



RECRUITERS' STRATEGIES FOR CANDIDATE ATTRACTION

A qualitative analysis on technical recruiters' individual strategies for attracting candidates at the first recruitment meeting in Turkey

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine recruiters' potential to play a role in candidate attraction, from the perspective of the recruiter, in the recruitment processes, by looking at recruiters' individual strategies at the first recruitment meeting.

Theory: In order to study the phenomenon as a performance of the recruiter, symbolic interactionism theory was utilized to approach social interactions in which candidates and technical recruiters meet for the first time for a job interview. Goffman's impression management theory contributed as a guideline to give insight into which type of strategies that recruiters employed through abductive approach.

Method: A qualitative research design was employed to examine the purpose of this study, on 5 observations and 10 semi-structured interviews. Respondents were in-house technical recruiters, who have 3-5 years of experience and working at small and medium size technology companies in Turkey.

Result: In order to appear more appealing to candidates, particular adjustments are done as a result of considering the first job interview as the performance of the recruiter. Different from the previous studies, this study offers a performative approach on recruitment, an abductive approach to data analysis, an insider perspective on HRM, and touching upon Turkey as a market that is unexplored.

Foreword

This thesis was written for my Master degree in Human Resource Management and Labor Relations at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The subject of this thesis is related to recruitment in Turkey. This is a very fascinating research topic as it is a blend of recruitment in SMEs and employer branding through investigating symbolic interactionism from Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective.

Despite the recent earthquake disaster in Turkey, I would like to express my gratitude to the respondents who participated in this study. They inspired me throughout the entire process while offering me perspectives from their own personal experiences in addition to helping me become better at doing research. I am really grateful to my supervisor (Senior lecturer Petra Adolfsson)-who has been guiding me every step of the way as we worked together without whom this would not have been possible- for her guidance, reviews and recommendations. At last, I would like to extend my gratitude to my family and friends because without their support, this thesis would not have been completed.

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1. Introduction

Due to today's rapidly changing business climate, firms must adapt to this environment to succeed while dealing with various challenges (Kumkale, 2016; Sołoducho-Pelc& Sulich, 2020). Organizations must provide some type of competitive advantage to meet these challenges, survive, and set themselves apart from their competitors (Haseeb, et. al., 2019; Liu& Yang, 2020). Because of its inimitable nature, human capital has been repeatedly found to be a valuable asset for a competitive advantage (Hatch& Dyer, 2004; Lawler, 2008; Hsu& Wang, 2012). When it comes to the human capital, as a competitive advantage, it is undeniable to pay attention to HR as a distinguishing feature of all sorts of organizations (Boxall& Steeneveld, 1999; Wright& McMahan, 2011; Hamadamin& Atan, 2019). It is clearly accepted that HR practices are strongly related to companies' competitive advantage (Elrehail, et. al., 2019), especially in relation to attracting and recruiting qualified candidates (Saks, 2017).

Since recruitment processes, which is the primary responsibility of HR, can be considered as the first step in developing a competitive advantage (Hamza et. al., 2021), the recruiter's impact on this process is the key, because development of businesses that aim to generate value through their human capital can be considered as the role of the recruiter (D'Alleo, 2011). In addition to that, it will become more challenging for businesses to find qualified people (Carpenter, 2013). Specifically, when it comes to candidates that are working in a technology industry, as a result of a talent shortage, there is a war for talent that companies need to deal with in order to attract tech talents (Barslund, 2016; Martín-de Castro, et. al., 2020; El-Deeb, 2022). Therefore, it is important to examine recruitment as a two sided process, in which, both the employer's selection of the employee as well as the potential candidate's selection of the employer or the job. From a Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective, this two- sided nature of recruitment becomes an HR dilemma that requires to be explored when it comes to small to medium enterprises (SMEs) due to their financial challenges. Having this perspective in mind, it is also accepted that there should be successful recruitment strategies to be selected by candidates and win the tech talent war battle (Allen, 1997; Lockwood& Ansari, 1999; Allal-Chérif, et. al., 2021).

While the importance of winning the tech talent war is underlined from the business perspective, it is also key to mention attracting candidates from SMEs and HRM perspectives. Although it has

been underlined for decades that the importance of HR is (Gould-Williams, 2003; Schroeder, 2012; Betts, 2020), in practice, especially in recruitment, what is done on an individual level and within perspective is not presented. Moreover, in Turkey, which is a country where rich results can be obtained, there is a lack of study on this subject. The practical and academic gap of current recruiter's impact on the candidate attraction is planned to be filled with this research, which provides within perspective to the HRM field. Furthermore, the theoretical gap while investigating the recruitment is planned to be filled through symbolic interactionism theory.

Despite the fact that the success of businesses is dependent on the employees (Dineen & Soltis, 2011), understanding recruitment procedures from various angles is relevant for both practical application and empirical research. As the topic of candidate attraction historically seen as a businesses' employer branding activity (Srivastava& Bhatnagar, 2010; Mandhanya& Shah, 2010; Wilska, 2014), having a critical perspective to this classification and considering recruiters' activities as a part of performing employer branding, since potential employees' first contacts are mostly recruiters, is practically and academically inspiring.

1.1. Problem statement

It is crucial to attract candidates, and in relation to that candidate attraction is regularly mentioned in extensive marketing research as a component of effective employer branding activities (Mandhanya& Shah, 2010; Figurska& Matuska, 2013; Mičik& Mičudová, 2018), there is, however, a lack of information regarding the individual strategies to attract candidates in the early recruitment processes and different perspectives on recruitment. Furthermore, recruiting technology talents is challenging since there is a tech talent war (Madding et. al., 2020) and lack of attraction due to the economic challenges that SMEs have, thus, understanding how technical recruiters individually contribute to the recruitment is relevant and important for the literature and HR practices. Therefore, it is interesting to further explore from a technical recruiter's view, which provides an insider standpoint to the HR field through a performative perspective.

1.2. Research questions

Considering SMEs' poor financial situation and lack of HR research in Turkey, this study aims to investigate the initial meeting as technical recruiters' performance to identify the distinctive strategies these individuals have created for candidate attraction by asking;

- *How is the first job interview meeting evaluated as employer branding performance?*

- *How is candidate attraction performed by technical recruiters in the first contact with the candidate?*

These two research questions will be investigated through qualitative research design, with the in-house technical recruiters at technology based SMEs located in Turkey, that focus on individual strategies through a performative perspective. In total 9 different SMEs, 15 recruiters observed and interviewed had to have 3-5 years of experience.

2. Previous Research

The focus of the chapter is to outline previous research on recruitment, candidate attraction and SMEs. First, recruitment and recruiter's impact on the recruitment processes are addressed. Second, research on the candidate attraction and its relation to HR are discussed. Thirdly, the earlier studies on the concept of SME and its relation to HR and recruitment are reviewed.

2.1. Recruitment

In today's work environment, human capital is likely the most valued and important asset in any company, and it greatly enhances all other assets in an organization (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Human resources (HR) function and HR practices are present in many different kinds of organizations, whether formally or informally (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). There are a few different categorizations of HR practices, traditionally HR function consists of different subcategories, which are recruitment, training, administration, payroll, and benefits (Kim & Jung Won, 2007). At this point, it is vital to describe recruitment and this study is benefiting from Klepic's definition of recruitment, which is a process of seeking out to source or attracting candidates it will ultimately select (2019). Moreover, the author emphasizes that the goal of recruitment strategies is to attract better candidates.

In the last few years specifically technology recruitment is a popular topic in the HR literature (Ahmed, et. al., 2014; Singh & Kamal, 2019; Prasad, et. al., 2019). As this paper is interested in technology recruitment, it is beneficial to share one of the IT definitions. Information technology (IT) is fundamentally the digital processing, storing, and sharing of various types of information (Rajani, et. al., 2016), and it is the automatic way of handling information provided by computing and telecommunications technologies. Based on this definition, IT consists of 2 main parts, which are hardware and software. Technology recruitment is an attractive topic for discussions, because there is a talent war in the industry, and organizations are competing with each other for attracting qualified candidates to win this battle (Barslund, 2016). Due to the shortage of qualified applicants and the high rate of mobility, hiring, training costs are expensive, the struggle with attracting IT talent continues (Dabirian et. al., 2019). From this point, recruitment can be seen as a two sided selection process, in which not only organizations select the candidates, but also the

candidates select the organization. Defining recruitment as inherently two-way selection process and acknowledging that there is no one ideal approach to increasing IT recruitment (Stokes, 2000), underlines the importance of the purpose of this study, which is that attracting candidates in recruitment is important with individual strategies since the IT sector is a competitive environment for the talent war.

Overall, the term “recruitment” can be seen as an umbrella term that consists of diverse components, and the characteristics and behavior of recruiters is one of them (Taylor& Bergmann, 1987), therefore, it is a reasonable step to take into account recruiters and their impacts.

2.1.1. Recruiter's Impact

As noted in the previous section, recruitment is a vital part of the HR, and extremely important for the firm's survival, because of their essential position in sharing information about the position and the organization, recruiters are crucial to the whole recruiting process (Carless& Wintle, 2007). Interactions of recruiter and candidate have been a popular research subject in the HR field, and considerable amounts of studies have been conducted on recruiters' impact on the recruitment processes for a few decades (Rynes et. al., 1991; Chapman et. al., 2005; Liao, et.al., 2022). It has been found that, in an interview environment, positive cues such as a recruiter's friendliness and kindness may enhance an organization's perceived attractiveness from the eyes of candidates (Rynes, 1991). Interviewed candidates might interpret friendly behaviors as positive indicators of the organization's working culture, such as a welcoming, and friendly workplace (Larsen& Phillips, 2002).

In the literature, it has been discussed that recruiters' impact on job selection decisions of a candidate is unessential. Powell (1984) examined graduating college students in a cross-sectional study and discovered that only job attributions found significant impact on the probability of landing a job. Furthermore, when perceived recruiter characteristics were eliminated from the equation, there will be no changes on subjects' decisions. The author, on the other hand, also underlines the fact that recruiters will always serve as a valuable resource for accuracy of the information regarding job requirements. Another study that investigates differences between in-

house HR personnel, and outsourced recruiters, even though underlines the importance of role of recruiters, could not find any evidence to support recruiter's impact on candidate attraction (Carless& Wintle, 2007). More recent study, conducted by Adeosun and Ohiani (2019), investigates the factors that influence recruiting qualified candidates, found that salary range, employer name, job security, and digitisation are the significant factors from the eyes of candidates. Their study does not mention any factors related to recruiter's impact, and there is currently a lack of studies investigating the direct impact of recruiters in the literature.

Completely opposite standpoint, which supports the positive recruiter impact on candidate attraction in the recruitment process, is also available in the literature for a few decades. According to the field study conducted to 145 university students, a recruiter's characteristics initially influence a candidate's perceptions of the job/position and the culture of the organization (Harris& Fink, 1987). Moreover, their results indicate that there is a significant correlation between recruiter's characteristics and accepting a job offer in the recruitment process. In their study, Taylor and Bergmann (1987) also put emphasis on the similar results that, organizational attractiveness from the eyes of candidates, and the likelihood that a candidate will accept a job offer correlated with interview qualities, recruiter demographic characteristics, and candidates' perceptions of recruiter empathy. Since then, studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of the recruiters on attracting candidates, and the positive correlation between them replicated over time. For instance, in their meta- analysis, Uggerslev et. al. (2012) found that recruiter behaviors and characteristics have a positive impact on candidate attraction at the early stages of the recruitment processes. Furthermore, Lawong et. al. (2019) conclude their study, which is the first experimental investigation of political skills, that the recruiters with high political skills, which was described as the capacity to successfully comprehend people at the workplace, and use that insight to influence the others, have a positive effect on attracting candidates. However, the authors are unable to show any correlation between the recruiters with low political skills and candidate attraction.

Consequently, even though a recruiter's direct impact on candidates perceptions is still an investigated and currently controversial topic in the literature, which creates a space for studying

this subject further. Investigating recruiters' impact may be a useful source for candidate attraction literature.

2.2. Candidate Attraction

Attracting talents is a hot topic for organizations, and referring to this topic the term 'employer branding' first used in the early 1990s (Gupta, Patti & Marwah, 2014). In the literature, employer branding has become a strategic tool for the organizations to have an advantageous position in the talent war, because successful employer branding strategies are grabbing candidates' attraction and generate an appetite for applying to the job for a specific organization (Mandhanya& Shah, 2010; Gregorka, & Silva, 2020).

Since the success of every organization is greatly influenced by its employees' skills, candidate attraction and employee retention has risen to be a major concern for organizations (Gupta, et. al., 2014). In this case, employer branding is not only a tool for transferring desired organizational messages, but also it might be used as a tool for engaging candidates (Barrow& Mosley, 2011). According to the study that aims to find organizational attributes that attract senior management students, conducted by Leekha Chhabra and Sharma (2014); organizational culture, brand name and compensation are found to be important attributes for candidate attraction. Further, the study emphasizes the strong and positive correlation between possibility of application and solid brand image. In this way, the candidate attraction can be used as a strategic tool and increase the likelihood of people applying, thereby providing a positive mobility in the recruitment area.

Employer branding is a marketing tactic that aids organizations in maintaining a competitive advantage (Gregorka, & Silva, 2020). It is important to distinguish between organization-based employer branding strategies and the term 'individual strategy', which is frequently employed in this study. The individual strategy used in this study refers to the performance the technical recruiter exhibits in accordance with the choices she or he has made to present himself/herself in a more attractive manner, independent of any instructions from the company.

The publications in the marketing literature are the main sources of academic research on the employer branding term (Sokro, 2012), which can be considered as a limited point of view. In

some cases, candidate attraction strategies can be seen as an instrument for achieving recruiting goals (Giblin& Galli, 2017). From this perspective, efforts for attracting candidates are serving an ultimate end, which is recruitment. Not only organizations' marketing efforts, but the integration of marketing and recruitment operations has become essential to winning the talent war while recruiters in the modern day are competing to achieve competitive advantages in the recruitment arena (Alashmawy& Yazdanifard, 2019; Amarakoon & Colley, 2022).

2.2.1. Candidate attraction and Human Resources

It's worth discussing candidate attraction with an HR area, as the link between candidate attraction and the field of recruitment was drawn in the previous section. In this period, where the battle for talent is increasing and important in the international arena (Armstrong, 2007), many areas from specific HR practices to employer branding activities are considered permissible to win this international talent war. In some studies, employer branding term is employed for the application of branding concepts to HRM, and the idea is increasingly gaining importance and employed to attract potential hires while retaining existing employees (Sokro, 2012).

There are different types of incentives that an employer may offer to current employees and candidates and organizations have moved their focus away from monetary incentives to acknowledge the impact that non- monetary factors play in attracting qualified candidates (Arthur, 2001). Since the recruitment process is the first point of contact with the candidates, HR professionals may be an impactful non- monetary factor on attracting candidates, for instance, Rynes (1991) underlines that friendly and warm behaviors of the recruiters may enhance candidate attraction in the recruitment process. Similarly, the findings from another research suggest that the factors most strongly influencing attractiveness are candidate views of recruiter behaviors, particularly the interest shown in candidates (Turban& Dougherty, 1992). Furthermore, an experiment with 498 participants, and done by Giannantonio et. al. point out that specifically recruiters' friendliness has a significant positive impact on candidate attraction, participants show more attraction to the employment opportunity that comes from the friendly recruiters compared to the unfriendly ones (2019).

It has been suggested that as an essential part of HR, recruitment is a crucial and continuing process in many firms that entails attracting suitable candidates and selecting the best employees (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975), since the initial step in the recruiting process is to get potential candidates' attention (Breaugh, 2013). Due to this, it is crucial for this study to look at how the HR perspective and candidate attraction complement one another in the studies mentioned earlier. In order to clearly analyze the relationship of candidate attraction with HR, more specifically recruitment, and the impact of recruiter, examining these relationships in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) was found useful by the author.

2.3. Small- Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Since the sample of this study is working in different small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), it is imperative to share the definition of this term to grasp its importance. There are less than 250 people employed by SMEs (Entrepreneurship - Enterprises by Business Size - OECD Data, n.d.). It is accepted that SMEs are holding a unique position in business life, for this reason, assuming SMEs are the same as large organizations leads to a variety of problems (Cassell et. al., 2002), and SMEs should be treated differently from large organizations, therefore it is significant to conduct particular research on SMEs to fully grasp their unique role and importance.

SMEs are important globally, because in both the developed and developing countries, they are seen as a driving force behind sustainable economic growth (Prasanna et. al., 2019) due to their contributions on creating new employment opportunities, and new areas to work with (Gilmore, 2011). Thanks to the rapid advancement of technology, SMEs especially in the technology sector are a significant economic driver (Furtado, 2016). Approximately 95% of all registered businesses in the OECD countries are SMEs, which also employ more than half of all employees in the private sector (Lukacs, 2005). As a result of their important position in the economy, academics and practitioners have switched their focus from large corporations to SMEs in the last 30 years (Karadag, 2015). In addition to that, SMEs have some unique characteristics that larger organizations should learn from them (Chanyatipsakul & Wongsurawat, 2013).

While their study examines Malaysian SMEs, Saleh and Ndubisi (2006) underline the lack of research on SMEs' challenges and development even though the evidence reveals that SMEs are crucial to the economy of the country. As a result of their literature review, both internal and external challenges have been identified, and it is suggested that those findings are also valid internationally. As the first challenge is identified as receiving funds from financial institutions, the lack of human capital follows as the vital challenge that Malaysian SMEs face. Referring to those findings, there is a need for more research on SMEs' current stage and their challenges to be more informed about them. SMEs have their unique strengths and difficulties, it is stated that a closer examination of HR practices would be beneficial for the HRM area (Baron, 2003). As Zinyemba investigates the recruitment challenges in Zimbabwean companies, she found that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe has resulted in a brain drain and a shortage of skilled employees in the country. It has created difficulties for smaller businesses because they are forced to compete with larger ones that can provide higher compensation (2014).

As SMEs make up 99.9% of all officially registered enterprises in Turkey, it is obvious how important this sector is to the country's economy (Arı, 2013), and also SMEs play a stabilizer role in the Turkish economy (Aycan, 2006). However, referring to the study, which covers different sizes of SMEs between 2007 and 2018 in Turkey, of Delikanli and Kilic (2021), nearly all research on SMEs in Turkey highlight the challenges with financial stress. A variety of problems with Turkish SMEs' managerial abilities, financial and human resources, and innovativeness surfaced as important factors damaging these companies' capacity to act as the economy's cornerstone, especially after the final internal crisis in 2001 (Karadag, 2015). These problems are a threat for the survival of SMEs, because they frequently require financial assistance already due to limited access to capital (Razak et. al., 2018).

Although SMEs are the backbone of the economy (Gurbuz& Akyol, 2009) in Turkey, it is necessary to examine the HR topic in these companies, as the opportunities it can offer and budget for candidate attraction are limited because of the financial challenges.

2.3.1 SMEs and Human Resources

As the unique position of SMEs underlined, there is a need to examine SMEs differently from other types of organizations. To correctly understand how HR systems and practices work, it is crucial to differentiate organizations based on their size (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). There are different difficulties that SMEs are dealing with, and the topic of HR is one of the biggest challenges that SMEs face, even so, it has been argued that there is a lack of research on HR practices in SMEs (Chandler & McEvoy, 2000). The possible reason for this research shortage in the literature is the heterogeneous nature of SMEs that there are issues on making generalizations about them since they have diverse ways of applying HR practices (Nadin, et. al., 1998).

In their study, Bilan et. al. (2020) investigate the HR problems in Ukraine. According to the study's findings, HR practices in SMEs in Ukraine are mainly disorganized, lacking ties to the overall economic efficiency of firms or taking into account the impact of the effective use of other resources. Therefore it might be beneficial to conduct some research that demonstrates strategic usage of HR and its great potential in recruiting qualified people. Further, their study underlines that recruiting is one of the most challenging HR responsibilities for SMEs, particularly in transition economies when qualified workers are migrating internationally. Turkey can be an example of this implication about transition economies, as the high cost and lack of competent labor are among the biggest problems facing SMEs in Turkey, and this has a significant negative impact on their ability to compete (Karadag, 2015). Gurbuz and Akyol also underlined that, in addition to their financial challenges, the majority of Turkish SMEs struggle to find and retain competent employees. Competent employees prefer to work for larger organizations or use small businesses as a stepping stone on their career path to positions in larger organizations (2009). They conclude by emphasizing the important role of HR for SMEs.

Poor recruitment decisions are frequently attributed to problems in the SMEs, therefore, they claim that recruiting is currently done with more care in order to find 'correct' employees (Jha & Bhattacharyya, 2012). Although Abraham et al. (2015) draw attention to the lack of particular research on the idea of talent "fit" in recruitment, according to the authors, finding a fit is the

essential component of recruiting in SMEs. Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges facing the organizations, especially SMEs, is recruitment and selection (Furtado, 2016).

As literature states the challenges with recruiting qualified talents because of the poor financial state of SMEs compared to larger ones, it is becoming important to investigate how recruiters' individual strategies for candidate attraction are crucial for the survival and success of SMEs.

3. Theory

This chapter focuses on explaining selected theories to support analysis of gathered data. The symbolic interactionism theory, especially Erving Goffman's theory of impression management, was used for conceptualization.

3.1. Symbolic Interactionism Theory

George Herbert Mead is a social psychologist from the Chicago School, who set the groundwork for symbolic interactionism in the early 1900s (Jeon, 2004). Based on this theory, meanings are created as a result of the interaction process (Denzin, 2004), that consists of gestures, and verbal and nonverbal tools. It examines the meanings occurring from individuals engaging with one another, concentrating on "which symbols and meanings originate from people interactions" (Aksan et. al., 2009), therefore, the source of the information is the interaction itself. Blumer emphasizes that people are not reflexively responding to one another, instead they interpret and define each other's action and refer to that meaning the response is generated (1962), and based on this, studying interactions is a key to interpreting human behavior. This theory has as a micro-level focus and investigates how individuals interacting with one another creates and maintains society (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

Due to its micro-level concentration (Meltzer et. al., 1975), this theory neglects the macro-level view. Social structures, culture, and those types of macro-level factors are overlooked, since its main material is human interactions. Another aspect to consider is the lack of emphasis placed on the emotional components of human actions (Meltzer et. al., 1975). As it is beneficial to acknowledge limitations, it is a valuable reminder that this study is neither interested in having a macro-level perspective nor emotional nature of people. Further, this theory is associated with qualitative research (De Nooy, 2009), which is also employed by this study.

3.1.1. Impression Management Theory

Erving Goffman, who is considered as one of the most prominent and frequently cited sociologists, was one of the most significant symbolic interactionist thinkers (Carter & Fuller, 2015) and made a key contribution by presenting a dramaturgical approach in his 1956

publication *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this work, he uses the analogy of life being a stage in a play to express the concept that individuals participate in daily performances, which may be named as a theatrical model of a behavior. Based on that, when an individual enters the presence of others, they tend to organize themselves to create an impression that their desire to transmit. He also emphasizes interpersonal interactions and the various roles that people play in response to different situations in daily life, and based on his interpretation, every person is a performer who plays in a certain way to be interpreted as they intended. The ‘audience’ that is exposed to the act of a ‘performer’, responds accordingly to this performance.

As the name suggests, “impression management” is a self presentation in which individuals act in a certain way towards others to establish a desirable perception of themselves. It can be promoting or hiding some specific characteristics to deliver a desirable and intended message or impression from the eyes of the audience. The following terms from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) used for this paper, referring to the aim to have a better understanding of technical recruiters’ performances.

One of the main terms is “performance”, which refers to all of an individual’s actions that take place over a certain period of time during which he is continuously present in front of a specific group of audiences and which have some sort of impact on those audiences. In relation to the performance, “the front” is equipment and tools that the performer utilizes consciously or unconsciously during the performance. The front is a selected, constructed, and observable location, in which the performer is expected to be consistent with the specific impression that he/she wants to deliver to the audience. There are three traditional parts, which are setting, appearance, and manner, at the front. It is expected to have a consistency between these parts as a confirming sign. To begin with, “setting” is a physical scene in the front where the particular performance takes place. In this study, the meeting room where the job interview takes place is the setting. The furniture, decorative items and background items can be examples of this term. As a complementary term, “personal front” refers to the expressive tools, the ones that are closely associated with the performer, and those that directly accompany the performer wherever he/she goes- e.g. mimics. Personal front is composed of appearance and manner, and the second important part is “appearance”, in which it is the look of an individual when he/she is performing

on the front stage. All the physical and non-verbal signs that belong to the individual can be named as appearance-e.g. smiling. The third part is “manner”, and it is an attitude that an individual takes when he/ she is performing on the front stage. Manner may play a role of warning the audience, and inform them what to expect about how the performer is going to act. In this study, the friendly or professional tone preferred by the participants can be an example of manner.

In relation to a specific performance it is important to distinguish between different scenes to observe impression management. In contrast to the front, the “backstage” is a preparation area that enables actors to build up their scripts to play in the front stage. Desired impressions are practiced in this more informal area, and performers are more relaxed and comfortable versions of themselves since every interaction occurs with no audience presence. Goffman clarifies this stage by giving a few examples of backstage behaviors, such as calling by first name, kidding, having a loose sitting positions, etc. While all the actions are observable to the audience and as a part of the performance in the front, the backstage is where the performer steps out of the front and relaxes. It might be possible to see the shifting from one stage to another, thus, Goffman finds it interesting to observe the impression management is the time when the performer steps out of the backstage, and steps in the front where the audience is present.

“Dramatic realization” is a term that can summarize all the processes of mobilizing activities on the front stage to perform. It occurs when backstage preparations actualize for the intended perception in front. While the performers act to direct how the audience perceives them, they are using a standardized, and transportable method “masks”, which allows them to perform as they are interested. Throughout our lives, everybody wears several masks proper to their particular performances. The urge of staying ‘in character’ is named as “maintenance of expressive control” to make sure to send consistent signals. Failing maintenance of expressive control leads to misinterpretation, which refers to the danger of delivering an incorrect message that results as a disbelief of the audience. Under normal circumstances, performers intend to avoid giving mixed signals that may lead to misinterpretation, and preserve maintenance of expressive control.

Given that the aim of this research is to explore and understand technical recruiters' performance, it is clear how the selected theory, the choice of method, and the aim are linked. Selected terms are applicable for categorizing daily practices at the workplace. This categorization enables the author to dig further into the research questions. There are some examples in effort to create a bond between the selected terms and daily practices to connect the theoretical framework. In this study, "the front" is the area where the candidate is around, and this stage consists of three significant parts. The first part is the physical environment, "setting", and it includes every object in the meeting room. The complementary part called personal front is directly related to the technical recruiter, and consists of "appearance" and "manner". The second part is the visible part that named "appearance", friendly body language, age of the technical recruiter can be examples. The third part is "manner" which can be explained as the way technical recruiters' act in the meeting, e.g. conducting the interview in a professional way. An example of the term "maintenance of expressive control" can be given to the recruiter who is consistent in the front stage and remains in character while the meeting continues, e.g. protecting professional manners until the end of the job interview. In this study, "backstage" is the outside of the meeting room, and daily workplace of the technical recruiter. In this place she/ he can take off the recruiter "mask", and has another mask such as a colleague, or an employee. This is the place where the "dramatic realization" to the audience- the candidates- ends.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, the primary source for this part, was published in 1956, hence it is to be assumed that there were not many technical advancements comparable to those of today at the time the text was developed. It is important to acknowledge the internet and its impact on human interactions today. However, recent studies (Jensen, 2010; Pinch, 2010; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013) have demonstrated how important Goffman continues to be for sociology and related fields. The themes and terms are still relevant and adapted versions are used since the main source of the information, human interactions, is the focus of interest for these studies. Although the lack of technological advancement of this theory is acknowledged, Goffman's notion of face-to-face communication has been employed in this study- even though online interviews are conducted- to avoid the potential misunderstandings that may occur online.

4. Method

The chapter focuses on a description of this paper's research method, explaining the logic behind the selected methodology in detail. This chapter consists of research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, limitations and ethical considerations sections.

4.1 Research Design

Referring back to the aim and research questions, a qualitative research design, which provides a better comprehension of social circumstances (Myers& Avison, 2002), was selected to obtain data. It gives the researcher the opportunity to capture the details and routines of the subjects as they happen (Palmer& Bolderston, 2006). For this reason, the author preferred to combine a qualitative method with the selected theoretical framework, since it is interested in interpreting and understanding human interactions. As a selected data collection strategy, this study benefited from the combination of participant observation and semi- structured interviews for maximizing the details of the gathered data. Considering that this study is interested in certain qualities of a subset of society members, technical recruiters from the author's previous workplace were the initial contacts. As a part of non- probability sampling, snowball sampling is used for extending the sample. Shortly after the research conducted, obtained data had been brought into written format for the detailed analysis. Further, the data collection and analysis parts were shaped by bearing in mind the impression management theory to keep useful observations and expressions. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that this study is benefiting from an abductive approach.

Acknowledging the disadvantages of the research design, overall, the author was satisfied with these methods she deliberately chose. Due to unforeseen issues that arose during the process, the research design that the author had originally planned has undergone some minor alterations, which are described below.

4.2. Sample Selection

Purposive sampling is beneficial when the aim of the study is an in-depth examination of a specific domain with experienced specialists (Campbell et. al., 2020). In relation to that, the author deliberately employed purposive sampling as she has a specific interest group, with certain qualifications. The author made an effort to create a homogeneous group as sample characteristics. Since it is thought that the members forming the sample should be working to form a strategy, 3-5 years of work experience was sought as a limit by the author. To increase sample size, snowball sampling, which is described as starting with a few initial contacts who fit the criteria for the study and their referrals are invited (Parker, et. al., 2019), is chosen. Initial contacts were made with the 4 previous colleagues of the author. Later, the author was getting in touch with the references, and everyone who had been contacted was asked to suggest other subjects. This referral process continued until the sample size was reached with sufficient size, in which decision was made when the collected material began to repeat itself.

Technical recruiter can be described as people who are responsible for identifying and presenting qualified talents to a firm that fit the technical and non- technical criteria (Ogbanufe, 2010). In this study, technical recruiters, who are recruiting for technology SMEs, which provide a service in the software tech/IT sector, as shared, were selected- in which the products are video games, and social media applications. They recruit roles such as software engineer, UI/UX designer, product manager. With this selection, the research delivers on its promise to provide an insider perspective to the HR literature. It was initially intended to create a gender diverse sample, but this goal was not achieved. Both some of the participants resigned from the study as a result of the earthquake that struck Turkey and the fact that this sector is dominated by females, the study remained barren. Since all the participants are female, it had an impact on the data, e.g. it has been discovered that changes that are attributed to women such as wearing high heels. If there were male members, it is acknowledged that more diverse data could be attained.

Another requirement was the workplace size, and the author is interested in technical recruiters, who are currently working at the technology SMEs, in which the number of employees differs from 50 to 300. This size selection is thought to be an inspiring choice because it is easier to

differentiate the individual strategies. Since larger organizations can allocate more budget on employer branding activities and have an opportunity to offer various benefits to candidates, it was thought that it is efficient to conduct this study in SMEs. The 15 participants who took part in this study are employed by a total of 9 SMEs located in Turkey, and actively recruiting (see *Appendix 1- Table of respondents*). At the beginning, it has been assumed that findings will be similar and consistent based on the similar features of workplaces, and the years of experience. However, considering the individual differences, it is possible to find interesting variations.

For summing up, technical recruiters who work at software technology SMEs as an in-house recruiter, and have 3-5 years experience, were selected. A sample of 15 people working in 9 different SMEs in total and meeting the criteria mentioned above was created. 5 people agreed to attend the participant observation part. The remaining 10 people agreed to be interviewed.

4.3. Data Collection

As adopted by many scholars, qualitative research is a valuable method of doing research on problems of everyday practice (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). Since this study is focusing on understanding and interpreting a specific daily human interaction, a qualitative method is preferred by the author. As the selected theoretical framework underlines, it is key to collect insightful data to understand human interactions, and this study benefited from in person data collection. Main sources of this study are field notes and transcriptions, mainly primary data had been used, and secondary data- i.e. previous research and theory- was benefited when needed.

In many social science fields, participant observation has been used for gathering information about people (Kawulich, 2005), and it provides a way to look for nonverbal cues of emotion, and understand how participants interact (Schmuck, 1997). When observing the front stage, the author used moderate participation, in which as the observer is present at the setting and recognized as a researcher, but does not actively take part or sometimes communicate with subjects (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). When observing the backstage, active participation, in which as the observer taking part in almost everything of what the subjects do to comprehend cultural standards of behavior (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), was selected. Since this was the

author's first time using this method, she began to observe after receiving guidance from her supervisor along with reading it from various sources. Being an observer had an influence on the author, which tried to be reduced by communicating openly with everyone that is part of this study, and being transparent about the processes. There was always an effort for making observed people comfortable to minimize the behavior change under the observation. In order not to disturb the natural flow of the conversation no notes were taken during the observation. Notes were written shortly after while the memory is fresh for strengthening data accuracy. To avoid observer bias, the notes were taken with the standardized procedure. Prior to the observations, a format was determined by the author, and five mutually exclusive categories- summary, setting, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, interactions with the candidate- were defined.

The most popular interview method in qualitative research is the semi-structured format (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), that is categorized as formal conversations, in which the researcher has an agenda of what will be covered by asking questions that can differ from one participant to another (Miles& Gilbert, 2005). In this study, it is critical, because it enables the author to gain insights from the participants that were not able to be observed. Semi- structured interview guide created after the observation part as the open- ended questions were formed after the analysis of the observation data. Interviews took place in quiet spots for clear records, in which the participants gave written and oral consent prior to the meeting.

The sample members who were observed (5 people) and those who were interviewed (10 people) are two different groups. Although the author initially intended to employ only participant observation, it was found that the participants preferred interviews over being observed. Because of this, the author used a combined strategy to improvise a solution to the problem, which arose throughout the process. Due to the lack of an opportunity to observe the interviewers, it may have the unintended consequence of making them overlook all of the techniques they employ. However, the positive effect of this selection increased the reliability of the observed data by stating that the people who were not observed used similar strategies.

To sum up, participant observation and semi- structured interviews were selected purposefully to get in- depth knowledge, and have an understanding of a specific human behavior.

4.4. Data Analysis

As a result of the selected research strategy, there are two different sources of information, which are observation field notes, and interview transcriptions. The author has written down both sources of information in detail, and the data forms the basis of this research. To give meaning to the data, categorizing and coding methods were used based on the theoretical framework. Theory chapter was used as a guideline for the categorization of the daily performances of the sample, which is consistent with the abductive approach that is employed by this study. The data analysis process began with translating data from Turkish to English with the effort of not losing meaning.

The most challenging and important part of qualitative research is data analysis, and coding is a significant stage in organizing the data (Basit, 2003). Saldana describes code as a brief phrase that symbolically provides an essence-capturing feature for a data segment (2021). Categorizing and coding enable the researcher to summarize the data without losing its essence, find both patterns and differences in the texts, and also to make the data understandable to the reader. Coding enables connection with the data, which helps the researchers make sense of the emergent phenomena based on the facts (Basit, 2003). In this paper, detailed examination of data served as the starting point for the categorization and coding procedure. *Appendix 2* serves as an example of how gathered data are presented to the reader in accordance with the theoretical perspective.

Field notes were analyzed to understand the strategies by observing and generating some themes for interviews. Interview transcriptions were also analyzed and coded for deeper comprehension of strategies by interviewing. After the analysis, the author looked for similarities and differences between the texts for detailed analysis of certain strategies, which were included in the results.

It is crucial to acknowledge the challenge of connecting data with symbolic interactionism. Since it underlines the interpretation of human interactions, and interpretation may differ one person to another, the conceptualization process can be seen as subjective on some level, and to prevent this, codes were created based on acts and words of the participants, author's implications.

4.5. Limitations

Strategic decisions taken to conduct this study have caused a few limitations. Because of the geographical limitation, selection of a qualitative design and the snowball sampling, there is a limitation on generalizability of the results. Although the author tried not to have an effect without interfering with the environment; employing a participant observation method has a limiting effect on the sample, because subjects may behave differently from their normal way of behaving when they are aware that they are being watched. It is known as the Hawthorne effect, the “observer effect”, the modification in behavior that results from being observed (Demetriou et. al., 2019). To minimize it, observations in both the front and back stages were included. Spending some time with the sample in the backstage, engaging in daily conversations with them prior to observing the front, and offering detailed information about this study comfort and encourage them to act as they usually would throughout the observation. Adding backstage observations, and follow- up questions in relation to the front stage also provide an opportunity to examine types of specific acts performed specifically on the front stage, and also the sample feel more comfortable to share their opinions in relation to the interviews.

Because native language of the sample is Turkish, it was preferred to conduct the study in Turkish so that there is less misunderstanding. As different languages do not always employ words in the same ways, it might have an impact on how sentences are phrased, however, an effort has been made to avoid meaning loss during translation. To reduce misunderstandings that may occur in the same language in the observations, the author took notes as soon and detailed as possible, avoided disrupting the natural flow of the interaction, informed every actor that was part, and explained the research in detail prior to meetings. To reduce misunderstanding in the interviews, the author avoided disrupting the natural flow of the conversation and the academic jargon, encouraged the sample with follow- up questions, and listened actively.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to attending observations and interviews, all respondents and candidates asked to sign a consent form that is prepared for this study (see *Appendix 3*) to inform them and to ensure their

voluntary participation and anonymity. To encourage respondents to be comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings, they were made aware of their anonymity both written and verbally during data collection. Further, the sample's workplaces were anonymized after sharing the essential information. At this point, it is important to recognize that using snowball sampling might risk anonymity. Because once sample members recommend each other, the sample may predict who will participate. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the preceding sections, when the data is analyzed and the findings are presented in the Results section, all names are fully anonymised; by doing that, specific responses from individuals will be inaccessible. It was avoided to share the physical appearance, characteristic features of the participants that lead them to be recognized.

Further information provided to respondents included that only the author, the supervisor, and the examiner of this paper would have access to the data they provided and the materials would be removed as soon as the thesis was accepted. The handwritten notes were taken in a way that the individuals could not be recognized, and they were transferred to the digital environment. Unauthorized users are not able to access the data on the author's private computer with a password. By using numbering instead of real names and refraining from disclosing any information that reveal respondents' identities, data collection was handled anonymously.

5. Results

This chapter provides some information about Turkey to fully grasp the circumstances of the selected country. Later, it presents the findings of the study, in a way that the direct quotations from the recruiters and the field notes lead the text. Quotations are italicized, and technical recruiters are labeled with the letter R and the number they were assigned to preserve their anonymity. Since two different methods were used to collect data, the presentation of the results was presented to the reader in two different ways as observation and interview parts.

5.1. The setting: Turkey

The setting of Turkey is a deliberate choice of the author, since investigating recruitment of tech talents in SMEs is an HR challenge for developing countries that further examination leads to fruitful results. Turkey can be defined as a developing country (Aycan, 2006), and it is important to be aware about skilled labor migration to developed countries (Oguz, 2011; Bilan, et. al., 2020). Even if they do not prefer to migrate, they can find jobs to earn foreign currency by living in Turkey and working abroad remotely. This is an unfavorable situation for HR in Turkey, specifically in SMEs, in which there is a need to attract qualified employees. As mentioned earlier, Gurbuz and Akyol underlined that, in addition to the financial challenges, the majority of Turkish SMEs struggle to find competent employees. Competent employees prefer to work for larger organizations or use small businesses as a step for positions in larger organizations (2009). SMEs located in Turkey, which is known to be a developing country, are facing economic challenges as mentioned before. In Turkey, there are workplaces where “You”,- the more formal and distant version (e.g. Vous in French)- is used, and there are some workplaces where directly “you” - more informal and sincere version (e.g. Tu in French) is used at the first meeting. However, it would be correct to say that based on the author has lived in the mentioned country for more than 20 years and her own work experience in that country, there is a transition period from formal to friendly address in every company, except for corporate enterprises. The importance of this information for this study, candidates generally do not expect a formal attitude especially from SMEs who are active in the technology field. For example, a friendly greeting at first will not be misunderstood by the candidate, nor will a formal greeting be awkward.

5.2. Observations on technical recruiters and their strategies

Since the aim was to investigate how technical recruiters use some strategies to attract candidates, it was seen as crucial to observe the actual setting. It is really important to underline one more time that the author is interested in observing the technical recruiters, and not the other parties that are directly or indirectly involved in the processes- e.g.candidates, co- workers etc. However, although these parties are not the main focus of observation, they are of great importance for understanding the interaction, because their presence has a direct impact on the technical recruiters' performance. The backstage observations were made a few hours prior and later to the meeting. Some feedback given by technical recruiters about the meeting also added the fieldnotes. The frontstage can be limited from welcoming the candidates to meet at the entrance of the office until saying goodbye to the candidate after the interview at the same office door.

Strategies found during the observation are defined and categorized as themes and sub-themes in this section. Four main themes and nine sub- themes that are found in the observations. Physical appearance, verbal communication, body language, and meeting setting were defined as main themes. Outfit, makeup, shape of hair, content, conversation & language, posture, facial expressions, head and hand movements, eye and body contact were defined as sub- themes. These findings are crucial to this study, because they were also used as a guideline for the interviews. It should be noted that some of the themes are done intentionally by the technical recruiters, and some of them are done unintentionally and have been noticed throughout the observation processes. Recognizing the unintentionally- done- themes is important for the discovery of the themes during the interview part- some themes that initially did not come to mind but that people frequently claim to do when questioned.

5.2.1. Physical Appearance

This theme covers the visible features of one's body. Despite the fact that it does not seem to be directly connected to communication, it has been found to have a considerable influence on communication. Furthermore, all of the participants utilize this tool and they all agree its importance on creating a good first impression in the meeting.

In one of the observations, the participant (R5) was accompanied by the observer to meet the candidate at the entrance door. Just before leaving her room, the participant straightened her skirt and buttoned the top button of her shirt. Additionally, it was noted that typically, the participants wore whatever they felt was appropriate for the impression they wanted to give. From this point, *outfit* is a significant sub- theme, which is a dressing choice of the participants that is commonly used. Overall, participants care about cleanliness and tidiness about their outfit. However, their preference of outfit differs, and some participants found it beneficial to wear casual clothes by explaining: “*Since computer engineers are fond of their comfort, I use jeans, sweaters and sneakers to keep up with the environment.*” (R1). On the other hand, another participant (R4) stated that: “*It's important to come to work elegantly to show my professionalism*”, R4 also has a pair of high- heels in her room to change the days when she comes to work in sneakers. Participants choose outfits that they find appropriate and to create an impression. They stated that this choice of outfit is in accordance with the dress code of the company they work for.

While awaiting the candidate, the participant (R2) and the observer drank coffee and ate a snack. Lipstick and concealers around the mouth were naturally taken off as a result. A certain time is reserved for lipstick and concealer renewal a few minutes before the candidate arrived. The participant’s visage changed due to makeup before the candidate’s arrival. Therefore, *makeup* is another sub- theme that is common for all the participants in the observations part. Although people come to work with make-up, a make-up refresh is done before the job interview. Make-up done in the morning is getting rubbed out due to external factors, drinking and eating during the day, etc., and small touches are made before the interview for a more complete appearance. In the backstage, one of the participants R3 stated that: “*Let’s freshen up our make-up before the meeting starts!* ”, and as a result of re- applying, in the front stage her make- up looks fresher. However, it is crucial to note that all observed participants were female, and male participants may not use this sub-theme in a way that female participants use. At this point, considering the care people take for themselves, potentially male technical recruiters might infer that they may use gel on their hair and oil on their beards when they are preparing for the job interviews.

The observer talked with the participant (R4) until the candidate arrived. 5-10 minutes before the interview meeting, R4 took out a small mirror from her bag and shaped her curls with her hands, and applied some gel. After this process, her hair looked more fluffy than before. One strategy that technical recruiters frequently employ, either intentionally or unintentionally, is the *shape of their hair*. It has been noticed that they regularly straighten their hair with their hands during the meeting. After small changes of hair before and/or during the interviews, the hair looks more decent according to the participants. However, it was observed that they did not straighten their hair that often in the backstage area. Playing with the tail of hair is seen in the backstage area, but it does not look like an effort to make hair more proper. In addition, it has been noticed that it was a feature that they checked in the glass reflection or phone camera before the meeting. Participants did not verbally express that they give importance to their hair, however, it is an observable difference between backstage and front stage that technical recruiters are doing.

5.2.2. Verbal Communication

The second theme includes all aspects of the audible parts of the communication. It is important to underline that, this theme is not only “what” people are talking about, but also, “how” they are talking. It has been observed that verbal communication is more structured than the other themes, because it includes fixed information about the firm and job description. The flow of the dialogue also has a predefined structure, because the questions in job interviews are more predictable in their nature. Those are more organizationally written scripts that were provided by the firm.

Before the candidate came, the participant (R5) was discussed both positively and negatively about insights about the company she works for. In fact, R5 remembered her candidate experience and shared her memories of her first interview here. With the arrival of the candidate, the content completely changed direction and turned into small talk. Then, when the interview started, only the positive characteristics of the company were shared, and the candidate was given time to explain themselves by asking guiding questions. It is possible to make an inference that the *content* can be the most vital part of the interview for the candidates, since it informs them about their potential company, position and benefits. It is mainly “what” people are talking about at the interview. Since there is an arranged salary range, benefits, company description, and job

definition on the participants mind, it has been found that this sub- theme does not vary a lot, because these parts were provided by the company. In the backstage, one of the participants stated that: *“If the candidate shared a salary expectation that we could not provide, I immediately bring the subject to the attractive benefits we provide. In this way, instead of saying 'no' to the candidates directly, I display the attractive features one more time (R1)”*. Furthermore, it has been witnessed that when a candidate asked about the possibility for working fully remote, in which this specific SME does not provide, R1 underlined the hybrid option, and added the fully inclusive health insurance that the company provides. After that, the remote working topic is closed, and the direction of the content evolved in the details of the health insurance.

Another part of the content is the part that candidates create, in which the recruiters aim to get to know the candidates by asking questions and encouraging them to talk about their characteristics and work experiences. Although this part is produced by candidates and varies from one person to another, its structure is also limited, it includes previous responsibilities, and future goals, etc. It is ‘professionally’ scripted rather than individually created ones that were created backstage.

One of the participants (R4) was observed having a chat with the observer while engaging in mutual discourse. When the time came, both initiated the conversation, encouraging questions were asked, and both sides were in charge of arranging silences and speaking periods. Further, the tone of voice, and the way of speaking are more casual. On the other hand, R4’s choice of words and tone radically shift once the candidate is inside the office. This change can be easily understood from the outside, as an example from “wanna” to “want to” for change in language. Additionally, it has been observed that R4 was leading the conversation in a more formal way. *Conversations & language* has a wide range of acts, which consist of pauses, talking time, encouraging the other party to talk, providing some time for candidates to ask questions, and tone of voice. It is mainly “how” people are talking at the interview, and it goes hand in hand with the content. Therefore, it is expected that conversations and language should be consistent with each other. Leading conversations- which includes turns talking, pauses, listening, encouraging the candidates to talk more, providing some time for candidates to ask questions- seems to be expected from the recruiter side. After the small talk part, recruiters started to give information about the company and the position. Candidates are given the opportunity to ask questions during

this introductory speech, in some cases by saying “*please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions any time*” (R1, R4, R5). After, candidates were given a time to introduce themselves. In some parts, if candidates were not talkative, recruiters were asking some conversational questions to encourage the candidates, such as “*...what are your responsibilities at your current workplace?*” (R3), “*...how many years of experience have you had in team management?*” (R1), “*... what are your expectations from your next workplace?*” (R2) etc. It has been observed that recruiters both listen and take notes while candidates are talking. At the end of the interview, it was seen that the candidates were asked if they had any questions they wanted to ask before concluding.

The language and tone used while speaking to the candidate varied from person to person. While R1 prefers a more friendly tone by using first name, and sharing some funny stories about the office, R4 prefers a more serious tone by using the titles -Mister-, and not referring to the company as “we”. On the backstage, R1 stated that: “*I am trying to share the warm work culture here, and make this person feel as a part of this family*”. R4, on the other hand, stated that: “*... working with senior candidates differs, because they want to see professionalism, and respect, in which I am providing with my language choice*”. Another way of language preference was using technical language as much as they can. It has been observed that 3 out of 5 participants were using some terminologies that belong to the software engineering field. Furthermore, all of the participants intentionally utilized them in order to show their competence and interest to the candidates. R2 explained this usage by saying: “*... I think it is really attractive to talk in the same language with the candidate, at this point they feel like you are one of them*”. R4 also emphasized that she is using it on purpose by saying: “*... when I say Java or Python I always see a spark in their eyes, at this moment I see that I am on the right track*”. Lastly, R5 stated that: “*It really does not matter how deep your knowledge is, they just want to see that they are going to be understood in their own way*”. Furthermore, when participants were asked about their technical knowledge, they mentioned that they do not have any technical training or understanding of the topic. They were using some terms they had heard and checked from existing tech teams.

5.2.3. Body Language

The third theme includes the nonverbal communication tools, which are related to the participants’ body. Based on the theory, it is expected that it should be coherent with the prior

theme to create a consistent impression. It has been observed that some of the sub- themes are done intentionally, and some of them are done unintentionally.

While chatting with one of the participants (R1) about recruitment until the candidate arrived, both R1 and the observer sat cross legged together and spent time in the resting area of the office. R1 seemed relaxed, and had a humpback. Moreover, on the way to meet the candidate, she straightened completely and sat still in the chair in front of the candidate. The quick posture shift from the environment of no candidate to around candidate can be interpreted from being more comfortable to more attentive. *Posture* might be defined as one's body position while sitting or standing. It is one of the observable sub- themes that may be quickly changed according to people around them. From an observer perspective, non-straight postures were connected with the backstage area, in which participants were more relaxed, as they mentioned their comfort in the backstage area a few times. Participants were sitting and standing straight when they were around the candidates. For example, R3 had a hump when she was sitting in front of the computer, and sometimes forward neck towards the monitor in the backstage area, however she was standing and sitting upright when she was around with the candidate. R4 was walking with rounded shoulders, and when she saw the candidate, she suddenly changed her posture to more straight, which was a real quick but an observable change. As a result of the observations, participants prefer relaxed posture at the backstage when they are around their coworkers and the observer.

The country's earthquake was discussed while the observer and participant (R3) were alone. R3's face naturally took on an expression of sadness as a result of this. R3's attitude softened just then, her eyebrows rose, and she swiftly adopted a smile as soon as the candidate entered the room. Even though the transition from a sad to a happy face is completely opposite, a quick change was observed in just a few seconds. From this point, *facial expressions* can be described as expressing a particular emotion or thought with some facial movements. It should be taken into consideration, because it has been observed that the participants are using these differently for the front and back stages. For example, at the backstage R4 was highly using facial expressions, e.g. eye brows, lips, eye etc. movements. It was visible whether she seemed happy or nervous because of the way her face looked. At the frontstage, on the other hand, she had a more steady face.

Further, even when the candidate shared the negative rumors about the company, there was no change detected in R4's facial expression, she explained that there was some misunderstanding that led to those rumors, and this explanation was the end of that discussion.

Another participant R1 used this tool as completely opposite to the participant mentioned above. On the backstage she had a steady face, and it was difficult to read her emotions and thoughts from her face. It was difficult to determine whether she is nervous or musing if she does not share it. It is possible to say that she prefers to use exaggerated facial expressions, which are positive, in the frontstage area, when she is communicating with the candidate. Especially when she was listening to the candidate's previous job experience, she made some facial expressions, and completed it with some head movements in a way that she seems interested in the conversation.

One of the participants (R2) preferred to talk with the observer by standing still without moving much during the conversation. However, as soon as the candidate arrived, hand and head movements significantly increased. While talking to the candidate, hand movements are frequently used; head movements are used abundantly while listening to the candidate. Therefore, *hand and head movements* are crucial to pay attention. It has been detected that participants are particularly interested in using them in the frontstage area, when they are communicating with the candidates. In the backstage area R5 verbally expressed that: "... *nodding is a really powerful move, because the candidate feels that they are listened to by you*", which might be utilized as conveying a particular message, in this case, the message is 'you are listened in here'.

Some hand movements made in a way that does not disrupt the flow of the conversation are also worth commenting on. Although hand movements are also frequently used at the interview meetings, these are generally used when it is the technical recruiter's turn to speak. In other words, these movements were not seen when the candidate was talking, the hands either remained motionless or there were writing movements because the interview notes were taken.

Based on the observations made with one of the participants (R2), it was found that while speaking, R2 sometimes broke eye contact, for example by looking at the screen frequently, being distracted by outside noises. However, it was observed that this contact lasted longer during the meeting with the candidate. In addition, R2 only was shaking hands while communicating with the candidate, however, with the observer, it was easier to make hand contact, such as patting her

back or touching her arm. *Eye and body contact* is another sub- theme, which can be defined as a way of interaction between the technical recruiter and candidates without verbal tools. The desire to make eye contact was noticed throughout the conversation, but this contact was naturally broken sometimes, e.g. taking notes. The desire of creating eye contact has been detected even if the candidate does not look at the technical recruiter. In fact, one of the participants mentioned the importance of eye contact in the backstage area by saying: “... *I find it appropriate to make eye contact even with candidates who do not prefer to make eye contact because by doing this I think I am giving the message that they are individuals (R2)*”. It can be said that R2 does this act intentionally because she thinks that giving a particular message by making eye contact, and she continued to keep the eye contact for the most part of the interview.

Considering personal space, some candidates may not prefer body contact, but it is worth noting that the author of this study did not come across anyone who reacted negatively to this contact. In this case, body contact is mainly shaking hands and sometimes subtle arm touch. It occurs generally right before or right after the interview, which can be seen as greeting movements. At the beginning of the interview, right after handshaking with the candidate, one of the participants stated that: “*Oh! We love tight handshakes, don't we? (R5)*”, and it is noticed that this sentence acts as an ice breaker, and the candidate laughed, and seemed more relaxed. It enables participants to create a warm environment, which may encourage both sides to talk more in the interviews. From this point of view, it can be used as a tool to start a friendly conversation.

5.2.4. Meeting Setting

Last theme is a physical space, where the job interviews occur, and where the candidate spends the most time at the potential future company. Although this theme is not directly related to the technical recruiter as an individual, it was added to this study considering that technical recruiters interviewed the candidate in the room they preferred among many meeting rooms in the office. It has been observed that the interviews take place in particular meeting rooms, which are somewhat different from the rest of the office. The way these meeting rooms differ from the rest of the office varies from company to company. For instance, one SME has some toys that are made of legos, and some superhero stickers on the whiteboard. There is a small round table and five chairs around it. There was a window, however, the light blue curtain covered it. However,

the rest of the office, which is an open work place, looks like a library with some super silence areas and individual desks all around. No one has a personal desk and everyone sits wherever they want when they come to work, so there are no personal items on the tables. The meeting room in this workplace looks more entertaining compared to the rest of the office.

Another company, on the other hand, has a corporate- like office, in which every employee has their desks with personal items- such as flowers and pictures-. The meeting room is bigger than the other personal offices, and has one long table and there are ten chairs around it. White and gray are the dominant colors, and there is a big window. Compared with the above- mentioned company's meeting room, it is possible to think that its meeting room looks more serious.

It was seen that the meeting rooms where the interview was conducted was different from the rest of the office. However, these differences also vary within themselves, so it is not possible to define one type of setting that may be generalizable. Considering that it is the first place where candidates stay in the potential workplace for a relatively long time, it might be a crucial factor in forming the first impression about the workplace, which is discussed in more detail.

5.3. Interviews on technical recruiters and their strategies

Four main themes and nine sub- themes that are recognized in observations are also investigated in the semi -structured interviews. Participants were asked regarding their thoughts on the themes highlighted above, including whether or not they are using. As the interviews are not fully structured, participants were encouraged to share their experiences. While conducting the interviews, there was an effort to not lead participants and everything the participants stated was recorded to directly benefit from their sentences without any interpretations.

In addition to the predefined themes mentioned above, participants were also asked about naming other strategies not specified by the author, and they were encouraged to share their strategies.

5.3.1. Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is one of the common themes, which is agreed by all participants. Further, it is the first theme that comes to mind of the participants. Participants purposefully change their physical appearance for the candidates. One of the participants (R11) stated: *“I think we all care and check our pre-interview appearance, it's a 'must' you complete before the candidate arrives”*.

Outfit is considered important and cared for by all participants. R8 underlined its importance by saying: “... no matter which type of clothes you prefer, you have to offer a clean and tidy look for a good first impression”. As it was found in observations the main point of this sub- theme is cleanliness and tidiness instead of outfit selection. While R15 underlines that they are still practicing dress code at the workplace, she believes that it has a positive impact by stating: “...it means something. I did not wake up and come here with my casual clothes, I made time for the candidate due to my respect”. R6, on the other hand, is insisting that casual clothes are giving a message of “I do not care about what you are wearing, as long as you do your job you are free” as an employer. As it can be noticed, although there are different opinions on a common style, everyone is happy with their choice and thinks that it gives a certain message to the candidates.

Makeup is seen as a complementary tool to the outfit through the eyes of the participants. All participants accepted that they are applying makeup, and reapply it when they need to. Even if sportive clothes are preferred, they state that they wear light makeup. R10 stated: “It covers facial imperfections, pimples, wrinkles, etc. and provides a complete look”. Further, during the Covid-19 pandemic period, there were also participants who stated that they applied make-up before the interview while conducting online interviews when they were working from home. As it was mentioned previously, it is important to underline that all participants are female, this sub-theme varies depending on the sex of the recruiter.

Shape of hair is another sub- theme that participants found important, and thought of together with the 2 previous sub- themes that mentioned above. They are aware of it and intentionally using this tool for making themselves more presentable. R14 mentioned that: “I always carry a small comb with me in my makeup bag, ... and use it while doing the mirror check- before meeting with the candidate”, which is a significant and daily feature for this participant. Further, R8 mentioned that she prefers to hair up in a ponytail before conducting the interviews, and making sure that it looks neat. Fixing their hair before the meeting is thought to give a better and/or professional impression by the participants.

5.3.2. Verbal Communication

From the participants' perspective, verbal communication is the most crucial part of the interviews. All of them agreed that it has a great impact on the candidate's interpretations about the firm and the role based on their experiences with candidates. This impact is two-sided, in which recruiters' opinions about the candidates are shaped mainly based on this theme.

Content is found to be at the core of the job interviews. This sub-theme is very valuable both to get to know the candidate and also to introduce the firm. Participants agreed that both the recruiter and the candidate are mainly meeting for this part, in which the information exchange occurs. R11 stated that: "... *the most part of the content is pre-defined by the employer, because of the salary range, and working conditions etc. so we do not have too many opportunities to shape it from scratch*". This 'fixed' nature of the content may limit the individual impact on this subject. As it mentioned earlier in the observation part, it would be correct to say that an 'organizational' script written by the firm is followed here as well. However, it may have a managerial implication that employers may consider offering some non-monetary benefits that might catch the attention of the candidates.

Conversations & language plays an important role between the candidate and the recruiter, and depends from one person to another. It is difficult to find commonalities and draw a pattern that can be shown as a common strategy, however, it is possible to state that participants are using it one way or another. R7 stated that: "... *when I realize that the other party is not speaking, I ask questions in a way that encourages them to speak*". Although it is the recruiters' responsibility to control the pauses and speaking times according to the respondents, candidates can also lead the course of the conversation. R10 mentioned that: "*If I have a candidate who is inclined to speak, I would never direct that person because everything she or he says is data to me*".

It is accepted that *language* is critical, and totally depends on the candidates. Participants found that senior candidates prefer a more formal and distant tone at the first interview meeting, which may be sincere over time. Junior candidates, on the other hand, are more comfortable with the more friendly tone. R14 said that: "*When interviewing young people, I prefer to talk as if we have already become colleagues and have a daily conversation*", which is a way of attracting young

candidates. It may not always be correct to categorize it as young and old candidates. For example, R8 said: “... *after the first interaction with the candidate, it can be understood what kind of tone the other party prefers by looking at the course of the conversation*”. As found in the observation part, the effort of speaking with using the technical terms is also valid for this part. In the interview process, 6 out of 10 participants accepted that they are trying to use tech terms to catch the candidates’ attention. According to their understanding, tech talents are impressed by the interviewers, who speak tech language. However, they are not trained in the technology field, which means they actually use terms just to impress the other side without knowing the meaning.

5.3.3. *Body language*

Participants have different opinions about this theme and its sub- themes. While each participant acknowledged that they are actively using body language in some way, half of them (5 out of 10), were not able to define properly how to use it as a tool for attracting candidates. Expressions of R13 might be a summary of this theme: “... *I think I am using it quite often, but I am having difficulty describing how I am doing it or which type of changes occur*”. R7 shared the similar perspective by mentioning: “*Of course my body language differs when I am around the candidates, but I could not name it right now. I have more control of myself in front of them; but back in the office area, I am more comfortable*”.

Posture is a distinct sub- theme in which all participants expressed that they are standing and sitting more relaxed when they are not together with the candidates. As previously underlined in the observation data, they save their comfortable posture when they are around their coworkers and the other employees. In fact, R9 shared that she sometimes sat cross- legged in the common office area while she was responding to her e- mails alone. Further, one respondent shared that their workplace has some bean bag chairs, which is her favorite spot at the office where she almost has a lie down position when she is working alone. R13 stated: “*I am trying to keep sitting up straight at the interviews, because I think it is important for the seriousness of the meeting*”, and by saying that it is implied that continuity of recruiter’s posture during a job interview meeting corresponds to maintaining one’s desired tone at the meeting. R6 shares the same views by saying that: “*In my opinion, slouching in front of the candidate gives the impression of being*

insecure”, from this point, it can be considered as an avoidable act in front of the candidates for giving a more secure impression.

Facial expressions is a sub- theme that is found to be a common component that every participant stated that they are intentionally using when they are around the candidates, and it noticeably differs with and without candidates. While it is stated that facial expressions that can be perceived as negative from the other party, such as frowning, sullen face, etc., are tried to be avoided; it is stated that attention was paid to mimics with a softer facial expression such as a smile, when they are around the candidates. R7 stated that: “*Ups and downs are very normal in daily business life. But it will be negative to make this feel to the candidate who sees you for the first time... so it is a good tool to hide it with your smile*”, which can be considered as masking negative experiences with a smile for hiding it from the candidates. R11 shared the same point of view by saying that: “*I think looking friendly and pleasant makes a good first impression, and you can reach it with a big smile*”, which means . R15 empathizes with the candidates and mentioned: “*... no one wants to be a co-worker with an angry or sad person*” that underlines that the improper facial expressions will give unsolicited messages to the candidates.

Hand and head movements are found to be less relevant than the other sub- themes. Because the participants were not able to describe or they do not seem to reflect upon their usage of hand and head movements when they are around the candidates. However, there are three participants who shared their view about this sub- theme. R12 stated: “*... nodding sometimes means that I am listening to you*”, and it might be thought of as a way of conveying ‘you are listened’ message. In relation to that, R6 mentioned: “*... not sure about my usage, however, it would be beneficial to be more aware of it from now on*”, which might be a moment of realization of the importance of this sub- theme. R8, on the other hand, has a different opinion about this, and shared it by saying: “*I do not think that it is a big deal. When I was a candidate for my current tech recruiter position, I did not pay attention to how my recruiter used his hands or head. Plus, tech candidates are less attentive than us*”, which is a comment that formed based on one’s personal experience.

Eye and body contact is a sub-theme that all participants agree to use properly, which means they are aware that too much or too little use of these contacts were thought to have a negative impact. They shared that they made an effort to do this without overdoing it and without disturbing the candidates. R10 stated that: “... *there should be a balance. It is not a good idea to avoid eye contact or to stare at candidates for a long amount of time*”. Especially, when it comes to body contact, participants underline that they are very careful. R15 emphasized that: “... *reading the candidates’ need for the physical space, sometimes, I wave my hand instead of hand shaking at the end of the meeting*”. The intensity and frequency of both contacts with candidates depends on their interpretation of the message they receive from the candidates. 2 participants out of 10 were not sure about the impact of the eye and the body contact, and they think that it is a neutral act.

5.3.4. Meeting Setting

All the participants stated that they are using a different meeting room for job interviews, 6 participants out of 10 think that those meeting rooms do not add any value to the interview. Since they are not opposed to having this room, they think that the overall attractiveness of the company or the desired employer message would not change if they prefer another room. However, one of them (R9) stated: “...*it is nice to have one room that is always tidy, private and available when an outsider arrives*”, since they have an open- office space, in which employees can sit wherever they prefer and change it everyday without putting in any personal items.

Because they also conduct online recruitment meetings, one of the six respondents (R10) believes that having a meeting setting is not crucial for the interviews. In the course of the interview with the author of this study, R10 expressed her frustration over accidentally double booking the meeting space with a teammate: “... *although it happens extremely rarely, we both scheduled the room at the same time because of an error. I immediately took my candidate to the HR room and there I conducted the interview... I almost embarrass myself*”. It can be inferred from here that although the presence of the meeting setting is not considered important, its absence is a cause of panic and frustration by the participants. This negative effect of absence on the technical recruiter may be a factor influencing the interaction between the candidate and the technical recruiter.

4 participants out of 10 think that having a separate room is advantageous for the interviews. In addition, these participants stated that those rooms were designed differently from the rest of the

office. R12 mentioned that: “... *it became my comfort zone, and when I am comfortable, I can provide comfort and more efficient meetings to the candidates*”. In a way that the room provides a relaxation to the recruiter, it may enhance the efficiency of the interview. Furthermore, R7 stated: “*No one knocks in the middle of a conversation when all employees know that this room is for job interview meetings*”. The fact that the meeting’s integrity is not divided due to the private space provided by the room can contribute to the continuity and overall quality of the interview.

5.4. Summary of the Results chapter

Adjustments were categorized as four themes, and nine sub- themes. The first theme is physical appearance, which consists of outfit, makeup, and hair shape. Physical appearance adjustments make them appear neater. Although they came to the office already dressed carefully, they made small changes before candidate arrival. The second theme is verbal communication, which consists of content, conversation and language. It includes what and how people are talking. Recruiters are spoken differently around the candidates in terms of content and manner. Body language, which includes posture, facial expressions, head and hand movements, eye and body contact, is the third theme. Recruiters adjust it to appear more friendly when they are with candidates. The last theme is the meeting setting, although not related to the recruiter, its importance was found to be significant.

It is found that recruiters significantly modify their performance when they are with candidates. Changes in physical appearance and body language are visible and making it simple for the observer to spot the adjustment. Those were quick shifts, and it was easier to categorize them with or without candidates. These changes are also distinguishable for the participants, e.g. when the candidate has not arrived yet, one participant was refreshing make-up ‘to be ready for the candidate’. In the interview part, the participants were more aware of their physical appearance adjustments when they were around the candidates, they began to talk about those changes.

Compared to the changes in physical appearance and body language, changes in the conversations and language require more attention and time period to notice. People speak with a certain professional attitude because they are already in the workplace, which makes it difficult to observe changes in language. Participants had to be observed with and without candidates for a

certain period of time, or it was necessary to ask questions. Additionally, content changes widely at the front stage. At the backstage, daily life, HR issues and this study were discussed. When there is a candidate, the topics change completely. Job interview-specific content such as giving information to the candidate and getting information from the candidate were main topics.

All of these adjustments are a component of the way a recruiter performs in attracting candidates and seen as a technical recruiter's individual strategy. Those strategies should be differentiated from the firm's employer branding strategies in that the participants were never asked to perform in a certain manner by their employer. Only in the content sub-theme, there is a professional script that is produced by the firm and is expected to be followed, e.g. information about salary.

All the adjustments they make in front of the candidates as personal strategies they believe to be appealing. These adjustments may vary from person to person, as each person's definition of 'appropriateness' varies. Although various impressions are planned to be given, the common point is that recruiters aim to give these impressions by developing individual strategies to reach their intended impression. Since they aim to reach the ideal impression they have in their minds, the strategies they use when they are around the candidates are shaped based on their specific agenda. Therefore, they intentionally or unintentionally communicate in a certain way.

In this study, it was categorized as personal strategies of recruiters to act differently on the front stage. It is possible to conclude that the participants of this study performing differently in front of the candidates can be called the individual strategies of a recruiter. This performance requires further investigation with the light of selected theoretical framework.

6. Discussion

This chapter offers the investigation of the previous chapter through symbolic interactionism and Erving Goffman's *impression management* theories. Overall, this part presents how the collected data is explained by the chosen theories and its relation to previous studies.

6.1. Recruitment meeting as a performance

Addressing earlier studies, recruitment is essential for HR (Hamza et. al., 2021), and approaching recruitment academically is relevant for all parties that are involved in this process, i.e. employer, candidate, and recruiter. Specially, technical recruitment is a popular research topic (Singh& Kamal, 2019; Prasad, et. al., 2019), and it is still open to be examined from different angles. This study proposes to treat the first recruitment meeting as a performance of a technical recruiter, which is a main difference from earlier studies and contribution to the HR field.

As mentioned, Lawong et. al. (2019) found that the recruiters with high political skills, which is the capacity to successfully comprehend, and use that insight to influence the others, have a positive effect on attracting candidates. By defining the recruiter in this study as a performer, it can be argued that if they give the candidate the impression that they have high political skills during the initial meeting, this will have a positive impact on the candidate. Referring back to the interview data, some participants explained their specific way of behaviors to convey a specific message. While the participants were explaining the adjustments in front of the candidates, they said that they made this change for the 'desirable' impression. For example, some participants underlined that they prefer to smile in front of the candidates for delivering the message of 'being friendly'. In their mind, making this particular facial expression means a sincere image with the intent of providing a warm image. It can be said that it is consistent with the previous studies, in which Rynes' (1991) contribution of the correlation between recruiter's warm behavior and candidate attraction, and Turban& Dougherty's (1992) contribution of significant correlation between recruiter's positive behavior and candidate attraction.

Unlike the previous studies that benefited from the HR perspective (e.g. Powell, 1984), or marketing perspective (e.g. Sokro, 2012) on the topic of recruitment and candidate attraction, this study is benefiting from the symbolic interactionism as a way of interpreting the recruiters'

performance, it contributes to the literature by looking at it from a new angle, which is sociological and micro- level. Further, using Goffman terminology enriches the understanding of recruiters' meaning making processes through their performance of desirable self- representation.

6.2. Goffman's impression management as a way of understanding the recruitment meeting

Referring back to Goffman, recruitment meetings enable recruiters to practice impression management to give a desired version of themselves. As previously mentioned, Giannantonio et. al. (2019) points out that specifically recruiters' friendliness has a significant positive impact on candidate attraction, in relation to this study, they perform their desired versions to be more friendly. This is consistent with the earlier research by Taylor and Bergmann, organizational attractiveness from the candidates' eyes, correlated with interview qualities and candidates' perceptions of recruiter empathy (1987). The adjustments found through recruiters' performances in this study also support these findings, as they are made to increase the interview quality and try to adopt tech language to find common ground with the candidates.

The specific setting is the first interview, and the human interaction is recruiter- candidate communication. In this study, technical recruiters are performers, and the candidates are the audience. Performers have different masks, i.e. employee, coworker, and recruiter masks, and as expected from the performer, they are changing their masks based on their settings. Technical recruiters' adjustments based on the environment are the main source of information, and should be analyzed to understand the meaning behind it. In addition to that, the first interview setting also meets Goffman's criteria of face to face interactions and micro- level analysis.

6.2.1 The backstage

As Goffman defines, performers create their 'scripts', in which they are using in front of the audience. At this stage, they are more comfortable, and it is important to acknowledge that performers wear the masks of employee and colleague since they are already in a social setting. In the backstage area, these performers are more relaxed, less formal, both in appearance and in

verbal and bodily communication, as in both observations and interviews. Performers are free to behave and talk informally, and stand without too much concern about the impression they make.

As the performer switches their mask from the employee or co-worker to the recruiter mask, it is found that they suddenly adapted to the front stage, in front of the audience, and almost immediately started to dramatic realization based on their script. While the change from the back to the front stage is very rapid, it contains differences that can be observed from the outside. Straightening a hunched back in the hallway, and fixing the hair by hand while going to meet the candidate at the door are examples of this rapid and observable change.

The professional nature of the backstage area in this study sometimes had problems directly fitting Goffman's terminology and required lengthy investigation. Although people are comfortable in a candidate-free environment, it should not be forgotten that this area is also a front stage compared to one's home setting.

6.2.2 The front stage

Performers deliver a performance based on the scripts that were created backstage, and use the recruiter mask at this stage. While they perform based on the role they find appropriate, they stay in character and provide the maintenance of expressive control, because it is expected and appreciated by the audience that each behavior is consistent with this role.

In addition, other terms that Goffman defines as integral parts of performance are also fully consistent with the results. To begin with, the setting is the meeting room, in which the interview occurs. As noted, these interviews are held in a separate meeting room, which has been found beneficial by participants. Although this is not directly related to the performer, it is related to the performance itself. Therefore, it should be considered as a factor that can have an impact on the recruiter, which may provide assistance to them while they are performing. The second term is appearance, which is also an important finding for this study. It has been found that, in the front stage area, performers took care of their appearances and body language. The last term is manner, which is referred to as the way one acts. The findings suggest that the performer drastically changes their manners when they are around candidates to create a desirable first impression.

This finding of desirable first impression is valuable for this study referring to another study that previously mentioned, Uggerslev et al. found that recruiter behavior and characteristics had a positive effect on attracting candidates in the early stages of the recruitment process (2012).

6.3. Individual strategies for candidate attraction

As it mentioned, with the sample of young and inexperienced job seekers, Carless and Wintle (2007) acknowledged that recruiters are crucial for the recruitment processes, however, they were not able to find a correlation between recruiter's impact on the candidate attraction. Although this study was closest to the subject of this study, it is important to distinguish that this study was concerned with the recruiter standpoint through the individual strategies they produced and used. Therefore it is important to underline this study's contribution of sample selection and pointing out the topic from the recruiter perspective.

Unlike the previously mentioned study (Leekha Chhabra and Sharma, 2014) that found organizational culture, brand name and compensation are found to be important for candidate attraction; this study indicates the importance of technical recruiters' individual strategies. The adjustments from backstage to front stage can be seen as individual strategies for attracting candidates. Two studies mentioned earlier, in which samples are the candidate, on the impact of recruiters in making the employer/ job attractive are mentioned. One of them (Harris& Fink, 1987), found out that recruiters' characteristics have a significant impact on candidate attraction; the other study (Adeosun& Ohiani, 2019), did not find any correlation between these two variables. This study underlines the strategies that are created for attracting candidates, which supports findings of Harris and Fink (1987), and rejects the findings of Adeosun and Ohiani (2019).

Different from the previous studies on the subject (Alashmawy& Yazdanifard, 2019; Amarakoon & Colley, 2022), this paper focuses on evaluating employer branding as a performance. As it mentioned before, adjustments from backstage to front stage are directly related to technical recruiters' individual choice, which might be beneficial to differentiate from the company's

employer branding activities. Individuals behave more ‘appropriately’ in front of candidates to make a good first impression on the candidates, which is because they make the employer and the job look more attractive. This performance, made to appear attractive while the candidate is around, is a vital move, given that recruiting is a two-sided selection process, as was stated at the beginning of this study. In other words, the likelihood of being selected by the candidate can be increased by being perceived as attractive to the candidate during the first encounter.

Referring to the previous literature on SMEs, it is underlined that due to their unique positions in the business and significant contribution of the economy (Prasanna et. al., 2019), the topic of SMEs requires attention for research to understand their exclusive characteristics. In addition to that, as mentioned earlier, SMEs have some unique characteristics that larger organizations should learn from (Chanyatipsakul& Wongsurawat, 2013). As also found in this study, referring to previously mentioned study (Zinyemba, 2014) a brain drain and a shortage of skilled employees created difficulties for SMEs because they are forced to compete with larger ones that offer higher compensation. Referring back to the study of Delikanli and Kilic (2021), all research on SMEs in Turkey highlight the challenges with financial stress. Therefore, it is a deliberate choice to examine the candidate attraction through SMEs in Turkey, as SMEs’ financial difficulties create a situation, in which they may not offer attractive monetary benefits for the candidates (Saleh and Ndubisi, 2006) and are unable to allocate a high budget for employer branding activities. However, some non- monetary factors were found beneficial for the candidate attraction previously (Arthur, 2001), and as a part of this, creating a candidate attraction in the first meeting that is formed by the recruiters might be considered. This study offers some solutions to not offering monetary incentives, and effective usage of these above- mentioned individual strategies, which may not seem impactful at the first, but they have an overall positive effect.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis four themes and nine sub- themes were found as individual strategies adopted by technical recruiters for candidate attraction in the first meeting at the technology SMEs in Turkey.

As the disciplines of sociology and psychology regularly employ symbolic interactionism and Goffman's approach, one of this study's contributions is to introduce this understanding to the HRM literature, by providing a performative perspective. Further, providing an insider perspective to the HRM literature by making use of recruiters as a valuable source of information. A necessary way of thinking for HRM is to view the problem of employer branding as performance through daily actions. Focusing on daily routines rather than long-term projects ensures a positive candidate experience and workplace atmosphere.

For practical suggestions, employers and HR employees consider investing in boosting the recruiters' skills for candidate attraction. Once these skills are developed, the potential job/ employer appears more attractive at the first meeting. Despite the fact that this study focuses on technical recruiters, the findings are generalizable and useful to all HR professionals because the main goal is for HR professionals to make a positive impression on potential employees with their performance. All HR professionals can make this priority of their daily performances for the aim of employer branding by keeping this perspective in mind. Employers consider to decorate the meeting room, which can be easily implemented based on the employer's impression they want to give. The meeting room, where candidates contact their potential workplace for the first time, can be a factor in forming an idea about the workplace.

For further studies, it will be beneficial to examine the end- to- end recruitment process. Due to the time limit of this study, a short period of the recruitment has been focused. Extending the study period will result in richer data as it will include the variable of whether the candidate selects the employer. Although it can be examined from different angles utilizing other theories, it is still relevant to use symbolic interactionism as well, since rich content can still be produced by examining performance as it provides insights. In such studies, learning the views of the candidates will be valuable both for professionals and the literature. In the future, conducting research in different countries would have fruitful results and will provide a rich comparison.

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Appendix 1- Table of respondents

Respondents	Data collection method	Years of experience	Workplace
Recruiter 1	Participant observation	3	SME 1
Recruiter 2	Participant observation	3	SME 2
Recruiter 3	Participant observation	4	SME 2
Recruiter 4	Participant observation	3.5	SME 3
Recruiter 5	Participant observation	5	SME 4
Recruiter 6	Semi-structured interview	3	SME 9
Recruiter 7	Semi-structured interview	3	SME 7
Recruiter 8	Semi-structured interview	3.5	SME 4
Recruiter 9	Semi-structured interview	4	SME 1
Recruiter 10	Semi-structured interview	4	SME 5
Recruiter 11	Semi-structured interview	4	SME 7
Recruiter 12	Semi-structured interview	4.5	SME 6
Recruiter 13	Semi-structured interview	4.5	SME 8
Recruiter 14	Semi-structured interview	5	SME 5
Recruiter 15	Semi-structured interview	5	SME 6

Appendix 2- Coding Scheme

Respondents	Data collection method	Raw data	Code	Sub- theme	Main theme
Recruiter 1	Participant observation	nodding while listening, keeping the eye contact, hand shaking before and after the interview	body language	Actively using non-verbal language	The importance of the using body language
Recruiter 11	Semi-structured interview	So of course, what you say is very important... but if you do this without caring about your actions, it will make no sense. It is also necessary to always smile, maintain a soft facial expression and express yourself using your hands.	body language	using body language as a complementary tool for verbal language	The importance of the using body language
Recruiter 4	Participant observation	tidying up the outfit and freshening up the make-up before the interview, straightening the hair before and during the interview.	physical appearance	physically getting ready for the interview	The necessity of taking care of the physical appearance
Recruiter 8	Semi-structured interview	I think it really matters how a recruiter looks. After all, first experiences are formed accordingly and no one can get a good impression from a person who looks dirty and untidy.	physical appearance	tidy look as a way of forming a good first impression	The necessity of taking care of the physical appearance

Appendix 3- Consent Form

Information to participants about the student Master project Technical Recruiter's Strategies for Candidate Attraction

The aim of this project is to further examine how recruiters can play a role in candidate attraction in the recruitment processes, by looking at technical recruiters' individual strategies at the first recruitment meeting, an underexplored theme within the HR literature. I am contacting you because I am interested in your experiences of technical recruitment.

This is a student project and will result in a thesis within the Master Program in HRM and Labour Relation Analysis at the University of Gothenburg. The study is conducted independently by the student Berfin Çetin, under the supervision of Petra Adolfsson, who is a senior lecturer at the Department of Business Administration.

Implementation of the study

The data collection consists of observations and qualitative semi –structured interviews. Interviews are recorded with the permission of the participant. Selected data collection strategies will be implemented face to face, more specifically, observations will take place at the workplace and interviews will take place at the common meeting place, in which you can suggest. The study follows good research practice.

Your personal data will be confidential. You can withdraw your participation at any time. You and your workplace will be given a pseudonym when interviews are transcribed and analyzed.

Handling of collected material

Collected data are kept locked away on password protected computers and are only available to authorized persons. Interview recordings will be transcribed. In the final thesis, extracts from interviews may be cited and interviewees are given a pseudonym to keep anonymity. The collected material will be used for the master thesis under the conditions described herein. Collected data will be erased after completion of the thesis.

Results and publication

The results of the study will be published in the form of a Master thesis that is planned to be completed in 2023. The thesis may be published electronically by University of Gothenburg, and participants will be able to download the essay from GUPEA <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/>.

Voluntary participation

Participation is voluntary and consent is given orally or in written. You can withdraw your participation at any time. You can withdraw your participation at any time and no explanation is needed; the data can be erased at any time during the study.

For questions and further information, please contact:

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Consent to participate

I have read and fully understood the scope and implications of participating in this student MA project. Any questions I had were answered satisfactorily.

- I agree to participate, and that the interviews can be digitally recorded.
- I agree to my personal details being handled as described above.

Date and place	Name and Signature (participant)
Date and place	Name and Signature (student)