INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND E-RECRUITMENT PRACTICES OF DANISH ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Various types of digital HRM have become a daily practice in organizations throughout the world, affecting all aspects of people management in organizations. Among various HRM activities, recruitment is one of the HR functions that has changed dramatically, from traditional paper-based process to digital or electronic recruitment process, commonly referred to as e-recruitment. This transformation was well observed and reported particularly in North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific (e.g. Lee, 2005, Cappelli, 2001, Holm, 2012a, Parry and Tyson, 2008, Yoon Kin Tong, 2009). Most of the extant research finds efficiency goals and operational effectiveness, the race for a larger pool of candidates and quality of job applications, better service to candidates and clients, as the main rationale and drivers in the adoption of e-recruitment (Parry and Tyson, 2011, Furtmueller et al., 2011, Williamson et al., 2010, Parry and Tyson, 2008, Parry and Olivas-Luján, 2011, Girard and Fallery, 2010, Strohmeier and Kabst, 2009). However, as noticed by some authors, the rate, breadth and depth of adoption varies considerably across countries and regions (Strohmeier and Kabst, 2009) and can hardly be explained by the above arguments. Alternative explanations attribute idiosyncrasies to the environment external to organisations, emphasizing among other things the level of Internet penetration (Bartram, 2000). Nevertheless, the apparent connection between the environment and the choice of specific recruitment practices is still only vaguely explained and understood.

The purpose of this study is to fill some of this research gap. More specifically, the aim of the paper is to explore and discuss the rationale behind, and the origin of e-recruiting practices from a macro level organizational perspective. The overall question that has guided this research is how the external environment affects individual organizations in their choice and adoption of e-recruitment practices. For this purpose, the paper takes a theoretical starting point in new institutional theory and argues that the new institutional theory (Royston and Hinings, 1996, Scott et al., 2000) is a good theoretical starting point to study HRM in general, and hereunder HRM in context (Kostova and Roth, 2002, Kostova et al., 2008, Brewster, 2006, Paauw and Boselie, 2003). Among other things, it allows for an analysis of how broad social forces (ranging from explicit laws to implicit cultural understandings) affect, and are affected by, the actions of organizations (Orlikowski and Barley, 2001).

The research is based on interpretive methods and the data have been collected from a number of sources. Initially, I studied a substantial number of articles from professional journals, together with industry reports produced by leading professional organizations and consultancies. I then conducted 23 explorative interviews, recorded a number of professional presentations, and

made direct observations at job and HR fairs in Denmark. The data were collected from 2008-2013. The findings indicate that, in the Danish context, the adoption of e-recruitment practices was mainly due to the functional and social pressures of the wider society, attributed both to an increased use and availability of the Internet and related technologies and a change in the expectations of candidates. In the studied organizations, the changes were reflected in beliefs, norms, rules, and routines of recruitment professionals, which in turn affected their recruitment practices.

The paper makes a number of contributions. First, it represents research on HRM in context (Jackson and Schuler, 1995, Paauwe and Boselie, 2003) and addresses a distinct gap in staffing research at the macro level (Ployhart, 2006). Second, it provides a framework for further research of recruitment practices from the neoinstitutional perspective (Hinings et al., 2004, Scott, 2001). Third, the study analyses and discusses the origin and the rationalization behind the adoption of digital HRM – and more specifically – e-recruitment practices – from a macro organizational perspective – the approach highly advocated by the extant research contributions in the field (see e.g. Strohmeier, 2007, Bondarouk and Ruël, 2009).

The remainder of the paper is as follows. The next section contains conceptualization of recruitment practices, a review of the literature on the adoption of e-recruitment practices, and a brief introduction to the neoinstitutional perspective on organizations. I then explain why interpretive methods were chosen for the research, and give a more detailed description of the data sources and the choice of the qualitative techniques adopted for data collection and analysis. That is followed by the presentation of the adopted e-recruitment practices in studied organizations and the changes in the recruitment field, as well as their causes. I continue by discussing my results against other relevant research contributions and reflect on the new insight of the current study. The paper closes with a brief reflection of key limitations and implications that HR managers and recruitment professionals face, together with some avenues for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Personnel recruitment includes practices and activities carried out by an organization for the purpose of identifying, attracting, and influencing the job choices of competent candidates (Ployhart, 2006, Barber, 1998, p. 5). Recruitment can be handled internally by the organization's own personnel, externally by a professional provider of recruitment services, or both concurrently. The choice depends on the recruitment expertise, the supply of suitable candidates, the profession, job requirements such as expertise, skills, age, gender, the geographic location of

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the job, and other parameters. In this paper, I primarily focus on the external recruitment of candidates.

E-recruitment, also often defined as online, web-based or Internet recruitment, is an "umbrella" or composite term characterized by diverse properties and a broad range of practices, tools and processes related to recruiting (Heery and Noon, 2001). In this paper I follow the definition that e-recruitment is the organisation of recruitment process and activities, which, by means of technology and human agents, facilitate time and space independent collaboration and interaction in order to identify, attract, and influence competent candidates (Holm, 2012b, p. 91). In summary, e-recruitment covers the following digital HRM practices: advertising of employment opportunities on job databases, career portals, social networking sites, corporate websites and intranets, and other online resources; e-recruitment systems for application submission, tracking, screening and candidate management; résumé databases and search engines, etc. (for more detail see e.g. Holm, 2012b).

Adoption of e-recruitment

Research on the digitalization of recruitment practices provides various explanations of the reasons for adopting e-recruitment practices, most of which are of a rational nature, and can be perceived as a result of finding an optimal choice given the information available, i.e. bounded rationality (March, 1981), of how to maximize benefits and minimize the costs. One of the main drivers identified is the reduction of operating costs (Buckley et al., 2004, Cappelli, 2001, Ensher et al., 2002, Parry and Tyson, 2008), i.e. the efficiency imperative. As reported by Capelli (2001), estimates suggest that it costs only about one-twentieth as much to hire someone online as it does to hire that same person through want ads and other offline means. Maurer and Liu (2007) confirmed that observation and suggested that e-recruitment reduces hiring costs by about 87% as compared to traditional recruiting through newspapers and magazines. Another major reason is to generate a larger applicant pool and to select better candidates (Buckley et al., 2004, Lievens and Harris, 2003, Parry and Olivas-Luján, 2011, Parry and Tyson, 2008), i.e. an effectiveness imperative. Some research suggests that e-recruiting results in higher potential applicant yield and better candidates (Chapman and Webster, 2003). The third most mentioned reason is a better service to applicants (Buckley et al., 2004, Cappelli, 2001, Lievens and Harris, 2003, Parry and Tyson, 2008). On a more strategic level, e-recruitment can even help to form a desired image of the employing organization, which can potentially contribute to a better person-organization (P-O) fit (Chatman, 1991) already at the attraction phase of recruitment. That is because corporate career websites and other online resources allow organizations to place

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complex visual, auditory, and cognitive recruitment messages (Cober et al., 2003, Maurer and Liu, 2007). Moreover, Braddy, Meade, Michael, and Fleenor (2009) found that applicants would self-select and be attracted to organizations that have cultures consistent with their own values, beliefs, and preferences, and a career website which reflects well these cultures will attract individuals with favourable P–O fit.

However, adopting e-recruitment can also be a result of a less rational and more cognitive decision-making process due to the environment or pressures external to an organization, e.g. to stay competitive or appear modern (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In their study, Parry and Tyson (2008) found that that 50% of the interviewed senior HR or resourcing managers with responsibility for recruitment were encouraged to adopt e-recruitment by the need to "keep up with other organizations" or to "move with the times". In that respect, an important dimension in adoption is that any type of organization creating an effective recruiting strategy and tactics will require considerable understanding of the decision-making processes of potential applicants (Lievens and Chapman, 2010). This means that recruiters adjust their practices in accordance with their knowledge, beliefs, and expectations of the candidates, which leads to certain ways of rationalizing and justifying these practices and suggests that many factors and even forces external to organizations play a significant role here.

Research and practice find a number of environmental factors to have considerable influence on the adoption of e-recruitment practices. First, there seems to be a growing recognition of the impact of the Internet information and communication technologies (ICTs) on organizations' recruitment practices (Bartram, 2000, Lee, 2005, Ensher et al., 2002). Another significant factor is the ageing population and a decreasing pool of candidates, which has forced recruiters to engage in fierce competition for valuable human resources, often referred to as "war for talent" (Axelrod et al., 2001, Bodden et al., 2000, Elving et al., 2013). However, despite the reported trends and developments, the existing research just vaguely explains how exactly the external environment influences organizations in the adoption of various recruitment practices (Williamson and Cable, 2003), and e-recruitment practices in particular, though recognising that it can vary across borders, regions and cultures (Strohmeier and Kabst, 2009). One of the reasons may be that when macro forces are at play, they work through many layers of the organization, i.e. from the society to the individual, and the linkages between the macro and micro levels can be difficult to establish. The new institutional theory however helps to recognize and investigate those linkages and provides a framework for the analysis upon which I further elaborate on in the next section.

Neoinstitutional perspective

Neoinstitutional theory provides a suitable framework for the analysis of how forces external to organizations impact organizational practices, as it postulates that organizational outcomes are affected by the actions at the level of the institutional environment, and not by firm-level characteristics alone (Mezias, 1990, Beckert, 1999). A stream of HR-related research contributions employ new institutional theory for the analysis of how macro forces influence the adoption of various HR practices, though mainly in the MNC context (e.g. Kostova and Roth, 2002, Kostova et al., 2008, Björkman, 2006, Björkman et al., 2008). Examples directly relevant to digital HRM agenda are scarce. For example, Heikkilä (2013) investigates how institutional pressures affect western-based e-HRM practices in MNC subsidiaries in China, and Burbach and Royle (2013) investigate levels of e-HRM adoption in subsidiaries of a US multinational corporation. However, the point of departure in those studies is that some HR practices are being transferred from one country of origin of an MNC, to its subsidiaries elsewhere, while the MNC management enforces the adoption. Differently put, the pressures investigated in those studies is rather on adaptation of standardized HR practices than the initial adoption, which is the focus of this study.

A general assumption underpinning new institutionalism is that organizations are forced by various pressures to be consistent with collectively held beliefs, rules and norms of the external environment (Björkman et al., 2008), and that impact on the social behaviour is reflected in activities, relations, and resources (Scott, 2008). In line with Hinings, Greenwood, Reay and Suddaby (2004, p. 310), I distinguish between *regulative*, *functional* and *social pressures*, and attribute regulative pressures to changes in public laws and regulations, whereas functional pressures refer to changes in technology and markets, and social pressures refer to changes in the norms and beliefs of individuals. Regardless of their origin, nature or purpose, organizations are constantly influenced by their institutional context, which is made up of interacting agencies, such as professions and regulatory agencies (Hinings et al., 2004, p. 307), and rationalized myths, i.e. widespread social understandings that define what it means to be rational (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 3). Institutional context is thus based on rules, norms, and beliefs surrounding economic activity which define or enforce socially acceptable economic behaviour (Oliver, 1997). That is because this approach makes it possible to link the study of how individuals function within organizations to an examination of the way in which societal pressures shape organizations' actions (Scott, 1994).

Professional activities related to personnel recruitment are therefore likely to be affected by a number of regulative, normative, as well as cognitive rationalizations, such as laws, structures,

technology, education, reputation, career, etc. Such rationalizations are recognized to enable, and even require, participants to organize along prescribed lines (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The more-or-less taken for granted repetitive social behaviour gives "meaning to social exchange and thus enables self-reproducing social order" (Greenwood et al., 2008, pp. 4-5), and is conceptualized by neoinstitutional theorists as *institutions* (Scott, 2001). In relation to recruitment, institutions are embedded in such social norms like employment and job. Institutions are complex phenomena that interact and operate across multiple levels of analysis, i.e. from the world system to interpersonal interaction (Van de Ven and Hargrave, 2004, Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009). Scott (2001, p. 83) identifies six levels of institutional analysis: world system, society, organizational field, organizational population, organization and organizational subsystem. Organizational fields in particular are suited to the study of institutional processes (Scott, 2001, p. 43). An organizational field constitutes of a community of organizations that interact more frequently with each other than with actors outside the field (Scott, 1994, p. 208). Institutional fields are generally recognized as organizational entities which constitute a recognized area of institutional life, e.g. common industries and business sectors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) or professions (Scott, 2008, Paauw and Boselie, 2003). They may be complex in nature because they often involve a variety of constituents and associated interests and cultures (Scott, 2001).

In line with this definition, I have chosen to refer to the recruitment field as an organizational field, meaning a community of organizations involved in providing recruitment-related services, including identifying, attracting, finding, selecting, and acquiring human resources for external and internal parties. Using this field definition enables the inclusion of a range of organizations that are perceived to play a role in developing and maintaining the mechanisms and structures involved in the staffing activities of organizations and their service providers, e.g. technology providers, advertising partners, and professional associations. Although these organizations carry out different tasks, they can potentially influence the development of organizational processes at the field level. Figure 1 provides an illustration of how organizations are embedded in institutional context and influenced by institutional pressures.

Figure 1 about here

Belief systems and related practices guide and orient the behaviour of organizational field participants (Scott, 1994, p. 209, Scott, 2001, p. 139), and the nature of their assumptions may

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differ fundamentally from field to field (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Moreover, wider society-level systems shape and interpenetrate field-level systems in complex and changing ways, attempting not only to influence and control the behaviour of specific organizations but also to affect the structuration of the field itself (Dacin et al., 2002). Thus an apparent institutional change is also most likely to cause transformations in the field, which in turn may include changes in relations between existing organizations, the emergence of new populations, and changes in field boundaries (Scott et al., 2000, pp. 24-25). Furthermore, new actors may join the field and old ones leave, thus contributing to modifying the makeup of the field.

Hence, by identifying the changes in the recruitment practices, possible shifts in the demarcation of the field and the belief systems of the recruitment field participants, it is possible to determine whether an institutional change 1) has taken place, and 2) has affected the adoption of e-recruitment practices of organizations in the recruitment field.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Institutional theory favours the use of pluralistic research methods, since organizations can be deeply embedded in an institutional context in a variety of ways (Scott, 2001, p. 82). Some consider interpretive methods to be particularly suitable for studying institutional change, since they focus on the ways in which institutions are experienced by actors, and on the rationalizations and meanings which the actors apply to institutionalized practices (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009, p. 181). If we assume that institutional change is invariably accompanied by shifts in meanings, understandings and values, then we can study it through the views and interpretations of individuals. In addition, by studying the everyday activities that constitute practice, it is possible to examine how actors interact, construct, and draw upon physical and social features of the context (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009, p. 288).

Therefore, the empirical part of this research is based on interpretative methods involving qualitative data collection techniques. Table 1 outlines the framework I used for the institutional analysis of the recruitment field. Here, the organizational field is considered to be a relational space, where organizations and individuals engage one another in an effort to develop collective understandings regarding matters that have consequences for field-level activities (Wooten and Hoffman, 2008, p. 138).

Table 1 about here

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Applying interpretive methods in an institutional analysis is not entirely without problems, however, since they are biased towards the insights of individuals who might lack a reflective capacity to recognize the change in their normative behaviour and the power of institutions in taken-for-granted beliefs and logics of action (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009, p. 183). Here, therefore, individuals are treated as agents who evolve and produce effects in the field, and so their knowledge represents particular points of view of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 107).

As also suggested by Lounsbury (2008), I found it useful to study several organizations within the field in order to capture enough detail and to be able to connect intra-organizational processes to the field level. The organizations included in this study were selected to reflect both maximum variation in the field (Patton, 2002) in terms of actors in the field, different functions and tasks, and differences in size, form of ownership, primary activities, and goals, and also because they were recognized as actors in the recruitment field by other actors. All the interviewed organizations carried out one or more functional tasks relevant to recruitment practices, e.g. job advertising, candidate searches, candidate coaching, outplacement, provision of supporting technology, etc., as well as playing a distinct role in the field, such as professional associations and regulation authorities. Interviews were conducted with individuals in relevant management positions (HR managers and other recruitment professionals) who were involved in recruitment practices, either directly or through the organization's customers. The list of interviewed organizations is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

The data stem from a number of different sources. The primary data were gathered from 23 exploratory interviews, field visits, recruitment seminars, organized by private and public providers of recruitment and other HR services, and job fairs organized by professional associations. The interviewing continued up to the point of saturation (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, pp. 145-146), where no additional concepts and insights emerged from the data. Also a number of professional presentations from these field visits were recorded, transcribed and analysed alongside the interviews, which provided valuable additional information. For additional detail and insights, I also studied corporate websites, organizations' brochures and newsletters, and a number of industry reports produced by reputable industrial organizations. The data were collected between 2008 and 2013.

All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analysed using QSR NVivo software for qualitative data analysis. According to the NVivo statistics, the transcribed interviews amounted to around 180,000 words, roughly corresponding to 580 pages of text. I used an inductive approach to identify the concepts of the institutional context as they were perceived by the informants. First, I coded data to a number of general codes related to the institutional field logics dimensions: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive to reduce the data to the relevant and workable chunks of information (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following the framework for institutional analysis presented in Table 1, I was then looking for instances representing rules, roles and norms, and meaning systems embedded in and carried by the various recruitment related aspects of organizational life, such as professional norms, organizational structure, recruitment function, strategies and tactics, etc. Those were coded following open coding procedures (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) with no preliminary codes, which led to the delineation of a number of sub-categories. Some of these sub-categories were further broken down into extra sub-categories to capture an additional level of detail. I continued the analysis by means of axial coding, through which I was able to relate concepts of the institutional pressures and the recruitment practices to each other (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 195). What I was looking for were respondents' explanations of which external pressures made them consider and introduce certain practices. I then proceeded with pattern coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 69) by grouping these explanations into sets of data, which were generalized to represent certain areas of economic and social life, e.g. "candidates / expectations of employment", "candidates / generation Y", "economy/ crisis", "economy / tax system", "economy / labour markets", etc. These were then grouped into three major themes, corresponding to regulative, functional and social pressures.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the rich data collected over five years revealed many insights into the recruitment practices and the recruitment field in Denmark. Below I present some findings related to the adoption of recruitment practices in general and then give a more detailed account of the e-recruitment adoption. The findings are then summarised to illustrate how external forces affect the decision to adopt various e-recruitment practices.

Changes in the recruitment field structure, actors and boundaries

By observing the participation of various actors at professional recruitment related events, job and HR fairs, as well as through our in-depth interviews, I identified groups of actors who play a

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distinct role in the recruitment field in Denmark, and who were sometimes both partners and competitors at the same time. More importantly, over the period of 2000-2010 the field underwent a process of transformation, with new actors entering the field and securing a powerful position, while old ones were either forced to leave it completely or give up their power and become marginalized players.

These changes were most noticeable in the case of Internet job intermediaries, such as Internet job databases, job portals, and most recently social network sites, and the traditional mass media, i.e. printed newspapers, popular and industry magazines. Internet job intermediaries joined the field roughly at the end of the 1990s, and quickly became powerful actors. Within a decade they had captured the job advertising market and completely outperformed printed and other mass media. At the time of this study, job advertising was concentrated in the three biggest Danish Internet job portals, who together generated over 3.5 million unique visits and 18.6 million page displays per month[1]. According to an estimate by Danske Research[2] in 2013, around 50% of all vacancies in Denmark were advertised on the Internet. Danish Internet job intermediaries also accumulated vast amounts of information on individual applicants by encouraging their website visitors to post a CV and other documents online.

The analysis showed that Internet job intermediaries managed to establish long-term cooperation agreements with larger organizations and professional recruiters, which in some cases also included automatic data exchange, e.g. instant submission of new job ads and access to vast online CV databases. As mentioned by a respondent from Job Portal, a few Internet-based intermediaries also began to offer traditional recruitment services for their clients, although to a limited extent in order to avoid direct competition with their clients from recruitment agencies.

Recruitment technology providers, e.g. HR software developers and hosting service providers also entered the field, offering recruitment-supporting technologies and solutions, including e-recruitment systems, modules for existing enterprise resource planning systems, outsourcing HR and other services. This, together with the changes above, clearly points at the changes in the composition of the recruitment field and a transformation of the field's boundaries.

The study has also revealed that in many organisations, recruitment became a recognised and clearly defined function within or outside the general HRM domain of the organization. My informant from the Dairy Company observed the following:

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[1] http://www.fdim.dk/charts/site/?site=jobindex.dk+jobzonen.dk+ofir.dk

[2] http://www.jobindex.dk/cms/dansk/index.shtml

"I think that there has been an increased focus on recruitment as an independent discipline... It seems to me that we've got more of the attention, which I think the discipline deserves ... " (My translation).

Rationalisations behind the adoption of new recruitment practices

When it comes to the adoption of new recruitment practices, recruitment professionals in the study justified the adoption of new recruitment practices by their understanding of the expectations of potential candidates and their perceived degree of difficulty of attracting them. Differently put, the rationalizations behind the adoption were not of organizational nature, but were affected more by the factors external to organizations, i.e. the Danish labour market and the expectations of candidates. This observation was consistent across all types of organizations in the study, suggesting a shared logic of action by recruiters. Their shared beliefs and rationalizations centred on their perceptions concerning a number of issues that can be summarized as follows:

1. The *degree of difficulty in acquiring the human resources* needed, i.e. the amount of effort necessary to fill the position with suitable candidates;

2. The perceived *quality of applicants* and the importance to the company that candidates actually meet the job requirements advertised.

3. The *perceived hiring costs*, i.e. the costs of attracting qualified applicants and the amount of time required to carry out a recruitment process.

As far as e-recruitment practices are concerned, the respondents chose new practices in line with the general rationalisations, but the adoption of individual practices received varying explanations. The explanations relied largely on the perceived beliefs and employment behaviour of potential applicants.

Advertising of vacancies on job boards and portals

The interviewed recruiters were generally convinced that the majority of potential applicants were using Internet job databases and portals to search and browse through job vacancies. Or, as one respondent described it:

> "We first and foremost use the Internet. We have annual contracts with certain job portals, and here we place practically all the vacancies we have… It was different when I started in 2001… If I place a job ad in a newspaper now, I will receive maybe one to three applications, but if I had put a job ad in a newspaper in 2001, I would have received 200 applications" (Personnel Search Company, my translation).

Internet job boards and portals were also a much cheaper option for companies than the traditional printed advertising. However, in many cases, the practice was adopted as companies

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became more concerned with the quality of the acquired staff than the extra costs a good candidate may cost. Put another way, the effectiveness of the recruitment process was in some cases prioritized over its efficiency.

Use of corporate career website

With tens of thousands of new job ads appearing on the Internet each month, recruiting organizations have found it difficult to distinguish themselves from one another, which in turn has made it harder for them to secure a usable pool of applicants. As a consequence, digital communications have become crucial for many recruiters. In one of the visited companies, approximately half of their corporate website visitors visited their homepage to look for products and/or services, while the other half were potentially interested in applying for a job. According to a recruiter from the Banking Corporation, companies should have done more to market themselves to future candidates, among other things "servicing" them when they visited the firm's website.

Communication and interaction with applicants

Online communication with applicants during the recruitment process was also regarded as part of promoting a good image of the organization. Some respondents suggested recognising the need to treat candidates as well as the firm's own customers, since individuals judged organizations by the way they were treated. Regardless of an individual candidate's chance of getting the job, many of our respondents used sophisticated as well as simple communication tools for enhancing the image of their organizations.

During the field study, I also observed that a number of organizations had hired communication professionals to work together with recruitment teams; their responsibilities included managing corporate recruitment websites, organizing job fairs and other events, communicating with mass media, and even assuming responsibility for the employer-branding strategy. In one of the interviewed organizations, for example, the employer-brand manager was appointed to manage the recruitment function in general, and reported directly to the Corporate Vice-President for HR.

Use of social network sites

Several of the interviewed recruiters seemed to be convinced that job seekers had different reasons for applying for jobs in different organizations and regarded them as being less loyal employees than a decade ago. Some interviewees noted that many candidates who were registered as job seekers in various CV databases, at recruitment and search agencies, and

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professional social network sites were in fact just "passive" job seekers in a stable job and were not interested in most of the vacancies. Their primary objective was to keep themselves up-to-date with the labour market and the average salary level and potentially to get a job offer, which was considerably better than the one they already had. In addition, popular online social network sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, have become an important source of recruitment for some respondents, as they could find many suitable profiles for their candidate searches.

E-recruitment system for application submission and processing

For many recruiters, electronic application submissions and processing have become the preferred recruitment practice. Large organizations with persistent recruitment needs in particular seem to have invested in e-recruitment systems, which allow candidates to apply and submit their CVs and other documents online in real time, either through the corporate website or through a third-party internet resource. For such organizations, it has become an institutionalized practice for all candidates to apply electronically:

> "If we receive applications on paper, then we inform them [applicants] that they should do it through our electronic system. They receive a telephone call, an email or a letter, where we thank them for the application and kindly ask them to register themselves for the vacancy if they want to be considered for the position. We are very consistent here" (Beverages Company, my translation).

For many companies, administrating recruitment processes was also both a time-consuming and expensive process, and the digitization of application processing tasks helped both to reduce the administrative burden and the time and personnel required to process them. The respondent from Personnel Search Company shared her observation:

> "…our way of working has changed much. It becomes less administrative because in the past we had to sit and manage all the applications, while now we spend time on actively finding candidates." (My translation.)

Managers from small and medium sized organizations, however, appear to have other preferences. Since their recruitment needs are not as great, they are quite happy to use email for communicating with candidates and a spreadsheet for registration and tracking purposes. Although a designated e-recruitment system would have been preferred, it was often considered too expensive.

The implementation of an e-recruitment system was also perceived as a way to improve the effectiveness of the recruitment process and secure the best possible candidates for the organization. A respondent from the Banking Corporation explained the rationale for implementing a back office recruitment system at his organization:

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"…Sometimes we were missing good candidates because we were too slow to respond as they came along, and there was someone quicker to see them and take them. So there was a very practical thought behind it [e-recruitment system] - to streamline the process, making it quicker, easier, but also a great desire of managers to get a quicker and easier access to applications and candidates so they could advance the process." (My translation.)

External pressures for adoption of e-recruitment practices

The links between the adoption of various e-recruitment practices and various external pressures were analysed by building a causal explanation between the two main variables in the study, i.e. e-recruitment practices and institutional pressures. A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 3. The respondents' rationalisations behind the adoption were to a large extent related to such factors as the degree of the Internet penetration, the wide availability of the required HR digital technologies, applicants' online behaviour and preferences and to a lesser extent cost savings. Differently put, the reasons for the adoption of various e-recruitment practices by the companies in the study were mainly caused by the external environment and only partly by the internal, i.e. company-related rationalisations.   Moreover, respondents provided quite similar for explanations for the adoption, which did not differ considerably from organization to organization.

Insert Table 3 about here

According to the analysis, the functional and the social pressures of the wider society play the predominant role in e-recruitment adoption. Of the functional ones in Denmark, a high degree of Internet penetration, well-developed IT market, scarcity of qualified candidates, and competitive labour market are in play. The social pressures on companies are due to the institutionalised practice of using the Internet for searching vacancies, conscious choice of employers by Danish applicants, a decreased degree of loyalty to existing employers and the popularity of online professional network sites. Regulative pressures play only a role and are only observed in play in public organizations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that recruitment in Denmark has become a much more distinct and recognised HR function than just a decade ago, and at some companies the status of recruiting is now equal to that of the human resource department. This is also in line with the observation

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from the USA by Cappelli (2001) who reported that recruitment receives a much higher degree of recognition. This clear professionalization and functional distinction reflects the fact that it is possible to draw recruitment field boundaries, identify the field's participants, and observe changes in the field. Differently put, in Denmark recruitment has become a distinct area of organizational life and an institutional field with its own field logics and boundaries.

At the same time, digitization and virtualization of the recruitment process in the studied organizations is strongly linked to a shift in the minds of individuals searching, finding and applying for jobs on the Internet, or as put by Cappelli (2001), the culture of how to get hired. This shift can be partly explained by the high degree of Internet penetration in Denmark, i.e. 90% according to the official statistics. However, the use of the Internet for job hunting is perhaps not so much a technical phenomenon as the outcome of a change in the social behaviour, norms, and beliefs of individuals (Scott, 2001). As underlined by a private provider of online recruitment services from the study, what was important for his business was not the number of broadband connections, but the number of potential applicants using it on a daily basis. Similar results were reported by Parry and Olivas-Lujan (2011), who found that the adoption of corporate career websites and job boards as e-recruiting practices was to a big extent due to the external compatibility to the adoption of this method by target job seekers and competitors, and the perception that the culture of the industry was online.

The fact that job hunting and acquisition takes place in the cyberspace points to institutional change, i.e. a change at the level of wider society and its norms. Changes to recruitment field logics, boundaries and power distribution (Scott, 1994), and transformations in relations among the field actors confirm the new institutional order. Among other things, Internet job intermediaries and their high power status have had a sizeable effect on the adoption of new economic behaviour by field actors or field logics. The power of the Internet job intermediaries seems to be reinforced by the steady growth in online traffic to their sites and the increasing number of their users. Thus, Internet job portals and social network sites can be viewed as powerful nodes to which recruiting organizations establish commercial and electronic links, i.e. institutionalized relationships with the other field actors. The changes in the recruitment field composition, boundaries and field logics provide additional explanations to why respondents did not explain the adoption of e-recruitment on e.g. declared company strategy and objectives, but rather on the practices that they considered rational in the field, i.e. rationalised myths (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 3).

The studied organizations adopted e-recruitment practices in a very similar way, though smaller organisations did not invest as much in the e-recruitment or other HR-related technology.

I found little evidence of extreme cases without a use of any type of e-recruiting in Denmark, as it was reported, e.g. in the UK by Parry and Olivas-Lujan (2011). If such cases exist, they can also be explained by looking at the recruitment field composition and structure. As postulated by the new institutional theory, new "rules of the game" accepted by most actors in the field may not adopted as quickly by peripheral actors, who might not have well-established ties to the powerful field actors (Hinings et al., 2004).

Through studying rationalizations and explanations of recruitment professionals, the research has established links between e-recruitment practices, environmental factors and the institutional pressures of the wider society. Functional pressures, stemming from changes in technologies and markets, and social ones, stemming from changes in the norms and beliefs of individuals (Hinings et al., 2004, p. 310) have contributed mostly to the adoption of e-recruitment practices. In particular, the high degree of the Internet penetration, new ICTs, and the competitive labour market are driving forces related to the functional pressures. The new social norm of using the Internet for job search, application and communication with potential employers, as well as decreased loyalty to existing employers and increased conciseness around employer-employee relationship are pushing employers and recruiters on the social dimension. The above makes it possible to conclude, that e-recruitment practices are most likely to be adopted in economies with a high degree Internet penetration, a competitive labour market, advanced employment relations, and a well-developed ICT sector. Moreover, certain e-recruitment practices like e.g. the use of professional social network sites will depend greatly on their degree of acceptance by the public. Differently put, functional pressures alone will not be substantial to force organizations to recruit electronically and the effect of the institutional pressures is synergetic – functional pressures coupled with social ones impact organizations to choose e-recruitment practices to cater for the labour market's desires and expectations.

Recruitment field as the level of analysis and the applied neoinstitutional framework for data analysis provided a good methodological construct for the explanation of how macro environment affects the adoption of recruitment practices. As a result, the study contributes to a better understanding of the conditions for drivers for adoption as well as suggests that it is not always up to companies to decide voluntarily of how to organize their activities, as they are forced by various environmental factors to act along certain prescribed lines. More specifically for e-recruitment, the study explains the interdependent relationship of the technical and the social spheres of the employer-employee relationship. Consequently, employers find themselves under pressure to excel both technically and communicatively when dealing with their

applicants, which might require a new set of skills and even new organization different from the paper-based recruitment process (see e.g. Holm 2012a, 2012b)   .

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The presented research is not without limitations and circumscribed to the national setting, i.e. Denmark, due to the acknowledgement that economic activities are embedded in wider social relations with beliefs and meaning systems, and operate in a specific context. Therefore, results of a similar study carried out in other economic, social, and cultural domains may vary considerably. On the other hand, the framework for the presented research framework can be applied elsewhere. It offers a novel approach to studying recruitment from a macro level organizational perspective of neoinstitutional theory, where recruitment as a profession and economic activity is treated as a distinct organisational field with its own boundaries and field logics.

Another possible approach to understanding the significance of contextual factors on the adoption of recruitment practices in general and e-recruitment in particular lies in studying the organizational environment at a higher, social level and in addressing among other things the impact of culture and language. This is an obvious and highly relevant topic for future research, which may help shed even more light on how recruitment practices are influenced by demands and expectation of a wider society. Additionally, new institutional theory can be employed to investigate how organizations respond to competitive pressures in their "war for talent". On a more general side, research in recruitment can also evaluate which e-recruitment practices secure the optimal pool of candidates and deliver the highest value under specific environmental conditions.

One of the implications for practice is that practitioners involved in recruitment might find themselves in the situation where they need to consider introducing certain e-recruitment practices for reasons other than reducing hiring costs, or securing a larger or better pool of applicants. In the economies similar to Denmark, applicants will anticipate potential employers master various forms of online communication, provide swift response to enquiries, and ensure time and space independent process of résumé and application submission. Moreover, they will expect to find the information about the hiring organization on its website. The quality and the amount of that information should be then substantial to form an opinion of the organization as employer. That implies that hiring organizations, regardless of their size and industry should make an effort and allocate resources for presenting themselves as a place to work and

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effectively communicate this online. That puts additional pressure on recruiting professionals to learn new skills of being effective job marketers as well as to master the arts of electronic communication. Moreover, HR executives may even find it necessary to reorganise the entire recruitment process and acquire different types of employees and information and communication technologies to handle it. Put it another way, new technological developments coupled with social innovations will require recruiters to organise along the lines prescribed by the potential applicants, the labour market and the society they operate in, and the success or failure of their hiring programmes depends greatly on how they well they are fit to their external environment.

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Figure 1. Institutional pressures

Organizations

Organizational Field

Society

Institutional Context

Functional pressures

Social pressures

Regulative pressures

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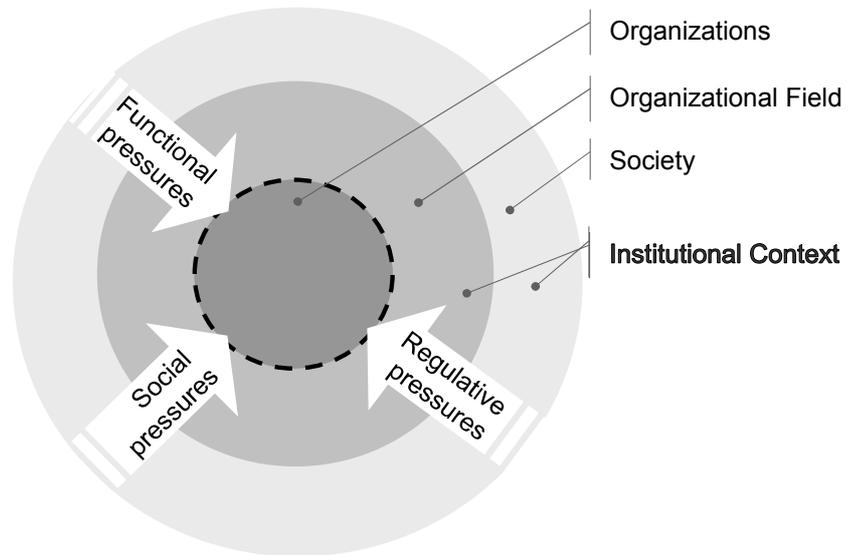
Table 1. Framework for institutional analysis of the recruitment field

Organizational field	Community of organizations and professionals involved in providing recruitment services, e.g. identifying, attracting, finding, selecting, and supporting the acquisition of human resources for external as well as internal parties.		
Organizational field actors	Recruiting organizations, technology providers, advertising partners, professional associations, and regulative bodies.		
Institutional field logics	**Regulative dimension**	**Normative dimension**	**Cultural-cognitive dimension**
	Rules	**Roles and norms**	**Meaning systems**
Embedded in and carried by:	Labour laws and acts, regulative acts, professional norms, organizational charters, declarations, code of conduct of professional associations, etc.	Organizational structure and recruitment function, organizational goals for staffing, recruitment strategies and tactics, recruitment practices and routines, ICTs supporting recruitment process, etc.	Common beliefs shared by individuals in the recruitment field and profession, shared logics of action by the recruitment field participants, professional identities, etc.

Table 2. Organizations and data sources

Organization type	Primary sector	Ownership	Employees	Interviews	Other data
Headhunting Company	Executive search, headhunting	Private	10	1	Website
Dairy Company	Dairy products and ingredients	Private	16,000	1	Websites, notes on observations
University School	Higher education	Public	700	2	Focus group interview
Employee Search Company	Personnel search, outplacement and temporary employment	Private	200	1	Website
Coaching Organization	Employment relations, coaching	Not-for-profit	10	1	Notes
Beverage Company	Soft drinks and breweries	Private	45,000	1	Presentation
Power Trading Company	Power trading	Private	70	1	Notes on observation
Internet Company	Internet applications and services	Private	30	1	2 presentations
E-recruitment Systems Provider	E-recruitment systems development and web-based hosting	Private	10	1	Brochures
HR Professional Association	Professional HR association	Not-for-profit	7	1	Brochures
HR Consulting Company	HR consulting and employee training	Private	10	1	Notes, brochures, participant observation
Job Portal	Job portal and personnel search	Private	100	1	Presentation, website, brochures, newsletters
Personnel Search Company	Personnel search	Private	25	1	Website
Banking Corporation	Investment and banking	Private	34,000	2	Website
HR Software Company	HR Information Systems	Private	n/a	1	Website
Information Systems Provider	Enterprise information systems	Private	50	1	Brochures
Danish Public Agency	Government Agency	Public	110	1	Website
Energy Systems Company	Energy systems	Private	20,000	2	Presentation, observations, brochures
Social Network Site	Professional social network site	Private	5000	2	Website, statistics

Table 3. E-recruitment practices and external pressures

E-recruitment practice	Common rationalisation behind the adoption	Examples from the interviews	Environmental factors at play	Environmental pressures for adoption
Advertising jobs on job portals	Most of potential applicants use Internet to find vacancies	"We [the job portal] grew up with the Internet … In the beginning we had only 100 users a day … All the job offers that came on line free - we gathered them. In the beginning we did not have any paying customers, and the first six months I did not even have anything to sell … So the problem in the beginning was that there were not very many who used the Internet." Job Portal "…It is simply required by the state that all positions must be advertised publicly, there is the requirement that it is done at the site called stillingeristaten.dk… We otherwise use a solid internet portal to advertise [jobs], and for special positions we use the N [i.e. a national daily] and a trade magazine." University School "… More and more people use job agents. It is typically our regular users… So, they do not need to visit our website, we just send [job] ads to them. We have acquired gradually 100,000, and the number is clearly increasing. It's also a little more advanced use of the Internet." Job Portal	Job seekers use Internet to search for a job, the employer-applicant relations moved to the cyberspace	Functional – high degree of Internet penetration Social – job search takes place on the Internet Regulative – in Denmark public organizations must advertise jobs online
Advertising jobs on corporate website	Potential candidates visit company website in search for vacancies and to get familiar with the organisation	"What we do is that our own website is the hub of it [i.e. recruitment], and that is where applicants have to go in order to find the link to send their online applications. There must visit our website to find it" Banking Corporation "We use the internet as much as possible. We use, of course, our own website, which is probably not very visited by graduates unless they know us in advance. But we also use Jobnet, and other job portals on the internet." Power	Job seekers use Internet and visit corporate career websites to learn about potential employers	Functional – high degree of Internet penetration Social – job search takes place on the Internet

Presentation of the company as a workplace on corporate career website, online employer branding	Job applicants are attracted to companies they consider good places to work	Trading Company	Candidates are concerned with the reputation of the potential employer and its employer value proposition	Functional – scarcity of qualified candidates, competitive labour market Social – employer of choice
		"Half of the people who are looking at their website are interested in applying for a job with them and the other half look after their ... products… But the employee portion is as important for NN on their website as the product part, and they have also done a great deal to tell about what it's like to work at NN." Job Portal		
Two-way communication with applicants	Job applicants must be treated as customers as they build an image of organizations also during and through the recruitment process	"When we post positions, especially with the latest trainee positions, we always put one or two testimonials from someone who has either been through traineeship or are in the process of it…, so there's an opinion from someone who has been through it or are 2/3 of the way, telling how they have experienced it, what they think about it …There is also contact information, of course." Banking Corporation "We have all sorts of content services with articles on job search, etc. … And we have just made a woman section, which we launched yesterday, where we have articles on women leaders and other stuff. We have a personality test, you can check your pay, we have a job game, all sorts of extra services that do not earn much money, but that attract users to the site. Job Portal	Candidates are concerned with the reputation of the potential employer and its employer value proposition	Functional – scarcity of qualified candidates Social – employer of choice
Use of social network sites for job advertising and employer branding	There are many registered users of social/professional network sites who are passive job seekers	"So if you are look at the social network's membership base in recruitment light, it reflects very well the labour market in its entirety, where approximately 20% are active job seekers… and approx. 80% are passive - that are people who have jobs… who might be interested in switching if the right offer comes" Social Network Site "But we do not use some of the new media, facebook.com or myspace.com, and also not secondlife.com. We have taken a strategic decision, to the media who are active in	Potential candidates use professional and social network sites to present and promote their profiles partly to be approached by potential employers, i.e. self-branding online	Functional – high degree of Internet penetration, Web 2.0. Social – decreased loyalty to existing employers; wide-spread us of online professional network sites

		social media, we will not be breaking the private sphere. Both as a risk prevention from our own side, but also because it is morally or ethically so it's a bit of partisan way to get out to the applicants. The applicants are there to chat and to build their social network, they are not out there to create a business network. On the contrary, we use media like linkedin.com for recruitment purposes, as it is a business network." Energy Systems Company	Wide availability of various recruitment technologies. Applicants use Internet to submit their applications. Workforce mobility. Many HR technology vendors with technological solutions.	Functional – high degree of Internet penetration; well-developed IT market Social – interaction and communication with potential employers is in cyberspace.
Acquisition and deployment of e-recruitment systems	It reduces administrative burden. Managers can react quicker to good applicants. Applicants can submit their papers online. Time and place independent, can be accessed from anywhere anytime.	"Therefore, it [i.e. the recruitment system] should be so that the applicant fills in the things we need that will stay in the system. And [suitable] systems exist on the market, and we have started looking for a system. … Those are standard systems, and I think that that can easily use standard systems in relation to recruitment." University School "We do not know how our e-recruitment will be… However, we would very much like to be able to see the job posted on our website and applicants apply it directly from the same website. It is also why we need to have a system - it should be as easy as possible for the applicant and to seek the job. If it becomes too cumbersome, then they will not bother" Personalestyrelsen		