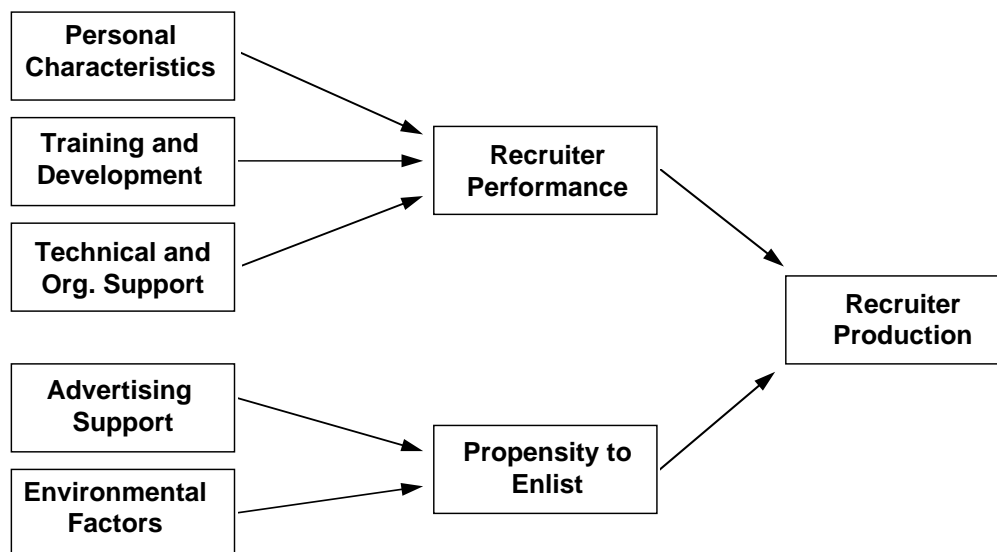


U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) Recruitment Research Program

Situation:

Recruitment of candidates to enlist in the Army has been a central issue to Army preparedness and fitness levels at all times since the formation of the U.S. Army over two hundred years ago. ARI maintains a research program in the area of recruitment in order to assist the Army in responding to changing demographics, elements of recruiter effectiveness, political circumstances in the US population, geopolitical challenges facing the US and its use of the armed forces, and changing conditions in US labor markets for likely recruits. PDRI has assisted ARI in this research program going back more than thirty years (see the first referenced technical report below). Recruiter effectiveness has been researched and modeled to be affected by the following causal factors.



The Department of the Army (DA) and the United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) must recruit approximately 115,000 highly qualified young people each year for the regular Army and the Army Reserve. A decade of economic growth and expansion, changes in educational aspirations among parents and their children, and negative perceptions of military life are only a few of the reasons why that has become an increasingly difficult task. To help them accomplish these goals, the DA and USAREC identifies and selects nearly 2,500 new recruiters each year from among their best soldiers. These recruiters receive extensive training and work extremely long hours in an increasingly difficult and stressful job. Despite their efforts, in recent years recruiting shortfalls have occurred.

To help address this problem, the U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) has been tasked with developing a screening tool to select Army field recruiters that will predict subsequent recruiter performance and production.

Personnel Decisions Research Institutes, Inc. (PDRI) was contracted to help with this project.

Over the last 25 years, PDRI has been involved in projects to develop behavioral rating scales for military recruiters in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps (e.g., Borman, Hough, & Dunnette, 1976; Borman, Toquam, & Rosse, 1978; Borman, Rosse, & Rose, 1982; Borman, Russell, & Skilling, 1986). The original effort to develop behavior-based rating scales for Army recruiters (Borman, Russell, & Skilling, 1986) resulted in eight performance categories: (1) Locating and Contacting Qualified Prospects; (2) Gaining and Maintaining Rapport; (3) Obtaining Information from Prospects and Determining Their Needs and Interests; (4) Sales Skills; (5) Establishing and Maintaining Good Relationships in the Community; (6) Providing Knowledgeable and Accurate Information About the Army; (7) Organizing Skills; and (8) Supporting Other Recruiters and USAREC.

Approach

In recent years, ARI has commissioned PDRI to update its core model of recruiter effectiveness, refine or develop the recruitment and selection tools as defined in PDRI's literature and recommendation research outlined below, and research the dimensions of station commander performance as it impacts recruiter effectiveness and recruitment production.

Results

The following suggestions are derived from our review of the selection processes and instruments employed by those organizations with positions similar to the Army recruiter job. Recognizing that some of the suggestions may require major policy changes that can only be instituted over time, we have divided them into those that could be introduced in the short term and those that will require longer-term interventions.

Short term recommendations

- Provide potential and novice recruiters with realistic job previews (RJPs) throughout the selection and training process (Pond et al., 1992). A variety of formats are possible including, for example, interviews with experienced recruiters, video, or through a web site.
- Include the applicant's spouse, significant other, or family in the RJP so they are aware of and understand the challenges of the job.
- Screen or evaluate potential recruiters for interpersonal skills (e.g., interviewing, active listening, etc.) through a structured interview (GAO, 1998). This could be combined with a RJP so that a single interview accomplishes both goals.

- Modify the Commanding Officers' Evaluation form(s) (currently used in the interview process) to a structured interview format with rating scales focused on the abilities and personal characteristics found to predict sales success. In addition, train these officers on how to conduct the interview and use the rating scales.
- Have an experienced recruiter interview every applicant. An experienced recruiter is the ideal interviewer; however, Career Counselors could serve in this role. Counselors are trained at the Recruiting and Retention School and are more familiar with the recruiter job than Battalion Commanders (Stephens, 2000).
- Train commanding officers in the personality, skills, and abilities needed for recruiting success so they can recommend applicants or encourage volunteers.
- Hire more contract recruiters (e.g., retired recruiters) in the short term to meet the immediate recruiting demands (Strickler, 2000).

Long term suggestions

- Develop and institute a comprehensive recruiter selection process to include the following steps:
 1. *Sourcing* – First, commanding officers in the field might be trained to evaluate the skills and abilities related to recruiting success, and to identify candidates who possess them. Second, existing recruiters might be rewarded for encouraging their friends or fellow soldiers to volunteer, provided the referral proves to be a successful recruiter.
 2. *Screening* – This could be some variation of the records screening the Army currently performs.
 3. *Realistic job preview (RJP)* – As discussed previously, recruiter applicants and trainees should be made aware of the positive and negative aspects of the role prior to accepting the challenge. RJPs should also be incorporated into the training process.
 4. *Interview* – Experienced recruiters should eventually conduct a structured interview for every recruiter candidate. In addition, recruiters should be trained to conduct these interviews and to make evaluations of candidates using rating scales targeted toward the abilities and personal characteristics important for success as a recruiter.
 5. *Assessment* – Recruiter candidates should be evaluated for the personality, skills, vocational interests, and abilities that predict recruiter success. Ultimately this testing might be conducted as part of a classification process, probably at the time of a soldier's first reenlistment. The test battery would be designed to predict not only Army recruiter success, but also effective performance in MOSs such as Drill Instructor, Military Police, and other alternative career paths soldiers might take at that point. Specifically, the test battery should be developed to be relevant to all of

these MOSs, and predicted performance or potential-for-success scores should be generated for each of these MOSs based on their responses to the test battery.

An appealing feature of administering the battery routinely at this point in a soldier's career is that there is very little likelihood of a respondent's faking or slanting his/her answers to appear to be an ideal candidate for recruiting (or any of the other MOSs being targeted). Thus, the test battery would not be billed as a recruiter selection test, a Drill Instructor selection test, etc., but as a diagnostic test to help provide guidance in the soldier's choice of a future career path. Results of the test battery could be used to do just that, encourage soldiers to volunteer for recruiting (or any of the other alternative MOS) if their potential performance scores warranted it.

The first step toward developing and validating such a battery is to conduct concurrent validation research targeted toward predicting recruiter job performance. In the next section we describe details of a proposed concurrent validity study intended to identify successful predictors of recruiter performance from several measures of personality, background, and related constructs.

6. *Job and environment design* – An attempt might be made to attenuate the negative aspects of the recruiter job (Pond, et al., 1992) and accentuate the positive characteristics. That is, USAREC might attempt to create a positive recruiting culture so more soldiers will want to volunteer for the job. For example, policy and procedure changes could be instituted that would reduce the time commitment per day, what are perceived as unrealistic production goals, the pressure to meet goals, the “make or break” effect of recruiting performance on the recruiter's career, and the “poor leadership in recruiting commands” that recruiters have specifically identified as some of the most pressing problems they face (Condon & Girard, 1998, p. ii).

PDRI continues its recruitment program of research along the lines outlined above, assisting ARI in improving the effectiveness of USAREC.

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