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Recruiting/Hiring of Older Workers

Filip Lievens, Greet Van Hoye, and Hannes Zacher

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Abstract

This chapter reviews five key components of the recruitment process with regard to an aging workforce. First, targeted recruitment entails that organizations understand the needs, preferences, and strengths of older workers. Second, the recruitment message should communicate job and organizational characteristics that are attractive to older jobseekers. Third, the recruitment source should be consistent with the media use and job-search behaviors of older jobseekers. Fourth, the characteristics and behaviors of recruiters play an essential role in the recruitment of older applicants. Finally, organizations need to convey an attractive image of themselves as employers for older workers. Throughout the chapter, best practices are contrasted with available research evidence, and directions for future research are outlined.

Keywords: recruitment, organizational attraction, recruitment source, recruitment message, recruiters, organizational image, older workers, older jobseekers, aging workforce

In recent years, labor markets in most Western countries have gotten increasingly tight, forcing organizations to compete in a fierce "war for talent" to attract talented jobseekers and fill job openings (Ployhart, 2006). As they struggle to cope with labor shortages, many organizations are intensifying their recruitment efforts to enhance their attractiveness to prospective applicants (Rynes & Cable, 2003). In addition, demographic trends such as a smaller supply of younger workers and retirements among Baby Boomers indicate that recruitment will be even more important in the future (Saks, 2005). As a result, recruitment has become one of the most important human resource functions for organizational success and survival (Taylor & Collins, 2000).

One of the strategies that has been suggested for dealing with labor shortages is to target recruitment activities toward alternative and more diverse applicant populations (Ployhart, 2006). This recruitment approach is not new; during World War II, for

instance, many organizations started to attract female applicants for jobs that were previously filled only by men (Rynes & Barber, 1990). In light of current demographic realities, it seems especially useful for employers to target their recruitment efforts at older jobseekers to attract the necessary talent (Breugh, 2008). However, the success of this approach depends on a thorough understanding of the factors influencing older workers' attraction to organizations (Rau & Adams, 2005).

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the recruitment of older jobseekers and reviews attraction strategies that are particularly applicable for an aging workforce. Where possible, we also contrast best practices with respect to the recruitment of older jobseekers to the available research evidence. When recruitment research on older jobseekers is scarce, we formulate directions for future research.

The chapter is structured around five key components of recruitment. We start with the decision

of organizations to target older jobseekers. Next, we discuss the importance of the recruitment message, the recruitment source, and recruiters. Finally, we address the image of an organization as an employer.

Targeted Recruitment

Recruitment is defined as "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (Barber, 1998, p. 5). This definition implies that the recruitment process should start with the decision of whom to target as potential applicants before designing recruitment actions to attract them (Breaugh, 2008). This might involve the decision to focus on attracting older jobseekers or ethnic minorities. Especially when labor markets are tight, organizations might gain a competitive edge in recruitment by focusing on such so-called nontraditional candidates (i.e., candidates who are overlooked or less sought after by other employers; Rynes & Barber, 1990).

So far, surveys show that organizations do not widely use the strategy of recruiting older jobseekers as nontraditional candidates in case of labor shortages. For instance, Van Dalen, Henkens, and Schippers (2009) conducted a comparative survey of employers' attitudes and actions towards older workers in four European countries. Results showed that only in the United Kingdom employers report recruiting larger numbers of older workers (42% of employers) or recruiting ex-employees who have already taken early retirement (23%). In the other countries surveyed, at most 10% of employers mentioned that they invested in such recruitment practices related to older workers.

Theoretically, targeted recruitment is based on a person-environment fit perspective, which postulates that potential applicants' attraction to jobs and organizations results from a congruency between the characteristics of applicants and those of the organization/job (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Both complementary and supplementary fit are relevant here. In the context of an aging workforce, complementary fit means that an older jobseeker's or an organization's attributes provide what the other one wants. For instance, older jobseekers might be attractive to organizations because they possess specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that organizations need. Conversely, older jobseekers might be attracted to organizations with career management or reward systems that they want. For example,

organizations might communicate in their recruiting message that they require older workers' particular strengths, such as increased work experience, maturity, and generativity (i.e., helping and supporting younger workers; see Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Mor-Barak, 1995). Supplementary fit means that attraction occurs when organizations and older workers have "matching characteristics" (Cable & Edwards, 2004, p. 822). In other words, potential applicants might react differently to an organization's recruitment activities depending on the match of this message with their personality, needs, values, preferences, and goals (Cable & Judge, 1994; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Rau & Hyland, 2002). Organizations that want to attract older workers might then stress job and organizational characteristics that matter most to them in the recruitment message.

Thus, the success of targeted recruitment seems to depend on the extent to which organizations understand the needs/demands/benefits (complementary fit) and the personality, values, and preferences (supplementary fit) of the targeted labor market segment (older workforce) and develop recruitment strategies and communication specifically tailored to them.

Recruitment Message

Once an organization has decided to target older workers as potential applicants, the next question becomes what message should be communicated in the organization's recruitment activities to attract this target group (Breaugh, 2008). Key elements of the recruitment message are job and organizational characteristics and the diversity staffing policy. These two elements are discussed below.

Job and Organizational Characteristics

It is interesting to start with considering the best practices related to the provision of job and organizational features implemented by organizations to recruit, motivate, and retain an older workforce. These include flexible work arrangements, comprehensive and flexible benefits packages, training and development opportunities, a supportive work climate, and workplace accommodations reducing physical strains (Claes & Heymans, 2008; DWP, 2001; Groeneman, 2008; Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006; NCWD/A, 2008). Another best practice is that organizations offer new and challenging work roles for older adults such as mentoring and organizational ambassador roles (see Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Calo, 2005).

Are these best practices supported by empirical research? Three different streams of research help to address this issue. A first group of descriptive studies has investigated the work motives and preferences of older workers. For instance, in 2007 the AARP surveyed 1,500 individuals aged 45 to 74 years in the United States who were either working or looking for work (Groeneman, 2008). When asked why they work, financial rewards arise as the primary motivation for older workers. This refers to current financial needs such as the need for money (mentioned by 76% of the respondents) and health insurance (61%) as well as to future financial needs such as saving for retirement (64%) and fulfilling pension requirements (41%). Older workers are also motivated by non-financial factors that address their needs for social and psychological fulfillment. For instance, 70% report working because they enjoy the job, 52% indicate that work makes them feel useful, and 46% state that working enables them to interact with other people. When respondents were asked to describe their ideal job, intangible work characteristics seem even more important. First, older workers regard opportunities for personal and professional development as most important to their ideal job, which should offer them the chance to use their skills and talents (91%), to do something worthwhile (86%), and to learn new things (75%). Second, older workers prefer a friendly work environment (88%) in which they feel respected by their boss (75%) and coworkers (80%). Third, the ideal job should offer flexible and convenient work arrangements that help to better balance work and personal life, such as adequate paid time off (79%), a flexible work schedule (74%), and a short commute (70%). Nonetheless, older workers' ideal job also provides excellent financial benefits, such as competitive pay (76%), health insurance (74%), and good pension benefits (69%). In a related study, Loi and Shultz (2007) investigated whether four distinct groups of older jobseekers (midlife career changers aged 40 to 55, displaced workers aged 56 to 61, younger retirees aged 62 to 69, older retirees aged 70 or older) had different motives for seeking employment. Results indicated that financial motives were more prominent among midlife career changers and displaced workers, whereas a flexible work schedule was more important for younger and older retirees. Other research also points to differing desired characteristics depending on the segment being targeted. For instance, Robson, Hansson, Abalos, and Booth (2006) scrutinized desired organizational characteristics among

older workers who are currently employed. Five factors emerged as being crucial: adaptability, positive relationships, occupational growth, personal security, and continued focus/achievement of personal goals. Aiken et al. (2009) aimed to replicate these factors in a sample of older workers who were currently seeking employment, but only the factors of adaptability and positive relationships could be replicated.

Second, several studies have tried to determine the importance of job and organizational characteristics for older workers by examining their relationship to work-related attitudes and behaviors. For instance, in a sample of Dutch older employees, Van Dam, Van Der Vorst, and Van Der Heijden (2009) demonstrated that perceived work quality was negatively related to the intention to retire before the official retirement age. Specifically, older employees were more willing to continue working if they anticipated a challenging and rewarding work environment offering interesting tasks, development opportunities, and support and appreciation from their boss and coworkers. Looking at Norwegian actual retirement data, Blekesaune and Solem (2005) found that hard physical work and low autonomy in job tasks predicted early retirement. In a study of Belgian and Swedish older workers, Claes and Van De Ven (2008) observed that skill discretion (i.e., the breadth of skills used by the worker on the job) and organizational fairness were positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, whereas job insecurity was a negative predictor.

Third, it is striking that almost no research has directly investigated the relationship between job and organizational characteristics and older people's attraction to organizations. A notable exception is the study of Rau and Adams (2005), who examined the impact of job and organizational attributes described in a job advertisement on retired jobseekers' perceptions of organizational attractiveness. They found that offering opportunities for flexible and reduced work hours significantly increased attraction. Clearly, there is an urgent need for more research in this area, given that this type of study offers the most relevant and direct implications for organizations recruiting older workers.

In conclusion, both best practices and research findings converge in suggesting that organizations trying to attract older workers should offer them flexible work arrangements, good financial benefits, a supportive, respectful, and fair work environment, challenging tasks with high autonomy, development opportunities, low physical strain, and job security.

To the extent that the organization provides such work conditions, they should be emphasized in the recruitment message.

Diversity Staffing Policy

Results from the 2007 AARP survey indicate that 60% of older workers and jobseekers believe that age discrimination exists in today's workplace (Groeneman, 2008). Moreover, 23% report having experienced some form of work-related age discrimination themselves. Not getting hired for a job because of their age was mentioned most frequently (15%), followed by being passed over for promotion (10%) and being laid off or forced out of a job (6%).

These concerns seem legitimate, as research has found extensive support for the existence of negative age-related stereotypes in work contexts that might lead to unfair treatment of or discrimination against older workers (Diekmann & Hirnisey, 2007; Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995; Kulik, Perry, & Bourhis, 2000; Morgeson, Reider, Campion, & Bull, 2008; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2006; Shore et al., 2009; Weller, 2007). Even though most countries have passed laws prohibiting age-related employment discrimination (Myors et al., 2008), older workers and jobseekers still seem at a disadvantage on the labor market compared to their younger counterparts. Therefore, it makes sense for organizations that want to attract older applicants to devise and communicate an explicit staffing policy with respect to non-discrimination and diversity.

With respect to staffing, four different types of diversity or affirmative action programs exist that might be applied to improve the employment opportunities of older workers (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). A first kind of program focuses on eliminating discriminatory barriers and providing equal opportunities for all applicants regardless of their personal characteristics such as age. This implies that hiring decisions should be age-blind, in that job candidates' age cannot be used as a hiring criterion. Second, opportunity enhancement programs aim to add more target group members to the pool of qualified applicants, thus increasing the alternatives available to the hiring decision-makers. This might involve training older people to qualify them for particular jobs or explicitly encouraging them to apply (e.g., through direct mail). However, once candidates have applied, age is not used as a criterion for choosing among them. Third, tiebreak or weak preferential treatment programs require that applicants from the target group

are given preference over other applicants, but only when they are equally qualified. This implies that if there are no job-relevant differences between two candidates, the older applicant is chosen over the younger one. The final type of program involves strong preferential treatment for applicants from the target group, in that they are chosen over others even when their qualifications are lower. In such a program, the age of job candidates would be assigned substantial weight as a hiring criterion.

Whereas almost no research has investigated reactions toward age-related diversity staffing policies, a considerable amount of studies have examined diversity programs aimed at ethnic minorities and women (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006). A recent meta-analysis showed that members of the target group (e.g., ethnic minorities) have a more positive attitude toward diversity programs than members of non-target groups (Harrison et al., 2006). In addition, opportunity-oriented programs are evaluated more favorably than preferential treatment programs. Interestingly, results indicated that support for diversity policies can be increased by providing justifications for its use, such as remedying past discrimination toward the target group or increasing diversity. Similar findings are obtained with respect to the effect of diversity policy statements in the recruitment message on applicant attraction. Specifically, potential beneficiaries (e.g., women) are more attracted to organizations with a diversity program than other potential applicants (e.g., white men), and opportunity-oriented policies have the most positive effect on attraction (Avery, 2003; Avery & McKay, 2006; Barber & Roehling, 1993; Highhouse, Stierwalt, Bachiochi, Elder, & Fisher, 1999; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Rynes & Cable, 2003). In a rare study on attracting older workers, Rau and Adams (2005) found that retired jobseekers were more attracted to a targeted diversity policy statement in the job advertisement that explicitly referred to older workers as a target group than to a more general statement.

These research findings suggest that organizations might increase their attractiveness as an employer for older workers by implementing a diversity staffing policy and communicating it in the recruitment message. To attract older applicants without putting off younger candidates, it seems best to develop an equal opportunities and/or opportunity-enhancement program and to provide a justification for applying it. In addition, the policy statement should explicitly refer to older workers as a target group of the diversity program.

Again, these recommendations seem to be supported by an investigation of best practices (DWP, 2001; Groeneman, 2008; Hedge et al., 2006). Specifically, organizations that actively try to recruit and retain older workers report developing formal diversity policies that prohibit discrimination, provide equal opportunities, and explicitly refer to older workers as a target group. In addition to formal policies, these organizations create an informal culture that values and supports older workers and that is free from discriminatory practices.

Recruitment Source

When the organization has carefully determined the content of the recruitment message, the next step in the recruitment process involves the selection of an adequate medium or source to communicate this message to the target group (Rynes & Cable, 2003). In line with the principles of targeted recruitment, this choice should be based on a thorough understanding of the target group. In other words, the selected recruitment source(s) should be consistent with the media and job-search behavior of the targeted individuals (Breugh, 2008).

To attract older workers, Hedge et al. (2006) recommend that organizations consider advertising in journals and newspapers that are read by an older audience. They might also cooperate with older or retired persons' associations and senior citizen centers to post notices, organize job fairs, and sponsor social events (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). Other options include working with employment agencies that specialize in hiring older workers and publishing on job sites or online community sites that are frequented by older individuals. It also seems worthwhile to actively involve current older employees in the recruitment process to "spread the word" about the organization and available jobs to people they know or to testify about their work experiences in job advertisements, on the organization's recruitment site, or at job fairs. Unfortunately, almost no research has investigated the effectiveness of these and other recruitment sources in attracting older workers (Hedge et al., 2006).

Word-of-Mouth Communication

Research has demonstrated that word-of-mouth communication is a particularly valuable recruitment source that has a beneficial effect on applicant attraction as well as on new hires' attitudes and turnover (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Contrary to more formal sources such as advertising, word-of-mouth involves

employment information being provided informally by one or more persons to one or more other persons (Van Hove & Lievens, 2007b). Word-of-mouth information can be communicated by the organization's current employees (i.e., employee referrals), but also by all other social actors, such as family and friends (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). People tend to pay more attention to interpersonal information and attach greater credibility to it, which might explain the potential power of word-of-mouth communication (Van Hove & Lievens, 2007b).

Although there has been no research investigating word-of-mouth communication as a source of employment information targeted at older jobseekers, some evidence suggests that social processes might play a key role in recruiting an aging workforce. For instance, Van Dam et al. (2009) found that the strongest influence on older employees' intention to retire before the official retirement age was the perceived social pressure exerted by their spouse to retire early. Similarly, Adams and Rau (2004) observed that retirees who received more emotional and instrumental support from their friends and family invested more time in various job-search activities.

Therefore, organizations might increase their attractiveness for older workers by using word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source. Given that people are most attracted to other people who are similar to them (Cialdini, 2001), it seems especially useful to stimulate current older employees to communicate job openings and share their work experiences with people they know. Their testimonials might also be included in job advertisements or on the organization's website (Van Hove & Lievens, 2007a). It also makes sense for organizations to maintain good relationships with their retired employees, for instance by organizing annual get-togethers and alumni events, or by publishing a regular newsletter. While they might be interested in future job opportunities themselves, they also represent an excellent source of word-of-mouth information about the organization for people they know. We need future studies to provide empirical support for these various recommendations.

E-Recruitment

In recent years, the popularity of the Internet as a source of employment information has increased dramatically (Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004). For organizations, the Internet provides an efficient and less costly means to provide more job and organizational information to potential

applicants in a much more dynamic and consistent way than was the case in the past (Van Hove & Lievens, 2007a). It further offers unique ways to supply jobseekers with customized information adapted to their needs and preferences, thus increasing their attraction to the organization (Dineen et al., 2002; Dineen & Noe, 2009). The ways to reach a specific target group of applicants are potentially endless and include communicating through corporate recruitment sites, job boards, weblogs, chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, social network sites, online communities, virtual reality, and so on.

However, using the Internet as a recruitment source also has some potential drawbacks, such as creating a "digital divide." Given that there are significant disparities in access to and use of information technology based on demographic factors such as race, age, and socioeconomic status, spreading recruitment information through the Internet might limit the employment opportunities of certain disadvantaged groups (Lievens & Harris, 2003). For instance, Loges and Jung (2001) found that Internet access declined significantly with age, especially for people older than 60. So it seems again important to make a distinction between different segments of older workers. For instance, Peacock and Künemund (2007) showed that age had a differentiating effect among European senior citizens' Internet access, keeping other variables such as marital, occupational, and educational status constant: young senior citizens (65 to 74 years) were two-thirds as likely to access the Internet compared to the middle-age group (55 to 64 years). In addition, Loges and Jung (2001) reported that older people mentioned using the Internet for a more narrow range of goals and activities as well as connecting to the Internet from a smaller range of places. However, despite these differences in scope and intensity of Internet connectedness, older people evaluated their Internet connection to be as central to their lives as younger people. Other surveys also indicate growing Internet use among older adults and the rise of online communities of older people (Morrell, Mayhorn, & Bennett, 2000).

Employment Agencies and Other Intermediaries

More and more organizations are outsourcing the recruitment of permanent and temporary employees to employment agencies (Gray, 2002). In recent years, the number of employment agencies and other intermediaries (e.g., online platforms) specializing in the placement of older jobseekers has been

growing (Olson, 2006). Besides placing older jobseekers in jobs, many employment agencies and websites offer services for vocational training and career counseling to older adults.

Employment agencies have to consider both the needs of older jobseekers as well as the needs of the contracting organizations. On the one hand, employment agencies may help older jobseekers to circumvent employer stereotypes by promoting older job candidates (Gray, 2002). For example, employment agencies might emphasize the special strengths of older workers, such as increased work experience. In addition, agencies may help to retain older workers' knowledge and skills by providing them with temporary work, which eventually may lead to a permanent employment contract. On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that employment agencies may also facilitate age discrimination by applying unfair hiring criteria for the contracting organizations (Handy & Davy, 2007).

In a recent qualitative study, Handy and Davy (2007) conducted interviews with older jobseekers and consultants of employment agencies about the experiences of older jobseekers using employment agencies to find work. Generally, older jobseekers described their interactions with the younger agency consultants as difficult. For example, they reported that their expectations of finding a job easily were not met, that some consultants seemed to be disinterested, and that the interactions with consultants were difficult due to generational differences. In turn, Handy and Davy (2007) reported that some consultants were confronted with their own fears of aging when interacting with older jobseekers. Furthermore, these authors suggested that the interests of agency consultants working on a commission basis may be best served by meeting discriminatory demands of the contracting organizations. For example, the consultants described a range of tactics that may be used to exclude older job candidates (e.g., estimating applicants' ages by asking about their education, or explaining that "team fit" was a key requirement of a job).

What can be done to avoid difficulties between older jobseekers and agency consultants? One possibility is that they contact only agencies specializing in older jobseekers. However, there may also be potential negative reactions because such agencies might have a stigmatizing effect on the target group, and it may not be beneficial for the relationships between agencies and contracting organizations if only older job applicants are available.

Another possibility may be to match the characteristics of the agency consultants with the characteristics of older jobseekers (e.g., in terms of age, work experience). In addition, agency consultants should be trained in how to interact with older jobseekers and how to deal with the specific problems encountered by many of this group. Further research is needed to evaluate the effects of these strategies.

Another fast-growing field of intermediaries between older jobseekers and employers are online services focusing on the information, recruitment, and placement of older workers. A number of examples are wrinklies.org, experienceworks.org, retired-brains.com, seniorjobbank.org, seniors4hire.org, and wiserworker.com. So far, no research exists that has evaluated these online services. It might be interesting to investigate older jobseekers' reactions to and experiences with such services, and which factors facilitate their successful placement in work settings using these intermediaries.

Recruiter

A longstanding debate in the recruitment field has examined the role that recruiters play in influencing applicant decisions. Earlier work suggested that recruiters play either no role or a minor one in determining applicant decisions. However, research since 2000 has confirmed that recruiters in fact do play a significant role in applicant job choice (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005). In other words, recruiters appear to influence job choices by changing applicants' perceptions of job and organizational characteristics.

Organizations that want to attract and hire older workers might take these findings in the broader recruitment literature into account. First, they might invest in training recruiters. Specifically, they might invest in diversity training. In this context, this means training recruiters to avoid discrimination and stereotype use. Again, there is a scarcity of research about the effects of diversity training in the context of age discrimination. Second, it is crucial that organizations pay attention to the characteristics (e.g., age) and the behaviors of recruiters (e.g., deprecating older workers' experience). Research is needed to investigate which recruiter characteristics are appreciated by older workers. For instance, early studies in the broad recruitment domain showed that applicants pay attention to and are positively influenced by recruiter behaviors such as being informative and expressing warmth (Chapman et al., 2005).

Image of the Organization

Given recent labor shortages, the importance of the image of an organization as an employer has grown in importance relative to influencing job pursuit intentions and other organizational attraction outcomes (Chapman et al., 2005). Organizational image refers to people's global impressions of an organization and is defined as people's loose structures of knowledge and beliefs about an organization (Lievens, 2006). There is no such thing as "the organization's image" because an organization typically has multiple images; various groups hold different images of the same organization.

Few studies have examined whether older workers hold different views of the organization as an employer than other groups (e.g., final-year students). As an exception, Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, and Slaughter (1999) asked not only teenagers but also retirees to rate fast-food companies on company image dimensions and organizational attractiveness. Retirees were more favorably inclined toward working in fast food. Two dimensions (related experience and task demands) predicted retirees' attraction to working in fast food significantly better than among teenagers, indicating that an effective strategy of fast-food companies for attracting older workers may be to emphasize the requirement that one needs to have food-service experience and that the work will be challenging.

Clearly, we need more research that scrutinizes older workers' perceptions of organizations as places to work. As shown in the example of the fast-food companies above, this is also important from a practical perspective because auditing the company employment image held by older workers provides clues about how organizations might strategically modify their image (employer brand) to be an attractive employer for this segment of applicants.

If organizations want to improve their image as a diverse employer, recent research has experimented with the use of organizational impression management for attracting diverse applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006; Elsbach, Sutton, & Principec, 1998; Mohamed, Gardner, & Paolillo, 1999). Elsbach et al. (1998) refer to organizational impression management as "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience's perceptions of an organization (p. 68)." Along these lines, various organizational impression-management tactics can be distinguished (Avery & McKay, 2006; Mohamed et al., 1999). For instance, ingratiation tactics might be used, exemplified by the use of ads in targeted media, diverse ads, diversity statements,

recruiting at diverse institutions, diverse recruiters, and diversity fairs. Other options are to employ promotion (e.g., advertising diversity success), exemplification (e.g., publicized sponsorship), supplication (e.g., use of a message conveying to older jobseekers that you need them to become more diverse as an organization), or defensive impression-management tactics (e.g., use of disclaimers, apologies, prosocial behavior in case of previous discrimination). Although such organizational impression-management tactics have been investigated with female and minority applicants, no studies have tested them in the context of age-related diversity.

Conclusions

Whereas traditional recruitment research has predominantly examined attracting young employees from universities and colleges, looming demographic realities involving a major shift in the average age of the workforce are forcing employers and researchers to learn more about attracting and retaining older workers. Information about this has just recently begun to emerge. The main goal of this chapter was to review the key components of the recruitment process, with an emphasis on attraction strategies that may be particularly applicable to an aging workforce. To achieve this goal, we contrasted best practices with the currently available research evidence.

Table 20.1 summarizes a number of potential recruitment strategies for attracting older jobseekers. First of all, the success of targeted recruitment efforts depends on an active decision of the organization to consider older workers as potential applicants and to arrive at a thorough understanding of the factors influencing older workers' attraction to organizations. Specifically, organizational practitioners need to find out which needs and demands older workers have, and the benefits and strength they provide to the organization (complementary fit). They also need to better understand the personality, values, and preferences of older workers (supplementary fit).

In the next step, the recruitment message sent out to potential job applicants should communicate that the organization values the strengths of older workers and should emphasize job and organizational characteristics that are attractive to older jobseekers. The recruitment source used should be consistent with the media use and job-search behaviors of older jobseekers. Organizations seeking older workers could advertise in journals and newspapers read by older adults, cooperate with associations

and employment agencies specializing on older jobseekers, and involve current older employees as advisors and recruiters in ongoing recruitment activities. It is also important that organizations pay attention to the characteristics of their recruiters and train them such that discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are avoided. Finally, organizations should convey an attractive image of themselves as employers for older workers by using different kinds of impression-management tactics (Table 20.1).

In summary, recruitment of older workers will become even more important in the future. The next section suggests various lines along which further research is needed to gain a better understanding of how organizations facing an increasingly aging workforce are able to recruit older workers.

Future Research Directions

One common thread running through this chapter is that we repeatedly called for more empirical research on attracting older workers. First, it is important that older jobseekers are not conceptualized as a monolithic population. There exist subgroups, and they should be the focus of attention. For instance, research has shown that financial motives are more prominent among midlife career changers, whereas flexible work schedules were more prevalent for younger and older retirees. Both conceptually and practically, it is of paramount importance to make distinctions between different groups of "older" workers and jobseekers, similar to what has been done in a recent profiling study on retiree subpopulations (Taylor & Walker, 1998; Wang, 2007).

Second, we need more empirical research that directly investigates factors affecting older workers' attraction. Although there is descriptive research on the motives and preferences of older workers, hardly any studies have empirically examined whether they are related to older workers' attraction to organizations. At a practical level, such research might inform which factors should be emphasized in the content of recruitment campaigns. Along these lines, we also believe that researchers in this field could benefit from adopting a marketing lens. In particular, segmentation and product positioning research in older populations might provide insights.

Third, studies are needed to examine the recruitment sources (e.g., formal, informal, e-recruitment), recruiter characteristics, and impression-management tactics (e.g., promotion, ingratiation) that are most effective for attracting different groups of older jobseekers. Research on older jobseekers' perceptions of a company's image as an employer fits also

Table 20.1. Recommended recruitment strategies for attracting older jobseekers

Targeted Recruitment	Recruitment Message	Recruitment Source	Recruiters	Image of the Organization
Decide to target older workers as potential applicants	Communicate that organization requires older workers' strengths	Source must be consistent with media use and job-search behavior of older jobseekers	Invest in diversity training for recruiters to avoid discriminatory behavior	Use ingratiation tactics (e.g., ads in targeted media, diversity statements)
Understand the needs, demands, and benefits of older workers (complementary fit)	Emphasize job and organizational characteristics important to older applicants	Advertise in journals and newspapers read by an older audience	Pay attention to the characteristics (e.g., age) and behaviors of recruiters	Employ promotion impression-management strategies (e.g., advertising diversity success)
Understand the personality, values, and preferences of older workers (supplementary fit)	Implement and communicate a non-discriminatory and diversity staffing policy	Cooperate with older or retired persons' associations and senior citizen centers to post notices, organize job fairs, sponsor events		Employ exemplification impression-management strategies (e.g., publicized sponsorship)
	Develop an equal opportunity and/or opportunity-enhancement program and provide a justification for it	Cooperate with employment agencies and services specializing in older workers		Supplication (e.g., convey to older jobseekers that you need them so that you can become a more diverse organization)
	The diversity staffing policy statement should explicitly refer to older workers as a target group	Involve current and retired older employees to "spread the word" and to testify about their work experiences		Defensive impression-management tactics (e.g., use of disclaimers, apologies, prosocial behavior)

in this stream of studies. Importantly, such research should not only be conducted from the point of view of organizations but also from the perspective of older jobseekers. For instance, we also need to find out which job-search methods are most effective for different groups of older jobseekers.

Taken together, we formulate the following questions for future research:

1. Which background characteristics, personality traits, values, and motives differentiate between different groups of older workers/jobseekers?
2. Which job and organizational factors are related to organizational attraction outcomes

among different groups of older workers/jobseekers?

3. Which recruitment sources are most effective for attracting and retaining different groups of older jobseekers?

4. Which recruiter characteristics signal to different groups of older jobseekers that the company values age-related diversity?

5. What are the reactions of different groups of older jobseekers and workers towards companies' age-related diversity staffing policies? What is the effect of different age-related diversity staffing policies on attraction and recruitment outcomes?

6. Which impression-management tactics are most effective for conveying to different groups of

older jobseekers?
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Image of the Organization

Use ingratiation tactics (e.g., ads in targeted media, diversity statements)

Employ promotion impression-management strategies (e.g., advertising diversity success)

Employ exemplification impression-management strategies (e.g., publicized sponsorship)

Supplication (e.g., convey to older jobseekers that you need them so that you can become a more diverse organization)

Defensive impression-management tactics (e.g., use of disclaimers, apologies, prosocial behavior)

older jobseekers that a company values age-related diversity?

7. Which job-search methods are most effective for different groups of older jobseekers?

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of employment agencies and other intermediaries specializing on the placement of older jobseekers? Are there stigmatizing effects? Which characteristics and behaviors of agency consultants are important to avoid age discrimination and to place older jobseekers?

9. How does the growing number of online services specializing on older jobseekers influence the job-search behavior of older adults? Which services are most often asked for, and which characteristics of online services lead to placement?

10. How is a company's image as an employer differentially perceived by different groups of older jobseekers compared to other populations? How are the determinants of a company's image as an employer differentially valued by different groups of older jobseekers compared to other populations?

Chapter 16. Age Stereotypes and Workplace Age Discrimination
Chapter 17. Ending on the Scrap Heap?
Chapter 19. Workforce Planning with an Aging Workforce

Related Chapters

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Further Readings

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