

Employee Selection:  
Mechanisms behind Practitioners' Preference for  
Hiring Practices

Kristina Langhammer

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# Employee selection:

Mechanisms behind practitioners' preference for hiring practices

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Stockholm  
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To my grandfather who  
taught me to fly and  
To my husband who taught  
me to land back on earth



# Abstract

Despite the great advances science has made in developing selection decision aids practitioners' generally remain reluctant to adopt them. This phenomenon is considered today one of the greatest gaps in industrial, work and organizational psychology. This thesis adopts a psychological approach to practitioners' resistance toward hiring procedures with high predictive validity of work performance. Consequently, three specific research questions were examined, two of which highlighted aspects of self-regulation, and one focused on agency relation in order to study outcomes in terms of actual use of hiring procedures and intention to change hiring procedures. The present thesis comprises three studies. Questionnaire data is used in two studies (Study I and II) to study how 1) prototype beliefs and ability to evaluate the quality of own performance is related to use of selection decision methods; and also how 2) behavioral intention to change hiring practice is related to self-efficacy beliefs, causal attribution and past behavior. Data collected with semi-structured interviews is used in Study III in order to study practitioners' experiences in collaborative contexts in employee selection. Study I found that prototype beliefs and task quality ambiguity perceptions varied across various hiring practices. The results from Study II showed that self-efficacy beliefs, external attributions of success and internal attributions of failure were related to intention to change hiring practices. Study III highlighted the prevalence of separate self-interests over more general organizational interests in the agentic relation between practitioners. The present thesis has implication for theory as well as practice when it concludes that conscious steered cognitive mechanisms are important for understanding practitioners' resistance towards high standardized hiring practices.

**Keywords:** employee selection decision making, employee data collection methods, hiring practices, self-efficacy, causal attribution, behavioral intention, agency





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Stockholm, November 2013

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*“I am in the present. I cannot know what tomorrow will bring forth. I can know only what the truth is for me today. That is what I am called upon to serve, and I serve it in all lucidity.”*

- Igor Stravinsky





# Introduction

“The practical possibilities of psychological tests are now generally conceded, both by the professional psychologist and the industrial layman. Thus far, however, the applications of these tests to industry, particularly in respect to employment, have been fragmentary and intangible. Before industrial leaders will commit themselves to any definite psychological program they demand a concrete account of the tangible results arising from a thorough and comprehensive application of psychological tests to typical industrial problems.” (Link, 1919, p. 3).

Beginning his book, *Employment Psychology*, with a somewhat bold statement regarding psychological tests and their acknowledged practicality, Henry Link made a couple of relevant points. First he pointed out that in order to introduce psychological testing in industry, and more specifically in employment, such as for example employee selection, science and practice need to agree upon the added value this practice may bring to organizations. He also realized, at that time, that coming to an agreement is not going to be that easy and practitioners’ resistance towards psychological testing might be stronger than expected, because they will need to see the direct link between using decision aids and the concrete outcome, financial or other. Today, almost a hundred years later employee selection research still struggles with similar issues. Despite the great advances in developing hiring procedures that provide valid and reliable predictions of employee performance and learning, a tremendous drawback is the failure to convince employers to use them (Highhouse, 2008). In order to highlight this phenomenon and the implications for employee selection research, a short overview concerning the emergence of the contemporary hiring practices and how these practices are perceived is provided below. First it is important to clarify who the practitioners are.

## Who are the practitioners?

In the selection literature the professionals involved in employee selection are most commonly addressed as ‘practitioners’. What these professionals have in common is that they are all involved in the employee selection process. What differentiates them is that they play different roles in this process

based on their functions in the organization. For example, hiring managers as the employers are making the *hiring decisions* (Carless, 2009; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). There are also professionals, often placed in the Human Resources (HR) department, so called HR professionals who assist hiring managers in this process and make *hiring recommendations*. Another important distinction is regarding these professionals' work tasks. Whereas employee selection for hiring managers is a secondary work task, for HR professionals might be a main work task. A third distinction is that concurrently with the development of the labor market new forms of organizations emerged, where core functions in the organizations like employee selection are often outsourced to external actors (Kwitakowski, 2003). This development led to a differentiation of HR professionals based on their affiliation to the organization (Clark, 1993). In this context, we can distinguish between professionals employed by the hiring organization, so called corporate recruiters, and professionals employed by another/different organization, or self-employed, so called third-party recruiters. A fourth important issue in this context concerns the expertise of the practitioners involved in employee selection. There is an increased professionalism of HR management (Caldwell, 2001; Legge, 1995) and an increased involvement of these professionals in the strategic decision making in the firms (Budhwar, 2000; Fardale, 2005; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007). Up to date the selection literature focused mostly on HR practitioners and was less concerned with hiring managers' expertise in employee selection. This is a paradoxical situation considering that hiring managers make hiring decisions. When hiring managers are performing the entire hiring process without assistance from HR practitioners, they will most likely rely on their own expertise. In the context where hiring managers are collaborating with corporate or/and with third party recruiters they might need to rely on these professionals' expertise. In the present thesis both these contexts are investigated: the context where hiring managers are responsible for both carrying out the employee selection and making the hiring decision; and the context where hiring managers are collaborating with corporate and/or third party recruiters.

## Employee selection decision making

Since the early years of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a great interest in employee selection research was oriented toward predicting individuals' performance at work. A great amount of effort was set to design, develop and improve assessment methods for pre-hire screening of potential employees. Moreover these efforts were focused on finding ways to increase standardization, as a mean to achieve highly reliable and valid assessments, and consecutively valid work performance predictions (Farr & Tippins, 2010). The domain of employee selection was strongly influenced by the positivist

current in the social and psychological sciences at that time. Those were times of enthusiastic faith in scientific progress and progress meant a great emphasis on quantification and experimentation (Gelo, Brackmann, & Benetka, 2008). On a larger scene, the debate concerned the superiority of either the intuitive or the rational approach with regard to decision making and predicting human behaviour in general (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011; Holt, 1958; Meehl, 1954b; Sawyer, 1966; Kleinmuntz, 1990). In employee selection, at some point, carrying out scientifically rigorous studies, with a heavy reliance on experimental designs, was promoted as the only way to establish facts (e.g., the statistical viewpoint; Freyd, 1926). In the same time, the clinical viewpoint promoted the importance of combining standardized tests with subjective judgments carried out by experienced examiners (e.g., psychologists; Viteles, 1925). The terms clinical, holistic, intuitive, subjective as well as statistical, rational, mechanical, analytical or objective were common terms used when referring to the amount of human judgment involved in the decision making process (see Kuncel, Klieger, Connelly, & Ones, 2013). In this thesis, the term holistic is used instead of clinical, intuitive/subjective in order to avoid association with clinical psychology. The term mechanical is used in this thesis instead of rational, analytical or statistical in order to avoid association with decision making style or statistics.

The point made by Viteles (1925), and other enthusiasts for the holistic perspective, was that it is impossible to make accurate assessments based only on scores provided by tests without the expertise of a qualified individual who would combine the scores with data from observations and subjective judgments. In that context an important differentiation was made between the psychological assessment and the interpretation of the measurement (see Maxfield in Viteles, 1925, p. 134; Thorndike, 1918). This distinction was a relevant one, pointing out that collecting information about individuals was only one aspect of the assessment. The other facet regarded interpretation of the measurement, the prediction. At this point it became obvious that a more clear definition was needed regarding the concepts and their use. Sawyer (1966) provided such a clarification in this matter. For the sake of parsimony this thesis will focus on two distinctions based on earlier classifications (Meehl, 1954a; Nolan & Highhouse, in press; Sawyer, 1966).

The first distinction is between measurement and prediction. Data collection method (e.g., measurement) refers to the way information is gathered. In employee selection such examples are the interview, test, work sample. Data combination methods are the ways the collected data are interpreted and then integrated into an overall evaluation with the purpose to make a prediction. In selection this means that information about the job applicant gathered by using for example an interview, reviewing a *curriculum vitae* and asking for references from a former boss is integrated into one evaluation, which then leads to a prediction about the applicant's likelihood to succeed on the job.

Second, data collection methods can be classified as holistic, when they primarily rely on human judgment to collect data. In selection such examples are low structure interviews. When data collection methods are limiting the influence of human judgment, such as standardized tests, they are regarded as mechanical. Likewise, whereas holistic data combination implies reliance on human judgment to combine collected data; mechanical data combination techniques use a statistical formula to weigh collected data. For example, a hiring manager who uses holistic data combination is most likely going to review applicant data collected through an interview, a personality inventory and references provided by a former boss and then, based on intuition, will make a prediction about the applicants' future performance. However, this manager could also perform a mechanical data combination by using a statistical formula to weigh the importance of each set of the collected data.

### A paradoxical situation and the way out of it

While research provided a substantial support for the superiority of the mechanical approach it also proved difficult to overcome the influence of the holistic approach in general and in employee selection in particular (Grove, Zald, Lebow, Snitz, & Nelson, 2000; Meehl, 1954a; Sawyer, 1966). The most striking response in this sense was regarding the use of mechanical data collection methods. Along the years a considerable amount of research showed that mechanical data collection tools (e.g. test) have considerably higher predictive power compared to holistic ones (e.g. unstructured interview) (Sawyer, 1966; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). However, mechanical data collection methods proved to be underutilized by practitioners (Highhouse, 2008), which constitute a paradoxical situation for both research and practice. Researchers refer to this phenomenon as the science-practitioner gap in personnel selection (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001; Klehe, 2004; Rousseau & Barends, 2011; Rynes, 2012). To understand this gap it seemed appropriate to explore the factors that might influence practitioners' use of hiring practices. External or so called contextual factors proved to have a certain role in employers' choices of applicant data collection methods. Among these, politics and legislation; anti-discriminatory laws (see Landy, Gutman, & Outtz, 2010; SFS 2008:567), and standards for testing for employment (see ISO 10667, 2011) are typical examples intended to secure transparency and justice. However, while these external factors have some possible influence they also can be perceived as pressuring. That means that practitioners' adopt certain practices mostly to achieve legitimacy or because other organizations do the same (i.e. mimetic pressure; König, Klehe, Berchtold, & Kleinmann, 2010). That does not mean that they are aware of the importance to use reliable and valid methods in order to improve their

predictions. Link (1918) assumed that making practitioners aware of the potential gain for the organizations when using standardized applicant data collection methods would have a positive influence on their use of them. In this regard, economic utility models provided information about financial and economic gains (Boudreau, 1983a; Schmidt, Hunter, McKenzie, & Muldrow, 1979) and also connected pre-hire activities with post-hire ones to provide a single decision-theoretic utility model (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985). Neither these have had much effect on practitioners giving up their resistance (Hastie & Dawes, 2001; Latham & Whyte, 1994).

A more recent line of research investigated internal factors, dispositional ones, in order to understand practitioners' preferences. According to this approach practitioners' preferences for holistic approaches to employee selection might be explained by traits, such as their decision making style (Lodato, Brooks, & Highhouse, 2011), or by specific psychological needs such as need for autonomy, competency and fulfillment, need for power, socialization (Dipboye, 1996, 1997; Hysong & Dipboye, 1999; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998; Nolan & Highhouse, in press). Although these studies provided some support for the importance of practitioners' individual characteristics for their preferences of hiring practices, an alternative explanation was provided attributing practitioners' beliefs systems a significant role in their resistance against mechanical approaches (Colarelli & Thompson, 2008; Highhouse, 2008). The research is still scarce in this area. One of the few attempts studied working adults' lay perceptions about holistic and mechanical approaches (Diab, Pui, Yankelevich, & Highhouse, 2011). However, in order to change scientists' attempts to change practitioners' beliefs and perceptions about high standardized hiring practices we need to know more about what these beliefs are and why practitioners have them (Colarelli & Thompson, 2008). It is also relevant to know how these beliefs connect to practitioners' current behavior, in terms of use of hiring practices and what it would take to change them. A natural step in this direction is to further investigate practitioners' beliefs about their capability to assess and make predictions about job applicants' future performance. Such an approach would probably benefit from theoretical frameworks that connect human beings' beliefs about own performance to their behavioral intentions and actual behavior.

## Theoretical framework of the present thesis

All of the theories mentioned above can be found throughout the fields of psychology. Social cognitive theory (SCT) provides a framework for understanding the nature of people's cognitions and the process by which these cognitions interact to influence behavior (Bandura, 1991). One assumption

in SCT is regarding the triadic reciprocal relation between behavioral, personal, and environmental factors that influences human functioning (Bandura, 1977; 1986). Another assumption is that people have the ability to influence their own behavior and environment in a purposeful way (Bandura, 2001). Applied to employee selection, SCT suggests that three categories of variables must be considered to fully understand the interactive and social nature of the hiring process. These categories are: (1) practitioner behaviors, (2), practitioners' social cognitions and (3) the characteristics of the situation. Social cognitions are the mental processes and structures (e.g., standards and goals) through which people plan their actions and regulate their behavior (Cervone, 1991). One type of social cognition that plays an important role in the regulation of behavior is prototype (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Bandura, 1997; McCormick & Martinko, 2004). Regarding prototypes, it is postulated that individuals hold implicit beliefs about the given role they are in at the time, and that these beliefs guide their behavior (McCormick & Martinko, 2004). In the context of hiring that means that practitioner' prototypes about an individual who is successful in selecting employees might be related to their use of employee selection practices.

A large body of evidence exists in the social sciences indicating that individual determinants play an important role in the process of behavioral change (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005). One model which falls within this body of work, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985), has a relevant role in explaining this process. This theory postulates that there are three direct antecedents of intentions to perform a behavior. First there is a person's *attitude* toward a given behavior. Second, there is a *subjective norm*, or a perceived pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. Finally, there is *perceived behavioral control (PBC)*, or an individual's own perception of the difficulty of performing a given behavior. According to van der Zee, Bakker and Bakker (2002), in the context of personnel selection, human resource (HR) managers' intentions to use a certain selection method may be influenced by these three factors. First, their attitudes toward certain selection methods may be influenced by their beliefs about whether they can retain their autonomy while using the method, or if its implementation would result in them being "enslaved" by it. Second, the perceptions of subjective norms, particularly those involving people with whom they work, can influence whether use of a certain selection method is seen as being supported. Finally, HR managers' control beliefs may affect their decision to utilize various selection procedures. For example, a manager's belief about whether they have the requisite skills to use a particular data collection method might influence his or her decision to adopt that particular method.

To achieve potential behavioral changes, a first step is for people to build an intention to change, but there are additional factors with potential influence.

These other factors include causal attributions, self-efficacy beliefs and past behavior (Ajzen, 2011; Chorlton, Conner, & Jamson, 2012). For employee selection that means that practitioners' self-perceptions regarding their ability to use certain assessment methods might influence their willingness to adopt new ones. If they are used to using certain methods with which they feel comfortable, it is possible that they will be less keen to change the way they select individuals. Another factor of influence in this context, closely related to self-efficacy beliefs, might be the way practitioners' reason about the causes of their successful and unsuccessful hirings. Research shows that leaders who are confident in their capacity to perform a task also attribute their successes to internal causes, such their own abilities (Silver, Mitchell, & Gist, 1995). In selection, this would be the case of practitioners who are confident about their ability to judge people and who would explain their successful hirings as a result of their good judgments. However, attributing the causes of their successful hirings to their own capabilities might constitute an impediment toward changing the practices these professionals are used to.

As pointed out before, hiring tasks in organizations are often performed in collaboration between two or more parties. For example, hiring managers are likely to collaborate with either corporate or third party recruiters, or with both, in their hirings. In such contexts, hiring managers are likely to delegate parts of the hiring process to these professionals. That means that applicant data collection might be performed by more than one individual, individual who present various degrees of training, various abilities, and various perspectives regarding employee selection. In such contexts, hiring managers would probably like to assure themselves that the experts they are collaborating fulfill the task they are given, and do so in a manner that would be expected. Such a setting may be better understood with the theoretical underpinnings of the principal-agent framework. According to this framework, the agent acts on behalf of another person, the principal, in return for some form of reward (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). However, as parties are presumed to be driven by self-interest, asymmetry of information and opportunistic behaviour are expected to occur. To resolve these issues, principals use monitoring actions in order to control for agents opportunism (Eisenhardt, 1989). In a hiring context, this may mean that understanding how hiring managers, corporate recruiters, and third party recruiters experience their hirings could shed more light onto the role of the interactive context when it comes to the use of applicant data collection methods and ways of data combination. These aspects are still underexplored in the selection literature.

## Aim of the thesis

With an emphasis on preferences for hiring practices, individual differences in behavioral intentions, and experiences in collaborative contexts in employee selection, the general aim of this thesis is to increase our knowledge about the mechanisms behind practitioners' choices of hiring practices. The thesis therefore rests on the following tenets. Firstly, implicit beliefs are described as main determinants of practitioners' resistance to adopt high standardized hiring practices. However, to understand these individuals' choices and preferences as a result of unconscious psychological mechanisms, this perspective alone may be too narrow. The second tenet of this thesis therefore calls for the use of an alternative perspective. By acknowledging the role of self-regulation in steering practitioners' preferences and choices of hiring procedures, the role of consciously controlled mechanism is highlighted. Upon these premises this thesis aimed to pursue the following objectives.

The first objective was to explore the way practitioners' personal standards and self-monitoring abilities are related to their preferences for various hiring practices. In accordance with this first aim, Study I investigated whether practitioners' different use of hiring practices was related to their beliefs about what characterizes individuals successful in employee selection. Study I also explored whether there was a relation between the level of standardization of the hiring practices and practitioners' perception about their ability to determine the quality of their own performances.

Another objective of the present thesis, reflected in the second study, was to investigate potential factors that influence practitioners' intention to change their hiring practices. More specifically, Study II investigated whether practitioners' readiness to change hiring procedures varied as a function of their self-efficacy beliefs, past behaviors and how they referred to these past behaviors, in terms of causal reasoning.

The presumption that practitioners in many circumstances work together with other practitioners in their hiring leads to the third aim of this thesis. Accordingly, Study III explored practitioners' beliefs about the hiring practices they use and how they experienced their hiring recommendations and decisions when collaborating with other practitioners.



## Practitioners' preferences for hiring practices

A constant preoccupation in employee selection research, one which has existed since early in the 1920s, is how to develop hiring practices that provide valid, reliable, affordable and understandable predictions for practitioners in various organizations. This has resulted in the creation of many practices that are now seen across industries. Such practices involve the use of one or more employee data collection methods, known also as assessment methods (e.g. unstructured interviews and standardized tests, among many others) and once these data are collected, a combination of the data into an overall evaluation of the job applicants through use of either holistic or mechanical techniques (Nolan & Highhouse, in press).

Through the years, a considerable amount of research has shown that standardized employee data collection methods (e.g. tests) have considerably higher predictive power compared to non-standardized ones (e.g. unstructured interviews), meaning that they are better at predicting job performance (Conway, Jako, & Goodman, 1995; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988). There is also sustained scientific support for the superiority of the analytical data combination strategy compared to the holistic one in general (Grove et al, 2000; Meehl, 1954a; Sawyer, 1966) and also in the specific context of employee selection (Kuncel et al, 2013).

Although there is substantial research regarding the usefulness of these various hiring practices, there is also a wide gap between this knowledge and the actual practices of organizations (Ryan & Tippins, 2004). In practice, these tools have not been adopted as widely as would have been expected based on their predictive ability and as a result, researchers started to investigate factors that influence practitioners' choice of hiring procedures. The most striking example of this research-practice gap is the immense popularity gained by unstructured interviews, despite their proven lack of psychometric soundness (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). Several surveys show that practitioners constantly prefer unstructured interviews over structured ones (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999; Ryan, McFarland, Baron, & Page, 1999) and that over time, as practitioners gain experience, they tend to depart from the structured forms of interviews (Latham & Saari, 1984). Dipboye (1994, 1997) developed a broad conceptual model in order to explain practitioners' preferences

for unstructured interviews. This model comprises two perspectives, an organizational and an individual one. In the following section these two perspectives are discussed by integrating results related to hiring practices in general.

## Organizational factors

The selection literature has shown that there is a wide spectrum of factors with influence in organizations' choices of hiring practices. Among these factors are government regulations, legislation and politics (Johns, 1993; König et al., 2010; Myers et al., 2008), organizational politics and culture, as well as norms and procedural justice (Barber, Wesson, Roberson, & Taylor, 1999; Dipboye, 1997). While legal aspects are more influential in countries like Canada, South Africa and the United States (Myers et al., 2008) in other countries such as Switzerland, the legal pressure is lower (König et al., 2010). Legal pressure in this context is interpreted as the effect legal considerations are perceived to exercise on I-O psychology (König et al., 2010). Organizations' fear regarding the legal defensibility of certain selection procedures can be a product of high legal pressure (Klehe, 2004). The Swedish legal pressure in this domain may be comparable with countries like Switzerland rather than high pressure ones like the United States. Organizations in low pressure legal contexts might perceive that the effort and costs involved in changing hiring practices are too high when their need to achieve legitimacy is low. An immediate consequence can be that these types of organizations might be more resistant towards accepting and changing hiring practices in accordance with scientific advances.

Another factor of influence is the tendency of organizations to follow other organizations in their hiring practices, a phenomenon often referred to as mimetic pressure (e.g., Spell & Blum, 2005). Indeed, Harris, Dworkin and Park (1990) results showed that organizations were more willing to adopt certain practices when other companies used those procedures. Furthermore, Williamson and Cable (2003) used imitation to explain the hiring pattern of top management in the Fortune 500 companies. Recently, König and his colleagues (2010) showed that mimetic pressure, along with applicant reactions and the economic costs involved play an important role in how organizations decide upon their hiring practices.

Organizations also adopt different hiring practices depending on their size. Barber et al. (1999) showed that external pressure and a need of legitimacy is higher in larger firms. Larger organizations also apply more formal and bureaucratic practices, making it more likely that large firms will adopt similar practices. On the other hand, we know very little about small and medium

size organizations. In the 1990s, small businesses (e.g. with fewer than 500 employees) employed about 53% of the private work force in the United States and accounted for 50% of the private gross domestic product (Barber et al., 1999). In Sweden, 99.9% of the Swedish business community is composed of small (e.g. up to 9 employees) and medium businesses (e.g. up to 250 employees); also these businesses account for approximately 60% of the added value in the Swedish gross national product (GNP), (SCB, 2011). These statistics support the fact that small and medium size organizations are playing a major role as employers, and we need to know more about their hiring practices (Barber et al., 1999).

Considering the factors mentioned above, it would be natural to conclude that organizations striving for legitimacy would employ hiring practices with higher predictive validity. Likewise, it may be assumed that larger firms would, with effectiveness on their agenda, employ standardized and analytical methods in their employee selection. While some studies conclude that organizations that have human resource consultancy expertise are keener to use standardized methods (Hoque & Noon 2001; Wolf & Jenkins 2006) other studies conclude that this is not the case (Barber et al., 1999; König et al., 2010). In these conditions, a micro-level perspective, like an individual-oriented perspective, seems appropriate to further investigate practitioners' reluctance toward standardized hiring practices.

## User-related factors

Recruiters' hiring decisions appear to be highly subjective and the bases they are made on are rather unclear (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). Hence, it would be natural to assume that there are factors more influential than the valid prediction of future performance in practitioners' adoption of hiring practices. These factors are thoroughly described in several studies concerned with individual determinants of preferences for hiring practices (see Carless, 2009; Diab et al., 2011; Lievens & De Paepe, 2004; Lodato, et al., 2011; Nolan & Highhouse, in press; Topor, Colarelli, & Han, 2007). Several studies in the past concluded that there is a lack of knowledge that leads to wide misperceptions among practitioners regarding hiring practices. Lack of knowledge is also one of the most frequently discussed impediments towards adoption of standardized hiring practices. Terpstra and Rozell (1997), for instance, argued that the scientific literature is inaccessible to practitioners. Gelade (2006) added to this critique by observing that scientific articles are long and may be seen as less relevant for practitioners. Several authors suggested that research results need to be presented in a more accessible form (Gelade, 2006; Hodgkinson, 2006). For example, some studies showed that HR managers attributed higher predictive validity to non-

standardized assessment methods, such as unstructured interviews, when compared to structured interviews and intelligence tests (Terpstra, 1996). Rynes, Colbert, and Brown (2002) provided several examples of such misconceptions. Despite the proven lack of knowledge, several studies have shown that HR professionals were able to distinguish, to a certain point, between various assessment tools for employee selection based on their predictive validity (Furnham, 2008), and that there was an increased awareness among HR professionals concerning predictive validity and reliability issues (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Harris et al., 1990; Wolf & Jenkins, 2006).

A somewhat different line of investigation concerned the role hiring practices play for practitioners' psychological needs. Dipboye (1994, 1997) assumed that the use of unstructured interviews, for example, might correspond to practitioners' need for control and discretion over the interview and its scoring, an assumption supported by several studies (Church, 1996; Dipboye & Jackson, 1999; Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). Furthermore, Harris and Eder (1999) posited that practitioners might prefer a certain level of informality, with this assumption underscoring the social function of the assessment. Using unstructured interviews and unstandardized procedures in general, makes it possible for practitioners to fulfill the need for social contact with applicants (Hysong & Dipboye, 1999; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998). As a result, practitioners concerned with establishing informal contact might prefer less structured interviews (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). Preference for unstructured interviews was also associated with fulfillment of certain other needs such as autonomy, relatedness, and competence as shown by Nolan and Highhouse (in press). In this study conducted on working adults (N=555), the results also showed that these individuals saw employee data combination with use of expert judgment (see holistic data combination, Sawyer, 1966) as potentially fulfilling needs of autonomy and competence. Moreover, these needs were significantly related to intentions to use hiring practices (Nolan & Highhouse, in press).

The implicit beliefs practitioners hold about hiring practices seem to influence them in their choices. Practitioners might be aware of the scientific advances in developing hiring practices but in the end, they might perceive that these are not applicable in their own specific hiring situations (Highhouse, 2008). They might believe that their own expertise is superior to the predictive validity of standardized tools in the hiring-related situations in which they work. In support of this, a recent investigation of lay perceptions that working adults hold about various selection tools showed that highly standardized methods are seen as impersonal, unprofessional and difficult to comprehend (Diab et al., 2011). Furthermore, Lodato et al. (2011) showed that professionals who prefer intuition-based hiring are typically individuals who prefer to base their decisions on feelings and do not possess advanced professional certification. Often, these individuals are also less experienced.

It becomes clear that the focus has shifted from studying practitioners' perceptions *about* the hiring practices, towards how certain hiring practices might *fulfill* practitioners' psychological needs. A more recent development in this area concerns how individual characteristics of the practitioners might be related to their preferences for hiring practices. An important goal to pursue in this regard might be to understand how these practitioners come to these perceptions. If we understand the origins of these perceptions, we might be able to predict and change them. A possible approach in this matter is to investigate self-regulatory processes, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. Although these theories are well known in social psychology, they have been somewhat overlooked in the pursuit of understanding the cognitions and behaviors exerted by individuals practicing employee selection. The following sections will seek to remedy this by discussing how these theories may relate to employee hiring practices.

## Practitioners' resistance towards highly standardized hiring practices: A tale of two mechanisms/theories

In a focal article published in 2008, Scott Highhouse described practitioners “stubborn reliance on intuition and subjectivity” (Highhouse, 2008, p. 333) as a matter of implicit beliefs that inhibit adoption of highly standardized hiring practices. These beliefs seem to be mostly related to practitioners' perceptions about their abilities to make accurate predictions about job applicants' future job performance. For example, one of the beliefs that practitioners may hold is that they are able to achieve near-perfect precision in predicting performance on a job. Studies show that this might be a result of misconceptions practitioners hold about the predictive validity of various hiring practices (Diab et al, 2011; Ryan & Tippins, 2004, Terpstra & Rozell, 1993) or a strong belief in their own judgmental capabilities (Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993; Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). Another common belief among practitioners is that their predictions are improved through experience, although research says otherwise (Camerer & Johnson, 1991; Daves, Faust, & Meehl, 1989; Grove et al., 2000; Sherden, 1998).

An explanation may be that besides their overall misconception related to the practices they use, practitioners, just like all human beings – regulate their own behavior, and the types of perceptions they hold about their own control over their tasks. It is also possible that in their practice, these professionals perceive that they are performing well, which might give them a sense of being good at what they are doing. Moreover, it might happen that in times when they are encountering failure, they manage to prescribe this failure to causes independent of their control. Consequently, they are not affected in their beliefs of being good at judging people. These psychological mechanisms are related to how human beings perceive their own behavior, but also related to how they perceive their own capabilities to perform certain tasks and the way they build intentions to change. Together, these mechanisms belong to the domain covered by Social Cognitive Theory (e.g., SCT; Bandura, 1986) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (e.g., TPB; Ajzen, 1985).

## Social Cognitive Theory of Self-regulation

The main purpose of Social Cognitive Theory is to explain human behavior as influenced by external sources and internal, consciously controlled mechanisms – that is the interplay among environmental, behavioral and personal factors. The guiding principle is that human behavior is motivated and regulated by self-influence (Bandura, 1991), a process known as self-regulation. One assumption behind this principle is that human behavior has a purpose, meaning that people set goals, and plan their actions in order to fulfill these goals. Another assumption is that human behavior is guided by forethought, which means that people anticipate the outcomes of their actions and they motivate and guide their actions in anticipation of these outcomes.

Effective self-regulation is considered a cyclical process in which people monitor the environment, develop task strategies, implement those strategies, and evaluate their results (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990; McCormick & Martinko, 2004). The principal mechanism behind self-regulation encompasses three subfunctions: self-monitoring, a judgmental process and a self-reactive subfunction (Bandura, 1991).

*a) Self-monitoring* is important for self-regulation because in order to adapt their behavior, human beings need to observe their performances, the circumstances in which actions are performed, and the effects of their performances. According to Bandura (1997), self-monitoring helps human beings to set realistic goals and to orientate their actions towards these goals. Based on the evaluation of their results, people modify their task strategies to behave more effectively in the future. Consequently, people's ability to accurately evaluate the results of their behavior is important for motivating positive behavioral change (Bandura, 2001). An accurate evaluation requires proximity in time because behavioral outcomes that happened longer in the past cannot change the past and provide little guidance for the future (Bandura, 1986). That means that while the specific details of a hiring might fade in time, the influence of the performance feedback might not. According to Bandura (1991), self-monitoring enhances performance when there is clear information about one's performance. When the effects of one's actions are surrounded by ambiguity, self-monitoring is less effective. Indeed, there is empirical support for the idea that employees' appraisal of their work-day tasks influences subjective outcomes at the end of the day (e.g., self-monitored performance; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Dunegan, 1993; Grant & Dweck, 2003) and the performance itself. More recently, Grawitch, Granda and Barber (2008) showed that, in a study of 170 faculty, staff and graduate students of a university, ambiguous work tasks were related to lower end-of-day self-monitored performance.

In the context of employee selection, highly standardized methods, such as structured interviews, require practitioners to collect the same information in the same way across all applicants, and formal rating scales are used to promote consistent evaluation (Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988; Gatewood & Feild, 2001; Meehl, 1954a). Conversely, less standardized methods of assessment, such as unstructured interviews, allow practitioners to consider unique information about each applicant, and evaluations are made using holistic judgment. The consequences are that highly standardized methods make errors in selection more visible, while less standardized methods make these errors more ambiguous (Highhouse, 2008). In terms of self-monitoring, that means that increased ambiguity of less standardized methods may lead to increased difficulty in accurately monitoring the results. That means that a hiring manager using highly standardized hiring practices should perceive less ambiguity in self-monitoring his or her own task performance and that hiring managers using less standardized hiring practices should perceive higher levels of ambiguity when monitoring how the hiring task has been performed.

*b)* In order to be able to adapt and eventually change monitored behavior, human beings also need to be able to *judge* their own performances. The judgment process encompasses cognitions formed as a result of external constraints (such as societal constraints or simply the influence of a role model) and also cognitions derived from personal standards. Human beings monitor their own actions and compare them to these cognitions, then decide whether they need to change the behavior or continue pursuing the same action. For example, when a hiring manager uses a hiring procedure, he/she might do that because there is a standard in place. However, this manager might also want to perform hiring in the same way a colleague, a mentor or an expert in employee selection does. While the selection literature provides support for the role of societal pressure for employers' choices of hiring practices (Barber et al., 1999; König et al., 2010; Myers et al., 2008), there is very little known about the influence of role models or of personal standards. People's cognitions involve picturing mental representations of the actions necessary to perform successfully (e.g., task schemas; Bandura, 1997; McCormick & Martinko, 2004) and through the judgment process, human beings compare their own performance to these mental representations. Some of these representations are socially shared and are known as prototypes or prototypical beliefs (Rivis, Sheeran, & Armitage, 2011). A closer look at prototypes and their relation to behavior is presented later in this chapter.

*c)* The third subfunction in self-regulation is a *self-reactive* one and is subsequent to performance judgments. Once the appraisal of the performance against the internal standard is done, the result of the self-reactive function



will produce positive reactions, known as self-incentive or negative ones, known as self-censuring (Bandura, 1991). In other words, people are reacting in a positive or negative way to their performance. Self-incentives can take the form of tangible outcomes, such as taking a relaxing break if the tasks to be performed are finished in the allocated time, or getting a bonus for closing a deal. Self-incentives can also take the form of self-evaluations, such as experiencing satisfaction with a job well done. If an individual strives to get better in performing her job, she might condition self-satisfaction on her performances on the job (Haney & Long, 1995). It is natural to assume that people would want to pursue their tasks in ways that lead to positive self-reactions (Buskist & Davis, 2008), and this has an important motivational function in workplace behavior. For example, when a salesman plans to reward himself at the end of a working day based on performing a certain amount of sales, he will motivate himself to spend the necessary effort to achieve his goal. According to Sharma and Sharma (2003) successes and failures can be compared to rewards and punishments and the desire to repeat successes are inevitable antecedents to them. While all three subfunctions described above play an important role in self-regulation, the mechanism is furthermore related to another major factor of influence, represented by self-efficacy beliefs.

*Self-efficacy beliefs* represent the beliefs people have about their capabilities to perform a task or a behavior in a successful way (Bandura, 1977a). These beliefs are important for self-regulation because they affect peoples' future behaviors. For example, people who have high self-efficacy beliefs after completing a task are more willing to continue pursuing it, while those with low self-efficacy might want to avoid that task in the future.

There is substantial empirical research that supports the idea that personal beliefs of self-efficacy are related to peoples' performance (Ellis, Ganzach, Castle, & Sekely, 2010). Several meta-analyses conducted across diverse areas of performance have supported this, showing that work performance (Judge & Bono, 2001; Sadri & Robertson, 1993; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), academic performance (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), and even athletic performance (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, & Mack, 2000) are related to this mechanism. Because of the connection self-efficacy has with performance, this self-regulatory function is highly relevant in the organizational context (e.g., Judge & Bono, 2001; Schyns & Moldzio, 2009; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). This relationship has been investigated with various work-performance measures such as adaptability to advanced technology (Hill, Smith, & Mann, 1987), managerial performance (Wood, Bandura, & Bailey, 1990), and commitment and job performance (Rigotti, Schyns, & Mohr, 2008). Individuals who present high self-efficacy beliefs also tend to set higher goals and assume risks (Bandura & Cervone, 1983) and individuals

who perform well develop high self-efficacy beliefs (Davis, Fedor, Parson, & Herold, 2000).

Applied to the employee selection context, the results mentioned above imply that hiring managers who perceive that they are successful in their hirings would also be high in self-efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, these individuals might take more risks and also tend to continue pursuing the same behavior because they have a strong belief that they are good at what they are doing. Given that many practitioners rely on and keep using less standardized methods, one possible explanation may be that they have developed high self-efficacy beliefs and that these beliefs are reinforcing their current behavior and the use of their methods.

Another important explanation for practitioners' use of less standardized hiring practices can be related to *prototype beliefs*, which is closely related to the judgmental process in self regulation. An assumption in SCT is that prototype beliefs influence people in their strategies to take action (Bandura, 1997). Several studies have shown that cognitions of the type of individuals who engage in certain behaviors are influencing other individuals in their behaviors (Gibbons, Gerard, & Boney-McCoy, 1995; Niedenthal, Cantor, & Kihlstrom, 1985; Ravis, Sheeran, & Armitage, 2006). Moreover, the more similar individuals think they are to others with these cognitions, the more they intend to engage in behaviors associated with the cognition (Gerrits, Ridder, de Wit, & Kuijer, 2009; Gibbons et al., 1995; Ravis et al., 2006). Prototypes are abstract mental representations that people use to classify and categorize the objects, situations, and people they encounter. Prototypes are developed by classifying items with similar characteristics together into a common cognitive category (Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Mervis & Rosch, 1981).

In organizational contexts more specifically studying leadership, examples for prototype beliefs are “a good leader is someone who is generous and compassionate” and “a good leader is someone who is visionary and intellectually stimulating” (Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2006, p.317). For instance, prototypes have been used in leadership studies to understand followers' leader perception and categorization processes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord, Foti, & de Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1991). Based on the abstraction level and also the context, individual leaders might not encompass all the attributes of the prototype. Researchers in the field concluded that the categorization is hierarchical and situation-dependent (Fischbein, 2005; Kenney, Blascovich, & Shaver, 1994; Lord & Maher, 1991; Schilling, 2007). Several studies provided support for the existence of leader prototypes, showing that behaviors and attributes describing effective leaders at a very basic level were valid for leadership situations in general, and that prototypes of quali-

ties that are context-specific may exist as well, such as prototypes for new leaders (Kenney et al., 1994) prototypes for leaders in the context of crisis (Fischbein, 2005) or even culturally-endorsed prototypes (Brodbeck et al., 2000; Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2006). While most of these results are based on followers' perceptions, few studies focused on leaders' own leader prototypes (McCormick & Martinko, 2004).

In employee selection, the role of prototypes would likely be similar as in other domains, with practitioners holding such representations about what makes ones successful in selecting employees. It is also likely that a hiring manager whose successful assessor prototype encompasses attributes such as being contact-oriented, responsive, and creative might also use assessment tools that allow these characteristics to manifest. In this context, less standardized hiring practices are more likely to permit such manifestations. There are few studies exploring recruiters' perceptions of applicants and how they form so called images of ideal applicants (Van Vianen & Kmieciak, 1998). Particularly with regard to recruiter-related prototypes, the literature is extremely sparse.

## Behavioral intention

While social cognition theory focuses on actual behavior, the theory of planned behavior is concerned with predicting intentions. Intentions are defined as cognitive representations of an individuals' willingness to behave in a certain way (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions are also determined by a person's attitude towards a behavior, subjective norms, and the perceived behavioral control (PBC) related to the behavior (Ajzen, 2002).

The *attitude toward the behavior* is represented by the individual's positive or negative evaluation towards performing the behavior, as well as an evaluation of the outcomes that this behavior leads to. For example, a hiring manager who is positively oriented toward the use of standardized hiring practices and who appreciates the type of information provided by these practices would want to use these methods (van der Zee et al., 2002). Some support for this assumption is provided in the selection literature by studies that investigated how practitioners' ratings of applicant traits were related to their preference for less standardized practices. For example, supervisors in the retail business valued more applicant traits (e.g., openness) and abilities (e.g., general mental ability) when these constructs were assessed using unstructured interviews (Lievens, Highhouse, & De Corte, 2005). Similarly, human resource practitioners attributed higher hirability ratings to job applicants who were assessed with unstructured interviews compared to those

assessed with paper-and-pencil test or assessment center (Topor, Colarelli, & Han, 2007).

*Subjective norms* represent the social pressure perceived by the individual to pursue the behavior or not (Chorlton et al., 2012). If reliance on holistic decision making is seen as a part of practitioners' professional identity, then resistance towards standardized practices might be seen as justifiable. This perception has been present since the pioneer years of employee selection research. Viteles in 1925 promoted the image of the professional assessor impersonated by a clinical psychologist, as the professional with expert knowledge and ability to make assessments about job applicants. Later, Meehl (1986) explained this impersonation as a result of practitioners' willingness to preserve a humanistic and ethical approach toward assessment. The role of social pressure for preferences for low standardized assessment methods was also encountered by Van der Zee et al. (2002). More recently, in Diab et al.'s (2011) study, the results showed that mechanical techniques are viewed as less professional, congenial, and comprehensive compared to their holistic counterparts.

*Perceived behavioral control* (PBC) is individuals' perception about the degree of difficulty or easiness of performing a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). That means that when individuals perceive that a task is easy to perform, they are also keener to actually do it. It is natural to assume that professionals in employee selection, for example, would use hiring practices they perceive as easy to handle. Such a relationship was found in van der Zee et al.'s (2002) study, in which the TPB model was investigated in relation to practitioners' intention to use unstructured or structured interviews. The results showed that perceived behavioral control was strongly related to human resource (HR) managers' use of highly structured interviews. Van der Zee and her colleagues also found that the relation between perceived behavioral control and the use of unstructured interviews was not a significant one. However, in predicting intentions to use unstructured interviews, overall and belief-based indicators of attitudes and subjective norms were consistently related to actual behavior (van der Zee et al., 2002).

Overall, the planned behavior theory promotes the idea that a positive attitude and perceived social pressure toward a given behavior, accompanied by a perception that one is capable of performing the behavior, will have a positive influence on both a person's intentions to perform the behavior, as well as on the actual performance (van der Zee et al., 2002). According to van der Zee and colleagues (2002), in the context of personnel selection, HR managers' intentions to use a certain selection method may be influenced by these three factors. First, their attitudes toward certain selection methods may be influenced by their beliefs about whether they can retain their autonomy while using the method, or if its implementation would result in them losing

control over the process. Second, the perceptions of subjective norms, particularly those involving people with whom they work, can influence whether use of a certain selection method is seen as being supported. Finally, HR managers' control beliefs may affect their decision to utilize various selection procedures. For example, a manager's belief about whether they have the requisite skills to use a particular process might influence his or her decision to adopt that particular hiring practice.

Reviews and meta-analyses (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Conner & Sparks, 1996; McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011) have provided broad support for the theory of planned behavior (TPB), specifically in the health care, transport safety and speeding literature, but the results are not as clear in the personnel selection context (van der Zee et al., 2002). Moreover, both intentions and PBC are sometimes found to have a low correlation with behavior in this area (Kor & Mullan, 2011). According to Ajzen (2011), a possible explanation for these low correlations is that *perceived* behavioral control is not sufficiently accurate to serve as a good proxy for the actual behavior. Regarding behavioral intention, McEachan et al. (2011) showed that the temporal aspect is important. As time passes between measurement of behavior (e.g., past behavior) and intention, there might be intervening events that change people's attitudinal, normative, and control beliefs. That means that the closer the measurement of past behavior and intention, the stronger the relation between the two. In the selection context, this means that practitioners who use less standardized methods today might not intend to change their practices in the very close future. Therefore, Ajzen recently (2011) proposed two other proxies: past behavior (Chorlton, et al., 2012) and self-regulatory abilities (Ajzen, 2011).

Included in the TPB model, the role of *past behavior* in predicting future behavior proved to be relevant over several studies, even after the other predictors in TPB were accounted for (see Ouellette & Wood, 1998). Some researchers explained this as an effect of habit and promoted the idea of an automatic mechanism involved in the relation past-future behavior (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Ouellette & Wood, 1998). However, this is not always the case. More recent studies showed that in some cases, behaviors that are performed frequently and in somewhat stable contexts are predominantly under habitual control, whereas behaviors performed infrequently and under uncertain circumstances are steered by intentional processes (Norman & Cooper, 2011). In the context of employee selection, it is possible that practitioners' resistance to adopting standardized hiring practices is also a matter of habit. For example a hiring manager who used unstructured interviews for a long time for selecting employees in the same functions might continue using unstructured interviews without even questioning if that is right or wrong.

Although introducing past behavior in the TPB framework might be useful, it seems that there are factors that might override the relations presented above. Kor and Mullan (2011) conducted a study in which they tested three sleep-related behaviors during one week. The purpose was to observe whether the participants were able to implement stress reducing behaviors before bedtime. The results showed that that was not the case. The explanation for this was that an overall capacity to override or inhibit impulses might be needed in order to strengthen the intention-behavior relation (Ajzen, 2011). Such a capacity is provided by self-regulatory mechanisms. For example, some individuals cannot put aside stressful or anxiety-provoking thoughts before bedtime (e.g., actual control of behavior) which affects their intentions and in the end, affects their chances of actually performing the stress-reducing behaviors before bedtime. According to Ajzen (2011) self-efficacy, the belief that one can actually perform the task ahead, might be a complementary factor to PBC. However, in the light of theory of planned behavior and as described in social cognitive theory, there are two possible ways of approaching self-efficacy. One way, in the light of past behavior, is to examine self-efficacy as “How capable I think I was in what I was doing” or in the light of a planned behavior, to examine it as “How capable I think I might be in performing the task”. Consecutively, related to intention, self-efficacy could be conceptualized as “How good I am at changing behavior”.

In the present thesis, the relationship between self-efficacy and behavioral intention is speculative. Self-efficacy in the light of past behaviors has more substance, in accordance to the assumptions in SCT, since it is a result of self-regulatory processes. Applied to selection, a hiring manager builds up a belief of his or her own proficiency based on past behavior. However, we don't know if this belief is enough to constitute self-efficacy and rather than risk being speculative, we must investigate whether an intention is likely to occur or not. Hence, in this thesis, self-efficacy is examined in relation to past behavior and the assumption is that high self-efficacy belief regarding performance in the past might inhibit intention to change.

The presence of perceived behavioral control in the TPB framework allows for the assumption that human beings do not always experience control over their behaviors. This means that there are other possible factors besides self-efficacy that influence how individuals intend to behave, how they actually behave, and how they reflect over their performance. One such factor is the way people explain the causes of their performances, so called causal attributions. Individuals recurrently use the same heuristics to explain their successes and failures as being caused by either internal or external factors (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Across several research studies, results have shown that there may be a close relationship between self-

efficacy beliefs and *causal attributions*. For example, individuals that show high self-efficacy scores also tend to attribute *success* to internal causes whereas those low on self-efficacy tend to attribute *failure* to internal causes (Silver et al., 1995; Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne; 2006). In a study conducted by Standing, Guilfoyle, Lin, and Love (2006), the results showed that, in a context where workers and their managers were studied, the workers manifested a classical self-serving pattern (e.g., attribute success to internal factors and failure to external factors), and the managers attributed success to external factors and took greater responsibility for project failures. Standing and his colleagues (2006) explained these results as managers being more aware of the external factors influencing their successes. However, several studies found patterns of internal and external causal attributions to be related to factors such as productive work behavior (Seligman & Schulman, 1986; Furnham, Sadka, & Brewin, 1992), high performance goals (Martinko, 2002) and even goal revision (Donovan & Williams, 2003; Tolli & Schmidt, 2008).

Applied to the employee selection context, it is possible that causal attributions have an impact on the intentional readiness to change hiring procedures. Presumably, practitioners who attribute success to internal factors, such as their own abilities, are unlikely to desire to change anything in their hiring practices in order to secure future success. Likewise, when failure is attributed to external causes, such as the behavior of others, an individual can still maintain a good self perception of his or her own abilities, hence decreasing the likelihood of changing strategies (Bandura, 1997). In contrast, if the individual ascribes selection failure to internal factors, he or she should become more willing to change hiring procedures. When success is attributed to external factors, subsequent judgments of efficacy should be weaker (Tay et al., 2006).

## Concluding notes

Two broad theories with a great explanatory potential, the social cognitive theory and the theory of planned behavior, are both concerned with understanding and predicting human behavior. Both theories attribute a great importance to the concepts of control and the perceived ability to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 2002). For example, while different in terms of how task-specific they are, perceived behavioral control (e.g., TPB) and self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., SCT) both are concerned with similar aspects regarding control over ability. A more recent development in this area is to involve further concepts from SCT in studying behavioral intentions. Such an example is the use of prototypes to explain behavioral intention (Rivis et al., 2011). Another development is the extension of Ajzen's (2011) model of planned behavior

by introducing additional elements, besides self-regulatory abilities, such as past behavior (e.g., habits; Chorlton et al., 2012). However, when considering the relationship between past behavior and behavioral intention, it is most likely that causal reasoning plays a role of its own. For example, let us consider the case of a hiring manager who is using unstructured interviews for some time now (habit), is confident with his/her abilities to conduct interviews (high self-efficacy/PBC), also thinks that this is a good tool in selecting employees (positive attitude) and the norms are not pressuring his or her into doing otherwise. It is most likely that this manager would not want or intend to change this behavior. However, if this individual perceived that those times he/she failed in hiring new employees were the result of him or her making the wrong assessment (attributing failure to internal causes), it is more likely that this individual would intend to change this situation and use a different method.

Over two decades of research studies speaking for the importance of self-regulatory mechanisms for actual behavior as well as the role of attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control for behavioral intention provides substantial scientific support for both SCT and TPB. Moreover, the recent development of studies entwining elements of these two theories seems to be promising as well. Although the domains of application are vast with studies in education, health-care, and various settings concerning organizational behavior, the applications in employee selection research are few. A possible explanation for the mechanisms behind practitioners' resistance towards highly standardized practices might be provided by the mechanism of self-regulation. Practitioners' confidence in their own abilities might be related to their self-efficacy beliefs and the way they monitor and judge and react to their own performances. Taking it a step further, studying possible factors behind practitioners' intentions to change hiring practices might open the field for further investigations and increase the understanding for these professionals and their choices.



## Choosing hiring procedures in a collaborative setting

Up to date we know very little about hiring managers' hiring strategies and expertise in regard to employee selection. We know that these professionals are sometimes performing the entire selection process with no assistance from a corporate or third-party recruiter. However, it is more common today that hiring managers are collaborating in their hiring of new employees with either a corporate recruiter or with a third party recruiter, or with both. In this context it is presumable that these professionals will set some common goals, have certain expectations regarding the outcomes and choose the optimal set of hiring procedures in order to fulfill those.

If things were this simple, these professionals would probably do as König et al. (2010) suggested: grab their copy of Hunter and Schmidt (1998), read table 1 and choose the most reliable and valid procedures listed in that table. In any case, discouraging results during the last decades showed that employers and practitioners in general do not choose hiring procedures according to this pattern. The point made by König and his colleagues, in 2010, was that despite the apparent simplicity of the task, which is to choose the optimal hiring procedures in order to achieve the desired outcomes, there are additional factors exercising a considerable influence on practitioners' choices. Couple of years earlier, Colarelli and Thompson (2008) mentioned that a potential influence in these choices is exercised by peoples' self-interest prevailing over the more abstract organizational ones. Colarelli and Thompson (2008) explained this self-interest from an evolutionary perspective. According to this notion, humans are predisposed to assess other humans "with help of psychological mechanisms that have been used for millennia" (Colarelli & Thompson, 2008, p. 348) which are similar to those used to assess enemies, friends, and allies in everyday life. These assessments are often a result of face-to-face interactions. Set against these well enrooted mechanisms the use of selection decision aids are to be considered evolutionary novelties. While Colarelli and Thompsons' (2008) evolutionary perspective on practitioners' self-interest has a great explanatory potential, it only explains individual interest against organizational ones. The context in which hiring managers interest is aligned or not with those of corporate/third party recruiters' remains pretty much untouched by this perspective in par-

ticular as well as the selection literature, in general. However, the type of collision of interests that may occur among parties involved in employee selection and the impact this might have on their explicit goals is better understood with the framework provided by agency theory.

## The agency theory

To understand why a practitioner-practitioner gap besides the science-practitioner gap plays a significant role in practitioners' choices of hiring practices, it is necessary to employ a broader theoretical framework that allows us to interpret the collaborative climate among practitioners. Such a framework is provided by agency theory. The theory originates in the late 1960's, when economists were interested in how individuals and groups share risks (Wilson, 1968), especially when cooperating parties have different attitudes towards risk (Eisenhardt, 1989). Agency theory extended the risk-sharing literature by including the concept of goal divergence among parties (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Goal divergence in this context is interpreted as the case when two parties involved in collaboration pursue different goals.

Goal divergence was and still remains one of the main agency problems that the theory is concerned to resolve. This is important considering that the conceptualization of the term agency is derived from the notion of a party promoting the goals of another party (an agentic relation), a conceptual development influenced by game theory (Heath, 2009). An example for such a relation is the one occurring between a chief executive for an organization and the shareholders in that particular organization. The agentic relation is further stressed when the party who delegates the goals has difficulties or considers that it is too expensive to verify that the other party behaves as it should. A second agency problem is related to the risk-sharing itself. The source of concern here is that parties might prefer different ways of actions because they have different risk-taking preferences. Hence, the domain of agency theory is commonly described similar to Eisenhardt's (1989, p. 59), such as the

*“Relationships that mirror the basic agency structure of a principal and an agent who are engaged in cooperative behavior, but have differing goals and differing attitudes toward risk”.*

The definition above is based on certain assumptions about people, organizations and information (Eisenhardt, 1989). According to Heath (2009) an important assumption is that people are driven by self-interest. Another assumption directly related to the first one is according to which people will

act opportunistically whenever given the chance to do so. A third assumption is that monitoring actions will minimize the risk of opportunism. Monitoring is necessary when the principal cannot determine (e.g. asymmetry of information) if the agent behaves as it should.

Critics of the theory were mainly concerned that corporate governance was defined based on assumptions about people such as individuals who behave unreservedly in their own self-interest (Noreen, 1988) rather than altruistically. However, this criticism lost some substance when business ethicists stated that in this context the point is not the egoistic, self-centered, interest that matter but the fact that people in a principal-agent relationship might have different interests (Dees, 1992; Gauthier, 1986) and these individuals act in accordance to their own goals (Heath, 2009).

This framework was mostly used to interpret and solve agency issues as they appear in the corporate world, in relations between corporate owners and managers (Nyberg, Fulmer, Gerhart, & Carpenter, 2010; Sardiello, 2011). This narrow focused stream is known today as the positivist stream (Eisenhardt, 1989) and its concerns were oriented toward parties' conflicting goals and governance mechanisms intended to limit agents' self-serving behavior (Nyberg et al., 2010). A second stream, the principal-agent perspective, on the other hand was promoted to encompass a wider span of relations, such as employer-employee, lawyer-client, and other agency relationships (Harris & Raviv, 1979). At the core of this perspective is, as Eisenhardt (1989) describes it, a trade-off between the cost of measuring agents' behavior, and the cost of measuring outcomes and transferring risk to the agent.

Translated to the context of employee selection, an agentic relation is likely to occur between hiring managers (as principals) and corporate/third party recruiters (as agents). By choosing to collaborate with corporate or third party recruiters, or both, hiring managers are also choosing to delegate parts of the hiring process to these professionals. While these parties are supposed to have a common goal which mainly consists in performing a successful hiring, they also have own goals and also different preferences regarding risk, which are likely to influence their choices of hiring practices.

While from an organizational perspective the goal is to employ the optimal individual for the job, hiring managers preference for hiring practice might be influenced by personal interests if the manager is likely to work close with the new employee (Colarelli & Thompson, 2008). This is not the case for corporate and third party recruiters. Hence, corporate recruiters might want to assert themselves as credible professionals in the organization (Ulrich et al., 2007) and third party recruiters would pursue behaviors that se-

cure continuous collaboration with the organization. In this light, corporate and third party recruiters might prefer less risk and in order to minimize this, they would prefer more valid and reliable hiring practices.

As mentioned before, hiring managers are making employment decisions (Carless, 2009). By delegating parts of the assessment process to corporate and third party recruiters, parts of these assessments are for the managers (as principals) in fact difficult to control. A certain asymmetry of information occurs in these situations. If hiring managers have a poor understanding or have unwarranted views (Guion, 1998) of the hiring practices employed by corporate and third party recruiters, they may try to implement certain monitoring actions.

# Method

While previous chapters focused on establishing the theoretical framework for the research presented in this thesis, this chapter is oriented towards the empirical portion, consisting of three studies.

The studies in this thesis are based on two different data collections. While study I and II used a quantitative approach and the data were collected with help of a questionnaire, study III used a qualitative approach and the data collection was based on semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data collection was performed in the retail business. The participants for the qualitative data collection were purposely recruited from various industries, both from the private and public sectors, and from various organizational sizes and various functions (hiring managers, corporate recruiters and third party recruiters).

Regarding the methodological approach, it is important to mention that although employee selection research, mirroring mainstream psychological research, is still dominated by quantitative approaches; both qualitative and mixed methods are gaining traction. Considering the advantages of individualization provided by qualitative approaches, combined with the power of generalizability provided by quantitative ones, it seems natural to combine the two. Hence, this thesis attempts to utilize the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, without promoting one over the other.

As it follows, the methodological approaches are described first, followed by the description of the samples and data analysis performed in each study.

## Quantitative and qualitative approach

Employee selection research is influenced by the positivist/post-positivist paradigm in psychology. According to this paradigm reality is tangible, quantifiable, and the observer and observed are independent entities. The methodology derived from this paradigm is characterized by a heavy reliance on experimental and correlational studies (Gelo et al., 2008), as there is the aim to arrive at generalizable conclusions. Quantitative approaches make possible inferences about the reality as perceived by a larger group of indi-

viduals, without knowing in detail how each and every individual interprets the meaning and the nature of their specific context. The strength of quantitative approaches is that they make possible the investigation of larger groups of individuals, that the relationships between phenomena are studied in terms of causal inferences, and that those inferences make it possible to form predictions (Gelo et al., 2008).

Although quantitative approaches clearly dominate employee selection research, several authors in this field have suggested that the use of qualitative approaches would be appropriate in order to better understand practitioners' beliefs associated with their choices of hiring practices (Harris et al., 1990; Rynes, Bretz, Gerhart, 1991). These types of studies are still a rare appearance in the selection literature.

In the past 50 years, the qualitative approach has gained ground (Smith, 2003) as a holistic and contextual-based understanding of human beings and social phenomena. Qualitative approaches aim to provide rich descriptive information about the phenomenon under investigation (Gelo et al., 2008). Also, qualitative approaches aim at investigating social phenomenon through the perceptions of, and as experienced by, the subjects themselves (Bryman, 1988). The methodology aims to record and comprehend individual and singular events, in a temporally limited reality (Gelo et al., 2008), in order to highlight unique and singular phenomena.

The strength of qualitative approaches becomes obvious when the research question aims at revealing information about specific contexts through the descriptions of the individuals experiencing those contexts. The purpose is also to explore the richness of information in individuals' unique experiences, and these unique experiences are highlighted and valued.

## Present thesis

In Study I, this thesis attempted to explore hiring managers' prototypes regarding successful hiring. First, the topic was practically unexplored in the selection literature. Second, there was a lack of information about practitioners' perceptions about the psychological attributes necessary to perform successful hiring. The use of a qualitative approach became necessary in order to determine attributes that are relevant for practitioners (e.g., prototype); the purpose at this stage was to develop a new measure by using a pre-step of qualitative interviews. In developing new measures, it becomes meaningful to start with a qualitative approach first, then to use the findings to develop quantitative variables and further investigate with quantitative methods (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). The strength provided by

qualitative approaches was also exploited in Study III, in exploring how practitioners' involved in employee selection relate to each other when they hire personnel in collaboration. We may assume that practitioners involved in such contexts are fully aware of their roles and what is expected of them. Hiring managers require expert knowledge in those asked to assist them in their hiring. These experts, such as corporate recruiters or third party recruiters, are aware that the hiring decision is not their own. Still, these professionals hold beliefs about their own expertise, and they might experience a willingness to perform well and influence the hiring decision. These individuals' experiences and beliefs are most likely to be revealed by giving them the opportunity to use their own words, describing their decision contexts and processes.

This thesis also adopted a quantitative approach in Study I and II, in order to explore associations between certain sets of variables. In these studies the purpose was to investigate whether well-known psychological theories have any explanatory power for specific phenomenon in the field of employee selection. In study I, the relationship between hiring managers' prototype facets of individuals successful in hiring, their task ambiguity perception, and their preference for intuition-based hiring was explored in relation to these professionals' actual use of employee data collection methods. In study II, self-efficacy beliefs, past behavior, and causal attributions of hiring success and failure were associated with hiring managers' readiness to change their practices.

## Samples

For study I and II, data were collected in a research project called "The retail business as a working place", which was designed to investigate recruitment and selection of employees in the retail industry (Langhammer, Bernhard-Oettel, & Hellgren, 2012). The data used for this thesis was collected during 2009. Paper-based questionnaires were posted to the workplaces of hiring managers in three firms in the retail business. In total, 1,948 hiring managers received the questionnaires, accompanied by a letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and providing information regarding voluntary participation and confidentiality of the answers, as well as an envelope to return the questionnaire materials. Two reminders were sent with a few weeks' time lag in between. After feedback from both firms and individuals was received, 120 individuals were excluded from the study for various reasons, including: changed employer, 7; haven't performed any employee hiring for the last couple of years, 98; changed function or been placed overseas, 15. A total of 670 questionnaires were returned in the included envelopes, 7 ques-

tionnaires were scanned and sent by e-mail and 2 were sent by fax, resulting in a sample size of 679 (overall response rate of 40%).

For study III, data were collected during 2007. The sampling procedure used in this study followed a chain referral method (Goodman, 1961). More specifically, a random walk approach (Klovdahl, 1989) was used. This procedure is commonly used for sampling hidden populations. Even though the participants in this study cannot be characterized as belonging to a hidden population per se, these professionals are filling functions in organization under various labels. Hiring managers appear under various titles that relate to the attributes and functions of “manager”. Corporate recruiters may appear as HR specialists, HR assistants, HR consultants and many other functions. The same situation characterized third party recruiters. An immediate consequence was that the target population for a random sampling would have been difficult to determine, making the random walk approach preferable.

The condition for being selected for the study was that all individuals had to have a minimum of five years experience in employee selection. Besides experience, these individuals needed to fill a function as hiring manager, corporate recruiter, or third-party recruiter. The sampling started with three subjects selected among the main authors' personal network. The first person was a third-party recruiter, who had owned her own business for the past five years. This person also had experience as a HR manager for several years before she started her career in employee selection. The second person was a hiring manager filling a top management position in the private sector at the moment of the study; this participant had over 15 years experience in employee selection at different management levels in the hotel business. The third person was also female, and when the study was conducted, she held a position as a corporate recruiter in the public healthcare sector. These three persons did not participate in the interviews; they only referred the researcher to one other person active in a different industry and organization. The motivation for asking them to refer to individuals active in a different industry and different organizations was to avoid overlapping of the same organizational and industrial cultural standards. For example, while two participants were active in the health care industry, one was a hiring manager in the public healthcare sector and the other was a corporate recruiter in a private healthcare organization. Each potential participant was contacted first by e-mail or phone call to establish a place and date for an interview. In total, 24 individuals were contacted. Two of them declined the interview due to lack of time and one declined due to lack of interest. All the participants were assured about the confidentiality of the interviews, that their participation was voluntary, and that no rewards were to be expected for participating. In total, 22 semi-structured interviews were performed. All interviews were



performed at the interviewees' workplaces and lasted between one hour and one hour and 50 minutes.

## Data analysis

The data analysis in this thesis comprises two different approaches. The first and second study investigated relationships between variables with help of regression techniques. The qualitative analyses performed in this thesis comprised a pre-step in study I, measure development, and main analysis in study III, using thematic coding. Both approaches are described below.

In study I, to examine how the individual attribute ratings combine to form an overall prototype of a successful hiring manager, an exploratory factor analysis was performed using principle axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation (Conway & Huffcutt, 2003). To determine the appropriate number of factors to retain two criteria were used: eigenvalues (e.g., greater than one rule; Kaiser, 1960) and the scree plot (Catell, 1966). Attributes with primary loadings less than .40 or high secondary loadings on other factors were eliminated. This analysis resulted in three factors, or prototype facets.

The next phase in Study I comprised a series of multiple regression analyses in which hiring managers' use of each data collection method was regressed across their individual difference variables. Demographic individual differences were controlled for by entering them in the first step. Preference for intuition-based hiring was introduced in the next step in order to find out how much of the variance in the use of each data collection method could be explained by this preference. In the last step, prototype facets and self-monitoring in terms of perceived task quality ambiguity were added in order to estimate how much variance these variables explained in the outcomes, while holding preference for intuition-based hiring and control characteristics constant. The order of the variables entered in the models was chosen according to the following reasoning. First, it was important to determine how much of the variance in use of data collection methods was explained by individual demographic characteristics and individual preferences for intuition-based hiring. Second, the purpose was to determine the amount of variance explained by prototype facets and self-monitoring actions, beyond the variance explained by individual characteristics and individual preferences for intuition-based hiring.

In study II, individual background characteristics were controlled for by entering them first in the model. Thereafter, while holding individual differences constant, self-efficacy was introduced. In the third step, causal attribution (external and internal attribution of selection success and failure, respec-

tively) and use of selection method (unstructured and structured interviews) were added. Interaction products were introduced in the last step. The order was chosen on theoretical grounds. First, it was important to determine how much variance in readiness to change hiring procedures was explained by self-regulation mechanisms, beyond the variance explained by the influences of practitioners' background and their organizational context. Second, self-efficacy was added in the second step in order to determine whether causal attributions and use of selection procedure, which are theoretically assumed to be affected by self efficacy, have any additional significant effect on readiness to change hiring procedures. Finally, the sets of interactions between causal attributions and use of selection decision aids were added, testing all eight possible combinations of interactions. The interaction terms were created with the cross product of the variables and were centered in order to avoid artificial multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

The qualitative approach used in both the pre-step and measure building of Study I, as well as in the analysis in Study III, was thematic coding of data provided by semi-structured interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed (Silverman, 2000) by the author of this thesis. Each interview was analyzed in several steps and the data were reduced by using thematic coding (Scott, 2004). The analysis strategy was inductive and comparative. The analysis started with establishing the direction of the analysis (Mayring, 2000; Schilling, 2006). In this thesis, this regarded practitioners in employee selection and their experiences, cognitions, and evaluations concerning hiring practices and the context of making hiring decisions. The main dimensions for categorization (Mayring, 2000) derived from the principal-agent perspective (see Eisenhard, 1989): principal-agent relation, role expectation, action monitoring, and information asymmetry. The coding units were established in the next step. These were single words and partial sentences (Schilling, 2006), because the responses of the interviewees were not only in the form of singular attributes but also included thick descriptions of complex relations that could not be reduced without losing their meaning. This material was then analyzed using a cross-interview technique (Schilling, 2006) where the questions were studied across the interviews (e.g., comparative). At this stage, when identical content was found across multiple interviews, the statements were marked to indicate their importance. The statements in this stage were condensed under the main dimensions and structured according to their meaning (e.g., induction; Schilling, 2006).

## Summary of the studies

### Study I: Hiring managers' prototype beliefs and their use of employee selection practices

The lack of standardization that characterizes intuition-based hiring practices compromises their reliability and predictive validity (Conway et al., 1995; McDaniel et al., 1994). By using non-standardized assessment methods, employers risk making employment decisions based on attributes that are not job-related, such as age, gender, physical appearance, and attractiveness, among many others. While scientific findings strongly support the use of standardized employee selection practices, practitioners continue to prefer unstructured and intuition-based approaches to hiring (Lievens et al., 2005; Lodato et al., 2011; Rynes et al., 2002; van der Zee et al., 2002). A recent development in the selection literature is an increasing focus on practitioners' implicit beliefs about hiring practices with the goal of understanding their resistance to standardized practices. In line with this focus, the aim of Study I was three-fold. First, Study I explored hiring managers' beliefs about the characteristics that make someone successful at employee selection. Second, it examined the relationships between these prototype beliefs and hiring managers' use of standardized and non-standardized employee selection practices. Finally, a third aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between professionals' ability to evaluate the quality of their hiring and the degree to which they use various methods.

For Study I, data were collected within the project "The retail business as a working place". The final sample for this study consisted of 679 hiring managers from the Swedish retail business. The collected data contained items on use of employee data collection methods (tests, structured interview, unstructured interview), perceived task quality ambiguity, preference for intuition-based hiring, and control variables (age, gender, and experience making employee selection decisions). In order to measure prototypical beliefs, the participants were also presented a list of attributes that could describe a hiring manager. They were asked to rate the importance of each attribute for successful hiring using a 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) response scale. The list was based on data gathered through interviews and focus groups, conducted with practitioners both from the retail business and also other industries (Langhammer et al., 2012).

The analyses carried out in this study began with an exploratory factor analysis to examine how the individual attribute ratings combined to form an overall prototype of a successful hiring manager. Then, three multiple regression analyses were carried out to examine how each assessment method (test, structured interview, and unstructured interview) was predicted by the attribute ratings.

The results showed that the prototypical hiring manager is defined by three primary facets. These facets were named *Professional Experience* (with attributes such as training in employee selection), *Disposition* (e.g., responsiveness), and *Importance of individual attributes* (e.g., hiring managers' gender, hiring managers' nationality). Further, the results showed that hiring managers' use of standardized assessment methods was positively related to their beliefs about the importance of professional experience. Hiring managers' beliefs about the importance of disposition were positively related to their use of unstructured interviews and negatively related to their use of structured interviews. Beliefs about the importance of individual attributes were negatively related to hiring managers' use of structured interviews and positively related to use of tests. The results also showed that hiring managers who frequently used tests and structured interviews were less likely to perceive employee selection as an ambiguous process. Hiring managers' preference for intuition-based hiring was positively related to their use of tests and unstructured interviews, and negatively related to their use of structured interviews.

What is important to remember from study I is that prototypical beliefs are important in predicting hiring managers' preferences for various employee data collection methods. In sum, the results from Study I support the assumption that these professionals' prototypical beliefs, and how they perceive the quality of their hiring, are both related to the degree of standardization of the methods they use.

## Study II: Individual determinants of behavioral intentions: What tells us that practitioners really want to change hiring strategies?

While previous studies focused on HR professionals' knowledge about, and perceptions of, various selection decision aids (Diab et al. 2011, Furnham, 2008; Harris et al., 1990; Topor et al., 2007), as well as the influence their decision-making style might have on their choice of assessment methods (Lodato et al., 2011), very little attention has been paid to factors that trigger a change in practitioners' behavior. Hence, the second study aimed to inves-

investigate individual factors that might influence hiring managers' intentions to change hiring strategies. The theoretical ground for this study was provided by an extended framework on the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985), with factors such as past behavior (Chorlton et al., 2012) and self-regulatory abilities (Ajzen, 2011).

The data used in Study II were collected within the project "The retail business as a working place". The sample in this study consisted of 563 hiring managers. The scale for intentional readiness to change was adapted from Bouckenoghe, Devos and van der Broeck (2009) and consisted of a five item index. Background variables were age, gender, experience in employee selection, and size of the unit (in terms of number of subordinates). Perceived self-efficacy in performing hiring was measured with a five item, mean value scale developed for this study. Causal attributions were measured with single item statements adapted from the Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire (Furnham et al., 1992). Past behavior was measured by providing participants with a list of employee data collection methods and asking them to mark how often they used each method. Structured and unstructured interviews were the data collection methods that were reported as being used by all the participants involved in the study. Therefore, only these were introduced in the analysis.

After performing a stepwise hierarchical regression analysis, controlling for background variables in the first step, the final model revealed that self-efficacy had a significant and strong negative relationship with intentional readiness to change hiring strategies. Only internal attribution of failure and external attribution of success presented a significant positive relation to intentional readiness to change. Eight interactional terms were tested, examining the possible interactions of external causal attribution (success vs. failure), internal causal attribution (success vs. failure) and structured/unstructured interviews, and only two explained additional variance in intentional readiness for change. The first significant interaction term indicated that hiring managers who used unstructured interviews and ascribed their success to external causes were also keener to change hiring strategies. Those hiring managers who used unstructured interviews and explained their failures as being caused by external factors scored lower on intentional readiness to change hiring practices. The results showed that there is high potential explanatory power in regulatory processes when explaining practitioners' reluctance to adopt more standardized hiring procedures.

Overall, Study II showed that the way practitioners perceive their successes and failures, together with a strong confidence in their abilities, constitute factors of high relevance for their willingness to change hiring practices.

These results were closely related to the context when hiring managers were using unstructured interviews.

### Study III: Hiring managers' reliance on intuition and subjectivity in employee selection: An agency theory approach

Outsourcing employee selection to staffing agencies is more common in today's hiring practices (Kwiatkowski, 2003) and the likelihood of hiring managers delegating the entire hiring, or parts of the process, to corporate or third party recruiters is high. While collaborating with experts might seem an optimal solution, we know very little about how the parties involved perceive this collaboration, and whether they may, based on their preferences, try to promote the use of certain hiring practices over others. The question behind Study III is how selection decision making is perceived in a context where different categories of professionals are supposed to collaborate. In this specific context there are certain role expectations which might exert an influence of their own. The rationale for this study originates in Topor and colleagues' (2007) statement that there is a degree of self-interest involved in practitioners' decision making when hiring employees. An excellent example for such an assumption is proven by agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). On this basis, Study III explores the relation between hiring manager, corporate recruiter, and third party recruiter from a principal-agent perspective, and its consequences for the use of standardized hiring practices.

The data used in Study III were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 practitioners (e.g. eight hiring managers, six corporate recruiters and eight third party recruiters) from various industries, both public and private, and from various organizational sizes. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data reduction was performed by using thematic coding. Identical content across interviews was marked and organized into themes.

The data reduction crystallized around two main themes. One theme focused on the expectations the various practitioner categories had on their collaboration with other practitioners in employee selection. The second theme developed around the concept of intuition and its role in employee selection decision making. The focus in Study III was mainly on practitioners' preferences for hiring practices in a collaborative context. The results showed that self-interest is an important factor of interest in this context. While self-interest can be associated with an interest for personal gain, in this context it becomes clear that hiring managers, corporate recruiters and third party re-

cruiters are driven by interests that go beyond self-interest. Hiring managers are aware that they are held accountable for employment decision making, so they express a need for having and maintaining control over the process. For corporate recruiters, the interest goes beyond the hiring managers' needs and is a question of maintaining and gaining credibility as experts. For third party recruiters, the self-interest is for both maintaining an expert status and succeeding in order to keep the client. For corporate and third-party recruiters, using standardized hiring practices is more natural because they are held accountable for the bases of their recommendations. For hiring managers, this is not the case. For hiring managers, intuition is the optimal way to regain control over the hiring process and to reestablish the principal-agent relation.

Overall, the results from Study III show that preferences for hiring practices can be further understood by studying contextual factors, such as the inclusion of multiple professionals in the process of making employee selection decisions. In this setting, hiring managers may perceive using non-standardized methods as a mean to regain control over the hiring process and its outcome, which they feel responsible for.

## Discussion

With the purpose of a better understanding of employers' beliefs about their abilities to perform successful hiring and their resistance towards mechanical approaches in selection, this thesis relied on the assumption that employers' resistance needs to be studied not only in the light of their implicit beliefs, but also in regard to beliefs that are products of self-regulatory processes. Three specific research questions were examined, two of which highlighted aspects of self-regulation, and one focused on agency relation in order to study outcomes in terms of actual use of hiring procedures and intention to change hiring procedures. The first question investigated whether use of employee data collection methods is related to practitioners' mental representations about individuals successful in hiring employees and their ability to determine the quality of their hirings. In the second question, employers' self-efficacy beliefs, their past behavior, and their causal reasoning were considered by investigating the extent to which these factors, individually or interactively, could be related to intention to change hiring procedures. And finally, the third question aimed at exploring practitioners' beliefs about hiring procedures and the employee selection decision making in the context of collaboration with other practitioners. As it follows the findings are summarized followed by conclusions, limitations, and implications of this research are discussed.

### Prototypes, self-monitoring and employee data collection method

One purpose in Study I was to identify hiring managers' prototype beliefs about what it takes to be successful in employee selection. Hiring managers identified professionalism, disposition toward job applicants, and certain individual attributes as necessary for success in selection. The first facet named *Professional experience* contained attributes related to formal education, training, and experience in employee selection. The importance attributed to educational and training experiences might be interpreted as recognition of the need for assessor training in order to make valid judgments. While practitioners hold erroneous beliefs about increasing the quality of their judgments as they gain experience (Highhouse, 2008), there is little known about practitioners' perceptions about training in selection. *Dis-*



*position* was the label given to the second facet and related to attributes, such as supportive, creative, curious, and humility. It appears that hiring managers attributed a high level of importance to the relational and social side of selection by prescribing a great importance to creating a positive experience for applicants. Research suggests that applicants are influenced in their intentions to accept job offers and recommend employers to others based on their experiences during selection (Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). Hiring managers are probably aware of these expectations. Moreover, employers often consider the hiring process as a time for both recruitment and assessment (Barber, Hollenbeck, Tower, & Phillips, 1994; Dipboye, 1997; Rynes, 1989), which might motivate them to create a positive impression about the job and the organization. The third factor was *Importance of individual attributes* and retained to gender, age and nationality of the recruiter as important attributes for success. The third facet showed that hiring managers consider demographic characteristics as important for being successful in hiring employees. No significant associations between the participants' own demographic characteristics and *the importance they attributed to individual attributes for successful hiring* could be detected.

Studies concerned with practitioners' preferences of employee data collection methods as a function of their personal characteristics are scarce. Lodato and colleagues (2011) found that individuals who 1) tended to make everyday decisions based on feelings, 2) were less-experienced, 3) worked for a smaller organization, and 4) had no advanced professional certification also preferred intuition-based hiring. Nolan and Highhouse (in press) found that individuals' intentions to use employee data collection methods are related to their perceived potential to fulfill self-determination theory needs (e.g., autonomy, competency, relatedness). Accordingly, the second purpose of this study was to investigate the way prototype facets are related to hiring managers' actual use of data collection methods. The results showed that hiring managers who highly valued the importance of educational and training experiences used mechanical data collection methods. The results also showed that hiring managers who considered dispositional attributes as important also used holistic methods such as low structure interviews. The more hiring managers valued academic training, the more likely they were to use standardized practices. Alternately, the more hiring managers valued having a relational disposition the less likely they were to use these practices.

The third aim was to study whether hiring managers' ability to evaluate the quality of their hiring was related to the degree of standardization of the methods they used. The results suggest that hiring managers' use of standardized assessment methods was negatively related to their perceptions of ambiguity surrounding the employee selection process. These results were expected, considering that standardized data collection methods are clear

about their limitations (Highhouse, 2008). Therefore, hiring managers who use these methods might perceive that they are able to evaluate the quality of their hiring; probably these professionals are more aware of the limitations of the methods they use. However, the results did not show that managers who use non-standardized practices are less confident about the quality of their hirings. An explanation for this may be that intuitive approaches make measurement errors ambiguous (Highhouse, 2008). Although, these practitioners are not able to effectively self-monitor their performances, given the ambiguity surrounding their performances they might feel content using practices that they are accustomed to.

In conclusion, the results from Study I are in line with the tenets of SCT, suggesting that the strategies people use to take action are directly related by their prototype beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Research has provided some support for the notion that people's prototype beliefs influence their behavioral intention in the workplace. For example, people's prototypes about leadership influence their willingness to follow (i.e., implicit leadership theory; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord & Maher, 1991). Study I in this thesis is one of the first to investigate the relation prototype – behavior in employee selection. In sum, it appears that hiring managers develop prototypical beliefs about people successful in hiring employees. Furthermore, these prototype beliefs are related to these professionals use of employee data collection method. For example, it is more likely that the hiring manager will use low structure interviews if he or she perceives that establishing a good contact with job applicants is characteristic to someone who is successful in hiring. This finding is similar to those of Lievens and De Paepe's (2004), where practitioners concerned with establishing an informal contact with applicants were less likely to use structured interviews.

## Individual determinants of intention to change hiring practices

The question concerning the factors that might make practitioners change their hiring strategies constitutes a highly relevant issue in employee selection research. Still, this is an underexplored topic. To address this, Study II investigated the associations between self-regulatory mechanisms and hiring managers' intention to change hiring practices. In the light of an extended model of Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2011), this study investigated the importance of self-regulation and past behavior in understanding managers' intentions to change their hiring practices. Also, it may not simply be the habit of a past behavior (here the use of certain data collection methods), but the explanation of the causes of the hiring successes or failures resulting from that behavior that may evoke intentions for changes in the future. For

that reason, causal attributions were also investigated. In addition to testing the overall unique influences of these three variables on practitioners' intentional readiness to change hiring practices, we also explored the interactive effect of past behavior together with the causal attributions of its success or failure on readiness to change, a unique addition to the existing literature in this area.

The first hypothesis examined self-regulatory mechanisms, assuming that hiring managers scoring high on self-efficacy beliefs regarding their selection would be less prone to change their hiring practices. The results showed that the relationship between managers' self-efficacy and readiness to change their hiring practices was strongly negative. Earlier research on self-regulatory processes has demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs exert a positive and necessary effect in the regulation of future behavior (Judge & Bono, 2011), something which seems strongly applicable to hiring managers. However, in this case, high self-efficacy scores may have a detrimental effect when it comes to intentions to adopt new hiring procedures. This may be particularly true when hiring managers have developed a strong sense of self-efficacy and are highly confident in their assessment skills, resulting in decreased chances that they will seek to change their hiring strategy.

The second assumption in this study was that internal and external attributions of hiring success and failures would exert an influence on practitioners' intentions to change hiring practices, beyond the influence of self-efficacy. The results only partially supported this assumption. Internal attributions for failures and external attributions for successes were positively related to intentional readiness to change hiring practices (supporting the hypotheses). Both findings are in line with earlier research showing that managers who blame themselves for their failures (Standing et al, 2006), or attribute their successes to external causes (Tay et al., 2006), tend to be more willing to change their hiring strategies. However, external attributions of failures and internal attributions of successes were not significantly related to low willingness to change. One post hoc explanation for this result may be that, since causal attributions and self-efficacy are closely related to each other and both are part of self-regulatory mechanisms (Ajzen, 2011; Bandura, 1997), the influence of internal attributions on its own might be overruled by self-efficacy.

The third hypothesis in this study highlights the importance of past behavior as a strong predictor for future intentions and was partially supported. Managers who used unstructured interviews were more willing to change their recruitment strategies, which is contrary to what the hypothesis proposed. A possible explanation for these results may be that at least a portion of managers who were currently utilizing unstructured interviews knew that a structured option would actually be preferable from a validity standpoint. Also,

these findings demonstrate that even though past behavior was somewhat related to intentions for change, it is not particularly clear how this association can be explained, a fact that Ajzen (2011) discussed in his recent paper. One way to solve this problem may be to relate past behavior to the individual's conclusions about its successful use, and in this study, this is achieved by exploring potential interaction effects of causal attributions and past behaviors. These results showed that practitioners who used unstructured interviews and attributed the causes of their failure to external causes were less willing to change hiring practices. On the other hand, managers who used unstructured interviews to a lesser extent and attributed successes to external causes were more open to changing hiring practices. This is an interesting finding, since external attributions for outcomes have generally been found to give little information for future behavioral change (Thomas & Mathieu, 1994). A plausible explanation for this finding may be that unstructured interviews have low standardization, so their success or failure may be more likely to be attributed to the user, rather than the method itself. Consequently, hiring managers could still believe they handle the method better when they use it themselves. In contrast, those who less often work with unstructured methods and see these methods fail or succeed may ascribe these outcomes more to the methods and thus, may be able to draw relevant conclusions about how they could implement changes.

In conclusion, the second study in this thesis highlighted the major importance self-efficacy beliefs play for practitioners' readiness to change hiring practices. It seems that a stubborn fondness for subjective judgments (Highhouse, 2008) is reinforced in this study since practitioners' reluctance to adopt high standardized hiring practices is a result of an excessive confidence in their abilities to make judgments about peoples' future performance. Regarding the influence of past behavior the findings are rather inconclusive. That practitioners who used unstructured interviews in this study were also willing to change hiring practices was somewhat puzzling. The question in this case is what motivates these individuals to leave old habits behind; it may be a newly gained awareness towards the weaknesses of the method or the signs of social, legal or other external pressures. The findings in this study also help to illustrate that more can be learned by studying past behavior in relation to causal attributions made about that behavior. Specifically when it comes to internal attributions for failure and external attributions for success, it seems that hiring managers take responsibility for the outcomes of their hiring decisions, which is in line with findings from earlier studies on causal reasoning (see Standing et al., 2006; Tay et al., 2006).

## An agentic perspective on hiring managers' reliance on intuition and subjectivity in employee selection

The third study explored practitioners' beliefs about the hiring practices they use and how they experienced their hiring recommendations and decisions when collaborating with other practitioners. The collaborative setting established between hiring managers and corporate and/or third party recruiters was defined as a principal-agent relation (Eisenhardt, 1989). The results showed that the HR-practitioner – hiring manager relationship can be characterized by precise role expectations. However, the results also showed that hiring managers' mandate to fulfill the selection goals was challenged by recruiters' own interests and goals (i.e. the stated need to assert themselves both inside the organization and with their external clients). In order to control for the risk of opportunistic behavior, hiring managers needed to make sure that role expectations were fulfilled and that recruiters complied with the roles expected from them.

Being in an agentic position, corporate and third-party recruiters seemed to use to a greater extent standardized applicant data collection methods. They were expected to support their recommendations to the hiring manager with viable arguments based on score results and rating matrices among others. On the other hand, there were no such expectations set on hiring managers. However, lack of knowledge and understanding for the methods employed by corporate and third party recruiters, sets hiring managers in a position of not being knowledgeable of what the recruiters were doing (e.g. information asymmetry). In such situations, hiring managers might need to employ monitoring actions. Lack of knowledge and poor understanding of high standardized data collection methods is quite common among employers according to previous research (Rynes et al., 2002; Terpstra, 1996). Such contexts might open up for intuition-based hiring to take place. The latter may become also the ultimate way in which hiring managers would exercise full control on the selection decision.

The results also showed that hiring managers' monitoring actions usually start with clear statements regarding role expectations to control over corporate recruiters performances and avoid the risk of opportunistic behavior. This is because these professionals usually comply with the expected role, and neither challenge nor threaten the managers' attempts to assert themselves as independent actors. The credibility of corporate recruiters is consequently perceived as low by hiring managers thus requesting no further monitoring actions. When it comes to third party recruiters the situation is slightly different. These professionals are perceived as trying to assert themselves towards the hiring managers in a more threatening way especially given their external affiliation and related demands (i.e., perform well in order to not lose the customer). The perceived credibility of these agents might be

somewhat higher and trigger further monitoring actions. As a consequence, intuition-based judgments risk to become a powerful form of control exerted by principals as it is based on judgments difficult to contest and to prove wrong.

In sum, the third study shed light on a couple of interesting points. From a principal-agent perspective, the findings in this study displayed among the participants in this study the existence of separate self-interests prevailing over more general organizational interests (Alchian & Demsetz, 1972; Colarelli & Thomson, 2008). While hiring managers employ corporate and third party recruiters' expertise in their hirings, the managers are in, most cases, not knowledgeable of the methods these professionals use in their assessments of job applicants. Therefore, the hiring managers may resume using various monitoring actions; there the most common is their own intuition.

This study is theoretically innovative by proposing a refining of the traditional principal-agent relationship as portrayed by agency theory. In light of today's organizational expansion of several functions outside the borders of the single company (Kwiatkowski, 2003) it becomes clear that agents can distinguish themselves as working inside the hiring organization or outside of it. Given the fact that employee selection functions are more frequently outsourced to outside staffing firms, the results suggest to see third-party recruiters as external agents. External agents' characteristics are those of being more independent and more self-interested than internal agents and therefore to represent a higher agency risk for the principals (e.g., hiring managers). Furthermore, external agents might require more monitoring actions by principals if the latter want to compensate or to reduce the gap in asymmetric information. A possible side effect of reduced information gap would be that external agents become more credible. For internal agents, the mechanism is different. Internal agents are part of the same organization as hiring managers' and represent a lower agency risk. Therefore, these agents will require less monitoring from the side of the principal. However, less monitoring leads to a growth in information asymmetry and at the end to less credibility of these corporate agents.

## Methodological considerations

As with all empirical research, there are some methodological considerations that need to be addressed, since they have implications on the findings, their interpretation and the inferences drawn.

A first consideration to be made is concerning the samples studied in this thesis. Two different samples were studied. The sample for Study I and II comprises a large sample of hiring managers from three large organizations in the retail business. While these participants may be representative for the group of hiring managers in these three organizations, and carry the advantage that they filled functions on similar levels – store managers, they may not generalize to all store managers in the Swedish retail business. Moreover it may also be that hiring practices in the retail business are not entirely similar with those in other industries. However, it can be argued how much particular samples matter for the generalizability of the theoretical inferences, see Highhouse and Gillespie (2009). Participants in the sample for Study I and II were hiring employees at entry level in the retail industry. The results might be slightly different if there were only high stake recruitments under study (Mattern, Patterson, Shaw, Kobrin, & Barbuti, 2008). Also the complexity of the job these hiring managers were hiring for was lower. In Study III, the qualitative study, the sample might be characterized as rather heterogenic, with a great diversity among the interviewees regarding individual characteristics, experience, industry and types of hiring and methods they used in their hirings. At the same time, this diversity was also purposeful in order to achieve an in-depth probing of a wide range of perspectives and experiences in employee selection accompanied by a high variability in attitudes related to the selection field. Also the interviewees were independent from each other, meaning that they were not part of same hiring team. A different approach might have been to select and interview teams comprising triads of hiring managers, corporate and third party recruiters in order to access information about how various members in the same group experience the collaborative context.

A second limitation in this thesis is that two of the studies (Study I and II) used cross-sectional data, which means that causal relationships between self-regulatory mechanisms and actual behavior and also self-regulation and behavioral intention cannot be tested. However, studying associations is worthwhile since it is one of the conditions to be met in order to establish causality (Bollen, 1989). Thus in order to establish causality further research might be necessary, with longitudinal designs and also further control for potential confounding factors, two additional conditions that according to Bollen (1989) are necessary to conclude about a causal relation between two variables. Regarding Study III, an important shortcoming is that the analysis is based on single interviews with each interviewee. Follow-up interviews might have provided further perspectives from each interviewee.

The third limitation concerns the fact that two of the studies used questionnaires as their primary and only data source. Two aspects need to be mentioned in this context. One is that this type of data might be affected of

common method variance (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Spector, 1994, 2006) and the other issue is regarding the nature of the information collected with self-reports (Spector, 1994). There is the risk that collecting data with the same method might result in inflating the results in the study. Also using self-reports might not mirror objective situations. However, the phenomenon under study is a result of individuals' subjective perceptions and a result of their day to day experiences.

And a last consideration to be discussed is related to a possible researcher bias that could have influenced the findings in Study III. It is possible that the background of the researcher, the experience and expertise at the time of the data collection and interpretation may have engendered misinterpretation of the data. However, this phenomenon is not exclusively characterizing qualitative or mixed method research (Bubany, Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2008). Although the data were analyzed by two independent coders, more elaborate methods of triangulation should be adopted (Mertens, 1998), for example by using findings from the qualitative data to build measures and collect quantitative data (Chang & Lu, 2007).

## Future research

Despite its limitations this thesis presents results that contain some important implications for research on employers' use of hiring practices. Primarily it is its emphasis on the role of prototypes and self-monitoring abilities in practitioners' use of employee selection decision aids. Furthermore, it provides the research field with an empirical investigation of practitioners' intention to change hiring practices as a function of self-efficacy beliefs, past behavior and causal reasoning. And last but not least, explores practitioners' experiences of employee selection performed in collaboration with other practitioners. These contributions are valuable, although they raise further questions. Some of the questions that may be of interest are presented below.

Although they are focused upon in the present thesis, self-regulatory mechanisms and more specifically prototypical thinking and self-monitoring of task performance could still use further investigation. First, in regard to prototypes, for example, it would be fruitful to investigate how corporate and third party recruiters' prototypes of what constitutes a successful recruiter relate to those of hiring managers. It is established that the more similar individuals' perceive that they are to prototypes the more inclined they are to engage in behaviors associated with the prototype (Gibbons et al., 1995; Ravis et al., 2006). In employee selection, there might be differences between various categories of practitioners' prototypes regarding individuals performing successful hirings. However, it is more likely that, regardless



function, individuals who prefer high standardized hiring practices (e.g. mechanical approach to hiring) are also those whose prototypes comprise attributes that speak for an interest in achieving knowledge and understanding high standardized practices.

The second aspect concerns self-monitoring task performance. In this thesis, hiring managers who used high standardized data collection methods also scored low on task quality ambiguity. Regarding hiring managers who used low standardized methods the results were inconclusive. According to Highhouse (2008) high standardized methods are less ambiguous in terms of errors; that is, their limitations are clear. It would be natural to assume that practitioners rather prefer such methods instead of more ambiguous ones. However, the substantial scientific research on this topic shows that this is not the case. The question is what does individuals' tolerance for ambiguity play for role in this context. It is established that people have stable attitudes toward ambiguity (Lauriola & Levin, 2001) and there might be a variation in individuals' tolerance for ambiguity. Based on these premises it would be interesting to investigate whether practitioners scoring high on ambiguity avoidance also prefer high standardized data collection methods and are more effective in their self-monitoring. Furthermore, it would be relevant to further investigate how low standardized methods are perceived in terms of ambiguity. In particular it would be helpful to understand how practitioners who use low standardized data collection methods cope with task ambiguity and if their ability to cope with ambiguity influences their self-monitoring.

Also related to self-regulation, while self-efficacy beliefs and causal attributions were investigated in relation to intentions to change hiring practices, it would also be interesting to approach intention to change in relation to actual behavior. Such an investigation might be possible by means of longitudinal designs. A more specific approach to intention to change would be interesting to explore in this context. While most of the focus has been oriented towards perceptions about data collection methods, little is known about how practitioners relate to employee data combination strategies (Diab et al., 2011). In this context, it would be useful to test whether self-efficacy perceptions and intention to change vary as a function of various data collection and combination strategies.

Another relevant research area concerns the role of expectancies and monitoring actions employed in contexts when hiring managers collaborate with corporate and third party recruiters. There is a lack of knowledge and understanding about selection decision aids, which explain the erroneous perceptions practitioners have about hiring practices (Rynes et al., 2002; Terpstra, 1996). That might also be an explanation for the findings in this thesis showing that hiring managers perceive an asymmetry of information in regard to

the methods used by corporate and third party recruiters. Hiring managers also employ monitoring actions, such as relying on own intuition, in order to compensate for this asymmetry. However, we know very little about the role recruiter credibility (see credible professionals; Ulrich et al., 2007) plays in such a context. In the future, it would be interesting to explore hiring managers monitoring actions as a function of recruiter credibility.

An important development in today's employee selection practices is that employers tend to outsource employee hiring functions. A possible scenario is that in-house employee selection functions will be more and more substituted by external ones. A challenge and a goal in this context is to assure that corporate and third party recruiters gain credibility by assuming a role of credible activists (Ulrich et. al., 2007). In this perspective it might be necessary to provide not only expertise regarding employee data collection and combination methods but also knowledge about their methods. This way, in the short term the practitioner-practitioner gap might narrow, and in the longer term this may have effect on the science-practitioners gap.

## Conclusions

The stated rationale for the present thesis was to increase our knowledge about practitioners' resistance towards standardized hiring practices and factors that influence their intentions to change hiring practices. The thesis therefore followed two tenets. Firstly, implicit beliefs are described as possible determinants of practitioners' resistance to adopt high standardized hiring practices (Highhouse, 2008). To this, the role of conscious controlled mechanisms, such as self-regulation (Bandura, 1997), in steering practitioners' preferences and choices of hiring procedures, is added. However, focusing on practitioners beliefs may only give a narrow picture if we lack information about their past behavior, how they relate to this behavior and their intention to change this behavior. Hence, the present thesis brings together self-regulatory processes and mechanisms behind planned behavior in an attempt to offer an explanation for the individual differences in practitioners' intention to change hiring practices. The present thesis also aimed to increase knowledge about practitioners' experiences regarding selection decision making in contexts when they collaborate with other practitioners. The rationale behind this investigation was that besides self-regulatory mechanisms there might be inter-humans relation related aspects that trigger practitioners' resistance for standardized hiring practices, such as an asymmetry of information inherent in a principal-agent relation.

In general, the findings in this thesis support the tenets mentioned above. The role of prototypes and effective self-monitoring proved to be influential

for hiring managers' preference of various hiring practices. There is also learning potential in investigating self-efficacy beliefs and causal reasoning in the light of past behavior as determinants of practitioners' intention to adopt new practices. The principal-agent perspective highlighted self-interest in collaborative settings as facilitators for practitioners' resistance towards using high-standardized methods. All these mechanisms are more or less under conscious control of the individual. However, none of the theories involved exclude or deny the role played by sometimes irrational and biased beliefs (Geraerts, Bernstein, Merckelbach, Linders, Raymaeckers, Loftus, 2008) practitioners hold about themselves and their surrounding reality.

## Theoretical implications

The theoretical value of the present thesis consists mainly in the pursuit of broadening the existent theoretical ground in employee selection research. In order to achieve this goal this thesis employed theoretical frameworks less utilized in this area and the findings showed that there is more to learn about practitioners' preference for certain hiring practices when studied in the light of self-regulation, planned behavior or from an agentic perspective. The findings in this thesis are in line with previous studies those promote for an extended model of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 2011; Chorlton, Conner, & Jamson, 2012). Also the findings in this thesis bring new elements to the principal-agent perspective, by promoting agency not only as an intra-organizational relation but also as one outside the organization, considering the recurrence of outsourcing services in today's global market. The present thesis adopted various methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative in order to achieve its stated overall purpose. Approaching practitioners' resistance toward standardized hiring practices from both perspectives highlights individuals' in-depth experiences as well as associations in larger groups' perceptions.

## Practical implications

From a more practical perspective, the findings in this thesis are interesting first because the practitioners more often targeted by scientists are also the ones who are not responsible of the actual hiring decisions. There are studies that look at social or cognitive mechanisms which are believed to be enacted in the context of employee selection, but are tested foremost on HR practitioners and other population such as for example a group of university students or working adults. Studying the behaviors and perceptions of hiring managers is therefore essential to increase our knowledge about employers' choices of hiring practices. A second important aspect is that individuals

scoring high on behavioral intention to change may be the ones who are more often targeted by scientists trying to implement and activate changes in use of recruitment and selection methods. However, these practitioners may also be the ones who actually do change their practices. Instead we might need to focus on those practitioners who are highly attached to the less effective (e.g., holistic) methods they use. A third aspect, highly relevant for practice is that HR practitioners today are gaining credibility through their expert knowledge (Carless, 2009). That means that it is not only a science-practitioner gap we refer to anymore, but also a practitioner-practitioner gap. Credible HR professionals with expert knowledge might be challenging hiring managers' beliefs. The findings in this thesis showed that these professionals attempt and sometimes succeed to assert themselves and their methods in their collaboration with hiring managers. Concluding in the spirit of the early years in employee selection research, in order to have "industrial leaders" commit themselves (Link, 1919) to the scientific advances in employee selection further research will be needed. A central role in this effort should preferably be attributed to the psychological mechanisms that lead these hiring managers and all those professionals hiring employees to behave the way they do.

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