

EVERY YEAR companies spend large sums of money to bring job candidates into offices and factories for mutual evaluations. These site visits can account for a large part of an organization's recruitment budget because of the costs associated with the candidates' transportation, lodging, meals, and entertainment, plus the time lost by employees involved in the interviewing process.

But the value of the site visit can outweigh this cost factor. The visit can be of critical importance to both the organization and the candidate as it allows them to acquire new information about each other. During this stage of the hiring process, an applicant usually meets with a wide range of company representatives, such as his/her potential supervisor, co-workers, top executives, and human resource professionals. The candidate can also experience and evaluate the quality of the travel plans, accommodations, and professionalism of the trip's organization, all of which may ultimately have an influence on the decision to accept or reject a job offer. Finally, the site visit can give the applicant a chance to see and evaluate the community and the factory or office building in which he/she would be located.

Information gained during the visit enables both sides to assess the "fit" of the candidate with the job, organization, potential co-workers, and community. This new information helps

How does the way a site visit is organized and run influence a candidate?

According to this study, the influence—positive or negative—can be strong enough to pay attention to.

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the applicant evaluate the attractiveness of the job and the organization, and the potential of receiving a job offer. It may also influence the applicant's likelihood of accepting a job if offered one. Most research on attracting applicants has tended to focus on the early recruitment experiences of the applicant (such as the campus interview) and has ignored the influence of the site visit. Hence, little is known about how or how well the site visit enhances or assists an organization's attempts to attract an applicant. The goal of this study was to determine if experiences and information obtained from site visits cause any changes in job seekers' perceptions of the visited companies, attitudes toward those firms, and intentions to accept jobs that may be offered.

Data Collection and Analysis

The authors followed 62 master's of business administration students (M.B.A.s) throughout their eight-month job search (from October to May 1992), which involved a total of 97 site visits. Our sample represented 50 percent of that year's graduating class at Purdue University. Participants filled out a questionnaire before and after each site visit, the information covering a number of aspects concerning these visits:

- The attractiveness of the job in respect to 20 attributes.
- The amount of information they had on each attribute.
- Where they received their information.
- Overall evaluations of the organization and position.
- The likelihood of receiving an offer.

Job Candidates' Views of



- The likelihood of accepting an offer.

In addition, participants answered a series of questions about what occurred on the site visit, such as whom they spoke with, how long they spoke with them, what they learned, and so on. Also, in an open-ended comment section, applicants were asked to share what they viewed as the most positive and negative aspects of their visits.

Study Results

How is the typical site visit conducted?

A majority of the site visits (58 percent) were set up within three to four weeks of the initial campus interview. In 84 percent of the cases, site visits were set up over the phone some time after that interview. There was an equal percentage of companies (41.5

vs. 45.7) that paid applicant expenses for the trip in advance and that required applicants to wait for reimbursement. In only 12.8 percent of the cases did applicants receive reimbursement during the visit. Among those applicants who had to wait, 68.2 percent received their reimbursement checks within three weeks. Some had to wait longer than six weeks.

The majority of trips (93.7 percent) lasted one or two days. The night before the site visit, most candidates stayed over in a hotel (78 percent). Only a small number received a schedule before the interviews (28 percent), had information waiting for them at the hotels (9 percent), or were taken out to dinner prior to the first day (24 percent). In only 2 percent of the trips were applicants picked up at the airport. Applicants saw the place they would be working during 62.4 percent of the trips, and met:

- Their potential supervisors—45.5 percent of the trips.
- Someone in a similar job to the one interviewed for—68.3 percent.
- At least one co-worker—70.3 percent.
- At least one person above their potential supervisor—75.2 percent.

There was an average number of 4.67 interviews per site visit, with the average interview lasting approximately 50 minutes. In only 8.9 percent of the trips did applicants experience delays between interviews of more than one-half hour. On average, candidates spent approximately 2 hours, 45 minutes with potential supervisors; 2 hours, 20 minutes with potential peers; 2 hours with human resources staff; and 10 minutes completing paperwork. However, there was substantial variability in the reported times.

continued

Site Visits

Candidates rated the companies "good" or "outstanding" on the following aspects of the trips:

- Quality of travel—48.3 percent of the trips.
- Quality of hotel—75.6 percent.
- Quality of meals—59.6 percent.
- Interview schedule—63.9 percent.



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- Treatment in interviews—75.8 percent.
- Effort to show working location—60.2 percent.
- Effort to show potential community—27.6 percent.
- Willingness to help with relocation—37.9 percent.

What attributes do applicants learn most about during the site visit? Who are the most important sources of information for those attributes?

The amount of information known by the candidates increased significantly

because of the site visits. In fact, they reported the visits improved their knowledge on all 20 aspects of the job situation that are listed in Figure 1. Their information concerning co-workers, boss/management, and company policies, practices, and reputation show particularly large increases from before to after the visit.

These results indicate that the site visit is an important source of new information, filling in large gaps in the body of knowledge that is needed for

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Figure 1

The Influence of the Site Visit on the Amount of Information Candidates Knew About the Job

Job Attributes	Average Ratings		Percent of Candidates Changing Ratings (N=62)	
	Before Visit	After Visit	Up	Down
Type of Work	3.20	3.83	55.5	7.4
Significance of Work	3.28	3.87	59.2	9.3
Variety in Work	3.35	3.87	51.9	13.0
Autonomy and Responsibility	3.12	3.80	59.3	9.3
Change to Use Skills	3.54	3.85	42.6	13.0
Challenge of Work	3.54	4.00	37.0	9.3
Physical Work Environment	2.98	3.78	57.4	14.8
Compensation and Benefits	2.72	3.41	53.7	11.1
Job Security	2.96	3.52	44.4	5.6
Career Advancement Opportunities	3.19	3.70	50.0	18.5
Co-Workers	2.44	3.65	70.4	3.7
Boss/Management	2.63	3.75	68.5	3.7
Geographic Location	3.63	4.02	38.9	13.0
Size of Town, City, Community	3.57	3.96	46.3	14.8
Commute Time	3.04	3.67	50.0	11.1
Company Size	3.89	4.20	37.0	5.6
Company Policies/Practices/Reputation	3.35	4.07	57.4	3.7
Company's Financial Position	3.56	4.02	44.4	9.3
Industry	3.65	4.04	33.3	7.4
Lifestyle Possible Outside of Work	3.15	3.63	50.0	11.1

Ratings Key

- 1 = No information is known on this attribute.
- 2 = Some information, but inadequate to make job choice.
- 3 = Minimally adequate information to make job choice, but more information would be desirable.
- 4 = Adequate information needed to make a job choice; feel confident that all relevant information is known regarding this attribute.
- 5 = More than adequate information than needed to make a job choice was given or obtained.

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applicants to make their job-choice decisions. The two major sources of information on the job attributes during the site visit were reported to be the direct supervisor and co-workers (Figure 2). Applicant comments suggested that the supervisor was the source most relied upon for information concerning the job itself, career advancement, and the leadership style of top managers, while the co-workers' comments were most valued for "sensitive issues" concerning the lifestyles possible outside of work, commute time, job location, and information on co-workers.

Among other sources, the human resources departments were cited most frequently as providing information on compensation and benefits, company size, company policies, practices, and reputation, and job security. The media (e.g., television reports and newspapers) was cited as providing information primarily on the industry, the company's financial position, company size, company policies, practices, and reputation, and aspects of the geographic location and town.

Overall, the results indicate that other students and friends and family are only infrequently used as sources of information on the job attributes listed here.

Does the site visit influence the attractiveness of the job and organization?

Experiences on the site visit influenced both the applicants' overall ratings of the attractiveness of the job and the organization as well as their specific ratings of attributes. A substantial percentage of these students either increased or decreased their attractiveness ratings after the site visit and also changed their willingness to accept a job offer (Figure 3). For example, 28.6 percent of the applicants increased and 30.4 percent decreased their ratings of the overall attractiveness of the job, and 35.7 percent of them increased and 39.3 percent decreased their willing-

ness to accept a job offer after their site visit. The substantial volatility of ratings, both up and down, for many of the attributes, and the observed significant increases in attractiveness for some key attributes (e.g. variety in work, autonomy and responsibility, and compensation and benefits) provide substantial support for the belief that the



site visit serves a vital role in applicant attraction.

Does the site visit produce changes in the perceived likelihood of receiving a job offer?

After 76.8 percent of the site visits, 42.9 percent of the applicants changed their estimates up and 33.9 percent changed them down on the likelihood of a job offer. While some of the candidates reported receiving explicit feedback on their chances of employment, most candidates indicated that they used their perceptions of how they were treated and of the interviewers' behaviors during the site visit as indirect indicators of organizational interest. These estimates are important because they may affect an applicant's willingness to remain an active candidate.

What aspects of a site visit make a difference from the job seeker's perspective?

Candidate responses to qualitative questions revealed a number of interesting trends. Several factors appeared in response to the questions asking for the "most positive" and "most negative" parts of the site visit. Those frequently mentioned included the tour of the site and community, meeting with people, the interviews, and the organization and professionalism of the trip.

Site and Community Tour. In general, the job candidates liked seeing the actual workplace and the products produced by the company. They also appreciated being given a chance to view the larger community in which they might be living and to see the type of housing available. They reacted negatively to visits where a tour of the site or community was not included or where it was "rushed."

Meeting With People. The candidates felt that meeting with a variety of people was very valuable. They liked talking with their potential supervisor, with upper-level management, employees who would have responsibility for their career development, and those who gave them a good overall picture of the

company's culture and mission. Having an opportunity for informal conversation with their potential co-workers—and especially with those who were alumni from their school—was particularly valued. Candidates felt the best time to ask "sensitive" questions and get candid answers was when they were talking with these employees over lunches, dinners, or drinks. Failure to have meaningful contact with the people cited above was frequently noted in trips which received negative evaluations.

The Interviews. The candidates preferred their interviews to be very open and "low key" discussions. They wanted them to be of sufficient length to allow them to ask strategic questions about the company and to learn in detail about the job, organization, and career development and growth opportunities. They also valued candid apprais-

als of their potential jobs and of the corporate environment. Such interviews helped some job candidates realize that they would not fit into the organization. They saw this as a positive aspect of the site visit for themselves and the company because it saved themselves and the organization the time and energy of any further pursuit of the job.

Organization of the Trip. Applicants greatly appreciated well-organized, well-planned trips. They also appreciated being met at the airport or door of the company, and "nice" accommodations and meals. However, there were some organizational aspects that made negative impressions:

- No itinerary.
- A confusing interview schedule.
- Lack of time to rest before interviews.
- Hastily arranged or rushed interviews.
- Back-to-back interviews.
- Unprepared interviewers.
- Not being interviewed by the person who would be their supervisor.
- Being asked too many technical questions which put them "on the spot."
- Answering the same questions over and over again in different interviews.
- Poor travel arrangements or directions.
- Canceled meetings.
- Too much activity planned into the trip.

Practical Implications

This study suggests that one way organizations can improve recruitment success is to pay careful attention to how their site visits are conducted (see sidebar for a list of dos and don'ts). Our results indicate that the site visit does have an important impact on applicant attraction. Hence, organizations need to pay careful attention to the applicants' experiences and the information they receive during the site visits. Our results also suggest that there are specific things companies do that make good impressions on applicants. For example, people in our study often cited their meetings with potential co-workers as one of the most positive experiences of their visits. Job candi-


Figure 2

Job Attributes	Candidates Who Received Information About These Job Attributes From Each Source					Human Resources Department	Friends And Family
	Supervisors	Co-Workers	Other Students	The Media	(In Percent of Sample. N=62)		
Type of Work	74	74	12	2	24	2	
Significance of Work	73	82	9	1	22	2	
Variety in Work	65	73	11	3	2	2	
Autonomy/Responsibility	70	67	9	0	17	2	
Chance to Use Skills	64	67	9	2	20	2	
Challenge of Work	60	68	9	0	20	2	
Physical Work Environment	52	62	9	4	25	2	
Compensation and Benefits	31	27	15	2	53	2	
Job Security	42	42	10	7	31	2	
Career Advancement Opportunities	72	55	8	1	27	2	
Co-Workers	53	76	7	0	20	3	
Boss/Management	72	55	8	0	19	1	
Geographic Location	37	47	19	20	28	2	
Size of City/Community	29	45	13	21	23	2	
Commute Time	27	46	11	10	21	1	
Company Size	40	37	13	32	33	1	
Company Policies, Practices, & Reputation	43	43	16	30	42	6	
Company's Financial Position	39	29	10	43	24	4	
Industry	49	43	15	47	24	1	
Lifestyle Possible Outside of Work	30	56	13	10	22	4	

Figure 3

The Influence of the Site Visit on Attractiveness Of the Job					
Job Attributes	Average Ratings		Percent of Candidates Changing Ratings (N=62)		
	Before Visit	After Visit	Up	Down	
Type of Work	3.86	3.90	26	20	
Significance of Work	3.74	3.92	30	16	
Variety in Work	3.80	3.94	34	14	
Autonomy and Responsibility	3.70	3.78	46	12	
Change to Use Skills	3.92	3.94	32	24	
Challenge of Work	3.80	3.96	44	16	
Physical Work Environment	3.46	3.71	28	18	
Compensation and Benefits	3.35	3.37	34	14	
Job Security	3.32	3.47	40	10	
Career Advancement Opportunities	3.60	3.69	34	20	
Co-Workers	3.26	3.69	40	0	
Boss/Management	3.24	3.71	46	6	
Geographic Location	3.40	3.98	26	24	
Size of Town, City, Community	3.38	3.92	30	24	
Commute Time	3.28	3.62	22	20	
Company Size	3.50	4.20	26	14	
Company Policies, Practices, & Reputation	3.44	4.06	44	8	
Company's Financial Position	3.60	4.02	30	20	
Industry	3.58	4.06	24	22	
Lifestyle Possible Outside of Work	3.50	3.69	34	16	
Overall, How Attractive Is This Organization to You?	3.89	4.02	16	23.2	
Overall, How Attractive Is This Job to You? What Is the Likelihood That You Will Accept This Job if It Were Offered To You?	% Yes	65%	68%	35.7%	39.3%
What Is the Likelihood That You Would Accept This Offer if Every Organization You Have Interviewed With Offered You a Job?	% Yes	47%	50%	42.0%	35.5%

dates feel that co-workers are in a position to share the "real story" of what its like to work for the organization.

On the other hand, there are things that companies do or don't do that turn candidates off. Our study participants criticized some companies for being unorganized: Companies that did not offer specific job descriptions or that did not pay attention to the details of the trip left recruits feeling that the companies were disorganized overall. Also, a large percentage of the firms involved did not give applicants their interview schedules in advance as the candidates would have preferred. These in themselves may be small details, but they are important to candidates and should be viewed as important by companies, as well. With so much time and money invested in recruiting qualified individuals, companies should do everything they can to make candidates' site visits highlights in their search for careers. 

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Site Visit Dos and Don'ts



Dos

- ◆ Do make a point of letting the applicant meet potential co-workers and supervisors.
- ◆ Do give the applicant a job description of the job under consideration.
- ◆ Do give the applicant an interview schedule and itinerary prior to the day of the visit.
- ◆ Do give applicants some time to rest and collect their thoughts between interviews.
- ◆ Do prepare for interviews. Give interviewers the applicant's resume ahead of the interview and stress that they read it prior to the interview.
- ◆ Do give applicants information about the company's policies, practices, and reputation.
- ◆ Do show applicants the places they would work (if possible).
- ◆ Do give the applicant a tour of the community.
- ◆ Do take the applicant out for lunch or dinner so that there is time to talk and get to know each other informally.
- ◆ Do use the site visit as an important selling point for your company.

Don'ts

- ◆ Don't forget that co-workers are an important selling source.
- ◆ Don't assume that the applicant will know what the job entails upon arrival.
- ◆ Don't give applicants schedules that are unlikely to be kept.
- ◆ Don't schedule back-to-back interviews all day long.
- ◆ Don't conduct an interview without knowing important details about the candidate and the job.
- ◆ Don't put applicants "on the spot" by asking pointed technical questions unless you want to test them.
- ◆ Don't rush a tour of the site. Give the applicant a chance to get a feel for the job.
- ◆ Don't rush a tour of the community.
- ◆ Don't just focus on the job. Candidates want to hear about the people, the company, and the community.
- ◆ Don't cause a good candidate to turn you down because of "the little things."