

Rude interviewers discourage people from looking for a job

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"I had an interview ... She was very rude to me as well as [to] others. After I left the facility I had no faith that my application would even be passed on to an employer or that it would even make it out of her office"

Experiences of incivility, defined as rude and discourteous behaviour with an ambiguous intent to [harm](#), are pervasive and can undermine employee [performance](#) and [well-being](#). Incivility is not only experienced by employees, but, as the above quote from our study suggests, also those looking for work. It occurs in interactions with recruiters and in interviews. The study we [published](#) with our co-authors ([Ann Marie Ryan](#), [Mark Ehrhart](#), and [Jennifer Wessel](#)) examined how incivility affects the motivation and job search behaviours of those looking for work.

What does incivility look like for job seekers?

We surveyed job seekers and asked them to share with us their experiences of rude or discourteous treatment from organizational representatives (e.g., recruiters or interviewers). We classified their responses to several broad incivility categories, which included "rushing through an interaction or interview" and "unresponsive or untimely communication." In addition, job seekers reported an average of two to four incivility experiences since starting their job search. These findings cemented that job seekers do experience incivility, and its essence is largely similar to that experienced by employees.

Does incivility present an employment challenge to job seekers?

The short answer is it depends. The psychological literature on [job searching](#) finds that individuals who exert effort by engaging in job search behaviours like attending recruitment fairs are more likely to receive job offers and reduce their length of unemployment. Across two field studies, we find that incivility undermines job seeker's confidence and their job search behaviours. One way that incivility may shape the employment process is by undermining job seeker's motivation to look for work.

The most interesting finding from our study, however, is the effect of incivility on job seeker's motivation depends on how the job seeker interprets the cause of incivility, that is, by asking themselves, "why did it happen?" When job

seekers provide external reasons for why the incivility act occurred (e.g., “the recruiter was having a bad day”), this does not undermine their job search motivation. But when job seekers make an internal attribution (e.g., “I don’t have the right job qualifications), we observe that these individuals have reduced motivation and engage in less job search behaviours.

Could there be long-term consequences of job search incivility? Because job seekers need to sustain motivation in order to be successful, exposure to repeated incivility may set the stage for the onset of withdrawal behaviours that can result in becoming a discouraged [worker](#). To avoid this, we suggest job seekers participate in resiliency training as a way to develop useful coping strategies to deal with the ambiguities associated with the labour market.

Beyond the focus on the job seeker, organisational representatives may in fact be turning off candidates who would otherwise join their company. Findings from our study hint that some job seekers declined employment offers from companies where they experienced rude or discourteous behaviors. Job seekers may interpret such behaviors as a signal for future workplace [treatment](#), resulting in decreased attraction to the organization.

This presents a large problem for companies because attracting talented job candidates is a source of competitive advantage. This is complicated by the fact that incivility is often seemingly innocuous. Employers would benefit from training their organisational representatives —especially those interfacing with job seekers — to pay careful attention to the quality of their communication because they can influence job seeker’s motivation as well as their attitudes toward the company.

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Notes:

- *This post is based on the authors’ paper [The long road to employment: Incivility experienced by job seekers](#), in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2016;101(3):333-49. doi: 10.1037/apl0000055. Epub 2015 Oct 5.*
- *This post gives the views of its author, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
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