Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry

Recruitment (2004)

Author: Wendy Casper, University of Texas at Arlington- Department of Management

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Basic Concepts & Definitions

Recruitment involves the utilization of organizational practices to influence the number and types of individuals who are willing to apply for job vacancies (Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Cable, 2003). Recruitment can focus on the internal labor market (i.e., pursuing staff already employed by the organization) or the external labor market (i.e., pursuing applicants from outside the organization). Internal candidates can be recruited through internal job postings, word-of-mouth, or internship programs. Organizational practices used to recruit from external labor markets include employment advertising, employee referral programs, job fairs, college campus recruitment, employment agencies, rehiring former employees, or networking (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Recruitment is a topic of importance in the study of work and family because family issues can influence the job choices that people make. Accordingly, an organization's success in recruitment may be influenced by the degree to which they can accommodate these family issues. In the remainder of this section, several important recruitment-related concepts are defined. This is followed by a discussion of the importance of work-family issues to recruitment, a review of the state of current knowledge on this topic, and a discussion of the implications for research and practice in this area.

A review of the organizational recruitment literature reveals several ways that recruitment effectiveness has been defined and conceptualized. Among two of the most popular approaches are the pre-hire outcomes of Organizational Attractiveness and Job Pursuit Intentions (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001). Organizational attractiveness is defined by Aiman-Smith et al. (2001) as "an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organization and toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship." In contrast, these authors conceptualize job pursuit intentions as more active, defining this construct as "the intention to take action to find out more information about an organization, to contact the organization, and to try and secure an interview with the organization." Thus,
organizational attractiveness is an outcome that employers should seek to develop in early stages of influence on potential applicants. Organizational attractiveness is often conceptualized as one of many antecedents to job pursuit intentions, although there may be a reciprocal relationship as well such that pursuing a job can also enhance attraction to the organization.

**Job Choice** is defined as the decision to accept or decline a position after an offer of employment has been made. While job choice is still a pre-hire outcome, it is more proximal to the actual hiring event than organizational attractiveness or job pursuit intentions. Although the terminology used in the recruitment literature typically focuses on the choice of the job, this choice also denotes an acceptance of the attributes of the organization as an employer as well as the attributes of the job (Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987).

Those that decide to pursue employment by applying for a job with the organization become members of the organization's applicant pool, the group of individuals who wish to be considered for the job. Characteristics of the applicant pool are also relevant dependent variables in recruitment and include the size of the applicant pool, the acceptance rate, and the length of time to fill positions. The size of the applicant pool refers to the total number of individuals who apply for the position. The acceptance rate refers to the number of offers that are accepted by applicants compared to the number of offers made, and the length of time to fill positions refers to the time period between when the organization begins to recruit and when the position is accepted by an applicant (Williams & Dreher, 1992).

In the work-family research area, the effect of family-friendly policies on recruitment is often examined. For the purpose of this entry, family-friendly policies are defined as "any employer sponsored benefit or working condition that helps an employee to balance work and nonwork demands" (Cascio, 2000).

**Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies**

There are numerous ways in which recruitment is important to work-family studies. Family members often serve as important sources of information about potential job offers. For example, family members' opinions about an employer's reputation may be influential in job choice decisions. Moreover, family responsibilities are likely to influence applicants' evaluations of whether compensation and benefits for a position are adequate. For instance, an applicant with numerous dependents may be more influenced to accept positions that offer high compensation or family medical benefits that are subsidized by the employer.

Despite the numerous ways in which family is relevant to recruitment, the empirical literature on this topic has primary focused on two aspects of how applicants' families influence recruitment. First, authors have discussed the fact that family can have an important influence on the decisions people make to accept or decline employment offers. Second, because they are aware of this, organizations sometimes develop
and implement family-friendly policies in order to enhance their effectiveness at recruitment. Scholars have reflected on the role of the family in recruitment for quite some time. In a review of the effects of sex and gender on recruitment, Powell (1987) argued that applicants' family responsibilities might be a potential explanation for sex differences in recruitment outcomes. Specifically, he argued that women might be more likely than men to avoid work opportunities that require them to engage in considerable amounts of training because of their family responsibilities. This implies that employers may have greater difficulty recruiting women into certain positions, which could impede an organization's diversity efforts.

Employers may face special family challenges when recruiting applicants who must relocate from a different geographic region. Research discusses the role of two important family-related factors that may be barriers to recruitment involving relocation. First, when dual-career couples are involved, the relocation will influence the spouse's employment, which may lead to spouse resistance to relocation (Eby & Russell, 2000; Eby, DeMatteo, & Russell, 1997). Second, the concern that relocation may have an unfavorable impact on any children that are part of the family could lead people to decline jobs that require relocation (Brett, 1982).

Clearly, applicants' families do influence their job choice decisions. Families might encourage applicants to pursue particular positions or organizations, or family issues or responsibilities can prevent individuals from pursuing certain types of employment. For example, applicants may decline offers for positions that require extensive travel or very long hours if they have extensive family care responsibilities (i.e., small children at home). When family issues present barriers to recruitment, several authors have suggested that family-friendly policies such as on-site child care and flextime may facilitate recruitment effectiveness (Guzzo, Nelson & Newman, 1992; Rynes, 1991). Popular press articles have also discussed family-friendly policies as aids to recruitment and the increase in organizations implementing these policies to facilitate recruitment (Basch Scott, 1996; Roberts, 1996).

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

This discussion of the current state of knowledge focuses on two key areas of work-family research that deal with organizational recruitment. First, empirical research on the role of family in job choice is discussed. Second, the literature that examines the effects of family-friendly policies on recruitment outcomes is also summarized.

*The Influence of Family on Job Choice.* Several empirical studies have examined the role that family plays in workers' employment decisions. Bretz, Boudreau, and Judge (1994) found that a desire for greater work-family balance and a lack of access to organizational work-family balance policies were both predictors of employed managers' motivation to search for employment alternatives. Stroh, Brett, and Reilly (1996) examined the hypothesis that women managers would be more likely to leave the workforce
due to family-related reasons, but found no support for this notion, suggesting that both men and women may be influenced by these family factors. More recently, Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, and Kriska (2000) hypothesized that concern over family issues would predict withdrawal from a selection process for law enforcement positions. Specifically, these authors anticipated that the expectation of having work-family conflict and the need to relocate would predict a greater number of withdrawals from the selection process. Results indicated that need to relocate but not anticipated work-family conflict was related to applicant withdrawal.

Although several studies have hypothesized that family status would be an important predictor of whether an employee would accept a job that required relocation, in general findings have not supported this idea (Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1993; Noe & Barber, 1993). Sagie, Krausz, and Weinstain (2001) discuss the fact that the presence of a working spouse may provide an impediment to recruitment for positions that require relocation, given that relocation will likely interrupt the spouse's career. Several studies have found that spouse willingness to relocate was an important predictor of employee willingness to relocate for a position (Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1993; Eby & Russell, 2000) and actual relocation decisions (Sagie, Krausz, & Weinstain, 2001). Moreover, research also suggests that spouse-relocation assistance is perceived as an attractive family-friendly policy (Eby, DeMatteo, & Russell, 1997), suggesting that this type of assistance may help overcome the challenges of recruiting employees in dual-career families for positions requiring relocation.

In addition to spouse-related concerns, organizations may be concerned about difficulty recruiting employees to relocate due to concerns over children's adjustment to relocation. Although children who relocate do have more health and behavior problems and poorer social adjustment (Brett, 1982), the data suggest that parents are no less willing to accept positions that require relocation than non-parents (Brett et al., 1993, Noe & Barber, 1993). In short, it appears that spouse-related concerns represent a more significant barrier to organizational recruitment requiring relocation than do child-related concerns.

**The Effect of Family-Friendly Policies on Recruitment Effectiveness.** An early review of the effectiveness of on-site child care indicated that there was no credible evidence that child care had a favorable impact on recruitment (Miller, 1984). However, the reason for such weak evidence was due to a lack of well-controlled studies examining these questions more than to studies with negative findings, suggesting the need for more research in this area. More recently, a handful of empirical studies (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Rau & Hyland, 2002; Rothausen, Gonzales, Clarke, & O'Dell, 1998) have examined the relationship between offering various family-friendly benefits and organizational recruitment outcomes. However, these studies reveal competing findings concerning the extent to which family-friendly benefits are universally appealing and therefore, may attract a wide array of potential applicants (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Casper & Buffardi, in press; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997) or
appeal only to (and are likely to enhance recruitment only for) workers who are most likely to benefit from them (Rau & Hyland, 2002; Rothausen et al., 1998).

The person-organization fit literature suggests that employee individual differences are important determinants of what employer characteristics a potential employee finds attractive (Turban & Keon, 1993). Following this premise, Frone and Yardley (1996) explored which types of people found family-friendly policies to be desirable. Although both men and women found family-friendly policies in general to be desirable, women perceived job sharing and child care supports as slightly more important than men. Parents of younger children and employees reporting higher levels of family interfering with work also rated family-friendly policies as more important. These findings are consistent with the person-organization fit perspective and the idea that family-friendly policies may be most useful in recruiting employees who will directly benefit from them. Another study suggests that on-site child care may also be most effective in recruiting workers who plan to use the policy (Rothausen et al., 1998). This study asked employees whether they believed that having on-site child care would enhance recruitment and retention for the organization. Results indicated that employees with current or future needs to use child care believed that on-site child care would facilitate recruiting more than employees without current or anticipated child care needs. Recent research by Rothbard, Dumas, and Phillips (2001) examined employee preferences for segmenting or integrating their work and family roles as an individual difference variable that influences which family-friendly policies are appealing. These authors found that individuals who preferred to keep their work and home lives separate were less satisfied when their companies offered on-site child care (a policy that fosters integration of work and family) but were more satisfied when their companies offered flextime (a policy that fosters segmentation of work and family). Finally, a study by Rau and Hyland (2002) explored telecommuting and flextime, and found that work-to-family conflict moderated the effects of both flextime and telecommuting on organizational attraction. Specifically, individuals with high work-to-family conflict were more attracted to organizations offering flextime, whereas those with low work-to-family conflict were more attracted to organizations with telecommuting. Taken together, the person-organization fit perspective and research by several authors (Frone & Yardley, 1996; Rau & Hyland, 2002; Rothausen et al., 1998; Rothbard et al, 2001) suggest that family-friendly policies such as flexible schedules and on-site child care might be most effective in recruiting potential employees who would have a need or a desire to use that specific policy.

In contrast, several studies have supported the idea that family-friendly policies may appeal to and help recruit a wide array of workers, including those workers who don't plan to use such policies. For example, Bretz and Judge (1994) explored attraction to organizations offering general work-family policies within a study examining attraction to several human resource systems. Although findings in general supported a person-organization fit model, this was not supported for work-family policies. Counter to expectations, the authors found that individuals with high work-family conflict did not find work-family policies more appealing. Although these findings are consistent with the idea that family-friendly policies have universal
appeal, alternative explanations for these findings are possible. For example, it is possible that the policies offered did not meet employee needs. Similarly, a study by Honeycutt and Rosen (1997) explored the effects of family-friendly career paths among a sample of MBAs, expecting that employee salient identity would influence how attractive an employee perceived family-friendly career paths to be. Instead, all participants were more attracted to organizations with flexible career paths, supporting the universal appeal of family-friendly policies, and the notion that such policies may help recruit diverse applicants.

One question left unresolved by these two studies (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997) is why family-friendly policies would attract workers who exhibit low work-family conflict and thus, would be less likely to use them. Signaling theory may provide one explanation for why work-family benefits appeal to workers who are unlikely to use them. Signaling theory argues that when individuals must make decisions with incomplete information, they form inferences about unobservable characteristics from the observable information (Spence, 1973). In job choice situations, signaling theory suggests that characteristics that can be observed during the recruitment process serve as signals for those characteristics of the organization that are important in job choice but can't be directly observed (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhardt, 1991). For example, the organizational climate may be an important characteristic of the organization that applicants feel is important in job choice, but little information about climate is available until after organizational entry. Thus, observable characteristics such as family-friendly policies may serve as "signals" that the organizational climate is supportive of employees and their families. Most recently, Casper & Buffardi (2004) conducted a study exploring this notion that family-friendly policies would be linked to recruitment outcomes through their impact on organizational support perceptions. Specifically, they examined the impact of two family-friendly policies, work schedule flexibility and dependent care assistance, on applicants' intentions to pursue jobs with potential employers, and found that all applicants were more likely to pursue employment with organizations that offered both these family friendly policies, irrespective of their level of work-family conflict or parental status. However, they also examined anticipated organizational support as a mediator of the relationships between these two family-friendly policies and job pursuit intentions, and a potential explanation for why these policies would attract applicants with low work-family conflict and without child care responsibilities. Findings revealed that anticipated organizational support fully mediated the effects of work schedule flexibility and dependent care assistance on job pursuit intentions. This suggests that family-friendly policies may have the potential to attract diverse applicants, including those applicants that have little use for these policies, but that the effects on such applicants may be indirect. That is, applicants who are less likely to use such policies might also be inclined to pursue employment with organizations that offer them because they believe these organizations care about employees and families. This perception that the organization is caring may, in turn, drive the attraction.
Implications for Policy and Practice

Research to date clearly indicates that family issues influence the job choices that applicants make. Accordingly, family issues can and do influence an organization's recruitment efforts. There is consistent evidence that spouse attitudes toward relocation are an important factor in an applicant's job choice when a job requires relocation. Clearly organizations that recruit from a wide geography and who recruit workers who must relocate will be more effective at recruitment if they adopt practices designed to consider the applicant's spouse. Given that research has found that spouse employment assistance is perceived as desirable by both husbands and wives, organizations may find that offering this type of family-friendly policy is one effective strategy. Yet future research is still needed to examine the effects of other family relationships (e.g., domestic partners or elder care responsibilities) on job choice requiring relocation. In addition, much remains to be learned about how family impacts recruitment in situations in which relocation is not needed. For instance, although it is reasonable to assume that family issues may be a barrier to recruiting employees into jobs which require unusually long hours, weekend work, or business travel, little research has explored these employment situations, or the employee family characteristics (e.g., age of children, elder care demands) that would make recruitment into these jobs challenging.

Additional research is also needed to examine how family-friendly policies influence recruitment outcomes. Although research indicates that applicants do perceive family-friendly policies as attractive, the findings are mixed regarding whether these policies are universally appealing or appeal only to workers most likely to benefit from them. In addition, most extant research on this topic examines the effect of these policies in the context of experiments that manipulate these family friendly policies among fictitious companies and measure recruitment at the individual level of analysis. There is no research to date which compares actual companies with varying levels of family-friendly policies in terms of organizational level recruitment outcomes such as applicant pool size or acceptance rate. Thus, future research should examine whether these phenomena exist at the organizational level such that work-family policies enhance recruitment in actual organizations. Such findings would likely be more effective in demonstrating a clear return on investment based on enhanced recruitment.

Finally, current research on family-friendly policies and recruitment outcomes has examined diverse policies and conceptualized these policies in distinct ways. It is likely that the effect of family-friendly policies on recruitment may differ depending on the type of policy considered. For instance, if an on-site child care center is found to be effective in enhancing recruitment, this is no guarantee that elder care assistance, flexible schedules, or spouse employment assistance would have the same affect. Given the wide array of family-friendly policies that could be offered, future research is clearly needed to identify which of these policies might hold the most promise for enhancing organizational recruitment effectiveness. In addition, when offering multiple types of family-friendly policies, it is important to explore
whether they interact in influencing recruitment outcomes. As the workplace continues to diversify and
individuals increasingly consider quality of life issues when deciding to accept or decline job offers,
knowledge of how family influences the recruitment process will continue to be critical for organizations to
effectively recruit new organizational members.

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Bass: San Francisco.


**Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:**


**Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies**

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. ([More about the Matrix ...](#)).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

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About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for
determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.

**Process**

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

   Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

   Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

   The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu
Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:

1. Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word “family” to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver-caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.
Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:

1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

Work-Family Experiences: The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

• Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
• Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
• Families' work-family need & priorities
• Families' work-family problems & concerns
• Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
• Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
• Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
• Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
• Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
• Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

Antecedents: Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

• Individual Antecedents
• Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
### Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

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