

Optimizing Frontline Employee Recruitment Strategies in Enterprises Based on Candidates' Dissatisfaction Events: A Perspective of CIT and AHP

I-Ching Chen*, Ting Luo

School of Economics and Management, Zhaoqing University, 526060, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment of frontline employees plays a pivotal role in ensuring sustainable business operations and strategic human resource planning. However, many enterprises, driven by the notion of recruitment advantage, have triggered numerous incidents of applicant dissatisfaction, ultimately damaging their corporate image. Recruitment is inherently a two-way selection process, and companies must adopt a more balanced perspective to identify candidates who are truly suited for frontline roles. This study analyzes 80 critical incidents of applicant dissatisfaction using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). These incidents are categorized into five dimensions: process design, recruitment information, interview environment, interview process, and feedback results. Among them, the interview process accounts for the highest proportion (45.00%), followed by process design (21.25%). Through AHP, the relative weights of each factor are determined, revealing that equitable communication during interviews and transparency in recruitment information are the most influential elements. Based on these findings, the study offers strategic recommendations to optimize frontline employee recruitment practices.

Keywords— Candidate Dissatisfaction Incidents, Critical Incident Technique, Frontline Employees, Recruitment Strategies, Analytic Hierarchy Process

INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of the knowledge economy and the diversification of market dynamics, sustainable business operations and competitive advantage increasingly depend not only on products and services, but also on strategic human resource management. Human capital is a critical driver of organizational competitiveness and economic strength, with frontline employees comprising a significant proportion of the workforce. As the initial and foundational stage of HR management, the quality of recruitment and the degree of person–job fit are essential to long-term organizational development. Although many enterprises have recognized the strategic importance of frontline recruitment and incorporated it into their planning, limitations in resource allocation, institutional design, and prioritization have hindered recruitment effectiveness. Common challenges include low applicant turnout, high recruitment costs, poor person–job matching, and elevated turnover rates. In the context of the Chinese labor market, frontline recruitment presents unique complexities. On one hand, structural contradictions persist—there is an oversupply of low-skilled labor alongside a shortage of skilled frontline workers, intensifying competition among firms for high-quality talent. On the other hand, the emerging generation of job seekers exhibits heightened awareness of rights and autonomy. Applicants are no longer passive

recipients of employer decisions; instead, they actively voice dissatisfaction through online platforms and industry communities, where a single negative incident can rapidly escalate into a public relations crisis. Moreover, the rise of flexible employment models has eroded traditional employer advantages, prompting candidates to make more rational and experience-driven decisions. The recruitment experience itself has become a core factor influencing applicant choices. Historically, recruitment was perceived as employer-dominated, with applicants often silently accepting unfair treatment. However, as job seekers become more informed and empowered, recruitment is increasingly viewed as a dynamic, two-way selection process. Therefore, when designing recruitment processes for frontline roles, enterprises must go beyond internal cost and efficiency considerations. They must actively listen to applicant feedback and continuously refine recruitment systems to achieve both optimal person–job fit and mutual selection.

In response to the frequent occurrence of applicant dissatisfaction in frontline employee recruitment, this study adopts the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to examine existing issues within corporate recruitment systems and propose corresponding solutions. Based on the empirical findings, the study offers practical recommendations aimed at helping enterprises align recruitment strategies with organizational development goals and operational needs. By doing so, companies can avoid ineffective recruitment practices and, with minimal resource investment, attract frontline employees who are not only well-matched to their roles but also capable of growing alongside the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource Recruitment

In a narrower sense, recruitment refers to the development and management of human resources. However, many enterprises have found that newly recruited employees often fail to meet job expectations, resulting in low candidate satisfaction, high turnover rates, and ultimately ineffective recruitment outcomes. In response, scholars have begun to explore strategies for effective recruitment. Collins and Stevens viewed effective recruitment as the strategic use of resources to optimize recruitment activities and maximize goal achievement [2]. Ahmad and Schroeder emphasized that effective recruitment involves acquiring talent that aligns with the organization's development needs through appropriate methods [3]. This concept not only focuses on obtaining the right talent but also highlights employee adaptability and satisfaction. The widespread adoption of effective recruitment practices marks a foundational shift in human resource management and reflects progress in societal employment standards.

The application of diverse theoretical frameworks and models in human resource recruitment has been extensively explored in prior research. Van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii integrated the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, refining the JD-R framework by introducing the concept of “support for strength use.” Their study examined how this support mechanism mitigates the adverse effects of cumulative job demands on employee well-being [4]. Bowen and Ostroff employed the HRM system strength theory to demonstrate that a strong HRM system—characterized by consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness—can significantly enhance organizational performance [5]. They proposed a “strength” framework to guide recruitment practices, ensuring effective communication and implementation of HR policies. Oruche et al. drawing on Andersen's Behavioral Model of Health Services Use, validated the effectiveness of broadcast advertising in reducing stigma and increasing participation willingness, thereby optimizing resource allocation and improving recruitment efficiency [6]. Galli et al. applied social marketing theory and the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) framework to develop a recruitment optimization model, offering a replicable methodology for recruitment in health intervention contexts [7].

Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

The CIT, introduced by Flanagan and Belles in 1954, is a qualitative research method that involves collecting and categorizing individuals' real-life stories or significant events to support inference and prediction. This technique focuses on both positive and negative experiences and has been widely applied across various disciplines. Bitner et al. emphasized the importance of employee–customer interactions in the service industry, advocating for the use of customer storytelling to assess service satisfaction [8]. CIT enables qualitative insights into customer expectations, service deficiencies, and improvement strategies. Coetzer et al. applied CIT to examine decision-making processes related to training and development opportunities in small and medium-sized enterprises, offering a systematic and qualitative analysis of driving factors, patterns [9], and characteristics. Johnston used CIT to investigate determinants of service quality—both satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors—providing a structured understanding of their mechanisms and features. Peltola et al. employed CIT to explore communication between healthcare professionals and patients, analyzing relevant factors and characteristics in a qualitative and systematic manner [10][11].

Although CIT has been extensively utilized in diverse fields and topics, it has not yet been applied to the study of recruitment systems in Chinese enterprises. This paper adopts CIT to categorize and analyze candidate dissatisfaction incidents across different stages of corporate interviews, aiming to offer strategic recommendations for frontline recruitment system design. The goal is to enhance human resource management practices across industries and improve recruitment effectiveness.

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

The Analytic Hierarchy Process, first introduced in the 1970s by a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, has gained widespread recognition for its statistical rigor and decision-making capabilities. Scholars across various disciplines have adopted this method to conduct in-depth academic research. Joshi et al. applied AHP to examine the factors influencing the selection of Picture Archiving and Communication Systems (PACS) in medical imaging [11]. From the perspectives of PACS administrators and radiologists, they constructed a structural model and identified key weighted factors such as system continuity, performance architecture, and workflow management. Their findings emphasized the importance of prioritizing system backup security and multimodal support. Sheng et al. utilized AHP to explore the commercial value of “grey spaces” beneath overpasses, developing a structural model to assess various influencing factors [12]. The resulting weight distribution informed targeted development recommendations. Mekonnen et al. employed AHP to investigate flood hazard zoning in the Upper Awash River Basin in Ethiopia [13]. Their model identified drainage density and soil permeability as core weighted factors, leading to strategic suggestions such as prioritizing river dredging projects.

AHP is widely applicable and treats research subjects as systems, enabling logical decomposition of factors and providing data-driven support for decision-making based on the influence of hierarchical elements. This study integrates candidate dissatisfaction incidents with AHP to synthesize data, derive results, and rank decision factors by weight, ultimately offering strategic recommendations for frontline employee recruitment in enterprises.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to collect real-life accounts of frontline job candidates who experienced significant dissatisfaction during the interview process. These incidents serve as the foundation for exploring the underlying causes and informing strategies to improve recruitment systems and practices for

frontline positions. Initially, data collection methods considered included questionnaire distribution, face-to-face interviews, and interactive discussions via mobile applications. To balance time efficiency and data authenticity, the final approach focused on gathering detailed user comments from the Zhihu app, which provided rich and specific accounts of dissatisfaction.

Subsequently, a structured questionnaire was developed to categorize the incidents and apply the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). Using statistical software, the study calculated the relative weights of each hierarchical factor, enabling a prioritized ranking of key elements. Based on these rankings, targeted recruitment strategies and recommendations were proposed for small, medium, and large enterprises.

Data Collection

To collect dissatisfaction-related incidents, this study selected Zhihu—a widely used Chinese Q&A platform—as the primary data source. Under the topic “interview,” the platform hosts over 301,000 discussion threads, with approximately 70% of responses involving applicant dissatisfaction, indicating strong sample representativeness. From this pool, 80 incidents related to frontline job interviews were selected, all posted within the past year. The selection process strictly adhered to academic standards: (1) responses containing promotional content or exaggerated narratives were excluded to ensure authenticity; (2) original user descriptions were retained in full to avoid misinterpretation or semantic distortion; and (3) responses with fewer than 10 likes were excluded to ensure public relevance and typicality, thereby enhancing sample quality. For the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed over a one-month period (January 1–30, 2021). Respondents included two groups: (1) individuals who had posted the selected dissatisfaction incidents, and (2) frontline employees with experience in campus or social recruitment, ensuring diverse perspectives. To minimize response bias, participants were briefed in advance on key instructions—such as avoiding duplicate answers and maintaining consistency in judgment. Invalid responses (e.g., identical answers to five consecutive items or missing critical information) were removed during data screening. Ultimately, 212 valid questionnaires were retained, providing a robust foundation for subsequent AHP analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS: CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

Data Analysis and Classification

The dissatisfaction incidents were initially categorized into three temporal stages: pre-interview, during the interview, and post-interview. To further refine the classification, the content of each incident was analyzed based on the candidate’s personal experience, resulting in five substantive categories, as presented in TABLE I to ensure classification reliability and academic rigor, two senior university professors and one professional HR practitioner were invited to serve as coders. Each of the 80 incidents was independently assigned to one of the five categories. A follow-up classification round was conducted two weeks later to reassess and confirm the initial coding. This process provided a robust foundation for subsequent data analysis and the formulation of practical recommendations.

Table I Classification Principles

Classified items
Pre-Interview: A. Process Design

B. Recruitment Information
During Interview:
C. Interview Environment
D. Interview process
Post-Interview:
E. Feedback on Results

Reliability and Validity Testing

In the reliability analysis of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), two key dimensions are examined: intra-rater consistency and inter-rater agreement. If the classification consistency coefficient among two or more coders exceeds 0.80, the categorization results are considered reliable. Therefore, this section evaluates data reliability from both individual consistency and cross-coder agreement perspectives. Validity is assessed through the completeness and rigor of data collection, as well as through expert review and guidance provided by professionals with relevant expertise or substantial field experience. Detailed explanations of these procedures will be presented in the following sections.

1) Intra-Rater Classification Consistency: Intra-rater classification consistency refers to the process by which coders evaluate and categorize the same incident at two separate time points, spaced two weeks apart. The greater the number of incidents assigned to the same category across both rounds of classification, the higher the consistency; conversely, fewer matches indicate lower consistency. After consolidating the data, the classification results of the three coders are summarized in TABLE II.

Table II Intra-Rater Classification Consistency

Coder	Coder A	Coder B	Coder C
Number of pieces			
Matched Cases	69	71	73
Total Cases	80	80	80
Consistency Ratio	0.8625	0.8875	0.9125

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the consistency coefficients are 0.8625, 0.8875, and 0.9125, respectively. As all values exceed the threshold of 0.80, this indicates that each of the three coders demonstrated a high level of intra-rater classification consistency. According to relevant academic standards, such consistency provides a solid methodological foundation for subsequent data analyses.

2) Reliability: Inter-Rater Classification Consistency: Inter-Rater Classification Consistency Inter-rater classification consistency refers to the degree of agreement among different coders when categorizing the same incident. A high level of discrepancy among coders indicates low data consistency and limited referential value. Conversely, minimal differences suggest high consistency and stronger referential validity, thereby providing a reliable foundation for subsequent investigations. To further verify the credibility of inter-rater consistency, and in accordance with relevant academic standards, the reliability of the data was assessed using the following formula.

Table III Inter - Rater Classification Consistency

	Coder A	Coder B	Coder C
Coder A	80		
Coder B	63	80	
Coder C	67	67	80

$$A = \frac{\frac{2M_{12}}{n_1+n_2} + \frac{2M_{23}}{n_2+n_3} + \frac{2M_{13}}{n_1+n_3}}{N} = 0.821 \quad (1)$$

$$R = \frac{N \times A}{1 + [(N-1) \times A]} = 0.932 > 0.800 \quad (2)$$

Where: R = Reliability; N = Number of coders; A = Average inter-rater agreement; M = Number of matching classifications among coders; n = Number of incidents evaluated by each coder;

Based on the calculations, the average inter-rater agreement (A) was 0.821 and the reliability coefficient (R) was 0.932. Both indices exceed the commonly accepted academic threshold of 0.80, indicating a high level of consistency among coders. This reliability provides a robust foundation for subsequent analyses.

3) Validity: This study collected 80 critical incidents based on responses from interviewees applying for frontline positions in participating enterprises. Prior to analysis, incidents containing exaggerations or elements inconsistent with factual authenticity were screened out, ensuring both the depth and breadth of the data. Furthermore, the design of the incident classification framework was informed by relevant scholarly literature and refined under the guidance of an associate professor from the School of Economics and Management, who reviewed the categorization principles. These procedures collectively reinforce the rigor of the data collection and design process, thereby supporting the validity and professionalism of this research to a considerable extent [14].

Data Analysis Results

The 80 dissatisfaction-related incidents collected in this study were categorized into five major dimensions: process design, recruitment information, interview environment, interview process, and outcome feedback. The classification was conducted based on the professional judgment of the coders, who evaluated and assigned each incident to the appropriate category. The final distribution of incident types, including the number of cases and their respective proportions, is presented in Table IV.

Table IV Summary Of Incident Type Classification

Category	Unsatisfactory incident	
	Number of Incidents	Percentage
Process Design	17	21.25%
Recruitment Information	10	12.50%
Interview Environment	8	10.00%
Interview process	36	45.00%
Outcome Feedback	9	11.25%

As shown in Table IV, the interview process accounts for the largest proportion of dissatisfaction incidents. This is primarily attributed to the prevailing “employer-dominated” mindset among many companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises. Such attitudes often manifest as overly critical or dismissive behaviors, including actions such as discarding résumés in front of candidates or making sarcastic remarks during interviews. Process design ranks second in terms of incident frequency, reflecting the degree of organizational commitment to recruitment professionalism. Details such as scheduling and procedural planning serve as indicators of recruitment quality. However, many companies exhibit a lack of rigor in this area, resulting in issues like inconsistent statements from interviewers and disorganized process changes, which leave candidates feeling passive and frustrated. Recruitment information accounts for 12.50% of the incidents, highlighting candidates’ dissatisfaction with the timeliness, completeness, and accuracy of job-related information. Although interview environment and outcome feedback represent smaller proportions, they nonetheless reveal a common gap in candidate experience—from preparation to post-interview communication. These findings suggest that many companies fail to adequately value job seekers throughout the recruitment process. Candidates generally expect clear guidance, detailed procedural explanations, and timely feedback. When these expectations are unmet, dissatisfaction is likely to arise.

HIERARCHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Data Analysis

The dissatisfaction incidents collected in this study were categorized to identify the key elements influencing frontline recruitment systems in enterprises, and a hierarchical analytical structure was established accordingly. Based on temporal cues, the first-level classification consists of five major categories: process design, recruitment information, interview environment, interview process, and outcome feedback. Each of these first-level categories was further divided into five subcategories: process design includes process planning, scheduling, job definition, selection criteria, and interviewer training; recruitment information includes transparency, job content, application requirements, compensation and benefits, and publication channels; interview environment includes document review, venue setup, site guidance, reception arrangements, and company introduction; interview process includes equal communication, process announcement, professional assessment, evaluative remarks, and privacy inquiries; outcome feedback includes timely response, feedback method, respectful attitude, document return, and follow-up guidance. This classification framework was reviewed and revised by a professional instructor prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, and the finalized element classification is presented in TABLE V.

Table V AHP Data Classification

Classification element					
Level 1	Process Design	Recruitment Information	Interview Environment	Interview process	Outcome Feedback
Level 2	Process Planning	Transparency	Document Review	Equal Communication	Timely Response
Level 3	Scheduling	Job Content	Venue Setup	Process Announcement	Feedback Method
Level 4	Job Definition	Application	Site Guidance	Professional	Respectful

		Requirements		Assessment	Attitude
Level 5	Selection Criteria	Compensation & Benefits	Reception Arrangements	Evaluative Remarks	Document Return

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) in this study was conducted through a standardized online questionnaire, targeting interviewees applying for frontline positions in enterprises. A total of 217 questionnaires were collected, with 5 deemed invalid, resulting in 212 valid responses. Among the valid responses, in terms of gender, 138 were female (65.09%) and 74 were male (34.91%); in terms of region, 133 respondents (62.74%) were from Guangdong Province, while 79 (37.26%) were from other regions; in terms of age, 142 respondents were aged 16–25, 67 were aged 26–35, and 3 were aged 36–45; in terms of educational and occupational background, 49.53% were current students, 36.79% were enterprise employees, 7.55% were employed in public institutions, 2.36% were freelancers, 0.47% were self-employed, 1.89% were unemployed or between jobs, and 1.42% belonged to other categories; in terms of monthly income, 43 respondents earned ¥1,000 or less, 46 earned between ¥1,001 and ¥2,000, 73 earned between ¥2,001 and ¥3,000, 25 earned between ¥3,001 and ¥4,000, 12 earned between ¥4,001 and ¥5,000, 7 earned between ¥5,001 and ¥6,000, 5 earned between ¥6,001 and ¥8,000, and 1 respondent earned between ¥8,001 and ¥10,000.

Construction of Pairwise Comparison Matrices

Through pairwise comparisons of elements, the geometric mean method and relevant computational formulas were applied to derive the pairwise comparison matrices for each classification level. As this study includes two hierarchical levels—Level 1 comprising a single dimension and Level 2 comprising five dimensions—a total of six matrices were generated: one matrix for Level 1 and five matrices for Level 2. By applying appropriate statistical methods and computational procedures, the following data were obtained. The pairwise comparison matrix for Level 1 is presented below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.9741 & 0.8486 & 0.5180 & 1.0262 \\ 1.0265 & 1 & 1.0831 & 0.5573 & 0.9654 \\ 1.1784 & 0.9232 & 1 & 0.4756 & 0.8290 \\ 1.9304 & 1.7942 & 2.1028 & 1 & 2.6990 \\ 0.9744 & 1.0358 & 1.2063 & 0.3705 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

The pairwise comparison matrix for the second-level category of Process Design is shown below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1.0220 & 0.8432 & 1.1740 & 0.9587 \\ 0.9785 & 1 & 1.2262 & 0.7668 & 1.2373 \\ 1.1860 & 0.8155 & 1 & 0.9951 & 1.3363 \\ 0.8518 & 1.3041 & 1.0049 & 1 & 1.0353 \\ 1.0431 & 0.8082 & 0.7483 & 0.9659 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

The pairwise comparison matrix for the second-level category of Recruitment Information is shown below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1.7276 & 0.8732 & 1.3646 & 1.0866 \\ 0.5789 & 1 & 1.5121 & 0.8929 & 1.4722 \\ 1.1452 & 0.6613 & 1 & 0.8946 & 1.3183 \\ 0.7328 & 1.1199 & 1.1179 & 1 & 1.2063 \\ 0.9203 & 0.6793 & 0.7586 & 0.8290 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

The pairwise comparison matrix for the second-level category of Interview Environment is shown below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1.5409 & 0.8694 & 1.5250 & 0.9211 \\ 0.6490 & 1 & 1.2840 & 0.7692 & 1.1630 \\ 1.1502 & 0.7788 & 1 & 0.9331 & 1.1340 \\ 0.6557 & 1.3000 & 1.0717 & 1 & 0.9047 \\ 1.0856 & 0.8598 & 0.8818 & 1.1053 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

The pairwise comparison matrix for the second-level category of Interview process is shown below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1.5880 & 0.9081 & 1.3032 & 1.1517 \\ 0.6297 & 1 & 1.1697 & 0.7591 & 1.3235 \\ 1.1012 & 0.8549 & 1 & 1.0336 & 1.4123 \\ 0.7673 & 1.3174 & 0.9675 & 1 & 1.1287 \\ 0.8683 & 0.7556 & 0.7080 & 0.8860 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

The pairwise comparison matrix for the second-level category of Outcome Feedback is shown below.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1.5693 & 0.7637 & 1.3653 & 1.0468 \\ 0.6372 & 1 & 1.2497 & 0.8625 & 1.3242 \\ 1.3094 & 0.8002 & 1 & 1.0551 & 1.5496 \\ 0.7324 & 1.1594 & 0.9478 & 1 & 0.9930 \\ 0.9553 & 0.7552 & 0.6453 & 1.0070 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Calculate the element weight values

Based on the numerical values in the above comparison matrices, the priority vectors for each matrix can be further calculated using the geometric mean method. The specific formula is as follows.

$$W_i = \left(\prod_{j=1}^n a_{ij} \right)^{\frac{1}{n}} \div \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\prod_{j=1}^n a_{ij} \right)^{\frac{1}{n}} \quad (3)$$

Where W_i = the eigenvector, a_{ij} denotes the pairwise comparison matrix, $i, j=1,2,3,\dots,n$. The final eigenvector values, representing the weights of the five primary decision factors at Level 1, are shown in TABLE VI. Based on the data in this table, one can indirectly analyze the degree of importance that candidates assign to each decision factor.

Table VI Weight Values Of First-Level Decision Factors

Comparison of Weight Values for First-Level Decision Factors		
No.	Decision Factor	Weight
11	Interview process	0.34478214
2	Recruitment Information	0.17148282
3	Outcome Feedback	0.16207098
4	Process Design	0.16122313
5	Interview Environment	0.16044093

The weight values (i.e., eigenvector values) of the second-level decision factors are shown in Table VII (Listed in descending order of weight.)

Table VII The Weight Of The Second-Level Decision-Making Factors

First-Level Decision Factor	Second-Level Decision Factor	Weight
Interview Process	Equal Communication	0.23193972
	Professional Assessment	0.1871343
	Evaluative remarks	0.21179767
	Process Disclosure	0.20271501
	Privacy Inquiry	0.1664133
Recruitment Information	Transparency	0.23349506
	Job Description	0.20442585
	Compensation & Benefits	0.20284218
	Application Threshold	0.19432707
	Posting Channels	0.16490984
Result Feedback	Timely Response	0.22279979
	Respectful Attitude	0.22134227
	Feedback Method	0.19501248
	Document Return	0.19003779
	Follow-up Guidance	0.17080768
Process Design	Job Positioning	0.2100378
	Selection Criteria	0.205593
	Scheduling	0.20497177
	Process Planning	0.19850542
	Interviewer Training	0.18089201
Interview Environment	Document Review	0.22645992
	Venue Guidance	0.19743871
	Company Introduction	0.19582532
	Reception Arrangement	0.19210103
	Interview Room Setup	0.18817502

The interview process holds the highest weight, indicating that candidates place significant importance on direct interaction with the company. This stage not only reflects the professionalism, recruitment attitude, and attentiveness of the interviewers, but also indirectly conveys the company's cultural essence. It greatly influences

the candidate's first impression of the organization, making it a critical area for companies to prioritize. Recruitment information ranks second in weight and serves as the "facade" of the company's hiring efforts. As the candidate's first point of contact with the organization, its completeness, timeliness, and transparency significantly affect the decision to submit a resume. Therefore, companies must exercise strict control over its presentation. Result feedback ranks third in weight. The wording, format, and timeliness of feedback all impact the candidate's subsequent arrangements and overall perception. This highlights the importance of post-interview communication, which companies must not overlook. Process design and interview environment rank lower in weight, suggesting that candidates are relatively less concerned with the logistical and physical aspects of recruitment. Nonetheless, companies should still pay attention to the handling and details of these components to ensure a smooth and professional experience.

Consistency Check

To verify whether the respondents' input contains any contradictions and to prevent potential impacts on the research recommendations, a consistency check was performed on the data. In accordance with the requirements set forth by the originators of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), the Consistency Ratio (CR) values for each decision factor were calculated. According to relevant research [15], if all CR values are less than 0.1, the data is considered free of inconsistency and thus highly reliable for reference.

$$\lambda_{max} = \frac{1}{n} \left(\frac{w'_1}{w_1} + \frac{w'_2}{w_2} + \dots + \frac{w'_n}{w_n} \right) \quad (4)$$

Where, λ_{max} = the maximum eigenvalue; N =the number of factors; w'_1 =the maximum eigenvalue for each column, and w refers to the eigenvector.

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n - 1} \quad (5)$$

Where CR refers to the Consistency Ratio, which must be less than 0.1 to be considered acceptable, and RI denotes the Random Index.

$$CR = \frac{CI}{RI} \quad (6)$$

Where, λ_{max} = the maximum eigenvalue, N = the number of factors, CI = the Consistency Index, which must be less than or equal to 0.1.

Based on these calculations, the corresponding values for the decision factors are derived as follows.

Table VIII Cr Values Of Decision Factors

Decision Factor	CI Value	RI Value	CR Value	CR < 0.1
Interview process	0.01557157	1.12	0.01390319	yes
Recruitment Information	0.02855043	1.12	0.02549145	yes
Outcome Feedback	0.02517867	1.12	0.02248095	yes
Process Design	0.01155793	1.12	0.01031958	yes
Interview Environment	0.02358789	1.12	0.02106062	yes

Based on the data presented in the table, the CR values of all five key decision factors are below 0.1, indicating acceptable consistency. Therefore, the data and results derived from the AHP analysis in this study possess a certain degree of reliability and reference value. They can serve as a theoretical foundation for subsequent data analysis and provide strategic recommendations for enterprises.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the diversification of the socio-economic landscape and the growing demand for talent, enterprises have significantly increased their need for frontline personnel. As a critical channel for screening and selecting candidates, recruitment plays a decisive role in shaping hiring efficiency and outcomes. The underlying recruitment philosophy, the design of institutional systems, and the degree of implementation all substantially influence the effectiveness of the recruitment process. If enterprises can skillfully utilize recruitment procedures to establish a positive corporate image and convey professionalism, they will not only be able to objectively identify the strengths of candidates but also lay a solid foundation for subsequent onboarding and employment. Conversely, poor recruitment practices may lead to a negative brand image, ineffective hiring, and high turnover rates. This is especially true for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often face cost constraints. For these organizations, thoughtful and professional recruitment details are essential to enhancing candidate goodwill and improving overall recruitment outcomes. Based on the analytical results presented in this study, a series of targeted recommendations are proposed for enterprises. These suggestions are visually organized using a mind map format, with the aim of supporting the development of effective strategies and facilitating the efficient recruitment of frontline employees.

Despite offering an in-depth examination of frontline recruitment practices in Chinese enterprises, this study has certain limitations. First, the dissatisfaction incidents were sourced exclusively from the Zhihu platform, whose user demographics—particularly in terms of age and education—may not fully represent the diverse backgrounds of frontline job applicants, introducing potential sampling bias. Second, the questionnaire data were collected solely within mainland China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to recruitment contexts in other countries or regions. Future research could expand data sources across multiple platforms and conduct cross-industry and cross-regional comparative analyses to enhance the universality of the conclusions. Additionally, emerging recruitment formats such as livestream hiring and AI-based interviews warrant further exploration. Investigating how candidate dissatisfaction manifests and evolves in the digital era may enrich the theoretical dimensions of recruitment research and offer more actionable insights for practice.



Fig. 1. Frontline Employee Recruitment Strategy Mind Map

Recommendations Based on the Interview Process

Establishing a Recruitment Philosophy of Mutual Selection: The interview factor of “equal communication” holds the highest weight, indicating that candidates place great importance on the attitude enterprises demonstrate during recruitment. Common issues in many recruitment processes—such as tardiness, discarding resumes in front of candidates, or using negative language to criticize candidates—reflect a top-down recruitment mindset. This hierarchical posture often leads to subjective judgments, making it difficult to accurately assess candidate strengths and may result in arbitrary hiring decisions. Such practices not only hinder the selection of suitable talent but also allow candidates to infer the company’s culture and employment philosophy from the behavior of interviewers. This can diminish their goodwill toward the enterprise and reduce recognition of its products and services. In more severe cases, candidates may share negative experiences on social media or online platforms, causing tangible or intangible damage to the company’s reputation.

Therefore, recruiters must shift away from traditional top-down thinking and embrace a philosophy of mutual selection. Candidates should be viewed objectively and respectfully, with professional feedback replacing critical or dismissive remarks. Particular attention should be paid to punctuality—interviews should begin on time to avoid keeping candidates waiting, as delays can significantly harm the company’s image.

Building a Professional Interviewer Team: The second-tier decision factors— “professional assessment,” “privacy probing,” and “evaluation remarks”—are all closely related to the professional competence of interviewers. Therefore, establishing a professional interviewer team and conducting pre-service training are essential. Candidates express strong dissatisfaction with interviewers who probe into personal privacy, excessively question reasons for resignation, ask irrelevant or self-serving questions, or boast about themselves or the company. Such behaviors not only reflect poor attitude but also reveal a lack of professional competence. Moreover, candidates often present their strengths or even embellish their profiles during interviews, making the interviewer’s ability to discern and evaluate a critical factor in talent selection. By observing subtle cues and assessing personality traits against job requirements, interviewers can uncover hidden compatibilities and create value for the enterprise. In contrast, unprofessional conduct reduces the effectiveness of interviews and may lead to the loss of high-potential candidates—who may instead join competing firms.

Therefore, within a manageable cost range, enterprises are encouraged to involve experienced employees from departments outside of HR or external experts in the recruitment process. Interviewers should also receive regular training. Prior to each interview, a thorough job analysis should be conducted to clarify the required skills and psychological traits, ensuring that the interview focuses on person-job fit.

Informing Candidates of the Interview Process in Advance: The factor of “process disclosure” ranks fourth in weight, indicating that candidates place considerable importance on receiving a clear explanation of the interview process when entering an unfamiliar environment. Enterprises are encouraged to provide a comprehensive overview prior to the interview, including an introduction to the company’s culture, business operations, job roles, and career prospects. This not only helps spark candidate interest and ease their anxiety, but also enables them to better engage in the interview process. Clearly outlining the subsequent interview steps allows candidates to be mentally prepared, contributing to smoother on-site coordination and reflecting the company’s professionalism and organizational maturity. Additionally, informing candidates of the exact interview start time and thoughtfully suggesting an early arrival can help them adjust psychologically upon arrival, laying the groundwork for a confident and effective performance.

Recommendations on Recruitment Information Disclosure

Transparent Job Information: No Wordplay or Misleading Terms: Transparency ranks as the top decision-

making factor, highlighting candidates' strong expectations for recruitment information to be both truthful and openly disclosed. In an effort to enhance the appeal of job postings, some companies may resort to misleading tactics—such as lowering educational requirements or exaggerating compensation and benefits. These practices not only increase the workload for HR managers during resume screening and interviews, but also lead to candidates withdrawing once they discover the actual conditions, resulting in unnecessary complications. Moreover, such discrepancies can damage the company's reputation, causing candidates to perceive the organization as deceptive or insincere in its internal culture. Therefore, companies should prioritize authenticity when publishing recruitment information. Only by doing so can they attract candidates who genuinely meet and accept the job requirements, ensuring a more efficient and trustworthy hiring process.

Timely Update of Job Information; Prevent Ineffective Recruitment: Within the recruitment information dimension, the factors of “job responsibilities,” “compensation and benefits,” and “application requirements” rank second, third, and fourth in importance, respectively. This indicates that, beyond ensuring transparency, companies must include these three core elements in their job postings, as they directly influence whether candidates choose to apply. Job responsibilities should be described in detail and with clarity. Application requirements must be explicitly stated to avoid situations where candidates discover mismatches with mandatory criteria during the interview process. Compensation and benefits should be presented specifically—vague, exaggerated, or inaccurate descriptions must be avoided. Furthermore, when recruitment information needs to be revised or when the hiring process concludes, companies should update postings promptly. This reduces unnecessary inquiries from candidates and minimizes the burden on HR personnel, contributing to a smoother and more professional recruitment experience.

Diversify Recruitment Channels, Deliver Effective Information: In today's information-rich digital environment, numerous recruitment platforms have emerged. However, job seekers—whether looking for internships or full-time positions—often rely on a limited number of channels to access job opportunities. Therefore, companies should expand their recruitment outreach based on their hiring needs, target candidate profiles, and cost considerations. It is essential not only to identify the most suitable platforms for the company but also to broaden the range of channels used to publish recruitment information. This increases visibility and helps attract a wider pool of frontline candidates, ultimately enabling the company to find talent that truly fits the role. In addition to leveraging mainstream job boards, companies can implement internal referral programs, such as real-name recommendations or incentive-based referral schemes. These approaches further amplify the reach of recruitment efforts and enhance the efficiency of talent acquisition.

Recommendations Based on Feedback from Recruitment Outcomes

Set Time Limits, Provide Timely Feedback: After completing an interview, candidates often hold high expectations regarding the outcome. Therefore, companies should incorporate a clearly defined feedback timeline into the recruitment process and proactively inform candidates to check for updates. It is essential to ensure that every candidate receives a definitive response—whether they are accepted or not. In cases of dissatisfaction, some university students who participated in campus recruitment have reported that companies only notified successful candidates, while failing to inform those who were not selected. This led to wasted time and created a strongly negative impression of the company. Such practices can be perceived as careless or even deceptive, damaging the company's image and credibility. To address this, companies must demonstrate both professionalism and attentiveness in their operations. They should not only set clear deadlines for feedback delivery but also ensure that all candidates receive the information. If necessary, follow-up phone calls should be made to confirm receipt, reinforcing the company's commitment to respectful and transparent communication.

Feedback Should Be Comprehensive and Considerate: For candidates who are offered a position, the

recruitment notification should emphasize follow-up arrangements, enabling them to prepare accordingly and manage their time effectively. For those who are not selected, companies must also implement appropriate measures to communicate the outcome. Rejection messages should be delivered using polite and respectful language—never through brief or perfunctory statements that may cause emotional distress. To demonstrate care and professionalism, companies may also inform rejected candidates of other available positions within the organization, offering them alternative opportunities for consideration. Additionally, it is worth noting that candidates—regardless of the outcome—may also be potential customers. By subtly introducing the company's products or services, enterprises can maintain a positive relationship and extend their brand influence beyond the recruitment process.

Recommendations Based on Interview Process Design

Establishing a Standardized Recruitment Workflow: Recruitment is either an annual task or one initiated based on specific organizational needs. Therefore, companies should establish a standardized internal recruitment process tailored to their operational structure. This process must carefully and thoroughly address the key stages—pre-interview, during the interview, and post-interview—with corresponding plans to ensure the recruitment work is effectively implemented. It is recommended that companies form a dedicated recruitment team responsible for repeatedly reviewing and refining the recruitment plan through structured meetings. This team should ensure continuity and coherence across all stages of the process, while also considering various operational factors such as resource allocation, time progression, and contingency planning. A well-designed and internally aligned recruitment workflow not only improves efficiency but also reflects the company's professionalism and strategic foresight.

Rational Allocation of Interview Panel Composition and Decision Authority: In many small and medium-sized enterprises, the recruitment process often consists of only one round of interviews, with human resource managers holding dominant decision-making power. This structure can limit the comprehensive evaluation of candidates and may result in missed opportunities due to subjective judgments by individual interviewers. It is recommended that companies design a two- to three-round, cross-level interview process involving a panel composed of HR managers, department heads of the hiring position, and senior executives. Each group should participate in different stages of the interview. Among them, department heads—who are most familiar with the technical and functional requirements of the role—should be granted greater decision-making authority. Regardless of the division of responsibilities, HR managers must ensure thorough documentation of the interview process to support subsequent talent selection. They should also coordinate a well-paced schedule to maintain efficiency and professionalism throughout the recruitment process.

Recommendations Based on Interview Environment Design

Strict Screening of Interview Resumes: When faced with a large volume of applicant resumes, companies must take the screening process seriously and filter out candidates who do not meet the recruitment requirements. It is crucial to avoid blindly inviting candidates for interviews when their resumes clearly indicate that they fail to meet essential criteria—such as required qualifications or experience. Such practices not only waste candidates' time but also reflect poorly on the company's commitment to people-oriented hiring, potentially leading to strong negative impressions. During the initial resume review, recruiters should mark areas of uncertainty or flag sections that require deeper exploration during the interview. Preparing notes in advance on key points to investigate can help streamline the interview process, saving time for both the candidate and the company, and avoiding unnecessary complications.

2). On-Site Reception and Venue Guidance: When candidates arrive at the company premises for an interview, the moments leading up to the interview are often filled with nervousness and uncertainty. To establish a positive

employer image, companies must show empathy and professionalism during this phase. In unfamiliar interview environments, it is essential to assign dedicated staff to handle reception duties and ensure that the venue is properly arranged and clearly signposted. Effective signage helps candidates quickly locate the designated interview area upon entering the company, reducing confusion and anxiety. Additionally, front desk personnel or customer service staff should offer warm greetings and brief introductions to the company. These gestures not only enhance the professionalism of the recruitment process but also contribute to creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for candidates.

Preparing Contingency Plans in Advance: In cases of candidate dissatisfaction, some candidates have reported that during on-site interviews, companies failed to adequately prepare for special interview arrangements—such as insufficient seating—which led to long delays as staff scrambled to reallocate resources. To avoid such issues, companies conducting offline interviews should establish contingency plans and ensure that all necessary materials and equipment are fully prepared in advance. For special circumstances, dedicated backup plans should be in place, and a designated staff member should be assigned to oversee on-site coordination. In particular, if an interviewer is unable to attend due to urgent external duties, the company must have a clear protocol for selecting a qualified substitute to maintain the interview schedule. This reflects the company's ability to respond flexibly and professionally under pressure. All of the above considerations should be integrated into the human resources recruitment strategy to improve the overall quality of the hiring process and create a more organized and positive interview environment.

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