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(Mis)Steps for Attracting High Resilience Workers

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Organizations are becoming increasingly likely to incorporate measures of trait resilience into their selection batteries despite the challenges and validity questions described by Britt, Shen, Sinclair, Grossman, and Klieger (2016). Organizations can overcome some of the challenges of selecting high resilience workers by improving attraction and recruitment methods. In the following commentary, we describe common organization efforts to attract high resilience workers for occupations with risk of psychological trauma. We integrate research on organizational attraction and trait resilience to predict which of these approaches are likely to have the desired (attract high resilient workers) or undesired (attract low resilient workers) effect.

Why Is Attracting High Resilience Workers Important?

Attracting high resilience workers to join an organization is dependent on the stable nature of resilience. High resilience workers are people who consistently demonstrate characteristics (e.g., sense of control, perceptions of challenge, optimism, hope) that help them overcome or thrive in demanding environments (see focal article for review). Although there are situational factors (states) that contribute to resilience, our proposed recommendations emphasize the stable characteristics that will be present despite a change in work environment.

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Attracting high resilience workers has several important implications for an organization's selection practices because it changes the applicant pool and how/whether organizations rely on resilience scales. A major concern with incorporating self-report resilience scales in selection practices is the likelihood of the scale to be faked. Resilience scales are most commonly developed in nonincentive environments where the primary goal is to allow the respondent to properly self-evaluate his or her health. Similar to an applicant's ability to fake it on other easy-to-interpret personality scales, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability scales, resilience scales are likely easy to fake in a hiring setting. The stigma attached to low resilience scores also demonstrates the motive for faking on resilience scales. A greater proportion of high resilience workers in an applicant pool will either decrease the necessity of measuring resilience in a selection battery or enable organizations to use resilience scales to select-out applicants with low scores without jeopardizing the selection ratio.

Organizational Examples

Organizational attraction is a prospective job applicant's interest in working for an organization. Organizational attraction begins with job postings and websites that share information about the organization. Unfortunately, there is no established approach to the type of information being used to attract high resilience workers. Whereas some methods are likely to attract high resilience workers, we propose that other methods may backfire and attract low resilience workers.

Realistic Job Previews

Example. One the most common approaches to attracting high resilience workers is the use of realistic job previews. A realistic job preview is an organization's effort to accurately convey the job requirements to prospective applicants. For example, an emergency communication specialist advertisement requires applicants to complete a job task checklist that demonstrates the need for a high resilience worker (see City of Lakeland, 2015). Job candidates are required to indicate that they are willing to work in a stressful environment, attempt to calm suicidal callers, make decisions that affect lives, and resolve conflicts that involve the deaths of children. It is made very clear that applicants will only be considered for employment if they are willing to complete all tasks listed. Realistic job previews are also in the form of short video clips that feature interviews with current workers and that provide a visual of the daily work tasks. For occupations that have a risk of trauma to the worker, a video is highly effective in conveying the gravity of the job tasks. For example, a realistic job preview for a welfare worker

demonstrates that the worker will encounter children in poverty, in abusive families, and in poor physical health (see Indiana Department of Child Services, 2015; Rocky Mountain Audio/Video Production, 2015).

Effectiveness. The increase in implementation of realistic job previews is due to the vast amount of research linking realistic job previews to retention of workers and job performance (Phillips, 1998) because a realistic job preview establishes expectations and promotes fit. In addition, realistic job previews are associated with greater levels of organizational attraction (Phillips, 1998; Thorsteinson, Palmer, Wulff, & Anderson, 2004), but the effect is likely dependent on the valence of the realistic job preview and the applicants' trait resilience. Realistic job preview content with a negative valence is rated lower in organizational attraction than content with a positive or neutral valence (Kanar, Collins, & Bell, 2010). Similarly, Bretz and Judge (1998) cautioned that realistic job previews with negative content might deter some highly capable applicants because negative job information is weighted more heavily compared with other job information, and the information threatens career success.

Overall, realistic job previews with negative valence are likely to deter applicants in general, but we propose that the deterrence effect is less likely to occur for high resilience workers. Resilience is often characterized by the tendency to see demands as a challenge and an opportunity to succeed (Britt et al.). High resilience workers will proceed into demanding environments because they do not perceive a threat. Conversely, low resilience workers are likely to see demanding conditions as overbearing and engage in avoidance. In sum, realistic job previews for high-risk occupations are likely to deter low to moderate resilience workers from pursuing an organization because of the negative valence content, but the organizational attraction levels for high resilience workers will remain unchanged or less affected.

Implications for best practices. Realistic job previews are best for occupations with a high risk of trauma in which high resilience is necessary for job performance. Realistic job previews will decrease the overall applicant pool size because fewer low to moderate level resilience workers will apply for a position. In turn, the proportion of high resilience workers in the applicant pool will increase. Caution should be taken for occupations in which resilience is not consistently linked to job performance (low to moderate risk of trauma) because realistic job previews with negative valence content are likely to deter moderate resilience workers who are qualified for the position. In all circumstances, it is necessary for realistic job previews to be an accurate portrayal of job demands to avoid deterring qualified applicants and reduce voluntary turnover (Earnest, Allen, & Landis, 2011).

Promotion of Organizational Culture

Example. Recently, organizations have also begun to promote organizational culture and shared company values to attract job applicants. The promotion of company culture and shared values is even a recommended strategy by recruitment website companies, such as Monster.com (Hunt, 2015). In some cases, organizations are describing their culture and workforce using characteristics that align with definitions of resilience (e.g., control, commitment, challenge, optimism) in an effort to attract high resilience workers. For example, a utilization management nurse job posting highlights the organization as an opportunity to work in an environment with talented others who seek to have a positive change in the world, are committed to a common goal, and enjoy overcoming challenges.

Effectiveness. The promotion of organizational culture has become increasingly common among organizations because of popular press publications from business leaders who describe organizational success being achieved through the dissemination of organizational values into all human resources functions. Empirical research also supports the notion that recruitment using organizational values is associated with greater retention and job performance of workers (e.g., Hoffman & Woehr, 2006) because it enables workers to self-select into groups that share their personal characteristics. These effects are rooted in the long-standing psychological and sociological theories of people being attracted to similar others.

The attraction–selection–attrition model (Schneider, 1987) and the similarity attraction effect (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) both describe how people are more attracted to others who share their values and personal characteristics. It is important to note that a workforce representing resilience characteristics is likely to be attractive to all workers, including low resilience workers, because of the positive valence content. However, the attraction effect may be stronger for high resilience workers because of the added opportunity to be with similar others. Indeed, workers provide favorable attraction ratings for organizational cultures that represent their ideal selves, but attraction ratings are higher for organizational cultures that are similar to the workers' actual personality characteristics (Nolan & Harold, 2010). We propose that the promotion of an organizational culture with resilience characteristics is likely to evoke a similarity attraction effect for high resilience workers. In other words, high resilience workers will be attracted to work with other high resilience workers.

Implications for best practices. The promotion of a culture with resilience characteristics is best for occupations with a moderate risk of trauma, in which only a moderate level of resilience is necessary for job performance. Promotion of culture with resilience characteristics will lead to a larger applicant pool accompanied by an increased proportion of high resilience work-

ers. For occupations with a high risk of trauma, organizations should consider packaging the promotion of culture with realistic job previews. The combination of approaches is likely complementary and will help overcome the small applicant pools for high-risk occupations. We caution against promoting a culture with resilience characteristics if the workforce does not already possess these values. Promoting a false culture will backfire over time because the new workers will feel misled and experience poor fit within the organization. Under these circumstances, the organization will benefit more by promoting other positive characteristics about the organization (e.g., geographic location, high compensation).

Promotion of Coping Resources

Example. Although less common than the prior two examples, organizations also promote available resources to attract job applicants. The promotion of available resources extends beyond the resources of compensation and equal employment opportunities, which are present in all job advertisements. In regard to attracting high resilience workers, the promotion of resources pertains to coping resources made available by the organization. Organizations concerned with resilience will commonly offer stress management training, access to mental health counselors, access to spiritual counselors, or a forum for peer-to-peer social support groups. The rapid application of positive psychology theories has also led to a variety of training programs, such as interventions for gratitude and mindfulness, being incorporated into the workplace. Similar to data recorded on organizational stress interventions (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), most available resources emphasize changes to the worker rather than changes to the physical work environment. Organizations seeking to attract high resilience workers have resorted to advertising these coping resources to prospective job applicants.

Effectiveness. The promotion of coping resources has become increasingly common among organizations because of the rapid growth in coping programs being developed for the workplace. Organizations promoting coping resources in recruitment efforts are likely trying to express points of pride and a commitment to helping their workers. There is considerable evidence that available coping resources are associated with improved worker health and performance (e.g., Richardson & Rothstein, 2008); however, no studies have examined the effects of promotion of coping resources on attracting high resilience workers. To evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy, we infer from organizational attraction and resilience research broadly.

Organizational attraction is most often rooted in theories of person–organization fit, which explains organizational attraction as a product of need fulfillment. That is, prospective job applicants evaluate whether orga-

nizational characteristics meet their needs (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996), which in turn influences organizational attraction. Although coping resources are important for worker success in high-risk occupations, the promotion of coping resources may have a backlash effect on attracting a resilient workforce because it promotes resources that high resilience workers do not need (or think they need). High resilience workers have internal resources ingrained into their perceptions, behaviors, and emotional reactions. When internal resources are low, high resilience workers also have an innate ability to locate resources. Conversely, low resilience workers perceive more stressors, experience greater strain, and have poor health habits. As a result, high resilience workers have less of a need for external resources compared with low resilience workers. We propose that the promotion of coping resources will evoke a need fulfillment among low resilience workers, which in turn will increase organizational attraction for low resilience workers rather than high resilience workers.

Implications for best practices. The promotion of coping resources is not recommended for any organizations with a risk of trauma. Coping resources should be discussed with job applicants later in the job recruitment process after the applicant's organizational attraction is more established. Promotion of coping resources will lead to a smaller proportion of high resilience workers in an applicant pool and an increase in low resilience workers. As an alternative to promoting coping resources, we recommend organizations promote resources that express the value of a worker's contribution, such as compensation and retirement benefits.

Summary

Organizations seeking to attract high resilience workers have incorporated realistic job previews, promotion of organizational culture, and promotion of coping resources into their job advertisements. We utilize organizational attraction and resilience theories to describe the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies in an effort to help organizations build a resilient workforce and direct organizational researchers to the topic. Realistic job previews deter low resilience workers and are ideal for occupations with high risk of trauma. Promotion of organizational culture with resilience characteristics will attract high resilience workers and is ideal for occupations with a moderate risk of trauma. Promotion of coping resources will attract low resilience workers and is not recommended for any organization until later in the job recruitment process. We encourage organizational researchers to empirically evaluate these propositions in an effort to enable organizations to properly build a high resilience workforce.

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