

early recruitment activities such as advertising or generating publicity about the organization.²⁹

Targeted Message. One way to improve upon matching people with jobs is to target the recruitment message to a particular audience. Different audiences may be looking for different rewards from an employer. This would appear to be especially true of special applicant populations, such as teenagers, older workers, welfare recipients, people with disabilities, homeless individuals, veterans, and displaced homemakers, all of whom may have special needs. Older workers, for example, may be looking for employers that can meet their financial needs (e.g., supplemental Social Security), security needs (e.g., retraining), and social needs (e.g., place to interact with people). College students appear to be attracted to organizations that provide rewards and promotions on the basis of individual rather than group performance. Also, most college students prefer to receive pay in the form of a salary rather than in the form of incentives.³⁰ Unlike the branded recruiting message, where the focus is on the organization and what it offers, the targeted message focuses on the potential applicant and his or her individual preferences and how the organization can match those preferences.

Choice of Messages

The different types of messages—realistic, branded, and targeted—are not likely to be equally effective under the same conditions. Which message to convey depends on the labor market, vacancy characteristics, and applicant characteristics.

The three types of messages are summarized in Exhibit 5.6. If the labor market is tight and applicants are difficult to come by, realism may not be an effective message, because to the extent that applicants self-select out of the applicant pool, fewer are left for an employer to choose from. Hence, if the employment objective is simply to fill job slots in the short run and worry about turnover later, a realistic message will have counterproductive effects. Obviously, then, when applicants are abundant and turnover is an immediate problem, a realistic message is appropriate.

In a tight labor market, branded and targeted messages are likely to be more effective in attracting job applicants. Attraction is strengthened, as there are inducements in applying for a job. In addition, individual needs are more likely to be perceived as met by a prospective employer. Hence, the applicant is more motivated to apply to organizations with an attractive or targeted message than those without. During loose economic times when applicants are plentiful, the branded or targeted approaches may be more costly than necessary to attract an adequate supply of labor. Also, they may set up false expectations concerning what life will be like on the job, and thus lead to turnover.

Job applicants will know more about the characteristics of highly visible jobs versus those of less visible jobs. For example, service sector jobs, such as that of