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Title: New employment relationship: The influence of young labor market entrees' attitudes on employer preference

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Abstract

The financial crises and demographic changes in the work population influence employment relationships. Traditional contracts evolve to non-standard forms of employment relationships (e.g. flexible work arrangements, Mobiflex work) aiming at to match employers' and employees' wishes and desires. Young graduates' attitudes, who are at the verge to enter the labor market, play an important role in the employer evaluation process by looking at appropriate job offer channels and work conditions. The current study is conducted in two universities in northern Germany, from those 175 graduates responded to our questionnaire. Data are analyzed by multiple regression analysis. Results suggest that employees' attitude toward opportunities for individual development is relevant and that face to face contact between potential employers and potential employees is highly appreciated. Surprisingly, provisions are not perceived as being highly relevant for the attractiveness of potential employers in the first step.

Introduction

Two important occasions have changed our economy and our world of work. First, the financial crises has led to unemployment of workers and second, demographic changes influence the number of older and younger employees at work. The work population in Europe is growing older and fewer young employees will enter the labor market (EUROSTAT, 2011). The changes have implications on employers' recruitment policy to find and to hire potential employees in the nearby future (Weitzel et al., 2011). Although organizations are currently busy with developing tools and instruments to assess potential employees, this is counterproductive with respect to the aforementioned developments. From both an employer's and a labor market entrant's point of view desires, wishes and expectations need to be matched in the future or companies will experience an extending gap of workers. Nevertheless, employers will face challenges in finding experts and employees will face challenges in finding good employers that offer them opportunities for working e.g. in a team, to travel, receiving adequate provisions and opportunities for individual development. Therefore employer branding, which includes the company presentation in online job offer channels, becomes more relevant. We know from research (Weitzel et al., 2011) that seven out of ten candidates are recruited through employers' online platforms. We argue that the importance of online job offer channels is not necessarily increasing and that therefore young labor market entree attitudes play a role in the assessment of the attractiveness of employers' job offer channel. Furthermore, employers need to advertise their work conditions for an initial assessment from employees' point of view. Derived from the aforementioned statements we formulate our research question as follows: Do young labor market entrees attitudes influence the evaluation process of employers' job offer channels and work conditions?

Our paper is outlined as follows. First, we start with a review of literature on employee attitudes, employers' job offer channels and work conditions to support our development of a conceptual framework. We continue with the method chapter and finalize the paper with the results and discussion section.

Theoretical Background

Research on *attitudes* has a long tradition in social psychology and is now revamping with the focus on attitudes' characteristics (Maio & Haddock, 2010). "Attitudes are important because they shape people's perception of the social and physical world and influence overt behaviors" (Crano & Prislin, 2008). What Crano & Prislin (2008) outlined is complementary to Maio & Haddock (2010) that the perception of attitudes characteristics can be subdivided content-wise into three components: Cognitive (e.g. beliefs, thinking), affective (e.g. influence) and behavioral (perform, being active) information. In our study we concentrate on attitudes' content since we are investigating how individuals' inner look at the world has influence on the outcome, although we know that attitudes structure and function are interconnected with the content. As Hess (2006) carried out, the attitude evaluation of someone or something and the subsequent response reflects a process of the individual, considering information about the attitude object and then deciding on a specific response. Response is given by individuals who accomplish daily tasks in a work team. In this context, employee attitudes might be influenced by the willingness and readiness to collaborate with colleagues, overcoming individual differences (Ellis, 2003). Team members' differences often appear as differences in demographics, experience, professional background and attitudes. This is related to what McGrath et al., (2000) describe as value, belief and attitude (VBA) differences of members in a group or a team which leads to high performance when resources and capabilities are positively used in a team.

Teamwork

Attitudes to teamwork are highly required in a modern organization as outlined by Ulloa & Adams (2004). Appropriate skills of team members should be trained and taught at every level of education so that pupils/ students know what to do and how to behave in a team. As researchers outlined (Levi, 2001; Hackman, 1987; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), working in a team needs to understand the goal of a team, its composition and its development, often defined as team dynamics (Levi, 2001). The social attachment of individuals in teamwork is a part that needs further attention because it is strongly related to teams' success or failures and should encourage team members to build successful relationships with colleagues. Therefore, it is absolutely a must that working in a team requires the capability of team members to invest in building relationships. If one is not

willing or not capable to learn teamwork skills he/she should never join a team. In this context, we argue that positive attitudes toward teamwork are an essential prerequisite for working in a team.

Travelling (mobility)

Mobility is defined in this context as having changes of workplaces (working at multiple working sites), which is the most solid mobility indicator available (Nas et al., 1998; Cohen, 2010). Moreover, mobility might also imply that workers are part of different organizations and social networks, various types of buyer-supplier relationships, R&D collaborations, and have temporary organisation exchanges and placements. According to Turner (2007), “modern societies (organizations, unions, and political parties) in particular are characterized by a deep contradiction between the economic need for labor mobility and the state’s political need to assert sovereignty”. However, the mobility of workers is supported by the European Union (Lisbon objectives) and should help to extend employment opportunities, productivity and the quality of work-life issues. Mobility of workers goes hand-in-hand with their flexibility toward markets, employers, clients and job demands. Workers with a combination of mobility and flexibility are increasingly named as Mobiflex workers.

Provisions

The expectations, needs and wishes of students toward prospective employers are assumed to mainly lie in getting good financial benefits (e.g. salary, company car, fringe benefits). “More than 95% of European employees have a regular, fixed salary” (FEWCS, 2006). Furthermore, half of them have a variable element in their payment agreement that allows them to increase the monthly income. On the other hand, we know from research that in the European Union an increasing number of “poor work” and low payment can be observed (Eichhorst et al., 2010). Moreover, next to the financial provisions, less tangible organizational provisions are observed as becoming more important. Additionally, intangible provisions such as a good company atmosphere or an open-minded communication philosophy will become even more important in the nearby future. When employers offer appropriate provisions to their potential employees, then one important expectation has been met. The next preference is to be offered opportunities for individual development by the potential employer.

Individual development

There is a trend in organizations to outsource projects, assignments, or even more importantly entire departments that eliminates opportunities for workers to follow a predictable career path inside the company. On the other hand, organizations offer their employees to manage so-called Individual Development Accounts (IDA) that enables them to “save” time and money for individual development usage (Han & Sherraden, 2009). IDA is a concept which has its roots in the Institutional Saving Theory which concentrates on institutional decisions to build up asset accumulation.

However, individual development (career path) can be perceived as subjective or objective. A subjective promotion is related to the employee’s perception of his or her level of development (Arthur et al., 2005) which can be related to a higher level of responsibility or a higher level of demanding tasks to be accomplished. The perception of objective promotion can appear as a status symbol, a higher position, or a new position title that represents career progression. However, the opportunities of individual development for workers mainly lie in conducting highly demanding projects, accomplishing good project outcomes to achieve a high level of employer satisfaction and building social and business networks for getting access to new projects with an increased level of internationalisation or business.

Job offer channels

Social media

Social media instruments (e.g. twitter, facebook, linkedIn) as communication instruments between in-side and out-side communities become important tools. Young labor market entrees are used to manage these instruments properly whereas employers are often unable to cope because of differences in beliefs, thinking and sometimes operational lack of usage. Following a study on how “social media” is used among young adults to communicate, results suggest that facebook is the dominant instrument to keep up social ties and being always up-to-date with information (Lenhart et al., 2010). When employers are hesitant to accept that development then young labor market entrees’ will have problems to feel well in such companies. As Weitzel et al. (2011) outlined, more than 70% of the recruited employees are hired through or with social media instruments.

Traditional ways of recruitment such as ads in newspapers, magazines and expert brochures are no longer of high interest (Weitzel et al., 2011).

Work Conditions

In general, work conditions are defined as under what circumstances individuals have to pursue their daily work (EWCS, 2010). Work conditions range from companies work atmosphere to how many hours an employee is working per week. In our study, we concentrate on work life balance which is complemented by interesting tasks and flexible working hours.

Work/life balance

Well-defined processes and employees well-trained in these processes constitute a good balance of work and life (Bassi & McMurrer, 2008). Although 80 % of workers in the European Union are satisfied with their work-life balance (WLB), it is necessary to have a closer look at work and family responsibilities which might be balanced or conflicting. Work-family conflict (WFC) or family-work conflict (FWC) is a situation in which demands from both professional and personal areas collide with each other and consequently affect an individual's satisfaction and well-being (Rantanen et al., 2008). Moreover, an individual's and family's well-being can be positively influenced by employers who have a family-supportive organisation and a supportive company culture and atmosphere (Lapierre et al., 2008). Additionally, when employers accept that working at home or from home is likely to be supported and complemented by telecommunication links such as wireless local area networks (LAN) or other advanced technologies, work also can be done from places all over the world. This means that no central workplace is required anymore and that through networks and links, projects as well as tasks and jobs can be managed effectively.

Interesting tasks

According to the EWCS (2010), employees in the European Union reported that monotonous work is common. It seems that the definition of "interesting tasks" is dependent on individual's look (attitudes) at the world (Baumeister & Bushman, 2011). Interesting tasks definition might range then from tasks enlargement or enrichment to new demanding and challenging tasks within the own department or in other departments or maybe outside the organization.

Flexibility in working hours

For most of the Europeans, a 40 hours week is the norm. However, the number of working hours per week is continuing to decrease on average which seems to be closely connected to an increasing number of work contracts that are temporary (EWCS, 2010).

Summarizing, for young labor market entrees it is of increasing interest how jobs are offered by potential employers and that employers offer jobs with good work conditions.

In the conceptual framework below, we have pictured our theoretical approach as follows:

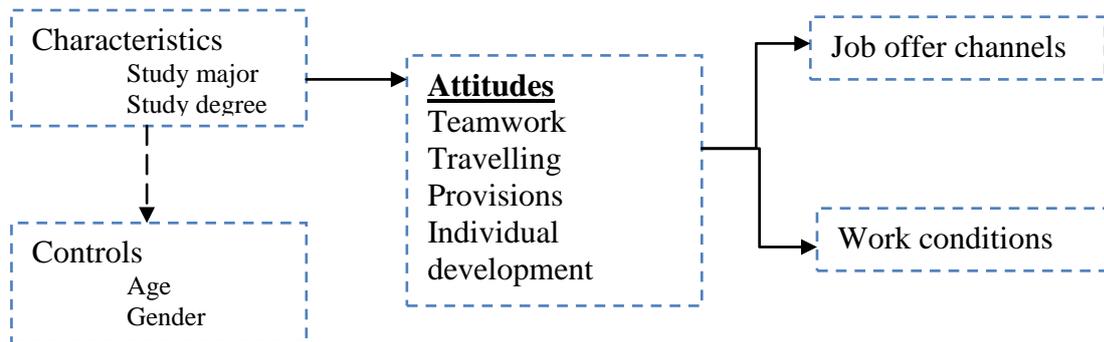


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Sample

Responses of students in two selected universities in Northern Germany (175 students - 58% male and 42% female) were gathered. The questionnaires were distributed by a graduate student of the Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen among students at the universities. The mean age of students was 25 and their degree level ranged from Bachelor to Master. Furthermore, it was of importance that they were planning to take the first step in entering the labor market as employees in the next three months. The response rate was 98%.

Instrument

Students were asked about their attitudes (18 questions) and about their perceived assessment of attractiveness of job offer channels and work conditions (14/6 questions). Respondents answered the questions on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1= fully disagree to 4= fully agree. Questions were in accordance to earlier studies on students' preferences for employers and work conditions in Germany. (Trendence, 2008; Universum, 2007).

Procedure

We first started with computing means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations. With respect to attitudes, four factors were selected: teamwork, travelling, employer provisions, opportunities for individual development. Teamwork (Cronbach's alpha = .60) included the following two items: project work and teamwork. Travelling (Cronbach's alpha = .80) included two items related to national and international travelling. Employer provisions (Cronbach's alpha = .79) consist of six items: salary (fixed and variable), other benefits, company car, technical equipment, promotions. Opportunities for individual development (Cronbach's alpha = .60) included eight items related to career chances, learning offers, independent work, fun to work, contact to clients, being part of task forces, acceptance/valuation and advancement. With respect to employers job offer channels (Cronbach's alpha = .72), fourteen factors were selected and ranged from regional newspapers to online recruitment. For work conditions (Cronbach's alpha = .71) six factors appeared: work-life balance, flexible working hours, work conditions, challenges, work place security, and job variety.

We tested the answer of our research question with hierarchical multiple regression analyses at an individual level. First, we controlled for gender and age. In the next step we entered graduates attitudes in one step and tested the influence on employers' job offer channels and work conditions.

Results

Descriptives

As we can see from Table 1, gender was strongly related to “study major” which indicates that, in the current sample, female students' preferred to study economics rather than informatics. Students' age influenced positively the decision on what kind of degree (BA or MBA) they are aiming at. Moreover, with increased age students perceived less importance of travelling and individual development which may lie in the fact that at the end of this life span students plan to stay with their family rather than to travel extensively or following specific career plans. The study major (economics or informatics) was negatively related to the degree students are aiming at which indicates that for economics a Master degree is preferred and for informatics a Bachelor degree. On the other hand, students' study major was strongly related to the travel attitude which supports the underlying assumption that professionals in informatics are more assumed to travel than in economics based on the type of the job. Teamwork was perceived as part of the individual development as well as a part of work conditions. Furthermore, individual development was strongly related to travelling and provisions. The outcome indicated that individual development was seen as an overall important part of work conditions that attracted students most. The types of job offer channels were perceived as less attractive for attitudes to provisions and individual development.

Insert Table 1

Regressions

Almost all students' attitudes were negatively related to job offer channels which indicate that for travelling, provisions and individual development the job offer channel does not increase the attractiveness. However, the provisions with negatively, significantly and strongly influence on job offer channels are not perceived and identified as an important attractiveness factor of employers. The variation was explained by 13%. Even more important was the influence of individual development on work conditions. The more

room for individual development, the higher the perception of suitable work conditions with a variance explanation by 16% of the sample. At this stage we can conclude that students' attitude of looking at provisions is less important than the attitude of individual development embedded in work conditions and therefore, our research question: "Do young labor market entrees' attitudes influence the evaluation process of employers' job offer channels and work conditions?" is partially answered for selected attitudes.

Insert Table 2

Discussion

Our study was designed to investigate the influence of students' attitudes (teamwork, travelling, provisions and individual development) on preferences for employers' job offer channels and work conditions. The study clearly demonstrates that the perceived attractiveness of employers' job offer channels is strongly related to face to face contacts rather than to online contacts. The results are in contrast to what Weitzel et al. (2011) found. Researchers carried out that the online contact between students and potential employers is highly preferred. That might be relevant for the first initial selection of potential employers to get more information about employers' background. When it comes to serious contacts or applications, then students prefer to have face to face contacts with employers on exhibitions and/or fairs. However, in the future it is expected that online access, or social media usage, will increase. We expected to find that provisions play an important role for young labor market entrees when looking at employers' job offer channels. Surprisingly, the relationship between provisions and job offer channels was negatively related which leads to the conclusion that students in the current sample did not feel attracted by provisions released in job offer channels.

With regard to work conditions, our results revealed that individual development is perceived as an important part of work conditions. The findings are in line with the 5th European survey on work conditions (EWCS, 2010) that employers' money for individual development, in terms of e.g. schooling and training, raised significantly. However, young labor market entrees are in favor of getting non-standard forms of jobs (EFILWC, 2011) which means that the type of individual development will undergo a process of negotiation between employers and employees bearing in mind that intellectual challenges that work poses had little or no increase over the last years (EWCS, 2010).

Looking at attitudes in general, we know that attitudes can change over time and that persuasion processes can influence attitudes and that therefore the outcome can change as well (Petty & Brinol, 2010). The relevance of our findings can be seen as an extension of earlier studies on attitudes (Fazio, 2007) as well as on organizational practices (Trendence, 2008; Universum, 2007) because students' attitudes change in a dynamic world and therefore regular studies on students attitudes help to broaden our theoretical understanding how students can be attracted for new employment relationships. For practical purposes we can conclude that it is important for both employers and employees to check their needs, wishes and desires on a regular basis to find ways how they can match and develop employment relationships that suits both employers and employees. In the nearby future it is relevant to check the influence of non-standard job formats on individual developments and how mobility and flexibility influences health of workers.

Although the study has noteworthy results, some special characteristics of our subject should be mentioned. First, the study was conducted in one country and in a specific rural area. This might have an influence on respondents attitudes and therefore on their reported answers. Second, we did not distinguish between study degrees and study majors and even more interesting we did not examine differences in attitudes of female and male. Third, our study was cross sectional and therefore, the current situation (private and official) in which students currently live may have played an important role as well.

Future research should focus on changes in the usage of social media instruments for employee recruitment and through what other factors students feel attracted. Furthermore, through developments in our societies, changes on attitudes might be expected as well and therefore we need more and relevant information about the relationship of attitudes and behavior from both employers and employees with regard to future employment relationships.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

	Mean	SD	Gender	Age	Study major	Study degree	Teamwork	Travelling	Provisions	Individual development	Job offer channels
Gender	1.42	.49									
Age	2.05*	.22	.06								
Study major	1.46	.50	.36**	-.00							
Study degree	1.25	.57	.02	.30**	-.15*						
Teamwork	2.92	.63	-.06	-.11	-.11	-.09					
Travelling	2.66	.77	.12	-.18*	.25**	-.05	.13				
Provisions	2.84	.57	-.09	.04	-.10	.06	-.00	.20**			
Individual development	3.25	.32	.08	-.15*	.12	-.11	.30**	.30**	.29**		
Job offer channels	2.10	.30	-.14	-.14	-.00	-.08	.01	-.14	-.31**	-.15*	
Work conditions	3.30	.34	.10	.01	.09	-.09	.14*	-.01	.05	.35**	-.00

*note: age is clustered in: 1<=20 ; 2= 20-29; 3= 30-39; 4= 40-49; 5= above 50

Significance: **p<.001; *p<.05; †<.010 (two-tailed)

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Attitudes on Job Offer Channels and Work Conditions

	Job offer channels			Work conditions		
	R ²	β	t	R ²	β	t
Gender	.02	-.07	-.93	.01	.07	.91
Age		-.14	-1.89		.06	.83
Study major	.02	.03	.38	.02	.06	.78
Study degree		-.02	-.37		-.06	-.81
Teamwork	.13	.03	.41	.16	.07	.94
Travelling		-.09	-1.22		-.15	-1.95
Provisions		-.26**	-3.34		-.00	-.08
Individual development		-.08	-.95		.37**	4.50

Significance: **p<.001; *p<.05; †<.010 (two-tailed)