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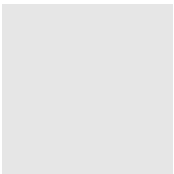
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THE EFFECT OF JOB OFFER TIMING ON OFFER ACCEPTANCE, PERFORMANCE, AND TURNOVER

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Employers often enjoy some discretion in how quickly they extend job offers following candidate interviews. Applicant reactions research suggests that quicker offers are more likely to be accepted. This paper reports an archival study investigating the effect of offer timing on offer acceptance and employment outcomes with field data ($N = 3,012$) from 1 large company, including both student ($N = 906$) and experienced ($N = 2,106$) candidates. The 2 groups differed markedly in their recruiting processes, but job seekers of both types were more likely to accept earlier offers. Further, we found no differences for either performance ratings or turnover among employees hired after quicker offers

and those who accepted later offers. It therefore appears that employers may benefit from accelerating their postinterview job offer processes, improving their acceptance rates, and reducing vacancy times without incurring either performance or turnover penalties.

The Effect of Job Offer Timing on Job Acceptance, Performance, and Turnover

In a recent survey, 85% of human resources executives indicated that single greatest challenge in workforce management was creating or maintaining their companies' ability to compete for talent (Lockwood, 2006). Demographic and cyclical labor market pressures are likely to increase demand for skilled employees in the near future, driving organizations to improve their recruitment, selection, and retention capabilities (Poppelli, 2005). Improvements in job offer acceptance efficiency could help them to reach this goal, significantly reducing overall hiring costs and freeing up resources to bolster new employee assimilation, development, and retention programs.

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Existing research suggests that speed and timeliness are important in the hiring process. For example, Arvey, Gordon, Massengill, and Peterson (1975) found that delays between application and initial interview discouraged economically disadvantaged candidates to self-select out of the process. Rynes, Bretz, and Gerhart (1991) and Chapman and Webster (1991) found that postinterview delays in communicating with candidates led to negative perceptions of the organization. Moreover, although initial interview experiences raise immediate acceptance intentions, these intentions tend to be short lived (Powell, 1991; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1992). Further, there is evidence that job seekers entertain relatively few alternatives while making their choices, so employers making slow offers may lose preferred candidates (Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2005; Rynes et al., 1991).¹ Results of a recent meta-analysis showed that employer response time is positively related to self-reported applicant acceptance (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005). Several researchers (e.g., Breugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes & Cable, 2003) have identified the entire range of time-related processes and cycle times in the recruitment and selection process as a priority research area. Nevertheless, the Chapman et al. (2005) meta-analysis did not include any studies that tested results relating offer timing by the organization to acceptance intentions or offer acceptance. The purpose of this investigation was to fill a gap in the literature. We utilized archival hiring data from a large organization to investigate whether offer timing was related to offer acceptance, job performance, and turnover.

organizational justice literature provides one theoretical perspective that suggests a mechanism by which job offer timing influences offer acceptance. Within this perspective, offer timing can affect acceptance through its affect on fairness perceptions. Gilliland proposed that job applicants will be less likely to accept a job if they perceive the selection process or their treatment in it to be unfair. He further suggested that perceived fairness may influence acceptances directly, through affective reactions, or indirectly, through perceptions about the organization. Timeliness of selection events and processes is often cited as an important factor in the formation of interactional and procedural justice perceptions by applicants (Folger & Bies, 1989; Folger & Bies, 1990). Chapman et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis found that fairness perceptions played an important role in acceptance intentions.

For evidence of similar search restriction in consumer choice, see Iyengar and Lepper (1999), Carmon, Wertenbroch, and Zeelenberg (2003).

More specifically, timely response by the organization was included as a category of justice perceptions, and longer delays were found to have a negative effect on organizational attraction.

A second theoretical perspective that can be used to inform hypotheses concerning applicant reactions to selection process events is attribution theory. Several studies have found that selection process delays lead applicants to make negative attributions regarding the organization and their own chances of being offered a job (Boswell, Roehling, LePine, & Lynihan, 2003; Rynes et al., 1991). Open-ended applicant responses from these studies suggest that these negative attributions decrease applicant intentions to continue in the selection process and accept offers. According to Applicant Attribution-Reaction Theory (AART; Ployhart & Holtz, 2004), applicants form largely unconscious and automatic attributions in response to selection process milestones (e.g., receiving a job offer) or when their expectations are violated (e.g., perceiving excessive delays in notification of a selection decision). AART proposes that negative attributions lead to unfairness perceptions and even behavioral consequences, such as withdrawal from the selection process and the rejection of offers.

At the conclusion of their meta-analysis of applicant reactions to selection procedures, Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas (2004) proposed a theoretical model in which they considered both the organizational justice perspective and attribution theory. The authors stated that it was unclear whether applicants viewed the selection process through a justice or attributional lens. They concluded that fairness perceptions, attributions about organizations, or both may influence applicants' reactions in any situation in which a long delay is present. For example, some applicants experiencing lengthy delays may dislike the process and form negative attributions of the organization without viewing the process as unfair. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which the effects

tributions and fairness perceptions in response to longer delays would be in conflict. Both perspectives suggest that longer delays between selection stages would lead to unfavorable candidate reactions and reduce the likelihood of offers being accepted.

In this study, we investigate the relationship between *offer timing*, the time between a candidate's final interview and a job offer being made, and *offer acceptance*, whether or not the candidate accepted the offer. In this situation, both justice and attribution theories predict the same effect of offer timing. Therefore, we expect that longer time lags in offer timing are more likely to violate candidate expectations and to contribute to both negative perceptions of unfairness and less favorable attributions of the offer and the organization, thereby reducing the probability that later offers will be accepted. Therefore, we predict:

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Hypothesis 1: Job offer timing is negatively related to the probability of offer acceptance such that later offers are less likely to be accepted.

Previous research also provides a number of insights into how offer timing may impact the amount of time required for candidates to reach a decision. Rynes et al. (1991) suggested that quicker offers may be interpreted by the candidate as a signal of the hiring manager's enthusiasm and confidence in the assessment of the candidate. They also found evidence that delays in making an offer lead candidates to perform more elaborate information processing and to evaluate information about the organization more closely. Boswell and Campion (2003) interviewed job seekers who were recent college graduates and found evidence of self-imposed decision deadlines that indicated a desire to make an expeditious decision once an offer was received. Many job seekers reported imposing decision deadlines upon themselves, regardless of whether the organization imposed one. Reciprocity may provide a plausible reason for why applicants who receive quicker offers from the organization would feel pressure to respond with quicker decisions (Fehr, Fischbacher, & Gächter, 2002).

Conversely, it is also possible that quicker offers might raise the candidate's estimate of his or her value and therefore promote further job search and a longer decision time. Higher self-esteem and job search self-efficacy are linked to more assertive job seeking behavior (Saks & Ashworth, 1999). There is no clear theoretical basis to predict how offer timing will impact candidate decision time. Nevertheless, it will be informative to investigate this issue, as it has not been previously investigated in the field.

In the present study, we explored as a research question the relationship between offer timing and *decision time*, which we defined as the time between a candidate receiving an offer and his or her decision to accept or reject it.

Research Question 1: Is job offer timing related to decision time?

A number of authors have suggested that applicant reactions during the selection process may spill over into the employment relationship.

and Seo (1992) proposed a model of organizational entry. They suggested that the final job choice plays a significant role in initial work-related attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, they proposed that intrinsic satisfaction with the final choice leads to greater organizational commitment, job performance, and employment stability. (1993) proposed that fairness perceptions formed during the selection process could have an impact on posthire outcomes such as job performance and job satisfaction. Two laboratory studies have provided empirical support for a positive relationship between applicant fairness

perceptions and subsequent job performance (Gilliland, 1994; Ployhart & MacKenzie, 1998).

The spillover effect for negative applicant reactions on turnover has not been stated as explicitly as the case for performance. Fairness heuristic theory suggests that initial fairness perceptions contribute to new employee decisions regarding long term investment in the organization and subsequent turnover (Lind, 2001). Only one empirical study has investigated the relationship between selection process fairness perceptions and turnover (Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002). In this longitudinal study of police trainees, the relation between fairness information provided during the selection process and subsequent turnover was not significant. Another practical perspective suggests that relatively quicker hiring decisions may be hastier and may be made without due deliberation and consideration of a full range of alternative candidates. Hiring managers may prefer to conduct a more deliberate search (losing some promising candidates during the process but raising their confidence that the hired hire will be a good one). Nevertheless, again, we did not feel that previous theory and research provided a sound basis for predicting that relatively quicker final selection decisions lead to more positive or more negative posthire outcomes. Therefore, we present this possibility as a set of research questions.

Research Question 2a: Is job offer timing related to job performance?

Research Question 2b: Is job offer timing related to turnover?

Method

Participants

We analyzed the hiring records for one division of a *Fortune* 500 engineering technology company from 2004 to 2006. Candidates were drawn from all areas of the United States and were recruited by job postings, active sourcing, and on-campus recruiting. Internal candidates were excluded from the analysis for this study. The records were limited to open positions that were filled externally through the recruitment and selection of students and experienced candidates. Archival data were obtained for 3,012 candidates (906 student candidates and 2,106 experienced candidates) who received job offers. Because this study focuses on offer acceptance and posthire outcomes, candidates who did not receive an offer

not included.
At the time of the study, the company was growing rapidly and was hiring new employees to fill engineering and administrative positions at organizational levels. The company used traditional recruiting and

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practices for hiring students and experienced candidates, including campus visits and external search firms. In general, recruiters reviewed resumes and conducted campus or phone screenings. Then, the promising candidates were invited for structured on-site interviews with hiring managers and human resources personnel. Student recruitment targeted more prestigious colleges and universities in the fall and continued throughout the academic year until hiring targets were reached. Experienced candidates were interviewed for specific vacancies until the position was filled. Hiring managers indicated that during this period the company's hiring cycle time was shorter than the sector-wide average.

Offer timing was measured as the time lag in calendar days between a candidate's final interview and the organization extending a formal offer of employment. *Job acceptance* indicated whether or not the candidate accepted or rejected the offer. *Decision time* was measured in days between the date the organization extended a formal job offer and the date the candidate notified the organization of his or her decision. Candidate type was defined as either *students* (recent or pending graduates of undergraduate or graduate programs, hired through campus recruiting efforts) or *experienced* (professional candidates who were hired through external recruiting efforts or contracted search firms.)

Performance. For 1,445 of the hired employees, we obtained supervisor performance ratings for the period of the study. The organization used a performance evaluation system that considers multiple aspects of employee performance, results, and goal attainment. The supervisors rated employees on each dimension and assign an overall performance rating on a 4-point scale: 1 = *needs improvement*, 2 = *meets expectations*, 3 = *exceeds expectations*, or 4 = *far exceeds expectations*. In this organization, the overall rating was not mathematically derived from the subdimension evaluations. These subdimension evaluations were narrative in nature and used formally for employee development. Only an overall performance rating was recorded in the personnel records. The organization spent a great deal of time and resources in performance evaluation, and the overall ratings factor prominently in subsequent compensation and promotion decisions. Applicants who accepted offers earlier in the study received multiple performance evaluations, whereas those hired near the end of the study had not yet received an evaluation. Mean Year 0 and Year 1 performance were calculated for employees who received at least one performance rating.

Termination. Termination date was recorded for each new employee who was terminated by the company before the end date of the study. The data provided by the

organization included a self-reported reason for employment resignation or termination.

Control variables. Several demographic variables that were of no direct theoretical interest to this study were coded as potential control variables. These included gender, ethnicity, whether or not relocation would have been required, and job level. Job levels define ranges of employee experience, responsibilities, and compensation associated with a position. A recent meta-analysis of the applicant reactions literature found little evidence that gender ($\rho = .05$), ethnicity ($\rho = .04$), or age ($\rho = -.04$) influence candidate justice perceptions (Hausknecht, et al., 2004). A complementary meta-analysis of the applicant attraction literature found a modest positive relationship between pay and job choice ($\rho = .12$), but not between location and job choice ($\rho = .06$; Chapman et al., 2005). Chapman et al. also found that neither gender nor race moderated the relation between justice perceptions and acceptance intentions for job choice. Therefore, we did not include gender, ethnicity, or relocation as controls. Nevertheless, as job level is expected to be moderately related with age, experience, and pay, we did include job level as a control in the reported analyses.

We subsequently repeated each of the study analyses described below, including all available control variables. Of these, only relocation requirement was significantly related to offer acceptance for both student candidates ($B = -1.08, p < .05$) and experienced candidates ($B = -.76, p < .05$). Gender was significantly related to offer acceptance for student candidates ($B = .32, p < .05$). Further, including these variables as controls did not impact any of the study findings. The analyses related to Hypothesis 1 and Research Questions 1 and 2, which include all control variables, are available from the first author upon request.

Results

Preliminary analysis (see Table 1) suggests that the hiring processes for student and experienced candidates were markedly different. Experienced candidates competed for higher job levels ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.63$) than student candidates ($M = 1.16, SD = .37, d = 2.21, 95\% CI = 2.51, 2.72$). Student candidates accepted 67.2% of the offers made to them, whereas experienced candidates accepted 88.2% ($\chi^2 (1, N = 3,012) = 187.48, p < .01$). Students' offers came an average of 23.1 ($SD = 22.60$) days after interview, versus 14.7 ($SD = 18.11$) days for experienced candidates ($d = .37, 95\% CI = 9.91, 6.86$), and their responses to offers took an average of 21.0 ($SD = 41.36$) days, compared to only 3.1 ($SD = 12.75$) days for experienced candidates ($d = .58, 95\% CI = 19.83, 15.93$). The student candidates, in short, competed for entry level positions, received

TABLE 1

Statistics and Correlations for Student and Experienced Candidates

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	<i>M</i>		14.75	3.13	.88	3.77	.78	.20	.25	2.32	.14
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	18.12	12.75	.32	1.63	.42	.40	.44	.54	.35
Offer lag	23.14	22.60		-.04	-.12	.04	.01	.00	.00	.02	-.01
Time	21.01	41.36	-.10		-.22	.08	.03	.00	.06	-.01	.01
Acceptance	.67	.47	-.15	-.37		-.03	.02	-.03	-.12	—	—
	1.16	.37	.01	.07	-.04		.16	-.10	.05	.02	.03
	.71	.49	.16	-.07	.07	.09		-.02	.06	-.05	.01
	.35	.48	.02	.06	-.04	.03	-.13		-.09	-.05	.00
Experience	.59	.49	.04	.07	-.24	.06	-.02	.10		.00	.05
	2.37	.54	-.07	.05	—	.25	-.07	.01	.10		-.12
	.12	.32	-.02	.03	—	-.01	.04	.03	-.07	-.02	

Student candidates are presented below the diagonal and experienced candidates above the diagonal. Offer acceptance was coded 1 for candidates who accepted offers and 0 for candidates who rejected offers. $N = 906$ for student variables 1–7 ($r > .06$ is significant at $p < 0.05$). $N = 1,364$ for student variables 8 and 9, respectively ($r > .10$ is significant at $p < 0.05$). $N = 1,106$ for experienced variables 1–7 ($r > .05$ is significant at $p < 0.05$). $N = 1,216$ for experienced variables 8 and 9 ($r > .05$ is significant at $p < 0.05$).

For student candidates, those who rejected offers, responded much more slowly, and accepted offers much more quickly than those who accepted offers. This is consistent with a picture of students putting themselves in the job market in the last year of their programs of study and exploring various job possibilities under no great time pressure. Experienced candidates, in contrast, presumably know much more about the job market and their relative position in it, applying for a particular job opening as a replacement for a position in their current jobs. Given the substantial differences between the two hiring processes, we decided to analyze the two samples separately.

Results bearing on Hypothesis 1 show that for both candidate groups, accepted offers were associated with quicker offers than were rejected offers. For experienced candidates, accepted offers were received on average 13.96 ($SD = 17.44$) days, versus 20.63 ($SD = 17.44$) days for rejected offers ($d = .37$, 95% $CI = -9.06, -4.03$). For student candidates, the corresponding offer time lag means were 20.72 ($SD = 24.59$) days for accepted offers and 28.10 ($SD = 24.59$) days for rejected offers ($d = .33$, 95% $CI = -10.49, -4.28$). Hypothesis 1 therefore was supported.

We then performed the logistic regression analysis for all candidates simultaneously, controlling for experience. We coded for experienced versus student candidates. Consistent with the separate analyses, we did not find a significant interaction between student/experienced candidates and offer acceptance. However, we did find that candidate experience moderated the effect of offer timing on decision time. This effect was not predicted but is considered in the results and discussion.

TABLE 2
Summary of Logistic Regression for Offer Acceptance

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds ratio	Wald	ΔR^2
Student candidates					
Step 1:					
Job level	-.06	.07	.94	.93	.00
Step 2:					
Offer time lag	-.02	.01	.98	13.60	.04
Experienced candidates					
Step 1:					
Job level	.28	.03	1.32	70.70	.06
Step 2:					
Offer time lag	-.02	.00	.98	48.00	.03

Note. Pseudo R^2 reported using Nagelkerke method. $N = 906$ for student candidates, 2,106 for experienced candidates. All coefficients with a Wald statistic greater than 3.84 are significant at the .05 level.

received relatively strong support: Quicker offers were associated with a higher probability of offer acceptance in both the student and experienced candidate groups. Binary logistic regression, shown in Table 2, confirmed the effect of offer timing on the probability of acceptance for student candidates ($B = -.01, p < .05$) and experienced candidates ($B = -.02, p < .05$) controlling for job level in both groups.

Research Question 1 was aimed at understanding the relation between offer timing and decision time. For the experienced candidates, offer timing was not significantly related to decision time. For the student sample there was a significant negative relationship between offer timing and decision time ($r = -.10, p < .05$), indicating that later offers were associated with quicker decisions. Hierarchical, moderated logistic regression analysis confirmed the difference in these relationships across the samples, indicating that there was a significant interaction between offer timing and candidate experience influencing decision time ($B = -.36, p < .05$). Although neither outcome suggested evidence of reciprocity norms, it is possible that quicker offers might have increased student applicant confidence and led them to search for other jobs, thereby creating longer decision times. In summary, there is a weak affirmative response to Research Question 1, indicating that quicker offer timing led to longer decision times but only in the student sample. We explore additional relationships between decision time and offer timing in the post-hoc analyses below.

Research Questions 2a and 2b were aimed at understanding whether offer timing would be related to two posthire outcomes: job performance and turnover. We were able to match recruiting and performance data for 1,445 applicants (1,094 experienced candidates and 351 student

modest differences between the makeup of the matched and unmatched records. The employees for whom recruitment and job performance variables could be matched had a longer mean offer time lag ($d = .09$) and a higher percentage of experienced candidates ($d = .09$) and men. There was no indication in the data or from discussions with participants to suggest systematic differences between the matched and unmatched records. For those employees with recruitment and job performance data, offer timing was not significantly related to initial supervisor performance ratings at the end of the first year of employment for student candidates or experienced candidates.⁴ Therefore, the results suggested a negative response to Research Question 2a.

We were also able to match recruitment variables and current employment status for 1,580 individuals (1,216 experienced candidates and 364 student candidates). Of these, 210 (161 experienced candidates and 49 student candidates) had left the organization as of July 2007. Only 10 of these employees were involuntarily terminated, which precluded examination of possible differences between voluntary and involuntary turnover. Mean offer time lag was not significantly different for new hires who quit and those who stayed during the period of the study for student or experienced candidates.

We also examined the mean offer time lag for recently hired student and experienced employees who terminated within 3, 6, 9, and 12 months of their hiring date. We did so in order to explore whether offer timing was related to turnover for those who left soon after being hired versus those who left later. We did not find any significant differences ($p > .05$). These results suggest a negative response to Research Question 2b.

In summary, the results did not suggest any evidence of a relationship between offer timing and posthire outcomes. Offer timing was not related to either performance ratings or turnover among those candidates

The organization maintained separate databases for their recruiting and personnel files using different unique identifiers. There was a policy in place for manually updating the recruiting database, but we were unable to link the records of 872 applicants who were not hired (36%) because of missing identifiers between the recruiting and personnel databases. In addition, 138 new employees (6%) had not yet received a performance rating due to their short tenure.

Analyses of individual initial and annual performance ratings were also analyzed without the full range of available control variables. These models yielded similar results and did not account for any incremental variance above the analysis

Post-Hoc Analyses

In the course of analyzing the data, we also encountered several findings that did not relate directly to our hypothesis or research questions but may help explain our null or weak findings, inform future research, and have practical application. We did not find the positive relationship between offer timing and decision time predicted by reciprocity norms.

the contrary, student candidates demonstrated a significant negative relationship between offer timing and decision time. Nevertheless, we found that decision time was associated with whether or not the candidate ultimately accepted the offer. Experienced and student applicants accepted job offers more quickly than they rejected job offers. For experienced candidates, the mean decision time was significantly shorter for accepted offers ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 9.82$) than for rejected offers ($M = 10.32$, $SD = 24.28$), $d = .48$, 95% $CI = -10.51, -7.22$. For student candidates, the corresponding means were 10.32 ($SD = 22.52$) and 42.93 ($SD = 58.92$) days ($d = .73$, 95% $CI = -37.94, -27.26$), respectively.

We further explored the relationship between offer timing and decision time in students. The negative relationship between offer timing and decision time indicated that, on average, students made their decisions more quickly when they received later offers. After an offer time lag of more than 15 days, 66% made decisions within 2 days. For an offer time lag of 15 days or less, only 38% of student candidates made decisions within 2 days. We regressed decision time on offer timing in a polynomial regression, in order to test the potential for a curvilinear relationship, but a quadratic term in this regression equation was not significant. Instead, we found that there was a significant interaction between offer timing and offer acceptance in predicting decision time ($\Delta R^2 = .17$, $F(3,902) = 3.33$, $p < .05$). Offer rejections generally followed long decision times and offers were made more quickly but came after much shorter decision times for slower offers. Decision times for candidates who accepted offers were relatively unaffected by offer timing. Therefore, the results suggested that faster offers to student candidates led to either relatively quick acceptances or long decision times that were more likely to end in offer rejection.

We did not find a relationship between offer timing and turnover. Nevertheless, of the employees who left the organization, experienced candidates were more likely to leave sooner than student candidates. The mean tenure of experienced new employees who left the organization during the period of the study ($M = 408.57$, $SD = 16.56$) was significantly shorter than that of student new employees who left ($M = 513.12$, $SD = 16.31$; $d = -.72$, 95% $CI = -176.13, -32.97$). In addition, we found no difference in performance ratings when comparing leavers and stayers

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group of experienced hires. For experienced hires, the mean tenure of those who left was 2.13 ($SD = .56$) versus 2.34 ($SD = .56$) for those who remained ($d = -.38$, $t(1,092) = 3.98$, $p < .05$).

Within this group, lower performers were more likely to leave the organization than were higher performers.

Discussion

This study makes several important contributions to the selection and reactions literatures. First, it investigated actual applicants for positions that are typically associated with long-term careers.

This study investigated the influence of offer timing on offer acceptance and posthire organizational outcomes. Timeliness of offers is one of the few selection process variables that can be modified relatively easily. Third, this study included experienced applicants and therefore responded to calls for research including this population (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes & Cable, 2003). Finally, it is a study of which we are aware that tests the relationship between a characteristic of the selection process and actual job choice and posthire organizational outcomes.

Acceptance

A central finding of this study is that both student and experienced applicants were more likely to accept job offers that were received sooner than later following the final selection interview. This finding is consistent with the predictions of applicant reaction models based on the organizational justice perspective and attribution theory (Gilliland, 1993; Ployhart et al., 2004; Ployhart & Harold, 2004). This finding also extends previous research in selection and other fields by linking a specific identifiable characteristic of the selection process to actual applicant behavior (Boswell et al., 2003; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Rynes et al., 1991; Tversky, 1967). The modest effect sizes for offer timing shown here are in fact practically important. Increased acceptance rates, reduced search costs, and lower vacancy times can provide substantial cost savings. Human resources managers conservatively estimated that a single interview costs approximately \$1,200 (including travel and lost productivity) and vacant positions cost an average of \$1,000 per day in lost productivity. Moreover, cost savings associated with quicker offers appear to result in any detectable increase in the rate of unsuccessful hires, which is offset by lower performance or higher turnover.

Organizational justice and attribution theories suggest that systematic differences in applicant reactions and behavior may be due to the

lack of salient and available information from selection events (Gilliland, 1993; Ployhart & Harold, 2004). All of the applicants included in this study received favorable selection decisions, yet the results suggest that offer timing had a significant impact on applicant acceptance decisions. Late offers are more likely to violate applicant expectations and produce unfavorable reactions to the offer and the organization. Applicants may conclude that the organization is not very interested in them, inefficient, and/or unfair and therefore not a very attractive employer. Timely offers are more likely to influence candidates in several other important ways. For one, receiving an offer eliminates uncertainty from the candidate's evaluation of the job. Uncertainty imparts a salient and negative aspect to a choice option that makes it much less attractive than a certain option (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). In addition, prompt offers may be interpreted by candidates as a signal of greater interest on the organization's part (Rynes et al., 1991) and make the offer more attractive to the candidate. This is the first study to examine simultaneously offer acceptance

employment outcomes of both student and experienced candidates, giving a comparison that has been of concern to several researchers (Kapman et al., 2005; Rynes, Orlitzky, & Bretz, 1997). Gilliland (1993) proposed that previous experience with selection processes would lead to more accurate schemas and expectations for this selection process. We found a number of significant between-group differences. On average, experienced candidates received quicker offers, made faster decisions, and were more likely to accept offers than were student candidates. Despite these differences, we did not find evidence that applicant experience moderated the effect of offer timing on offer acceptance.

Candidate Decision Times

In exploring our first research question, we did not find support for reciprocity norms in candidate decision times. Nevertheless, post-hoc analysis provided evidence that candidate experience moderated the effect of offer timing on candidate decision time. We did not predict this finding a priori. In terms of the time needed to make decisions, experienced candidates were relatively insensitive to offer timing. In contrast, student candidates responded to quicker offers with either quick acceptance decisions or longer delayed decisions, which were more likely to produce offer rejections. Unfortunately, the data did not offer further insight into this seemingly contradictory finding. Human resources managers within the organization indicated that the organizational procedures for student and experienced recruitment and selection were quite different. The organization used separate recruitment personnel for student and experienced

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candidates, and the selection process was more flexible for experienced candidates.

The organization under study did not impose candidate decision deadlines, which may have contributed to the conflicting decision time findings. We did not find evidence of consistent candidate self-imposed decision deadlines, as suggested by the Boswell et al. (2003) qualitative study of student job seekers. The negative relationship between decision time and offer acceptance for student candidates suggests that quicker offers are more likely to result in offer acceptance but may also produce some longer decision times that end in offer rejection. These results would be consistent with the findings that a small portion of student candidates who received quicker offers pursued further search, whereas those who received slower offers made relatively quicker decisions and were more likely to accept the organization's offer. Experienced candidates, on the other hand, often use job search to test the waters or to attempt to improve their bargaining power with their current employer (Bretz, Boudreau, & Campion, 2004). They are also more likely to have reached their decisions to accept or reject a potential offer prior to the final interview. Furthermore, offer time lags may cause them to drop an organization from consideration. Our findings suggest that experienced candidates tend to be

more likely to make quicker decisions, regardless of offer timing.

...and return relatively quicker decisions, regardless of offer
their decision to accept or reject the offer.

Outcomes

...loring our posthire research questions, we did not find evi-
...offer timing had spillover effects on subsequent performance
...r. Individuals who received slower offers performed no worse
...than those who received relatively quicker offers and were no
...y to exit the organization during the first years of employment.
...t did not support the predictions of models of applicant reac-
...longer delays contribute to unfairness perceptions and negative
...s that negatively influence posthire outcomes (Gilliland, 1993;
...ht et al., 2004). It also contradicts the conventional belief we
...ed among human resources personnel and hiring managers that
...ons primarily extend quick offers to the most outstanding candi-
...later become higher performing employees. The results suggest
...g quicker final selection and offer decisions likely will not have
...or negative influence on performance or turnover. This is con-
...h the findings that candidate reactions to selection processes are
...fleeting (Powell, 1991). The evidence suggests that although
...dgments and affective reactions regarding the recruitment and

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...ction process played an important role in offer acceptance, they likely
...little impact on longer term employment outcomes.

Alternative Explanations

The primary strength of archival studies is the application of real
...ld data to reduce the number of viable explanations for observed
...nomena. Archival studies also have inherent weaknesses. The data in
...study were collected by the organization for their own purposes, and
...therefore had no control over what variables were collected. Therefore,
...ortant variables such as justice perceptions, attributions, applicant
...lity, alternative offers, and the organization's reasons for offer timing
...e not available. This created an unmeasured variables problem that
...its our ability to make direct conclusions regarding the effect of offer
...ing on justice perceptions and attributions. It also does not allow us
...ule out alternative hypotheses related to the unmeasured variables
...mes, 1991). Therefore, in addition to pointing out where the results are
...sistent with the predictions of justice and attribution theories, we also
...ress a number of alternative explanations and provide any additional
...vant information that could be obtained from the available data to
...ken the alternative explanations.

Conventional wisdom suggests that organizations might extend prompt
...attractive offers to highly rated candidates to forestall alternative of-
... . This alternative explanation is also consistent with our archival data.
...vertheless, interviews with human resources managers and generalists

the organization indicated that the organization preferred to make strong initial offers regardless of offer timing. Moreover, the financial terms of offers extended to student candidates were almost entirely formulaic and were based on degree and grade point average. Therefore, highly rated experienced candidates may have received quicker and more lucrative offers, but highly rated student candidates would have received quicker not richer offers. If the financial terms of faster offers were the primary driver behind offer acceptance, experienced candidates, rather than students, should have shown a greater preference for earlier offers. Our results suggested that the relation between offer timing and offer acceptance for these two groups was not significantly different.

Another alternative explanation for our results is that longer time lags between interviews and offers could provide candidates additional time to pursue and accept alternative offers from other organizations. The data included each candidate's reported reason for declining an offer. In a post-hoc analysis, we found 224 offers that were declined in favor of an alternative offer. We did not find a significant relation between offer timing and candidates declining in favor of an alternative offer for either student

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or experienced candidates. Logistic regression confirmed that longer time lags did not significantly increase the likelihood that an offer would be rejected in favor of an alternative for experienced or student candidates. Although we acknowledge the relative weakness of the self-reported measure of job alternatives, these results do provide evidence that the observed effect was not simply the result of longer time lags leading to the generation of alternative offers.

A limitation of this study was its restriction to a single organization—that was also a very attractive employer, as judged by its industry and high offer acceptance rate. This organization was a high-skill, high-paying employer, and generalizability to nontechnical employers is limited. The relative attractiveness of the organization, indicated by its high offer acceptance rate, would have weakened our ability to detect a predicted relationship between offer timing and offer acceptance. These results would make our results conservative. There may also be some confounding over the potential effects of range restriction because only the most qualified applicants received interviews and a relatively small percentage of interviewed candidates who interviewed received offers. During the study, the organization extended offers to 32% of candidates interviewed (30% of experienced candidates and 36% of student candidates). We were primarily concerned with actual offer decisions, and the nature of the study prevented us from observing the job choices of candidates who did not receive offers. It is possible that less highly qualified candidates could be influenced by offer timing than those in this study. These candidates may accept fewer alternative offers and would, presumably, seize opportunities more eagerly. Therefore, we expect our results to be a conservative

of the broader impact of quicker job offers. Single-item supervisory performance rating suffers from a number of limitations that may have contributed to the null findings. Nonetheless, the performance measure is generally accepted as an adequate measure of performance in field settings (Arvey & Murphy, 1998; Judge & Bies, 2003). Given the relatively large sample sizes, we should have had sufficient power to detect relatively small effects, even with the potential validity concerns with this performance measure. The low turnover in the first year and apparent lack of involuntary turnover may have limited our ability to detect a relationship between offer timing and turnover. The available measures also did not provide insight into the reasons behind observed offer timing (e.g., perceived candidate quality, organizational inefficiency, or manager indecision).

Implications

These limitations suggest a number of potentially fruitful avenues for future research. A similar analysis of the archival records of an organization from a low or medium wage industry could answer questions about whether the effects observed in this study vary with job type and candidate education and aptitude. Such organizations generally have lower acceptance rates and higher turnover (Jones & Skarlicki, 2003). Given the difficulty of measuring candidate fairness perceptions and attributions in the field (Pyhalta & Harold, 2004), a laboratory experiment of simulated job offer decisions could explore the effects of offer timing with candidates who would exhibit more variance on aptitude-related variables. An experiment would also allow for conclusions regarding causal relationships concerning the effect of offer timing on fairness perceptions, attributions, and offer acceptance. It is possible that longer offer lag times could lead candidates to believe that they are not the organization's first choice. Perceptions of second-choice status could have unique effects on acceptance decisions. Finally, a longitudinal study of active job seekers throughout the interview and job choice process could explore the actual attributions formed by job seekers in response to selection process timing across multiple ongoing opportunities. This would allow researchers to better understand the actual job choice process and directly test the predictions of justice and attribution theory.

With regard to practice, this study demonstrates that organizations may be able to improve offer acceptance rates by reducing lag times between initial interviews and the extension of job offers. This increased efficiency likely will be obtained with minimal changes to existing selection processes. Further, the changes would require little financial cost to implement and could produce substantial long term savings for the organization in terms of time and money spent recruiting and selecting new employees. The results also provide additional support for the utility to the organization of imposing candidate decision deadlines. Student applicants who took longer to announce their decision were more likely to reject the offer.

This study extends our understanding of how timing in the final phases of selection impacts offer acceptance and employment outcomes. It suggests that organizations may benefit from extending early offers to all candidates who have successfully passed through a preliminary selection process and who perform well in final selection interviews. Candidates in this study who received earlier offers were more likely to accept an offer. Those who received delayed offers—whether due to hiring manager

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or other reasons—ultimately performed as well on average as those who received earlier offers. Longer offer time lags ultimately hurt the company in terms of longer vacancy times and decreased likelihood of offer acceptance, without improving the average performance of new hires.

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agent may want to signal high interest. For instance, employers can increase job- offer acceptance rates by making their interest in the applicants (Becker, Connolly, and Slaughter 2010) ; applicants, knowing this, might try to bargain for e some recent studies have explored the relationship between RTs and preferences, there has been a lack of research s recognize the importance of RTs and manipulate them in a strategic manner. ...

Response Times

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Krajbich

fuzzy: people perceive themselves as different when they imagine themselves in the past or in the future, compared to er, and Weber 2005;Hershfield et al. 2011). When they look back to the past, they have a rather clear idea of what and the same goes for future events (Becker, Connolly, and Slaughter 2010) . That is, even within temporal windows psychologically distant, people have clear idea of the time sequence of events. ...

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