JOB FAIRS AND PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANY ATTRACTIVENESS: EVIDENCE FROM JAPANESE COMPANIES RECRUITING OVERSEAS

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ABSTRACT: Research on impression management has continuously highlighted the importance of a company's brand equity in attracting talent. Whereas the determinants of company attractiveness are well documented, less is known about the effects of recruitment tactics, particularly in non-Western settings. We investigated these effects using survey data from 13 Japanese multinational companies (MNCs) and 436 international job seekers collected before and after a large-scale career fair held in Singapore in 2017. The unconventional setup of the fair allowed us to conduct the survey in a semi-experimental setting. Using endogeneity-robust linear, logit and probit models, we found that recruitment tactics significantly affect perceptions of company attractiveness regardless of job seekers' pre-existing beliefs. The effect is larger in cases of high person-organization fit. The mechanism modulating this effect is the image of personnel heterogeneity a company is able to project through the characteristics of its recruiting staff. We identify the key dimensions of heterogeneity and provide estimates of the optimal personnel heterogeneity levels. Our findings build on previous research on targeted recruitment in Western settings, showing that the success of international recruitment is contingent not only on fixed firm characteristics, but also on a firms' impression management tactics throughout the recruitment process.

KEY WORDS: Impression management, job matching, job fairs, international recruitment, company image, optimal staff heterogeneity

JEL CODES: M5, J5

INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus in academic literature that a company's success is impingent upon the quality and the productivity of its workforce. These are affected by numerous variables, but three categories stand out the most in existing human resource management (HRM) literature: incentives, work organization and recruitment practices. For more than four decades academic literature mainly focused on the former two (Oyer & Schaefer, 2011; Griffeth, Tenbrink & Robinson, 2013). Accordingly, whereas how a firm can motivate an employee has largely been understood, meta studies have shown that existing empirical literature supplies significantly less evidence on how a firm should go about finding the right employee in the first place (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Rynes & Cable, 2003). In view of this, and of increasing employee turnover accompanying the decline of lifetime employment worldwide, academic attention has increasingly shifted toward the topics of recruitment and job search, especially targeted recruitment of minority, international and highly skilled candidates. (Dineen & Soltis, 2011; Rynes-Weller Reeves & Darnold, 2013; Darnold & Rynes, 2013; Breaugh, 2014). The relevance of this research area became evident with the publication of the Oxford Handbook of Recruitment in 2013, which provides a thorough review of existing theories and research.

An in-depth inspection of recruitment-related literature reveals that how companies are perceived and evaluated by prospective candidates is crucial for attracting talent. Academic publications on both job-search and recruitment have continuously highlighted the importance of a company's image (brand equity) in attracting talent (Theurer Tumasjan, Welpe & Lievens, 2016; Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Collins & Kanar, 2013; Collins, 2007; Chapman et al., 2005; Cable & Turban, 2003; Turban & Cable, 2003). In fact, impression management (IM), defined as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions" (Schlenker, 1980: 6), has been one of the most studied topics in HRM literature in the last two decades. Although the majority of IM studies have focused on the job applicants' personal IM (PIM) and the outcomes of employment interviews (Scandura

& Williams, 2000; Tsai & Huang, 2013), another line of organization-level IM research has been attracting academic attention. Known as 'organizational impression management' (OIM), it has been defined as "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience perception of an organization" (Elsbach, Sutton & Principe, 1998: 68). Within the recruitment context it can be understood as the recruitment tactics adopted by a firm to modify its image in the eyes of job seekers and thereby influence their job application intentions. Recruitment-related OIM research, however, has remained limited, as early literature (e.g. Powell, 1984; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987) suggested that recruitment tactics play only a minor role in affecting applicant decisions (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley & Gilstrap, 2008). Accordingly, while the determinants of employer attractiveness have been thoroughly researched both empirically and theoretically, there has been little research on how companies can modify these perceptions. The overwhelming majority of studies related to job matching focus on the former, and tend to either (1) compare the characteristics of different companies and identify which of them make a firm more attractive in general, or (2) explore the personal characteristics of job applicants with the purpose of determining what kind of candidates are attracted to certain companies, without specifically addressing the issue of how the way a single company can modify the image it projects in the eyes of job seekers. Job seekers' attitudes, in turn, have also been tacitly treated as non-modifiable (Chapman et al., 2005).

Consequently, one of the biggest challenges in IM research is to disentangle the effects of a firm's non-modifiable characteristics from those of a firm's recruitment tactics (Challenge 1), especially in view of the fact that more recent studies indicate that recruiters play a significant role in applicant job choice (Chapman et al., 2005), and that this influence is most pronounced in the case of highly skilled candidates with multiple job offers. Since research in this area could have important implications for the selection and training of a firm's recruiting personnel, the main goal of this study is to investigate whether a firm's recruitment tactics can help improve its attractiveness as an employer in the eyes of job seekers, and if yes, through what channels.

In doing so, it is indispensable to consider both sides of the job matching process, which we identified to have been another major challenge in existing empirical literature (Challenge 2). Integrating the recruitment perspective, which refers to a company's hiring tactics, and the job search perspective, which focuses on job seekers' employment search activities. While literature on either side of the job matching process abounds, few scholars have addressed empirically the challenge of integrating the two sides of the job matching process. Notwithstanding the necessity to incorporate these two perspectives into one academic endeavor has become increasingly salient, as both applicants' and recruiters' assessments of fit play an important role in organizational entry (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Kristof-Brown Reeves & Follmer, 2013), this has eluded most existing empirical research, owing to the difficulty of collecting data from both sources. Considering this, one of the major motivations for this study is to integrate both perspectives by collecting responses to identical questions from employers and job seekers alike in a setting where both parties have almost symmetric information about each other.

Another major challenge faced by empirical research on job matching is related to the applicability to real-world settings, considering the survey methods used so far (Challenge 3). Existing empirical research on recruitment practices tends to study job seekers' attitudes and behavioral intentions more than their actual behaviors utilizing mostly content analysis-based policy capturing methods or controlled laboratory experiments. Due to the use of such methodologies, most studies do not clearly delineate among the temporal and sequential processes of recruitment, which also raises concerns about endogeneity issues (Rynes-Weller et al., 2013; Carlson & Mecham, 2013), as well as questions about the validity of findings in a real-life context. Consequently, this study utilizes a field survey rather than policy capturing methods or a controlled laboratory experiment, which is a major advantage over previous studies. Using a sample of real job seekers, we analyzed their actual behaviors (we collected information on whether they applied or interviewed with the companies they evaluated), and we investigated how subjects' perceptions changed before versus after being exposed to a company's recruitment activities on the recruitment day,

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which adds a clear temporal dimension to our survey while restricting the scope of the survey to the initial part of the job-matching process.

Last but not least, the overwhelming majority of existing empirical research is focused on domestic recruitment in Western settings, especially the US (Chapman et al., 2005), which raises questions as to what extent findings are applicable to non-Western settings. Another major challenge, therefore, is to extend the generalizability of existing findings (Challenge 4). We address this issue by providing evidence from international recruitment in a non-Western setting, namely Japanese multinational corporations recruiting in the ASEAN region. This was done in view of the fact that the ASEAN has become by far the most preferred region for international recruitment by Japanese companies. The ratio of Japanese firms wishing to employ ASEAN nationals has almost doubled since 2014, reaching 76%, a ratio far larger than any other region's, including China, which had long been the traditional source of foreign labor for Japanese firms. The number of ASEAN workers increased dramatically between 2001 and 2016: the proportion of visas issued to ASEAN nationals among all foreign workers jumped from 5% to 24% in that period (DISCO, 2018). In addition, despite being the backbone of a major developed economy, Japanese firms are lagging behind their Western counterparts in attracting skilled foreign workers. Although the case of ageing and labor-scarce Japan is of particular relevance to the topic of international recruitment, with multinational enterprises increasingly focusing on Southeast Asia as a source of talent, academic research on this topic is virtually non-existent. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first empirical endeavor to provide that missing piece of evidence.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the next section provides background on major theories of the interaction between organizational image and perception changes, and introduces our hypotheses and empirical model. Section three introduces the survey design and the data we collected, and section four presents the results from the empirical analysis. Section five concludes with some recommendations concerning recruitment practices, and discusses the limitations of this study while suggesting potential

paths for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Since the main concern of this study is to address the issue of changing perceptions of a company's image, as well as to identify the existence of any tactics during the recruitment process that a company can employ in order to improve its perceived attractiveness as an employer in the eyes of prospective candidates, a review of major theories related to changes in perceptions and attitudes is essential for formulating testable hypotheses. As mentioned, the majority of exiting studies explore the impact of non-modifiable company and applicant characteristics on organizational attractiveness and job application intentions. Job candidates' attitudes tend to be seen as an extension of their personal values, and are either not viewed as manipulable, or at least their modifiability has not been seen as a key factor in the job matching process so far. According to various theories however, it is possible for a company to influence candidates' perceptions. As these theories come from disciplines ranging from labor economics to social psychology, their validity in recruitment settings has not been tested systematically. A key contribution of this study is that it validates empirically some of the most prominent of these theories in a recruitment context, and provides evidence of the exact channels through which they work. The most influential and relevant theories, selected after a comprehensive review of the Oxford Handbook of Recruitment (2013), are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model and Media Richness Theory

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was developed in the social psychology literature to explain the cognitive processes associated with persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986a, 1986b). The framework postulates that processing persuasive message is influenced by the extent to which individuals have the ability and motivation to process the message itself. When both ability and motivation are high,

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message recipients are likely to centrally process the persuasive message, and evaluations are based on the content of the message. Conversely, when either processing ability or motivation is lacking, evaluations are based on positive or negative reactions to peripheral cues associated with the message, such as the medium of communication or the message source, i.e. the communicator (Hovland, Janis & Kelly, 1953). Since peripheral processing involves less thought-related effort than central processing, it leads to less stable attitudes. For example, with regard to job advertisements, academics have argued that message content and design affects job seekers' motivation to process. As such, job advertisements have the potential to influence important outcomes such as P-O fit perceptions (Roberson, Collins & Oreg, 2005), organizational attractiveness (Walker, Field, Giles & Bernerth, 2008) and effort expended to evaluate the job ad itself (Jones, Schultz & Chapman, 2006). We interpret recruitment activities as modifiable peripheral routes of attitude formation, as graphically represented in Figure 2, and we aim to test the hypothesis that these activities can be thought of as 'persuasive messages' within the ELM framework, which can be instrumental in enhancing the attractiveness of a company in the eyes of job seekers.

Figure 1 about here

In order to empirically test the validly of the claim that company attractiveness is modifiable, we considered all recruitment types discussed in existing literature. An exhaustive list of these was provided by Miller & Guo (2013), who identify twelve categories of recruitment practices: (1) ads in the media, (2) job rotation/transfer, (3) direct/walk-in, (4) employee referrals/word of mouth, (5) college campus recruiting, (6) employment agencies, (7) internal recruitment/promotion, (8) online recruiting, (9) job fairs, (10) internships/temp jobs, (11) inheritance of jobs, and (12) government appointment.

Of these, (1), (5), (8) and (9) would be the most suitable settings to test the peripheral route mechanism described in Figure 1, as in the other case either the motivation on either side of the job matching process is asymmetric (walk-ins, referrals) or completely absent (inheritance, appointments), or the condition of a short-term exposure not satisfied (internships). Since we would like to exclude the effects of intermediary (non-company) recruiters, we do not consider employment agencies either.

Drawing from the Media Richness Theory (MRT), which posits that communication effectiveness is dependent on the stimulus transmission capacity, i.e. the 'richness' of a medium of communication (Daft & Lengel, 1984; 1986), with richer media being characterized by (1) the opportunity for two-way communication, (2) the ability to convey multiple cues (i.e. nonverbal), (3) the ability to convey a sense of personal focus (i.e. warmth), and (4) language variety (Schmitz & Fulk, 1991), we exclude print ads and online recruiting, as these do not possess these characteristics, and are therefore suboptimal for detecting the effects of peripheral routes. Allen, Van Scotter, J. R. & Orondo (2004) applied MRT in a recruitment context and showed that the media used to communicate recruitment information significantly influenced job applicants' perception of the amount of information presented, personal focus, social presence and symbolism. Furthermore, Cable & Yu (2006) found that career fairs were rated higher in perceived richness than company web sites or electronic bulletin boards.

The abovementioned considerations imply that the best way to test the ELM mechanism in the job matching context would be campus recruitment or a career fair. We choose the latter, as they are usually not as targeted in terms of institutions and majors as college campus recruitment. In addition, job fairs have already been found to serve as an important source of information on companies and could therefore influence prospective applicants' reputation perceptions (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Collins, 2007; Barber, 1998). Considering this, we conclude a career fair is the best setting to investigate changes in perceptions of company attractiveness, and we formulate our first testable hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Job fair recruitment activities, being rich in stimuli and information transmission paths, can act as a peripheral route of attitude formation, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of a company regardless of pre-existing attitudes.

Assuming job fairs are instrumental in enhancing a firm's attractiveness as an employer, the next step is to establish the precise mechanism of perception changes. Since peripheral routes could be any combination of factors ranging from recruiters' behaviors, their physical characteristics, the amount of information provided, the information medium, the scale of the presentation, etc., we draw from empirical research on targeted recruitment in order to narrow down the scope of potential factors and formulate a testable hypothesis concerning the peripheral route mechanism.

Targeted Recruitment and Signaling Theory

Empirical research on targeted recruitment, which is overwhelmingly focused on racial or ethnic monitories in Western settings, is largely based on the premises of the Signaling Theory proposed by Spence (1973) addressing the issue of information asymmetry in job matching. In this model potential employees send a signal about their ability level to the employer by acquiring education credentials. Education is manipulable by an applicant and is referred to as a 'signal'. It is differentiated from non-manipulable attributes, such as age, for example, referred to as an 'index'. On the basis of previous experience of the market, the employer is supposed to have conditional probability assessments over applicants' productive capacity given a certain combination of indices and signals. The employer updates his beliefs by observing the employee characteristics.

In the context of job search, the theory treats job seekers as the employer in Spence's model, and postulates that since early in the recruitment process job seekers know little about potential employers, they rely on environmental cues (indexes and signals) during the recruitment process to update their

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beliefs (Rynes, 1991). Several scholars have conducted empirical research on what these environmental cues might be, especially in the context of job advertisements, which have been shown to signal unknown organizational attributes, especially when it comes to diversity.

Most prominently, a number of studies by Avery and colleagues demonstrate that minority job seekers are more attracted to organizations when they are presented with evidence that the organization welcomes minorities (Avery, Hernandez & Hebl, 2004; Avery, 2003). Companies might be perceived as more attractive by minority, international or female seekers if they ingratiate these job seekers in job ads or increase demographic diversity in ads (Avery & McKay, 2006). Volpone, Thomas, Sinisterra & Johnson (2013) review the literature surrounding tactics related to targeted (minority) recruitment and establish that diversity messages and images in formal recruitment advertisements have a significant impact on minority applicants' behavior.

We extend this theory to international instead of minority job seekers, and investigate whether this holds true for ASEAN job seekers who would like to work for Japanese companies. Based on the Signaling Theory, we expect that the characteristics of recruiters will have a major impact on an applicant's perception of the recruiter's company, especially when it comes to diversity, which is our second testable hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. A company can improve its desirability as an employer by projecting a more diverse working environment to international job seekers.

We measure diversity by coding the perceived gender, nationality and seniority level/perceived age of the recruiters representing the company, and approachability by the ratio of recruiters dressed relatively casually (i.e. not wearing suits) at the career forum. Although the dimensions of diversity and approachability are admittedly subjective, we are more concerned with defining these in opposition to the

traditional image of a Japanese firm, whose typical representative is a male Japanese formally dressed middle-aged/senior employee.

Importantly, since we are reversing the original scenario of Spence's signaling paradigm, we treat all observable characteristics of company representatives at the job fair as 'signals', as opposed to a mixture of signals and indexes. Since every participating company can make conscious decisions regarding the observable characteristics of the recruiters they dispatch to the fair as representatives of the firm, characteristics such as age, race and gender are in this case manipulable, and hence viewed as signals.

The Person-Organization Fit Framework

The Person-Organization (P-O) Fit framework emphasizes the importance of the congruence between job seeker characteristics and recruiting organization characteristics in the former's evaluation of potential employers. Early HRM research suggested that individuals define themselves in terms of organizational membership when their perceptions of fit are high (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991), and empirical studies generally support these predictions.

In the recruitment context, the theory suggest that information provided during the recruitment process helps candidates assess P-O fit, and affects organizational image and job decisions. Cable & Judge (1997) have shown P-O fit is more important for hiring decisions than person-job (P-J) fit. Empirical studies show that enhanced P-O perceptions can influence job choice decisions (Walker & Hinojosa, 2013), and formal information sources, such as job advertisements, have been related to job applicants' P-O fit perceptions (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Cable & Judge, 1996). Therefore, based on the P-O fit framework, the third testable hypothesis was formulated in the following way:

Hypothesis 3: The impact of factors influencing changes in perceptions is larger for applicants who are an objectively good fit for the company (high P-O candidates).

It should be noted that in this study 'fit' is defined as a mix of skills and personal characteristics. Accordingly, no specific mentions of skills or personal characteristics were made in the survey, using the word 'strength' instead. This was done with the intention of removing the effects of any potential intervening variables related to whether applicants and companies emphasize personal qualities versus skills during the job-matching process. This is considered particularly relevant in the case of Japanese firms, which traditionally hire for organizational fit, based on the premise that skills can be taught but personalities are innate (Robinson, 2003), which might be different from recruitment cultures in other countries, like the ones in ASEAN, which are focus of our analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The empirical investigation was based on data collected via a job seeker survey, a company survey and an independent evaluation of company booths during the ASEAN Career Fair (ACF) held in February 2017 in Singapore. The job fair has been held annually since 2013, and is organized collaboratively by the ASEAN Career Fair Japan Committee (Energize Inc. & Global Human Capital Corp.), the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, the ASEAN University Network, and Osaka University, including the authors of this paper. As organizers, we had the opportunity to conduct large-scale surveys among the 13 well-known Japanese companies and 604 prospective applicants from the ASEAN region who attended the fair. The average job seeker visited 40% of all booths, which approximates the ACF setting to an ideal experiment-like scenario of having all subjects attend all booths. In addition, the fact that all 13 companies are Japanese reduces the likelihood of self-selection. At a job fair featuring a mix of Japanese and non-Japanese firms, job seekers who are interested in working for the former will self-select into attending only the booths of Japanese companies, and even if they do not, they might be biased to report better attitudes towards them. In this case, every attendee is interested in working for Japanese companies by

default, and compares the recruitment methods of attending companies only to those of similar companies. All these characteristics of the ACF fair make our sample especially well-suited for analyzing the effects of impression management.

Data collection: Job Seekers

Upon entering the venue, all 604 attendees were handed a survey (response rate n=436, 72.2%) inquiring about their skills, values, job preferences, social status, opinions about Japanese firms and most importantly, their evaluation of the image of participating companies before and after attending their booths on a five-point Likert Scale, which was used as the main dependent variable in the econometric model (a relevant excerpt from the survey is available in Appendix B). The survey was distributed at the entrance prior to front desk registration, and was collected upon leaving at a collection point located at the only entrance to the venue. As organizers, we were able to locate the survey collection point in a key and prominent location, between the front desk and the company booths, which played an important role in attaining a high response rate. Job seekers were kindly asked to complete the survey, with specific instructions to answer the 'before' and 'after' parts of company evaluation question respectively before and after visiting the company booths. Applicants were told that upon completing the survey they would be provided with a modest gift (e.g. a pen, a clear file, etc.). In order to further stimulate the survey response rate, participants were informed that a number of additional gift stickers has been randomly inserted into the files containing the survey, so that the respondents who had a sticker in their file would receive an additional present. Although some of the surveys were not answered completely, the overall response rate was quite high at 72.2%.

Data collection: Recruiters

The survey distributed to the representatives of the participating companies, on the other hand,

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consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of four questions concerning the company, including what skills and personal characteristics were considered desirable in prospective candidates. These questions were identical to ones the one job seekers were asked, and they were used later to create our high person-organization (P-O) fit subsample. The second part of the survey contained nine questions inquiring about the recruiter's personal characteristics and their evaluation of various aspects of Japanese companies in general. Those questions were also identical to the ones the job seekers were asked but they were not used in creating the high P-O fit subsample. 50 representatives of the 13 companies received the survey, and the response rate was 100 %.

In addition to the survey, four trained coders affiliated with Osaka University recorded the characteristics of the attending companies' booths at the fair (e.g. number of company representatives, their seniority level (perceived age), gender, dress, visual characteristics, presentation methods, etc.) at three different points in time (at the beginning, the middle and the end of the fair). Information such as the appearance of the recruiters at the booth, the number of job seekers looking at the booth, the availability of paraphernalia, brochures, presentation methods, available information etc. was recorded for every booth.

Creating the High Person-Organization Fit Subsample

The question used to establish the presence of a high P-O fit level between companies and job seekers was about the strengths (i.e. a mixture of personal qualities and skills, as discussed in the previous section) they were looking for and able to offer, respectively. Both recruiters and applicants were asked to select up to three items. Respondents were able to select among 15 skills and traits, carefully selected based on nationwide surveys inquiring Japanese employers about their demand for human resources conducted by DISCO (2018) and other recruitment support providers (Energize Inc. etc.), and they were able to add their own to the list (the full list is available in Appendix A).

Since respondents were asked to select only up to three skills or traits, if one of the items that an

applicant indicated coincided with an item a company representative selected, it was considered a match. Although the theoretical probability of a match is quite low, the actual matching rate was 73.9 %, reflecting the careful and targeted selection of the attending job seekers. 5% of all responses (7% of all matches) were complete three-skill matches, meaning all three skills a company representative and a candidate chose were identical.

Since the high P-O fit subsample is a major element of this study, all descriptive statistics hereafter are shown for the entire sample, as well as for the "lower P-O fit" versus "higher P-O fit" sub-samples, i.e. for candidates who had no skills or traits matching any of those that any of the companies were looking for, versus candidates who had at least one such skill or trait. The descriptive statistics, discussed next, reveal no significant differences between lower versus higher P-O fit candidates.

Descriptive Statistics: Job Seekers

The valid sample of job seekers consisted of 436 respondents from the ASEAN region, most of them final year undergraduate and graduate students from top-ranking universities across ASEAN countries. A special feature of the ASEAN Career Fair was that access was not open to anyone. Attendees are selected based on several criteria, most importantly their GPA, the ranking of their university and their self-reported English proficiency. Japanese language skills were not required in order to participate in the event – in fact 40% had zero proficiency in Japanese. Applicants who were selected to take part in the event were eligible to receive up to USD 200 as a reimbursement to help cover travel expenses from their respective country to the venue in Singapore. In this way, the sample of job seekers was limited only to people who 1) are originally from the ASEAN region (including a few Chinese and Indian nationals studying in ASEAN countries), 2) are interested in working for Japanese companies and 3) have an excellent academic record.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the job seekers. The sample is well-balanced in terms of

genders, majors and nationalities. All parts of the ASEAN region were represented in a relatively proportional way, with Indonesians, Malaysians and Singaporeans cumulatively accounting for about 60% of all respondents, and Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai respondents comprising another one-third. The average number of booths an applicant visited was 5. 65% of respondents reported an improved impression of the companies after attending the fair, 25% reported no change, and less than 10% reported a deterioration in their impression.

Table 1 about here

While otherwise balanced, the sample is conspicuously homogeneous in terms of geographical location and skill-level. By targeting only highly skilled job seekers from a region which has rather uniform in work-related values (authors' observations based on the World Values Survey), the cultural and skill-level heterogeneity of the sample was minimized, making it unnecessary to include an excessive number of control variables in the estimation. Considering that applicant heterogeneity has often been cited as a major impediment to conducting empirical investigations on hiring practices (Oyer & Schaefer, 2011), our relatively homogeneous sample could be considered a unique advantage of our dataset.

Another unique advantage of our sample is that it allows for a semi-experimental setup. Although attending job seekers are generally interested in working for Japanese companies, Japanese companies are not necessarily their first choice: about half (58%) reported that if they were to choose the nationality of the company they would like to work for, a Japanese company would be their top preference (multiple answers were not possible). The fact that the average job seeker in the sample tends to be on the fence when it comes to choosing Japanese versus employers of other nationalities, suggesting that their attitudes

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are relatively malleable, allowed us to examine the effects of recruitment-day activities with a high level of statistical validity. This would not have been the case if every subject in the sample was firmly determined to work for a Japanese company.

Descriptive Statistics: Recruiters

The sample of recruiters, on the other hand, included 50 representatives of all 13 participating companies. A unique feature of ACF is that due to the small number of companies, unlike other fairs, participants do not go there solely for a pre-arranged interview, but rather for a window-shopping-style job search. For example, in the case of some of the largest career fairs featuring Japanese firms overseas, such as the Boston Career Forum, the large number (n>250) and the high level of heterogeneity of participating firms (Japanese, American, European) do not allow for this kind of setup. Instead, most job seekers have three to four pre-arranged interview appointments, and the average number of visited booths by a job seeker is barely eight, or about 3% of attending companies (DISCO, 2018). In contrast, at ACF job seekers have the chance to attend all 13 booths within the span of the day, and arrange interviews whenever possible.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the recruiters. The average number of company representatives per booth was 4.3 and approximately half of the people appeared to be in non-senior positions (their perceived age was used as a proxy, approximately in their early 30s or younger). The majority of company representatives at the booths were coded as male (61.6%), Japanese (64.5%), and formally dressed (about 50% wore business suits). Accordingly, we refer to formally dressed mid-age male Japanese company representatives as "default" or "homogeneous", and use these characteristics as dummy variables to estimate the effect of projected staff heterogeneity on changes in prospective candidates' impressions.

Table 2 about here

Empirical Model and Variables

In order to test Hypotheses 2 and 3, as well as to estimate the impact of the recruitment day activities on

changes in prospective job applicants' perceptions of a company's image, the following econometric

model was formulated and estimated using the collected data:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta Booth_j + \gamma X_{ij} + e_{ij} \qquad \text{(Eq.1)}$$

Y is the dependent variable, the difference between applicant i's impression of company j after versus

before visiting company j's booth. By using the changes in perceptions before and after rather than

absolute score values, we are able to mitigate the effects of individual evaluation standards (some

applicants might be inherently more generous than others in their evaluation benchmarks). α is the

constant, $Booth$ is a set of company j's booth characteristics, X is a vector of control variables including

both applicants' and companies' characteristics. The error term, e_{ij}, is assumed to be composed of λ_i and ε_{ji}

($e_{ij} = \lambda_i + \varepsilon_{ji}$), where λ stands for the time-invariant individual error component and ε is white noise. The

inclusion of the individual component λ in the error term helps address the problem of endogeneity, which

arises from the fact that there are unobserved heterogeneities among applicants that are correlated with

other explanatory variables and that might determine their impression of company. If that were the case,

the estimates would be biased. In order to ensure the results from such a bias, we estimate both

fixed-effects and random-effects models. Although the coefficients in both estimations were almost

identical, the Hausman tests suggested that the fixed-effects model is more appropriate.

The survey was designed with the intention to collect data on all variables that were to be included in

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the empirical model. Based on previous research on factors that might influence prospective applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness, we collected information on over 70 variables directly related to applicants' skill set, personal traits, strengths, preferences when it comes to job search, in addition to a set of variables related to personal characteristics such as age, gender, university, major etc. These factors were included as independent variables and controls in the empirical model. For a comprehensive overview of dependent and independent variables used in past research on the topic, we refer to Rynes-Weller et al. (2013).

Most importantly, the variables that present a significant contribution to existing research are ones related to job seekers' impressions of a company (i.e. the image or the reputation of a company) before and after visiting the respective company's booth. Applicants were asked to evaluate each company on a scale of 1 to 5 before and after visiting their booth and the difference between the two scores was utilized as a dependent variable in the empirical model. The average number of booths an applicant visited is 5, resulting in 944 applicant-booth dyad evaluations – a number which was considered sufficient for conducting an empirical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes in Booth Impression Scores

Testing Hypothesis 1 is fairly straightforward. The fact that job fair activities enhance the attractiveness of a company regardless of pre-existing attitudes can be gleaned from descriptive statistics, and confirmed with a simple repeated-measures t-test. In the clear majority of their evaluations of companies (65%), job seekers reported an improved impression. A deterioration in their impressions was registered in less than 10% of the cases. The average score before attending the booths (pre-treatment) was 3.32 out of 5.00 and the one after attending the booths (post-treatment) was 3.74 out of 5.00. The difference between the means was significant at the 1% level, confirming Hypothesis 1 (Table 3).

Table 3 about here

The Determinants of Impression Changes

The results from the diagnostic OLS regression (Table 4) reveal that the ratio of female company representatives at the booth was positively correlated with an improvement in the prospective job applicants' perceptions of the image of that company. Conversely, a higher ratio of Japanese-looking or formally dressed staff is associated with a smaller change in image perceptions. The seniority level (perceived age) of the booth staff does appear as a significant factor in shaping the image of the company.

The results align with the proposition in Hypothesis 2 that projecting an image implying diversity through a heterogeneous group of company representatives at the booth can boost a firm's image as perceived by international job seekers.

The 'firm evaluation score before visiting the booth' variable has a negative coefficient indicating that the higher the initial evaluation is, the smaller the change in perception is likely to be. This is in line with expectations, as low initial evaluations logically provide more room for improvement within a scale that has an upper limit (1 to 5) – if the initial evaluation of the image of the company was 5, then an enhanced perception after visiting the booth could not possibly be reflected in the survey, resulting in a reported lack of change.

All control variables have signs in line with expectations. For example, the number of foreigners employed the previous year by a company appears as a very robust predictor of enhanced image perceptions, which relates well to the concept of heterogeneity discussed above. Since this is an objective measure of a company's openness to non-majority individuals (as compared to projections of diversity,

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which are not necessarily representative of the true state of attains at a company), it provides an additional level of validity to our results.

The number of company representatives at the booth also appears as a significant factor. Assuming that dispatching more people to the job fair is costly for a company suggests that the effort the company is putting into recruiting is appreciated by job seekers. The signs for the bottom three variables is negative, implying a smaller positive change in the perceptions of job seekers who prefer Japanese firms, speak Japanese and evaluate Japanese firms highly before visiting their booths, which is exactly what we expect, assuming their initial evaluations of the companies were higher, allowing for a smaller increase within the bounds of 5-point evaluation scale.

Table 4 about here

As mentioned, there might exist individual unobserved heterogeneities, which affect both impression changes and explanatory variables including companies' and individuals' characteristics. In that case, the OLS estimates shown in Table 4 are biased. Therefore, we conducted the panel estimations (Table 5), which treat job seekers' unobserved characteristics as fixed effects.

Table 5 about here

The coefficients and their significance levels are both very similar to the OLS estimations. That is, the

results remain robust even after removing unobserved heterogeneities or existing beliefs and attitudes that might modulate the applicants' impression changes of companies.

As a robustness check, an ordered logit model was estimated. The results from the estimation are once again very similar to those obtained using the OLS and the fixed-effects panel models, thereby confirming the robustness of the results. The results from the ordered logit were not reported here for brevity.

High Person-Organization Fit Job Seekers

In order to test Hypothesis 3, the model was re-estimated by isolating the subsample of applicants who had indicated at least one skill or trait matching that indicated by a recruiter (id = 165, n = 721) – i.e. the high P-O fit job seekers – from the full sample (id = 171, n =944). The results of the fixed-effects model are reported in Table 6 and show that the effects of diversity projections are significantly larger for high P-O fit job seekers (compare with Table 5).

Table 6 about here

In order to confirm that the effects of a matching skill/trait set are not spurious we re-estimated the models while splitting the sample of job seekers along other potentially skill or trait-related but not necessarily matching characteristics, such as job seekers with better versus worse than average English or Japanese language skills, and job seekers who selected Japanese companies as their first choice (54%) versus those who did not (46%). The results, not reported here for brevity, further support Hypothesis 3 – the effects are indeed larger for high P-O fit candidates than any other subsample. Notably, none of the coefficients changes its sign. Only the size of the effect changes, which confirms the robustness of the

results obtained using the entire sample in addition to confirming Hypothesis 3.

Optimal Levels of Heterogeneity

Having established the importance of projecting an image of staff heterogeneity in a company's

impression management activities, we proceed to ascertain the exact amount of heterogeneity. Since by

definition diversity suggests a balanced mix of majority and minority representatives, while companies

certainly do not want to project an image of excessive orientation to majority, they do not want to project

an excessively minority-heavy image either. Therefore, finding the optimal ratio of majority to

non-majority representatives during recruitment activities is essential.

Assuming a concave curve or the effects of staff heterogeneity, we include squared terms in our

estimation model of Equation 1 and re-estimate it:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 Booth_j + \beta_2 Booth_j^2 + \gamma X_{ij} + \lambda_i + \varepsilon_{ji} \qquad \text{(Eq.2)}$$

The results show that the improvement in the perceived attractiveness of a company is indeed

modulated by a non-linear concave relationship, as can be observed by the negative signs of the squared

terms in Table 7 (the opposite in the case of the ratio of senior-level representatives). Since

$\partial Y / \partial Booth = \hat{\beta}_1 Booth + 2\hat{\beta}_2 Booth$, we can find the level of *Booth* characteristics which maximize the

level of Y, if $\hat{\beta}_1$ is positive and $\hat{\beta}_2$ is negative, holding the other effects as given.

Table 7 about here

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We find that the optimal ratio of female representatives is 57%, that of Japanese staff is 43%, of formally dressed people – 41%, and of senior employees – 88%. These percentages align with the "golden mean" concept in philosophy, which represents the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency. The perceived seniority of company representatives is more ambivalent, which could be explained by the possibility that the presence of more senior company representatives at the job fair might signal to job seekers that the company is taking its recruitment very seriously, and can therefore override preferences for approachable recruiters, usually associated with less senior representatives.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

More research is necessary to ascertain whether changes in perceptions for job seekers with different profiles from the ones in our sample (e.g. mid-career, non-highly skilled etc.) would be influenced to the same extent by the factors outlined in the previous sections. Rynes-Weller et al. (2013) point out that the vast majority of recruitment research has focused on a small portion of the labor market, specifically new college graduates, and since our sample also focuses on prospective college graduates, using a different sample might shed more light on the effects of the recruitment day.

Rynes-Weller et al. (2013) also note that empirical research on recruitment practices tends to study attitudes and behavioral intentions more than actual behaviors. In that sense, another limitation of this study is that we were unable to track how exactly the positive change in prospective applicants' impressions influenced their job search behavior after the job fair.

The need for a more controlled experimental setting cannot be understated. Although the ASEAN Career Forum (ACF) provided us with an opportunity to conduct a quasi-experimental study with the average job seeker attending 40% of company booths. In order to measure perception changes with an even higher degree of validity, however, ideally job seekers would attend all booths, especially booths of fictitious companies or ones they have never heard of.

Furthermore, in identifying high P-O fit individuals special attention should be paid to differentiating skills from personal traits, which we could not do at ACF in 2017, due to our assumptions concerning hiring practices by Japanese companies. We did, however, draw a clear distinction between these when conducting a similar survey during the ASEAN Career Forum in 2018.

Finally, relating to the issue raised by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), of whether companies should develop a unified brand and market it internationally or if they should rather tailor their image to the culture of the country where they wish to recruit, it would also be meaningful to explore whether our findings hold true for other world regions.

CONCLUSION

This study uses a novel dataset collected via surveying both job seekers and recruiters in a non-Western context, which is to the best of our knowledge the first evidence of its kind in related academic literature. Utilizing a quasi-experimental survey design, as well as fixed-effects panel data estimations in techniques to resolve issue of heteroscedasticity and endogeneity, the results of the empirical analysis offers three main contributions to recruitment and HRM literature. These are the findings that (1) recruitment-day activities significantly improve prospective job seekers' perceptions of the attractiveness of a company, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes, also in a non-Western context; (2) the heterogeneity (diversity) of company representatives at the booth in terms of gender, perceived ethnicity, seniority level (perceived age) level of formality, play an important role as peripheral cues in shaping foreign applicants' perceptions of company attractiveness; and that (3) recruitment-day activities impact impression changes to a significantly larger extent for those job seeker's whose skills or personality traits match the ones sought after by the companies, the so-called high person-organization (P-O fit) candidates. In addition, as an extension to the second finding, we estimated the optimal levels of heterogeneity. The estimates suggest that a balanced mix of majority and minority representatives is

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essential if companies for successfully projecting an image of employee diversity.

The results from our estimations confirm the empirical validity of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory as applied to recruitment, and they build on previous findings from empirical literature on targeted (minority) hiring in the United States, extending their generalizability to non-Western settings. The results remain robust across various specifications and sensitivity checks. Consequently, we formulate several recommendations for companies wishing to increase their attractiveness among prospective international job applicants through the recruitment process. Our findings suggest that companies wishing to attract international talent might consider participating actively in job fairs as well as sending a larger number of company representatives in order to demonstrate engagement with the recruitment process and give more attention to each interested candidate. In doing so, they might benefit from projecting an image of high levels of employee heterogeneity, specifically by ensuring a good balance among what they consider to be majority and minority representatives. The findings also suggest that special attention should be aid to gender, perceived ethnicity and seniority level in the firm. Last but not least, providing more explicit information on the types of personality traits and skills firms are looking for might provide a signal to potential high P-O fit candidates, thereby increasing the chances of a successful match.

We hope that this investigation will inspire other similar studies in regions other than the ASEAN, and that other scholars will be able to resolve the issues we were not able to address in this study. In the meantime, we believe that our current findings will be useful in enhancing the efficiency of job fairs and other activities aiming to match job seekers and companies, such as intermediary agencies, independent recruiters and headhunters.

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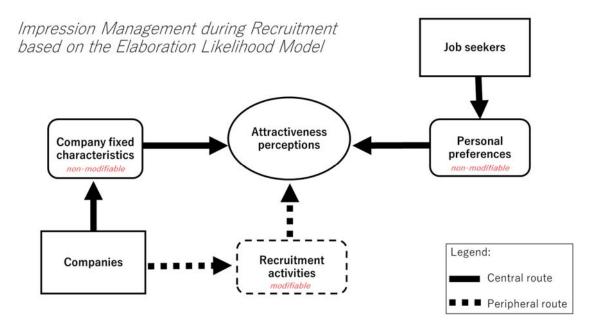
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TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1

The authors' conceptualization of the mechanism though which recruitment activities affect job seekers' attractiveness perceptions based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the job seekers

	Full sample	Subsamples by number of skills matching	
		No matching skills	At least one matching skill
Prefers Japanese firms over other firms (%)	0.555	0.534	0.562
	(0.497)	(0.500)	(0.50)
GPA (1-4)	3.488	3.537	3.472
	(0.523)	(0.562)	(0.509)
Science major (%)	0.696	0.677	0.702
	(0.460)	(0.468)	(0.457)
Male (%)	0.521	0.534	0.517
	(0.499)	(0.500)	(0.500)
Cannot speak Japanese (%)	0.427	0.430	0.426
	(0.494)	(0. 496)	(0.494)
Fluent in English (%)	0.518	0.448	0.540
	(0. 499)	(0.498)	(0.498)
Near-native English speaker (%)	0.424	0.520	0.394
	(0.494)	(0.500)	(0.489)
Has visited Japan (%)	0.452	0.448	0.454
	(0.498)	(0.498)	(0.498)
Relative standard of living (1-10)	6.843	6.740	6.875
	(1.494)	(1.592)	(1.461)
Relative standard of living at age 15 (1-10)	5.912	5.861	5.927
	(1.757)	(1.64)	(1.793)
Top priority in a job:			
High salary	0.282	0.211	0.304
	(0.450)	(0.408)	(0.460)
Short working hours	0.082	0.081	0.083
	(0.274)	(0.274)	(0.275)
Advancement opportunities	0.517	0.538	0.510
	(0.500)	(0.499)	(0.500)
Task attractiveness	0.261	0.291	0.251
	(0.439)	(0.455)	(0.433)
On the job training	0.242	0.251	0.239
	(0.428)	(0.434)	(0.426)
Organization atmosphere	0.194	0.188	0.196
	(0.395)	(0.391)	(0.396)
Benefits	0.212	0.251	0.200
	(0.408)	(0.434)	(0.400)
N	944	223	721

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of recruiters by booths attended by job seekers

| | Full sample | Subsamples by number of matching skills | |
		No matching skills	At least one matching skill
Ratios of			
Female recruiters	0.388	0.386	0.388
	(0.292)	(0.312)	(0.286)
Japanese recruiters	0.628	0.628	0.628
	(0.298)	(0.305)	(0.296)
Formally dressed recruiters	0.438	0.428	0.446
	(0.236)	(0.233)	(0.237)
Senior recruiters	0.477	0.470	0.479
	(0.298)	(0.300)	(0.298)
Number of visited booths	8.101	8.094	8.103
	(3.717)	(3.837)	(3.681)
N	944	223	721

Table 3

Means and two-tailed t-test for company booth evaluations by job seekers before versus after visiting the booths

Variable		Mean	Std. Dev.	Difference (After-Before)	t value	p value
Booth impression score	Before	3.324	0.893	0.411	11.919***	0.000
	After	3.735	0.956			

Note: N = 944.

Table 4

The effects of diversity projections on changes in company attractiveness perceptions, OLS estimation

VARIABLES	Dependent variable: Difference in job seekers' company evaluation scores before versus after visiting the booth			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Recruitment day tactics				
Female recruiter ratio	0.374			
	(0.133)			
	[0.017]			
Japanese recruiter ratio		-0.443		
		(0.218)		
		[0.067]		
Formally dressed recruiter ratio			-0.593	
			(0.110)	
			[0.000]	
Senior recruiter ratio				-0.046
				(0.108)
				[0.676]
Number of booth staff	0.045	0.054	0.029	0.023
	(0.020)	(0.026)	(0.016)	(0.015)
	[0.051]	[0.064]	[0.095]	[0.155]
Company controls				
Foreigners employed the year before	0.168	0.201	0.159	0.125
	(0.024)	(0.044)	(0.019)	(0.027)
	[0.000]	[0.001]	[0.000]	[0.001]
Number of branches in Asia	0.004	0.005	0.003	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
	[0.057]	[0.091]	[0.062]	[0.443]
Firm evaluation score before job fair	-0.653	-0.651	-0.654	-0.644
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.036)
	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]
Constant	1.598	1.896	2.169	1.990
	(0.433)	(0.419)	(0.467)	(0.446)
	[0.004]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.373	0.372	0.375	0.368
N	944	944	944	944

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, p values in square brackets. Controls include applicants' gender, nationality, university, major, GPA, living standard now and at age 15, English and Japanese language skills, perceptions of salaries and working hours at Japanese companies, type of industry of the firm.

Table 5

The effects of diversity projections on changes in company attractiveness perceptions, fixed-effects estimation

VARIABLES	Dependent variable: Difference in company evaluation scores by job seekers before versus after visiting the booth			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female, ratio	0.317			
	(0.127)			
	[0.013]			
Japanese, ratio		-0.368		
		(0.175)		
		[0.037]		
Formal attire, ratio			-0.487	
			(0.170)	
			[0.005]	
Senior, ratio				-0.060
				(0.146)
				[0.682]
Candidate fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.277	0.275	0.279	0.271
Observations	944	944	944	944
Number of id	171	171	171	171

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, p values in square brackets. Company controls include the type of industry, number of booth staff, number of foreigners employed the previous year, number of branches in Asia and firm evaluation score before visiting the booth.

Table 6

The effects of diversity projections on changes in company attractiveness perceptions for high person-organization fit individuals, fixed-effects estimation

VARIABLES	Dependent variable: Difference in company evaluation scores by prospective jo candidates before and after visiting the booth			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female, ratio	0.375			
	(0.144)			
	[0.010]			
Japanese, ratio		-0.456		
		(0.202)		
		[0.025]		
Formal attire, ratio			-0.571	
			(0.188)	
			[0.003]	
Senior, ratio				-0.091
				(0.167)
				[0.589]
Candidate fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.279	0.277	0.282	0.271
Observations	721	721	721	721
Number of id	165	165	165	165

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, p values in square brackets. Company controls include the type of industry, number of booth staff, number of foreigners employed the previous year, number of branches in Asia and firm evaluation score before visiting the booth.

Table 7

Optimal levels of heterogeneity

VARIABLES	Dependent variable: Difference in company evaluation scores by prospective jo candidates before and after visiting the booth			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female ratio	0.811			
	(0.398)			
	[0.043]			
Female ratio, square	-0.706			
	(0.513)			
	[0.171]			
Japanese ratio		0.739		
		(0.558)		
		[0.187]		
Japanese ratio, square		-0.868		
		(0.438)		
		[0.049]		
Formal attire ratio			0.910	
			(0.951)	
			[0.340]	
Formal, square			-1.104	
			(0.749)	
			[0.143]	
Senior ratio				-0.134
				(0.486)
				[0.783]
Senior, square				0.077
				(0.506)
				[0.880]
Candidate fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	944	944	944	944
R-squared	0.279	0.279	0.281	0.271
Number of id	171	171	171	171

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, p values in square brackets. Company controls include the type of industry, number of booth staff, number of foreigners employed the previous year, number of branches in Asia and firm evaluation score before visiting the booth.

APPENDIX A

Question 4 from the job seeker survey corresponding to Question 1 in the company survey was used to create the high P-O fit subsample. For job seeks the question was phrased: "Question 4. During your job search activities, (1) what do you think your strengths are? Choose up to THREE from the list below." For company representatives the question was phrased: "Question 1. What is YOUR company looking for in a foreign candidate? Please select UP TO THREE from the list below." The answer sheet is provided below.

		Example	Your answer
1	Human relationship skills (leadership, cooperativeness, etc.)		
2	Self-control skills (stress tolerance, persistence, etc.)	✓	
3	Problem detection and solving skills		
4	Logical thinking skills		
5	Expert knowledge/ skills		
6	Desire to succeed		
7	Confidence	✓	
8	Name of college/ university		
9	Major in college/ university		
10	Lived overseas, studied overseas		
11	Japanese Language skills		
12	English Language skills		
13	Work experience (business experience, internships, etc.)		
14	IT skills (programming, network expertise, etc.)		
15	Occupational qualification	✓	
16	Other ( )		

APPENDIX B

Question 16 from the job seeker survey was used to create the dependent variable (firm evaluation score after attending the booth minus the score before attending the booth). The question was phrased: "Please evaluate the participating companies on the following three: (1) Did you visit the booth? (2) Did you have an interview? (3), (4) What was your impression of each company BEFORE and AFTER today's fair? (1=worst, 5=best)".