides (Phillips, 1998). Giving applicants this information gives them the opportunity to withdraw themselves from consideration if they feel as if the job does not meet their interests. Applicants who know more information about a particular job also have the ability to lower their
expectations about a job, therefore increasing job satisfaction by not feeling disappointed by the job conditions (Taylor & Schmidt, 1983).

In the past, the realism hypothesis has been subject to close scrutiny. This is due to the disappointing results of several RJP studies. In several studies seeking to find a relationship between voluntary turnover and RJP s, results presented only a slightly significant RJP effect (Breaugh, 2008). In recent years, the realism hypothesis has gained more credibility. More recent research examining the realism hypothesis have supported a marginal relationship between RJP s and both employee turnover and job performance. However, there have been very few researchers who have appropriately operationalized realistic information while providing a reasonable sample size (Phillips, 1998).

The second theoretical explanation to receive a significant amount of attention is referred to as the individual difference hypothesis. This explanation proposes the idea that certain recruitment sources may reach different applicants from different populations, resulting in a variation of effectiveness (Taylor & Schmidt, 1983). It may be the case that certain recruitment sources attract more effective employees. For instance, it is assumed that individuals recruited by employee referrals will be more capable of performing job tasks compared to applicants recruited by external hiring sources (Ullman, 1966). This assumption is due to the fact that current employees most likely evaluate the potential candidate before referring them to the organization. By evaluating the referral, employees ensure the value of the potential candidate reinforces their own reputation within the organization.

The earliest research on the individual differences hypothesis consisted of exploratory analyses exploring recruitment sources in terms of demographics. The current body of research no longer concentrates as much attention on demographics, but instead, focuses on how
individual differences affect applicant quality (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). This led to findings suggesting that higher quality applicants are found more through referrals and other inside sources compared to external hiring sources. The biggest question that still remains from this research is why may there be differences across different recruitment sources. Studies have shown differences but fail to underline why this may be the case.

Over the years, there has been a substantial amount of research concerned with post-hire outcomes. The recruitment literature has primarily focused on this one aspect of the recruitment process. The recruitment process and the complexity it conveys has been overlooked. However, it is imperative for researchers to consider focusing on pre-hire variables. This will result in a better understanding of how recruitment sources impact post-hire outcomes (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Corporate recruiters have expressed interest in learning whether or not recruitment sources can predict the quality of potential job candidates and whether the same sources can produce a higher yield of new hires (Barber, 1998). With very few studies investigating these variables, there is currently no sufficient foundation for future researchers to build upon. To begin considering pre-hire outcomes, a great starting point would be to first look at the job search process. This helps us understand how candidates arrive in the applicant pool before being hired.

Job search is defined as an individual’s activities in response to their current employment status relative to their employment goal (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Considering how important employee recruitment is for organizations, researchers are now set to expose the factors that explain how to successfully find and hire desired candidates. The body of research on job search is intended to view the recruitment process from the perspective of the job-seeker to discover which factors influence whether or not an applicant secures a job they are pursuing.
In order to do so, one must recognize the current recruitment sources in which applicants are using in their job search. Many applicants utilize traditional methods which consist of advertisements, referrals, internal job postings, job fairs, and employment agencies (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). In the past two decades, job candidates have become progressively engaged in online recruitment (Acikgoz, 2018). Employers are now aiming to attract applicants through company websites, online job boards, and social media platforms.

When potential job candidates determine to search for a job, they typically engage in the following strategies. First, the candidate will search for a job through different recruitment sources. This results in communication between the candidate and the employer, creating the initial attraction. The applicant will then determine whether or not they qualify for the job. Correspondence between the applicant and the employer will acknowledge compatible characteristics, making each party aware of potential interests. Applicants will then evaluate their impending options and whether or not they sense person-organization fit. From here, the applicant must be persuaded by the employer that they are indeed the right fit and should accept the job offer. The main goal of this process is for applicants and organizations to communicate, evaluate, and persuade the other party into accepting a new career opportunity (Acikgoz, 2018).

Looking back to individual differences, it is appropriate to assume that employers are actively searching for the most capable and unique applicants that fit their company’s needs. There are certain qualities an individual must possess in order to be successful in a position. There is an abundant amount of research that suggests that organizations can predict how applicants will perform on the job (Ryan & Ployhart, 2013). As one of the constructs that have been shown to have validity in predicting job performance, applicant personality is frequently used by organizations in making hiring decisions. For instance, in a study involving automobile
machine operators, researchers found that supervisor ratings of job effectiveness had a positive correlation with conscientiousness (Hayes, Roehm, & Castellano, 1994). Krilowicz and Lowerey (1996) found a significant positive correlation between employee productivity and traits that were consistent with conscientiousness and extraversion. In another study looking at pilot performance, Hormann and Maschke (1996) found individuals who tested high in neuroticism had lower job performance scores compared to the other pilots.

Due to the evidence that personality traits predict job performance, employers may be interested in the possibility of predicting applicant personality traits from their job search strategies. As mentioned, the individual differences hypothesis infers that different recruitment sources have the potential of reaching different types of individuals (Breaugh, 2008). For instance, researchers found that nurses referred by other current employees possessed more valuable work experience compared to nurses who were recruited by external job advertisements (Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993). When looking for a job, there are six job search styles that individuals use. These include the use of college resources, strategic job searching, traditional methods (e.g., newspaper ads and company job postings), utilizing recruiters, utilizing social media, and utilizing personal connections (Nield, 2018). If the individual differences hypothesis is correct, employers may have the ability of targeting applicants with certain attributes by their job search strategies. So far, there has been an insignificant amount of research devoted to targeted recruitment, even though it has potential to have a major impact on pre-hire and post-hire outcomes (Breaugh, 2008). Targeting applicants allows employers the opportunity to attract candidates who are genuinely interested in the job opening, who have adequate self-insight, and the specific attributes needed for the job. If it can be established that applicants with certain personality characteristics are more or less likely to utilize certain job search strategies,
organizations may utilize this information to design their recruitment strategies such that they are more likely to attract applicants with the desired personality traits.

It’s widely accepted by most researchers that nearly all personality measures can be categorized into the five-factor model of personality, commonly referred to as the “big five” personality dimensions (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). These five facets have been developed and studied for over fifty years, so they have been used by many researchers. These five dimensions include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness is described as possessing an active imagination and insight, aesthetic sensitivity, and attentiveness to other people’s inner feelings (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Individuals scoring high on openness typically have an extensive range of interests. They tend to be curious while questioning authority. They also enjoy the excitement of a new experience. They are seen as being more creative than the average person. Emotions frequently affect these individuals more often compared to closed-minded individuals. People who score low on openness tend to be conservative and conventional. They are uncomfortable with new experiences and would rather engage in familiar territory.

Individuals high in openness would possess an interest in trying a broad range of approaches when applying for a job. Since openness results in curiosity, applicants with this trait would be attracted to the possible outcomes for each job search strategy. They like new experiences and would not be satisfied with limiting themselves to focusing on just one strategy. Research has also shown that openness to experience has a relationship with both success in many careers, including consulting, and the likelihood of adapting to changing environments (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). This could cause an increase in activities concerning interest for new career explorations. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:
Hypothesis 1a: There will be a positive correlation between openness and using multiple job search methods.

Hypothesis 1b: There will be a positive correlation between openness and job-search intensity.

Conscientiousness has the highest validity among personality traits in predicting job performance (Salgado, 1997). If an organization is looking for someone to be goal-oriented with a high desirability for achievement, they may want to focus their recruiting efforts in finding a highly conscientious individual. Conscientiousness is characterized as having efficient self-control. These individuals are well-disciplined and have the ability to organize and complete tasks in an orderly fashion. They are described as being hardworking, persistent, and dependable (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). They will take their time assessing situations in order to pay close attention to detail. Due to their strenuous planning process, they will make sure to go about their job search carefully. They will do this by utilizing resources in order to increase their chances of being hired. Applicants high on conscientiousness are disciplined enough to develop a strategy that attracts an employer’s attention resulting in their own desired outcome. For this to happen, these individuals will be persistent and apply to multiple positions. This strategy will be planned out ahead of time and integrated into the search for a job opening. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2a: There will be a positive correlation between conscientiousness and using strategic job search.

Hypothesis 2b: There will be a positive correlation between conscientiousness and job-search intensity.
Extraversion includes traits such as friendliness, being talkative, and sociability. Extraverts are described as being relatively energetic and enjoying conversations with others (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). They could also be seen as, “the life of the party”. When in the presence of an extravert, one will acknowledge a sense of optimism and assertiveness. In a study examining sales personnel, it was found that extraversion was a valid predictor of job performance through social interaction (Barrick & Mount, 1991). This would also make sense for police officers since they spent a great deal of time interacting with the public. Johnson (1997) effectively demonstrated this by finding a positive correlation between extraversion and job performance of police officers. Organizations could benefit from hiring an extravert if they are seeking an individual who must be socially engaged with other people throughout the day. When looking for a job, extraverts will look for an opportunity where they may bring their social skills to the table. Also, through their social engagements, it is presumed that extraverts will have a large network of friends or acquaintances in both their social life and on social media platforms. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive correlation between extraversion and using a) recruiters, b) personal connections, and c) social media during job search._

An agreeable individual is characterized as being trustful, affectionate, and sympathetic (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). People scoring high on agreeableness sincerely care for the well-being of others. They are known for putting others before themselves. During conflict, agreeable people will express an interest in resolving the matters rather than being confronted with prolonged issues. They also enjoy cooperating as part of a team. A study found that agreeableness is positively related to success in training other individuals (Salgado, 1997). With their prosocial behaviors, an organization could hire an agreeable person in a position that
required customer service skills or cooperation with a team. When searching for jobs, agreeable individuals would most likely rely on collaboration with their peers. Because these people get along well with others, they most likely have a large network of individuals that they can call upon. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 4:** There will be a positive correlation between agreeableness and using personal connections in job search.

Neuroticism is the tendency to be emotionally unstable while experiencing prolonged effects of negative feelings such as fear, embarrassment, and disgust. People high in neuroticism have a tendency to feel depressed for long periods of time while dealing with irrational ideas. If scores on a neuroticism scale are too high, an individual may be prone to psychiatric problems (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). These individuals do not possess the ability to effectively deal with stress or control impulses. In a study examining neuroticism levels of bank employees, it was discovered that high levels of neuroticism resulted in lower levels of job satisfaction and job performance. (Hlatywayo, & Shaleen Mlanga, & Zingwe, 2013). Rather, people who score low on neuroticism are perceived to have adequate emotional stability. They are naturally even-tempered individuals who have the capability of staying calm and relaxed during high-stress situations. An organization may want to avoid neurotic individuals in regard to a position that is likely to be stressful. This could not only be detrimental to the company, but the applicant could potentially be triggered by the stress and suffer from negative emotional impulses. With the emotionally unstable tendencies of these individuals, it is expected that they elude the possible stressful means of searching for many jobs. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 5a:** There will be a negative correlation between neuroticism and all job search styles.
Hypothesis 5b: There will be a negative correlation between neuroticism and job-search intensity.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The hypotheses of the study were tested by utilizing a sample of 255 individuals who were invited to take an online survey including measures of job search behaviors and personality. The sample was 20.4% male with a mean age of 23.34 (SD = 9.98). Among those who participated, 11.9% had a high school diploma or less, 84.6% had some college education, an associate degree, or a college degree, and 3.5% had a master’s degree or higher. Sample was 86.7% White, 8% Hispanic or Latino, 3.5% Black or African American, and 1.8% were from other racial/ethnic groups.

Measures

Job search behaviors. Job search behaviors were measured using items from a literature review developed by Nield (2018). This measure included 76 items measuring the behaviors that participants perform when searching for jobs. Participants indicated the frequency in which they perform each activity on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always). Sample items included, “I attend a job search training.”, “I use a college or university employment service to search for jobs.”, and “I look at the job listings in newspapers to search for jobs.”. Types of job search strategies measured by this scale include using college resources, strategic job search, traditional job search, using social media, utilizing recruiters, and utilizing personal connections.

Personality. Personality was measured using the Big Five Inventory-2 developed by Sota and John (2017). The measure included 60 items measuring the big five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Participants were
asked to indicate the extent to which each item applied to them on a 5-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly). Sample items included, “Rarely feels excited or eager,” “Tends to be disorganized”, and “Is helpful and unselfish with others”.

**Job-search intensity.** Job-search intensity was measured using the Job-Search Intensity and Clarity Measure scale developed by Wanberg, Hough, and Song (2002). The measure included ten items measuring how frequently certain recruitment sources were used when searching for a job. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency on a 6-point scale (0 = never, 5 = very often). Sample items included, “Looked at help wanted/classified ads in the newspaper or in a newsletter”, “Used the internet to locate job openings”, and “Telephoned or visited a possible employer”. This scale also measured job-search clarity using four items. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree on each item in order to measure how clear their job search objectives are. Sample items included, “I have a clear idea of the type of job that I want to find.”, “I need help deciding if I should make a career change.”, and “I need help planning a career change.”.

**Results**

The means of and correlations between the variables assessed in this study are presented in Table 1. Hypothesis 1a predicted that there would be a positive correlation between openness and using multiple job search methods. As the results in Table 1 indicate, openness was positively correlated with strategic job search, \( r = .25, p < .001 \), traditional job search, \( r = .22, p = .001 \), and utilization of personal connections, \( r = .17, p < .05 \). Hypothesis 1b proposed that there would be a positive correlation between openness and job-search intensity. Openness was positively correlated with job-search intensity, \( r = .20, p < .01 \). Thus, both hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. Hypothesis 2a predicted that there would be a positive correlation between
conscientiousness and using strategic job search. Conscientiousness was positively correlated with strategic job search, $r = .21, p = .001$. Hypothesis 2b projected that there would be a positive correlation between conscientiousness and job-search intensity. Conscientiousness was positively correlated with job-search intensity, $r = .19, p < .01$. Therefore, both hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported. Hypothesis 3 indicated that there would be a positive correlation between extraversion and using recruiters, personal connections, and social media during job search. Even though the results showed that extraversion was negatively correlated with recruiters and conveyed a nonsignificant correlation with social media job search, there was a positive correlation with utilizing personal connections, $r = .16, p < .05$, providing partial support for the hypothesis. Hypothesis 4 suggested that there would be a positive correlation between agreeableness and using personal connections in job search. Results indicated that this correlation was non-significant, $r = .11, p = .090$. Accordingly, this hypothesis was rejected. Hypothesis 5a anticipated a negative correlation between neuroticism and all job search styles. While results actually indicated that neuroticism was positively correlated with personal connections, college, recruiter, and social media job search styles, none of the correlations were significant. Hypothesis 5b predicted there would be a negative correlation between neuroticism and job search intensity. Despite the fact that there was a negative correlation, the correlation was not significant, $r = -.09, p = .172$. Thus, hypotheses 5a and 5b were not supported.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the possible relationship between personality traits and job search strategies. This was done by recruiting a random sample of individuals to fill out an online survey. The objective was to find which hiring sources individuals particularly use and whether these hiring sources predict certain personality traits. We used six job search
styles that included college, strategic, traditional, social media, recruiter, and personal connections. Correlation analyses were run to investigate the relationship these job search styles had with the big five personality traits: openness, consciousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. We also examined the relationship between these personality traits and job-search intensity. Results indicate significant correlations between different job search behaviors and several personality traits. Consequently, these findings partially support our hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a proposed that there would be a positive correlation between openness and the use of multiple job search methods. Hypothesis 1b suggested that there would be a positive correlation between openness and job-search intensity. The results indicated support for both hypotheses. It makes sense for individuals who are open to different experiences while possessing an extensive range of interests to apply for jobs using numerous job search strategies along with high job-search intensity. As mentioned before, these individuals would possess interest in the possible outcomes of using different job search sources and would not limit themselves to only one approach. Since openness has been found to be related to positive job performance in many careers, organizations could use this information if they are in need of a curious individual who has potential for a successful career. Organizations can utilize novel recruitment sources not utilized by the mainstream applicant population in order to reach out to those individuals who are high in openness.

Hypothesis 1a predicted a positive correlation between conscientiousness and using strategic job search, and hypothesis 1b proposed a positive correlation between conscientiousness and job-search intensity. Both hypotheses were supported. This comes as no surprise as individuals high in conscientiousness are well-disciplined and goal-oriented. This correlation demonstrates that conscientious applicants are indeed utilizing resources to develop a
strategically planned job search with high job-search intensity. If an organization is seeking an individual who must take on a managerial role or a position that requires a great deal of responsibilities, it would be in their best interest to hire an applicant who is high in conscientiousness. Understanding these results could allow the organization to make a more accurate prediction that an applicant possesses these traits. For example, organizations may inquire about the candidates’ behaviors before and during a job application, and can use this information as an indicator of conscientiousness.

The third hypothesis predicted that there would be a positive correlation between extraversion and the use of recruiters, personal connections, and social media during job search. The results provided only partial support for the hypothesis. Surprisingly, results revealed a negative correlation between extraversion and utilizing recruiters while displaying a nonsignificant correlation with social media. Extraversion did show a significant positive correlation with personal connections. Even though extraverted individuals have a tendency to favor a variety of social interactions, it is possible that when applying for a job, they only focus on their network of friends and acquaintances for assistance. If an organization is seeking an employee who must socially engage with others throughout the day, they may benefit from acquiring an applicant through current employee referrals rather than focusing on applicants applying on social media or referred by recruiters.

The fourth hypothesis suggested that there would be a positive correlation between agreeableness and using personal connections in job search. The results did not support this hypothesis. However, there was one unexpected finding. Specifically, a significant correlation was found between agreeableness and strategic job search. This was unanticipated as it was believed that agreeable individuals would primarily concentrate their job search efforts on their
personal networks. Similar to individuals high on conscientiousness, it appears as if agreeable individuals also implement a coordinated strategy when searching for a job. Organizations can use this information to seek out applicants using this strategy in order to obtain individuals with these characteristics.

Hypothesis 5a reasoned that there would be a negative correlation between neuroticism and all job search styles. Results concluded that neuroticism was positively correlated with several job search strategies, but these correlations were not significant. Hypothesis 5b predicted a negative correlation between neuroticism and job search intensity. Even though there was a negative correlation here, the correlation was also not significant. The findings for neuroticism was interesting due to the positive correlations with personal connections, college, recruiter, and social media job search styles. Additional research could expand these findings by using a larger sample size in order to possibly discover a significant relationship.

This research could ultimately lend employers a hand in predicting and targeting applicants who possess desired personality traits based on their job search strategies. Previous research has found that certain personality traits are optimal for different careers (e.g., Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Personality traits also influence employee’s attitudes, motivation, behavior preferences, and job performance (Ayub, Suzan, Wafa, & Karen, 2017). As the individual differences hypothesis suggests, different recruitment sources have the ability to reach different types of individuals in an applicant pool. It is evident that organizations can optimize performance by successfully placing competent employees in the right positions. Predicting applicant personality traits would play an influential role in placing these employees in a position where they will succeed. Research in this area can potentially allow employers the ability to better understand pre-hire variables. By understanding these pre-hire variables, employers will
be able to select an employee and predict their post-hire outcomes before beginning the hiring process. This could ultimately help an organization save utilization of time, money, and prevent turnover.

There are a few limitations from this study that merit attention. The sample of 226 individuals can be considered a relatively small sample. The majority of the participants were university students, so this sample may limit the generalizability of the results. Another limitation would be that participants were instructed to self-report all responses. This means responses could be considered subjective and participants could have had the ability to take part in socially desirable responding. Also, the study would be classified as cross-sectional, meaning behavior is not evaluated overtime, which can limit representativeness.
References


RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RECRUITMENT AND JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES


### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RECRUITMENT AND JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between the Variables Used in the Study*

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<td>.55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* *p < .05, **p < .01.