An interpretative phenomenological analysis psychology essay

Organisations are struggling in the current competitive economic climate. Ensuring organizational survival may ultimately come down to attracting and recruiting skilled employees (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Terpstra (1994) identified recruitment as an essential strategy for organisations to prosper and survive in the global economy, suggesting the initial attraction and selection of candidates may be the most important foundation for organisational performance. As the realisation of the link between human-capital and financial growth is now a shared knowledge across sectors, the crucial importance an employee holds is broader acknowledged (Gardner, 2002). Recruitment is a fundamental organisational activity defining who will constitute the organisation (Turban & Cable, 2003). The difference between a mediocre and exceptional hire could mean momentous differences for organisational profit (Wicklund-Hansen & Weyergang-Nielsen, 2007). Thus the benefits of efficient and successful recruiting are increasingly recognized in research and literature (Barber, 1998; Billsberry, 2007; Breaugh, 2008).

Recognising the importance of employees, individually and as a whole, organisations are increasing their recruitment investments. Ralston & Brady (1994) modestly suggested the average cost of recruiting and selecting to be over $2000 per individual. Given such large amounts are spent, there is both an expectation and a demand for recruitment to be of organisational benefit. The study by Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007) addresses the need for adapting recruitment practices to up-and-coming graduates, soon to constitute the labour force of the 21st century. Research findings by Ryan, Sacco, McFarland and Kriska (2000) emphasize also the importance of recognising the individual applicant's choice in the recruitment process.

However, Ryan and Tippins (2004) argue there are still large gaps between research and practice in this area.

Recruitment in the current labour market

Recruitment takes place in a wider societal context and shifts in the labour market will subsequently affect recruitment activities. In tighter markets potential candidates are likely to be less critical of the process as they are in desperate need for a job (Cable & Judge, 1996). Contrary, in a flourishing economy where organisations are in demand of multiple hires, the on-going competition leads to a lack of high-quality candidates. Fernández-Aráoz, Groysberg and Nohria (2009) claim organisations will face challenges when recruiting to replace the plentiful baby boomers. Some business sectors are especially prone to this and hence compete for the best candidates, also known as the war for talent (Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002; Hiltrop; 1999).

In contrast to much of Europe, Norway is a country where the economy is boosting (Takla, 2012). With an unemployment rate of 2. 7% and increasing growth in the industry, Norway finds itself in a position where some occupations actually lack qualified workforce. Low unemployment rates will naturally increase competition for the best people (Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002), but in Norway this is also combined with a strong economy and growing companies. Recent figures from the Norwegian labour and welfare administration revealed a need for 16. 000 engineers in the imminent future (Kaspersen, 2012) The numbers are consistent with research predicting technical and engineering skills of particular shortage in the years to come (Dohm, 2000). Businesses in unrelenting demand of talent are consequently competing, all depending on qualified employers to survive (Tulgan, 2001).

How recruitment is managed should be of essential value especially for organisations in such a position. A recent survey showed that 92% of organisations within the oil- and gas sector in Norway were in demand for graduate engineers (Vartdal Riise, 2012). One of the largest technical universities in Norway plans to expand their capacity for engineers by several hundred (Amelie, 2012a). An emerging job market consisting of desperate organisations and cohorts of new graduates triggers the need for further insight into attraction and recruitment.

Defining recruitment

Recruitment literature stretches over a wide spectre, thus claiming necessity to clarify a definition for the thesis at hand. Also, it must be distinguished between the two organisational activities recruitment and selection, tightly linked and often occurring simultaneously. Recruitment can be viewed as the initial and sustained attraction of candidates, whereas selection is the process of selecting among potential employees (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). Research on recruitment has often been subject to critique of having a static view of a process that is rather quite dynamic (Barber, 1998). In response this thesis views recruitment as an on-going process consisting of several stages (Saks & Uggerslev, 2010) and will apply the following definition for recruitment: "(…) the actions organizations take to generate applicant pools, maintain viable applicants, and encourage desired candidates to join those organizations" (Dineen & Soltis, 2011, p. 43). This definition differs from Barber's (1998), critiqued for only focusing on attraction of candidates. Hence, it is desirable utilizing a definition that acknowledges the ultimate

outcome of recruitment, namely a candidate´s job offer acceptance (Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002).

Five dimensions of recruitment

As the area of recruitment research is versatile, Barber´s (1998) distinction between five dimensions of recruitment will be applied in the following paragraph. This serves as both a framework for organising a wide research area, as well as discussing previous work with its inevitable strengths and limitations. Clearly illustrated by these examples are how the dimensions are inextricably linked, underlining recruitment as dynamic and complex (Boswell, Roehling, LePine & Moynihan, 2003).

Context

Rynes (1991) highlights the obvious fact that recruitment occurs in a wider contextual setting. The economic climate, labour market, organisational size and business-sector are all potentially influencing factors (Rynes, 1991; Rynes, Heneman & Schwab, 1980; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987; Turban, Campion & Eyring, 1995). As the experience of recruitment inevitably will vary, it can be of value to have more specific recruitment research related to a given context (Derous & Schreurs, 2009). Moreover, the need to recognise context as a variable in concrete research is much needed, as a great deal of recruitment studies is done in experimental settings. For example, Rynes and Miller (1983) manipulated recruiter knowledge, recruiter affect, and job attributes to measure effects of recruiter influence. Goltz and Giannantonio (1995) manipulated recruiter friendliness in an experimental video-condition study. Both studies found recruitment activities to have an effect on candidates, confirming the contributing value of experimental studies in the

development of recruitment research (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005).

However, suggestions have been made that research designs using simulating job-applicants can lead to understated research claims (Rynes & Miller, 1983; Uggerslev, Fassina & Kraichy, 2012). Barber (1998) argues studies of experimental nature contribute to a simplification of the complexity the recruitment process holds. A simulated study does not necessarily capture the many variables and external occurrences that will influence a candidate in a real-world setting (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005). Studies utilizing real job seekers in an actual recruitment setting might validate the strength of previous findings, if holding true to contexts where influence of a recruitment process truly has consequences both for candidate and organisation. On the other hand, manipulating variables in recruitment activities would be ethically challenging (Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar, 2003). Therefore, studies done in a real-life setting must choose a method in line with strict ethical considerations.

Players

Naturally receiving most attention in recruitment research has been organisational representatives and candidates. Recognising both parties is the social process paradigm with a view of recruitment as a two-way, inter-subjective interaction (Herriot, 2002). This perspective has progressively earned respect as an alternative to the dominating psychometric paradigm by allowing for the candidate´s voice to be heard (Billsberry, 2007). The development towards a social process rather than a one-sided organisational

choice leads to interesting interactions between candidate and organisation in the current economic climate. A number of recent studies have attempted to determine the best strategy for attracting and convincing candidates to accept job offers in a competitive market (Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998; reference – possibly Boswell et al, if not finding any other more about a competitive market).

Extensively debated is whether recruiter characteristics and behaviour actually have an influence on candidates. Alderfer and McCord (1970) were among the first to explore the possible effect of recruiter characteristics; a continuing topic of interest as recruitment research has evolved. The meta-analysis by Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones (2005) concluded that recruiter behaviour such as being personable influenced candidate attraction to organisations. By applying signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to recruitment, research has demonstrated how candidates view recruiters in the recruitment process as signals of unknown organisational characteristics and attributes (Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998). Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart (1991) found recruiters to act as a symbol of interpersonal relations in the organisation, indicating candidates use recruiter behaviour as images of interpersonal work relations. Chapman and Webster (2006) later concluded recruiter influence appears more complex than anticipated.

However, Breaugh (2012) points out that less attention has been devoted to recruiter effects over the last few years. Also, a majority of recruiter-candidate interaction research is built on experimental designs, possibly ignoring effects from a real-life human interplay (reference). It is further

suggested that qualitative research could prove value beyond the majority of existing quantitative research (Breaugh, 2012).

Activities

Organisations facilitate recruitment activities such as campus career fairs, employment interviews and site visits to attract candidates (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Turban, Campion & Eyring, 1995). The review by Rynes, Heneman and Schwab (1980) and more recent research by Collins and Stevens (2002) both state that recruitment activities have the potential to influence candidates, possibly by signals of wider organisational attributes (Turban, 2001). However, there is still a need for a better understanding of how recruitment activities affect a candidate (Turban, 2001).

Breaugh (2008) highlights the site visit as a recruitment activity given undeservedly little attention. An exception is the study by Turban, Campion and Eyring (1995) extending preceding research by demonstrating just how influential the site visit can be on actual job acceptance decisions. Another interesting aspect of the site visit is the possibility to meet future colleagues beyond organisational representatives often sent from the human resource department. Consistent with the suggestion by Rynes and Miller (1983), Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart (1991) found that meetings with any given organisational representative is less influential than meeting someone from the same functional area as the candidate. The site visit typically consists of several activities and Turban, Campion & Eyring (1995) suggest future research continuing to investigate how applicants interpret and make meaning of attending one.

Saks and Uggerslev (2010) critiques existing research for an exaggerated focus on single activities. Consequentially some activities can come across as having a very small or large influence, possibly limited by research methodology. Those who ultimately accept a job offer will have been through a more extensive process, very likely consisting of several activities. Whereas initial stages are critical to determine candidate´s further pursuit, later stages have a profound effect on the final job acceptance decision. Recruitment activities do not occur in a vacuum. The overall experience of a recruitment process based on combined effects of activities must be acknowledged (Saks & Uggerslev, 2010).

Phases

Experimental studies often break the recruitment process down to smaller units for investigation. This approach ignores that going through a recruitment process is not likely to be experienced as single events with a separate effect on the candidate, but rather as a process consisting of phases (Boswell, Roehling, LePine and Moynihan, 2003). The early stages of recruitment have been suggested critical, because this can decide candidate's willingness to proceed with a given organisation. Critical contact theory addresses how applicants are influenced in their first meeting with organisational representatives (Ralston & Brady, 1994). Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart's (1991) study demonstrated the possible detrimental effects of a single interaction, showing a number of candidates actually chose to withdraw from recruitment based on a negative first impression.

Due to the stress job search can hold as well as anticipation of evaluation, it has been suggested job applicants enter the process with uncertainty as a

salient emotion (Proost, Derous, Schreurs, Hagtvet & De Witte, 2008; Rynes, 1991). Moreover, uncertainty is likely to persist as candidates are faced with consistently limited information (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Assessing levels of uncertainty is difficult in a simulated setting, unfortunately undermining a great deal of existing research (Breaugh, 1992, as cited in Barber & Roehling, 1993).

Studies have demonstrated that candidates weigh various information and organisational features differently throughout the recruitment process (Carless, 2005; Jaidi, Van Hooft & Arends, 2011). The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests peripheral processing is superior to central processing in the primary stages of a recruitment process (Larsen & Phillips, 2002). The former type of information processing typically leads to a focus on environmental cues rather than relevant job characteristics. Saks and Uggerslev's (2010) study on college students found that rather focusing on the effect of a single activity or stage, the total combination of the whole recruitment process should be considered. Contrary, it has been suggested that various stages of the recruitment process in itself does not significantly influence a candidate' final decision (Lawler, Kuleck, Rhode & Sorensen, 1975; Powell & Goulet, 1996). Findings from previous research thus prove conflicting; suggesting candidates may go through recruitment with or without a diverse range of perceptions, emotions and thoughts that influence their final decisions.

Outcome

For organisations to maximise utility, the ultimate end goal of a recruitment process is job offer acceptance from desirable candidates (Jackson & Schuler,

1990). Nevertheless, much research has often studied candidate´s reactions at a given point during the process. Attracting and maintaining candidates are obviously necessary requirements for a viable recruitment process. Yet, acknowledging the process' inherent dynamic nature combined with the fact that organisations attempt to actively influence a potential candidate; the effects of this influence must be assessed. The study by Aiman-Smith, Bauer and Cable (2001) revealed that different factors lead to job attraction and actual job pursuit. An extensive amount of research measures only candidate's attitudes, perceptions and impressions, rather than actual choice (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991). Many studies approach recruitment from the organisation's view, attempting to establish how an applicant can be persuaded to accept a job offer (Jaidi, Van Hooft & Arends, 2011; reference). Such studies operate with the implicit assumption of a candidate actually making a choice (Boswell et al., 2003). However there is less knowledge of how the candidate perceives this choice or decision-making. The perspective of a candidate who has been through a full recruitment experience with the result of accepting a job offer is less investigated and will inevitably provide knowledge of important aspects of recruitment (Saks & Uggerslev, 2010).

Graduates

A large part of an organisation's recruitment activities revolve around new graduates, of interest for the new skills and updated education they contribute with (Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998; Wayne & Casper, 2012). The recent years have witnessed changes in recruitment practices as competition for graduates tightens (Branine, 2008).

However, recruitment literature and research has often been criticised for overly emphasizing college graduates (Breaugh, 2008; Rynes, Heneman III & Schwab, 1980). Nevertheless, multiple interesting aspects serve justice to focusing on this particular group of job seekers. Career theory refers to the transition from student to employee as an important one, significantly affecting a person´s life (Super, 1980). Previous research has found inexperienced job seekers to be more likely influenced by recruitment practices (Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Larsen & Phillips, 2002). Walker, Field, Giles and Bernerth (2008) demonstrated how candidates' limited job experience and job search influenced their perception of recruitment activities. Seeking full-time employment for the very first time might be a particular meaningful event where one is exceptionally aware of recruitment practices because of their novelty.

Graduate recruitment is both voluminous in size and investments(Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). In addition, the study by Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007) suggested the coming workforce, generation Y (1977-1994) differs from previous generations. As organisations are increasingly acknowledging human capital as a competitive edge, the need for educated workforce is not likely to decrease. Liden and Parsons (1996) points out that educated candidates approach job-searching differently than candidates seeking lower level jobs, where the former is more discriminating in the process.

Collectively, this demonstrates new graduates as a sample of interest for further investigation. Rather than attempting to generalise across all job

seekers, clearly quite distinctive, this study recognises and appreciates graduates as a separate target group for research.

Aim and research question

In summary, Barber's dimensions call attention to recruitment research in the field, where context and realistic human interaction is acknowledged. There is a need to further investigate how recruitment activities and recruiter behaviour are elements of a whole recruitment experience leading to the ultimate outcome of a candidate's job offer acceptance. The current economic climate holds exciting times for new graduates. Indeed, Celani and Singh (2011) highlight the competitive benefit an organisation could gain from enhanced understandings of candidate´s reaction and appraisal of recruitment practices.

By acknowledging the individual as the organisations most valuable asset, an expectation follows to consider the individual´s perspective, also in recruitment. Breaugh (2012) highlighted the valuable in-depth insight to the candidate´s perspective from the previous qualitative work of Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart (1991) and Boswell, Roehling, LePine & Moynihan (2003). Based on a person-centric approach, Weiss & Rupp (2011) suggest the human subjective experience should guide more research. Insight from candidate's own words about recruitment experiences has been of inspiration (Billsberry, 2007). Therefore, the study employs a phenomenological approach to address the following research question:

How does a recent graduate experience the recruitment process?

A phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is concerned with exploring the richness of a real, concrete, daily-lived phenomenon (Finlay, 2009). The transition from graduating student to working professional has been proven a major one, additionally supported by life-stages theory and career theory (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Schein, 1978, Super; 1980). Billsberry (2007) argue job-related events such as obtaining or changing jobs are of significance, but they are also a natural experience in the inevitable progression of life. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an approach of exploration of a lived experience (Clarke, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is therefore suitable to explore how a new graduate experience a recruitment process. Something about why not other qualitative methods?

However, merely stating that a study is of phenomenological nature is not sufficient for methodological rigour. Adopting a philosophical stance underpinning the method of choice should be done to uphold methodological clarity (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). The transcendental phenomenology as described in the original work of Husserl request suspending all presuppositions of a phenomenon through bracketing (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This standpoint has been critiqued for not recognising the cognitive aspect of a human being situated in a contextual world (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher´s seminal role in identifying, defining and formulating research is consistent with Smith´s (2004) recommendation to avoid a superficial attempt of bracketing. The philosophical foundations underlying IPA is simply not compatible with

complete bracketing, as the interpretative component inevitably acknowledges the researcher´s role.

Heidegger advocates a hermeneutic phenomenology with interpretation at its core (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Utilizing a double hermeneutic acknowledges the dual role of the researcher, where one tries to make sense of the participants experience after the experience has been subject to sense making from the participant itself (Smith & Osborn, 2003 – double check book Uni). Rather than shallow bracketing, not adequate to its true form as proposed by Husserl, reflexive bracketing was done in resonance with Ahern´s recommendations (1999). As being reflexive involves more than having an awareness of one´s standpoint, but should be consciously exercised throughout the research process, a full reflexive account is given in section x. x (Finlay, 2002).

A main goal in phenomenology is being able to understand what a particular experience is like for someone else (Creswell, 2007). Rooted in the phenomenological approach is the recognition that an experience takes place in a specific context (Willig, 2009). The contextual setting of the study will subsequently be addressed in the following section.

Context

To advocate high-quality research, Stiles (1993) advise explicit awareness of the social and cultural context of the research (as cited in Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). IPA recognises that the individual is positioned in a context, inevitably influencing the individual sense-making process (Clarke, 2009). Furthermore, the aspect of context has often been overlooked in recruitment

research, pointed out by Rynes (1991) more than twenty years ago. Erhart and Zieger (2005) continuously emphasize researchers to render the environmental context where organisational recruitment takes place. Several authors have highlighted the important factor of the current labour market (Rynes, Heneman & Schwab, 1980; Turban, Campion & Eyring, 1995). In response and in the belief of context-depending findings, the following paragraph will give a brief description of the context where this study took place.

The region of Western Norway thrives on the oil business and a majority of workplaces originates within this sector (Boe Hornbug, 2012). Stavanger, one of the largest cities in the region is often referred to as the oil capital of Norway. Several large international oil companies base their Norwegian head offices in this part of the country. Due to constant development over the last years and a forecast of continuous growth there is a pressing need for qualified engineers.

The present study was conducted in an oil company employing 70. 000 across the world, whereby 2000 of these work in Norway (Taraldsen, 2012). A recent survey completed by engineering students from the largest University in the area demonstrated the company´s high status; the company was rated among the top five most popular employers (Hult, 2012). The company still emphasizes advertising their vacancies through the most popular job-search base in Norway. In general, job advertisements underline the company's attractiveness by emphasizing their abilities and position in the market. The adverts also encourage potential candidates to apply by embracing the uniqueness of each individual employee. During winter

2011/2012, the company carried out a recruitment process for their graduate programme, hiring 25 trainees after receiving several hundred applications.

On the basis of their recent recruitment experience, a number of the newly hired trainees were asked to participate in this study. Acknowledging the criticism of recruitment research´s large focus on graduate samples (Rynes, Orlitzky & Bretz, Jr., 1997), nevertheless this was seen as a factor adding to the interest of this study. The social, the cultural and the heavy media focus on the oil business sector may lead to both expectations and pressure for a new graduate. A survey of the labour market during spring 2012 demonstrated that 82% of engineer graduates already have a contract signed by completion of their education (Amelie, 2012b). Organisations are ambitious in their search for talented candidates and as a result initiate recruitment at early stages (Gjerde, 2012; Halvorsen & Ellingsen, 2011). While the offensive approach of competing organisations can contribute to an awareness of the attractiveness of engineers, it can simultaneously force feelings of pressure, rush and stress to the process of securing a job.

Method

Design
To explore new graduates experience of a recruitment process, a cross-sectional study of qualitative nature was conducted. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse semi-structured interviews.

Procedure
The researcher made contact with the organisation through a personal acquaintance in February 2012. Being aware of possible challenges in

regards to organisational access, the researcher took several steps to ensure a smooth process (Johl & Renganthan, 2010). Through mutual agreement between the researcher´s area of interest as well as the organisation´s need, a suitable sample for research was identified. The sample was chosen purposively to ensure all the participants had experienced the phenomena of interest, necessary to give insight into a particular perspective of the experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Striving for a homogeneous sample, sample criteria were set to be recent graduated engineers who through the process of obtaining their first job naturally had been through a recruitment process. It was established prior to commencement of research that participants had been exposed to various recruitment activities.

To increase credibility for the study the human resource senior manager of the organisation sent out the first informative e-mail, encouraging participation. This was also done to ensure the participants felt comfortable sharing their experience, given they were recently hired at the organisation. Further, the researcher established contact per e-mail with the individual with thorough information (Appendix X: Information sheet). E-mail contact is considered efficient for both parties in establishing contact and to make further arrangements for the interview (Seidman, 2006). Given practical considerations and various start-dates, 14 individuals were contacted. As IPA is concerned with the quality and not the quantity of accounts, the researcher searched for a smaller sample as 3-6 participants is recommended (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However it was found useful to initially contact a larger number, being aware that some participants may withdraw (Seidman, 2006). All but one were initially positive, however

situational factors led to a final sample of 6 participants. The researcher found this sample to fulfil the requirement of both suitable size and saturation (Kvale, 2007).

Participants

The sample consisted of Norwegian citizens, 3 females and 3 males (6 in total) between the ages 22-28. All participants had experienced various recruitment processes, including a site visit arranged by the organisation prior to being hired. The participants were all recent graduated engineers with a BSc or an MSc degree within various fields of engineering. All participants had their education from Norwegian universities where recruitment activities arranged by several companies had taken place in various forms. All but one participant resided in the greater area of Stavanger. Fictitious names were given to each participant to ensure anonymity.

Interviews

Inviting to a rich, detailed and personal account of the individual´s experience, semi-structured interviews were chosen as method for this study. This is the preferred method for IPA as its flexibility allows for the experience of interest to lead the interview, rather than fitting it into pre-determined categories of a structured interview (Smith, 1995).

Two pilot interviews were conducted early in the process, as strongly advised by Seidman (2006). This familiarises the researcher with the complexities an interview may hold. Although not identical with the actual sample, the volunteers for pilot interviews were also recent graduates having undergone

recruitment processes in their search for jobs in the past year. Hence pilot interviews were useful to provide insight into possible important aspects of a recruitment experience and also led to changes in the interview structure such as fewer and less non-directive questions. The pilot was also seen as valuable training in interview technique, which according to Kvale (2007) is mastered through extensive practice.

The interview guide was developed after wide reading around the topic of interest as well as inspiration from the pilot. Advised by Smith, Flower and Larkin (2009) it was attempted to approach the area of interest sideways. Rather than asking direct questions, which may be leading the participant, the questions attempted to facilitate a discussion around the topic of interest. The interview commenced by the open-ended question " Could you tell me about how you got this job?" (Appendix X). For an open-mind in regards to the participant´s experience, open-ended questions were asked, allowing the participant´s answer to steer the direction of the interview (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Although having prepared possible follow-up questions, the researcher exercised flexibility throughout the interviews to fully be able to attend to the personal experience of the individual. Probes and prompts were used as suited. The interview session was rounded off asking each participant if they had anything further to add which had not been addressed in the interview, but that was seen as important in their recruitment experience (Kvale, 2007).

Interviews were held in the workplace during week 26 and 27 at the participant´s convenience. The researcher made sure to be allocated a room in sufficient distance from the participant´s department, to s