

## Selling and Smooth-Talking: Effects of Interviewer Impression Management From a Signaling Perspective

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# Selling and Smooth-Talking: Effects of Interviewer Impression Management From a Signaling Perspective

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8 **Signalings<sub>5</sub>.**

9 **Abstract**

10 Prior research suggests that interviewers play an important role in representing their organization and  
11 in making the interview a pleasant experience for applicants. This study examined whether  
12 impression management used by interviewers (organization-enhancement and applicant-  
13 enhancement) is perceived by applicants, and how it influences applicants' attitudes, intentions, and  
14 emotions. Adopting a signaling perspective, this article argues that applicants' positive attitudes and  
15 intentions towards the organization increase if interviewers not only enhance the organization, but if  
16 the signals they sent (i.e., organization-enhancement) are actually received by the applicant.  
17 Similarly, applicants' positive emotions should increase if interviewers not only enhance the  
18 applicant, but if the signals they send (i.e., applicant-enhancement) are actually received by the  
19 applicant. A field study which involved video coding interviewers' impression management behavior  
20 during 153 selection interviews and pre- and post-interview applicant surveys showed that the signals  
21 sent by interviewers during the interview were received by applicants. In addition, applicants rated  
22 the organization's prestige and their own positive affect after the interview more positively when  
23 they perceived higher levels of organization-enhancement during the interview. Furthermore,  
24 applicants reported more positive affect and interview self-efficacy after the interview when they  
25 perceived higher levels of interviewer applicant-enhancement. We also found an indirect effect of  
26 interviewers' organization-enhancement on organizational prestige through applicants' perceptions of  
27 organization-enhancement as well as indirect effects of interviewers' applicant-enhancement on  
28 applicants' positive affect and interview self-efficacy through applicants' perceptions of applicant-  
29 enhancement. Our findings contribute to an integrated understanding of the effects of interviewer  
30 impression management and point out both risks and chances in selling and smooth-talking towards  
31 applicants.

32 **1 Introduction**

33 Over the last three decades, interviewers have gained a lot of research attention because of the  
34 important role they play in attracting applicants and thus in ensuring organizations' success. From the  
35 perspective of the interviewer, a successful interview is one in which the applicant is not only  
36 evaluated accurately, but also leaves the interview room with a favorable image of the organization  
37 and feeling good about him- or herself (Dipboye, Macan, & Shahani-Denning, 2012; Gilmore,

38 Stevens, Harrel-Cook, & Ferris, 1999; Tsai & Huang, 2014). Research on interviewer impression  
39 management (IM) – defined as interviewers’ attempts to influence the images applicants gain during  
40 social interactions (cf. Schlenker, 1980) – suggests that the signals interviewers send to applicants  
41 have the potential to improve the effectiveness of recruitment activities (Stevens, Mitchell, & Tripp,  
42 1990; Tsai & Huang, 2014; Wilhelmy, Kleinmann, König, Melchers, & Truxillo, 2016). However,  
43 despite this initial proposition, we are still unclear about the mechanism by which the signals that are  
44 sent in terms of interviewer IM influence recruiting outcomes.

45 Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that it is crucial to study the mechanisms that explain how  
46 applicants respond to interviewers’ IM signals. Doing so would provide a more comprehensive  
47 theoretical understanding of the effects of interviewer IM and offer recommendations to  
48 organizations on how to effectively use interviewer IM in recruitment (e.g., Celani & Singh, 2011;  
49 Gilmore et al., 1999; Tsai & Huang, 2014). Therefore, the aim of our study was to examine how  
50 interviewer IM influences recruiting outcomes by incorporating applicants’ perceptions of  
51 interviewer IM: Are the signals that interviewers send actually received by applicants, and how do  
52 applicants react to the signals they receive? It is striking that past research has rarely addressed  
53 whether applicants are responsive at all to interviewers’ use of IM, as prior studies have not  
54 differentiated between the signals that are sent (i.e., interviewer IM) and the signals that are received  
55 (i.e., applicants’ perceptions of interviewer IM). In addition, previous research on the effects of  
56 interviewer IM has focused on laboratory settings even though applicants’ perceptions and reactions  
57 can differ in real selection settings (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005;  
58 Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004; Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Yonce, 2009).  
59 Furthermore, past research has neglected the notion that applicants may already enter the interview  
60 with different attitudes, intentions, and emotions, and that these initial differences need to be  
61 considered in order to capture the influence of interviewer IM.

62 The current study extends existing research in several ways. First, we draw on signaling theory  
63 (Bangerter, Roulin, & König, 2012; Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973) to  
64 provide the first study that examines how signals sent by interviewers in terms of IM influence  
65 recruiting outcomes. We develop and test a signaling timeline model of interviewer impression  
66 management and argue that for interviewer IM to be an effective means for recruitment, the signals  
67 sent (i.e., interviewer IM) need to be perceived by applicants (i.e., perceived interviewer IM), and  
68 applicants need to react to the signals they receive (i.e., recruiting outcomes). Second, we examine  
69 two interviewer goals that have repeatedly been emphasized in the literature: the goal of representing  
70 the organization to enhance applicants’ positive attitudes and intentions towards the organization, and  
71 the goal of making applicants feel good in terms of applicants’ positive emotions (Dipboye et al.,  
72 2012; Gilmore et al., 1999; Tsai & Huang, 2014; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). We link these goals to two  
73 interviewer IM behaviors that have been found to be particularly promising for recruitment purposes  
74 in past research: organization-enhancement, which seems to be particularly important to increase  
75 applicants’ attitudes and intentions towards the organization, and applicant-enhancement, which  
76 seems particularly important to induce favorable emotional reactions in applicants (Stevens et al.,  
77 1990; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). Third, we extend prior research on interviewer IM by differentiating  
78 interviewer IM as signals sent (IM behavior that is applied by interviewers) versus signals received  
79 (IM behavior that is perceived by applicants) by using different data sources such as video ratings of  
80 actual interviewer behavior and survey ratings on applicants’ perceptions after the interview. Fourth,  
81 we extend prior research by examining interviewer IM in a high-stakes field setting instead of a  
82 laboratory setting. This is important because applicants’ perceptions and reactions have been found to  
83 be different in real high-stakes compared to laboratory settings (Chapman et al., 2005; Hausknecht et

84 al., 2004; Truxillo et al., 2009). Fifth, the current study considers applicants' initial attitudes,  
85 intentions, and emotions before the interview in addition to their attitudes, intentions, and emotions  
86 after the interview to extract the effects of interviewer IM. Finally, from a practical perspective, an  
87 integrated understanding of the effects of interviewer IM and the mechanisms explaining their effects  
88 is important for designing interviewer training programs. Interviewers could, for example, be trained  
89 on how to conduct interviews in a way that makes it a worthwhile experience for applicants and  
90 makes applicants feel attracted to the organization.

## 91 **2 Theory and Hypotheses**

92 In the following sections, we delineate a signaling timeline model of the effects of interviewer IM.  
93 As shown in Figure 1, we propose that for interviewer IM to have an effect on recruiting outcomes,  
94 applicants need to first perceive interviewers' IM behavior, and then react to it. We also propose that  
95 organization-enhancement is particularly important for interviewers' goal of representing the  
96 organization in terms of increasing applicants' positive attitudes and intentions towards the  
97 organization. On the other hand, applicant-enhancement is particularly important for interviewers'  
98 goal of making applicants feel good in terms of increasing applicants' positive emotions. Below, we  
99 first present signaling theory as a theoretical rationale for these effects. We then review research on  
100 interviewer IM as signals sent and as signals received as well as research on recruitment effects of  
101 interviewer IM.

### 102 **2.1 Signaling Theory**

103 Signaling theory (Bangerter et al., 2012; Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) is widely used to  
104 explain how applicants' attraction to an organization can be influenced by information or signals  
105 during the recruitment and selection process. This theory suggests that the signals to which applicants  
106 are exposed have the potential to influence how applicants feel about themselves and the organization  
107 (Celani & Singh, 2011). When applicants receive information about the job and the work  
108 environment, it helps them decide whether or not they are excited about the job and whether they  
109 want to work with the organization (Farago, Zide, & Shahani-Denning, 2013). An important source  
110 from which applicants receive signals are employment interviews, which are characterized by a  
111 dynamic exchange between applicants and interviewers (Celani & Singh, 2011; Levashina, Hartwell,  
112 Morgeson, & Campion, 2014).

113 Many theoretical frameworks suggest that the signals interviewers send to applicants influence  
114 applicants' attitudes, intentions, emotions, and behavioral reactions, but relatively little theoretical  
115 work has focused on applicants' perceptions of these signals. For example, as Celani und Singh  
116 (2011) point out, "an improved understanding of how applicants are influenced by recruitment  
117 signals will help to address outstanding research needs" (p. 231). Particularly, an issue that remains  
118 unresolved regarding signaling theory is how the signals that interviewers use to induce favorable  
119 reactions in applicants ultimately lead to these reactions.

120 The signaling timeline model by Connelly et al. (2011) specifies the process of how signals  
121 ultimately influence individual reactions, but has not been tested sufficiently in the field. According  
122 to the model, the most basic form of a signaling system consists of a sender (e.g., the interviewer), a  
123 signal (e.g., IM behavior), and a receiver (e.g., the applicant). In addition, the model suggests that  
124 there is a chronologic process through which signals have an effect: Signals are sent to the receiver,  
125 the receiver observes the signals, and eventually, the receiver reacts to the signals, for example, with  
126 an attitude, a behavioral intention, or an emotion. In the context of the interview, this means that the

127 signals sent by interviewers are an effective means for recruitment when, first, interviewers send  
128 signals to achieve their intended outcomes, second, applicants receive these signals, and third,  
129 applicants react in the desired way. Based on the signaling timeline model by Connelly et al. (2011),  
130 we suggest that a better understanding of the effects of interviewer IM can be achieved by  
131 differentiating the signals sent (interviewer IM), the signals received (perceived interviewer IM), and  
132 the reaction to the signals (recruiting outcomes).

## 133 **2.2 Interviewer Impression Management: What Are the Signals That Are Sent By** 134 **Interviewers?**

135 While earlier recruitment research suggested that interviewers play only a minor role in influencing  
136 recruiting outcomes (e.g., Powell, 1984; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), recent  
137 work shows that interviewers actually play an important role in attracting and retaining applicants  
138 (e.g., Carless & Imber, 2007; Chapman et al., 2005; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). In addition, interviewers  
139 are well aware of their role as representatives of the organization and of the emotional reactions they  
140 can elicit from applicants. In a qualitative study, for example, Wilhelmy et al. (2016) found that  
141 interviewers can have a multitude of goals, but that interviewers' primary concern was about  
142 representing the organization. Most interviewers reported that they tried to signal an attractive image  
143 of the organization to applicants to influence applicants' acceptance intention and organizational  
144 reputation, for example. Furthermore, in that study, interviewers' secondary concern centered on  
145 their personal interaction with applicants. Most interviewers reported that they tried to signal a  
146 closeness to applicants, for example, to make applicants feel comfortable and elicit positive emotions  
147 in applicants.

148 To achieve their goals, interviewers can send signals to applicants in the form of verbal IM, that is,  
149 interviewers use the content of what they are saying to influence applicants' impressions.  
150 Furthermore, the IM literature makes a fundamental distinction between self-focused IM and other-  
151 focused IM (Tsai & Huang, 2014). From the perspective of the interviewer, a central self-focused IM  
152 behavior is organization-enhancement, sometimes used interchangeably with the term enhancement  
153 of the organization or self-enhancement. Organization-enhancement refers to stressing the positive  
154 qualities that one's organization possesses (e.g., pointing out strengths of the organization, Stevens et  
155 al., 1990; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). A central other-focused IM behavior of interviewers is applicant-  
156 enhancement, sometimes used interchangeably with the term ingratiation or other-enhancement,  
157 which refers to flattering the applicant (e.g., acknowledging past accomplishments of the applicant,  
158 Stevens et al., 1990; Wilhelmy et al., 2016).

159 In the present study, we chose to focus on these two interviewer IM behaviors because research  
160 indicates that they are relevant for applicants' positive attitudes, intentions, and emotions.  
161 Specifically, we assume that organization-enhancement is related to the goal of representing the  
162 organization such as creating an attractive image, whereas applicant-enhancement is related to the  
163 goal of putting applicants at ease such as creating a close relation image. For example, qualitative  
164 interviews with applicants revealed that applicants were impressed by interviewers who knew how to  
165 pitch the job and the organization and felt enthusiastic when interviewers encouraged them during the  
166 interview (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Similarly, Wilhelmy et al (2016) found that interviewers  
167 from the health services field such as hospitals put emphasis on selling their organization by pointing  
168 out the advantages of the job and their respective hospital. In addition, in that study, it was found that  
169 interviewers reported trying to ensure that applicants would leave the interview room feeling good  
170 about themselves by paying attention to what applicants were saying and encouraging them during  
171 the interview. Furthermore, a laboratory experiment conducted by Stevens et al. (1990) found initial

172 evidence that both organization-enhancement and applicant-enhancement elicited overall positive  
173 reactions in applicants.

### 174 **2.3 Perceived Interviewer Impression Management: Are the Signal that Are Sent Actually** 175 **Received by Applicants?**

176 Although research has shown that interviewers use IM to influence applicant impressions, an  
177 important question that remains is whether applicants discern interviewers' IM. On the one hand, the  
178 selection interview is a highly stressful event that can trigger strong emotions such as anxiety  
179 (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). In contrast to interviewers, who are known to be responsive to  
180 applicants' IM, applicants are often nervous and anxious, which might not only lower their  
181 performance but also their attention span and the cognitive capacity to receive all the signals sent by  
182 interviewers (cf. Tsai & Huang, 2014). On the other hand, signaling theory (Bangerter et al., 2012;  
183 Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) proposes that interviewers are an important source of  
184 information for applicants because applicants lack information about the job and the organization. As  
185 a consequence, applicants should try to pay attention to interviewers' behavior and to every piece of  
186 information that interviewers provide.

187 In line with the latter suggestion, previous studies indicated that applicants often perceive interviewer  
188 IM behavior. Wilhelmy et al. (2016) found that applicants were able to report examples of verbal  
189 interviewer IM behaviors that they had perceived in prior selection interviews. Thus, applicants seem  
190 to notice these behaviors. In addition, in Stevens et al.'s (1990) laboratory study, recruiters who  
191 praised the applicant were perceived as putting more persuasive effort into the interview compared to  
192 recruiters who used other IM behaviors. Furthermore, in the same study, participants reported a high  
193 degree of flattery when they were exposed to a recruiter who used applicant-enhancement. Therefore,  
194 given applicants' ability to report and comment on interviewer IM behavior (Stevens et al., 1990;  
195 Wilhelmy et al., 2016), and rooted in Connelly et al.'s (2011) signaling timeline model, we expected  
196 that organization-enhancement and applicant-enhancement used by interviewers during the interview  
197 would be perceived by applicants (see Figure 1):

198 *Hypothesis 1:* Interviewers' organization-enhancement in the interview will be positively related to  
199 applicants' subsequent perceptions of organization-enhancement.

200 *Hypothesis 2:* Interviewers' applicant-enhancement in the interview will be positively related to  
201 applicants' subsequent perceptions of applicant-enhancement.

### 202 **2.4 Recruiting Outcomes: How Do Applicants React to the Signals They Receive?**

203 The signaling timeline model by Connelly et al. (2011) suggests that when a signal is received, the  
204 receiver interprets the signal and reacts to it. In the context of recruitment, these reactions come in the  
205 form of recruiting outcomes, that is, applicants construe interviewer behavior as signals of how  
206 interesting a job and an organization is for them and also emotionally react to these signals (Rynes et  
207 al., 1991). Prior research indicates that important recruiting outcomes encompass applicant attitudes  
208 such as organizational prestige, which refers to the degree to which an organization is perceived as  
209 being well-regarded and reputable (Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003), applicant intentions such as  
210 offer acceptance intentions, which captures applicants' willingness to accept an offer for a job or a  
211 place at a university (Chapman et al., 2005), and applicant emotional reactions such as positive  
212 affect, which reflects applicants' positive emotional state (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and

213 interview self-efficacy, which captures the extent of their belief in their ability to succeed with an  
214 interview (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998).

215 In addition, previous work indicates that organization-enhancement plays a central role for applicant  
216 attitudes and intentions, whereas applicant-enhancement is more important for applicant-emotions.  
217 Qualitative findings suggest that organization-enhancement is primarily used with the intention to  
218 create an attractive image to “sell” the organization to the applicant. By engaging in organization-  
219 enhancement, the interviewer attempts to quickly recruit applicants, enhance the organizations’  
220 reputation, and increase applicants’ intention to accept an offer (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). Furthermore,  
221 in Stevens et al.’s (1990) laboratory study, participants watched three videos of interviewers, each of  
222 whom applied a different IM behavior to describe a hypothetical study program: self-promotion,  
223 which is in line with the conceptualization of organization-enhancement in the present study, other-  
224 enhancement, which is in line with the conceptualization of applicant-enhancement in the present  
225 study, and opinion-conformity, which combined aspects of organization-enhancement such as  
226 advantages of the study program and aspects of applicant-enhancement such as emphasizing the  
227 applicants’ qualifications. The authors found that organization-enhancement was perceived as  
228 persuasive by some participants. However, the authors did not find full support for their assumption  
229 that compared to other IM behaviors, organization-enhancement would be most effective in making  
230 participants choose the hypothetical study program, particularly when organization-enhancement was  
231 used early in the interview. The authors interpreted this finding by suggesting that applicants may not  
232 always take organization-enhancement seriously or may not always pay attention to this kind of  
233 information. However, an important limitation of Steven et al.’s (1990) study is that it did not  
234 consider whether applicants actually perceived the IM behavior that was presented in the videos.  
235 Therefore, given that organization-enhancement has been linked to interviewers’ intention to create  
236 an attractive image (Stevens et al., 1990; Wilhelmy et al., 2016), we expect that perceived  
237 organization-enhancement would increase organizational prestige and applicants’ intention to accept  
238 a potential offer from the organization:

239 *Hypothesis 3:* Applicants’ perceptions of organization-enhancement will be positively related to a)  
240 organizational prestige and b) offer acceptance intentions after the interview.  
241

242 Given the positive association that can be expected between the degree of IM sent by interviewers  
243 and the degree to which applicants perceive interviewer IM, and based on Connelly et al.’s (2011)  
244 model, we also aimed to test the whole signaling timeline mechanism for organization-enhancement.  
245 Extending the arguments above, we assume that interviewers’ organization-enhancement during the  
246 interview has an indirect effect on organizational prestige and applicants’ intention to accept a  
247 potential offer through perceived organization-enhancement (see Figure 1):

248 *Hypothesis 4:* Interviewers’ organization-enhancement will be positively related to applicants’  
249 perceptions of organization-enhancement, which, in turn, will be positively related to a)  
250 organizational prestige and b) offer acceptance intentions after the interview.

251 Although applicants’ attitudes and intentions are central to an organizations’ success in recruiting  
252 new employees, researchers have recognized that applicants become emotionally invested. Thus,  
253 applicant emotions play a central role in the recruitment process (Truxillo, Bauer, McCarthy,  
254 Anderson, & Ahmed, in press). This is particularly true for job interviews, which, unlike selection  
255 tests, involve a social exchange and can therefore trigger emotional reactions (McCarthy & Goffin,  
256 2004).

257 So far, applicant reactions research has mainly focused on negative affective reactions such as  
258 interview anxiety (e.g., McCarthy & Goffin, 2004) or perceived strain (e.g., Merkulova, Melchers,  
259 Kleinmann, Annen, & Szvircsev Tresch, 2014). Several researchers, however, have called for  
260 research that considers applicants' affective reactions from another point of view, that of positive  
261 emotional reactions such as positive affect and self-efficacy (McCarthy et al., 2017; Truxillo et al., in  
262 press). In a recent framework on applicant perspectives in selection, McCarthy et al. (2017)  
263 emphasize the central role of applicant affect. They propose that treating applicants favorably during  
264 selection procedures enhances applicants' cognitive processing and triggers positive emotional  
265 reactions like positive affect. Specifically, applicants may feel more comfortable and self-confident  
266 when recruiters and interviewers show interest in their past achievements (Truxillo & Bauer, 2011).  
267 In this sense, perceived applicant-enhancement, which includes showing interest in applicants' past  
268 achievements, flatters and reassures applicants, which makes them feel inspired and excited, and  
269 strengthens their beliefs in their own interview ability.

270 Despite the theoretical indications for a positive relationship between interviewers' applicant-  
271 enhancement and applicants' interview self-efficacy and positive affect, empirical evidence remains  
272 scarce. Regarding general self-efficacy, meta-analytic findings show that recruiters' attentiveness and  
273 friendly interpersonal treatment is related to applicants' self-perceptions such as self-efficacy after  
274 the selection process (Hausknecht et al., 2004). In addition, Stevens et al.'s (1990) study provided  
275 evidence that applicant-enhancement can be perceived as "battering the ego" (p. 1087) by some  
276 applicants, but can also make applicants feel desired and reassured.

277 Regarding positive affect, Wilhelmy et al. (2016) found indications suggesting that applicant-focused  
278 IM is used with the aim of creating a close relation image and making applicants feel good in terms  
279 of creating a positive affective state. For example, interviewers compliment applicants with the  
280 intention to cheer them up. In addition, Stevens et al. (1990) proposed that in contrast to  
281 organization-enhancement, applicant-enhancement should provide weak information about prestige  
282 and suitability of the organization, but should provide a stronger basis for positive emotional  
283 reactions. In line with this assumption, they found that compared to other IM behaviors, applicant-  
284 enhancement had a positive influence on applicants' ratings of recruiter likeability, but no other  
285 affective reactions were assessed in the study. In addition, the study was limited to comparative  
286 effects of IM behaviors, that is, there was no variation in the degree of applicant-enhancement so that  
287 no main effect of applicant-enhancement on recruiting outcomes was assessed.

288 Given preliminary evidence regarding the positive link between perceived applicant-enhancement  
289 and feelings of reassurance and self-efficacy (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Stevens et al., 1990), along  
290 with interviewers' aim of creating a close relation image (Wilhelmy et al., 2016), and applicants'  
291 favorable affective reactions to applicant-enhancement (Stevens et al., 1990), we expected that  
292 perceived applicant-enhancement would increase applicants' positive affect and interview self-  
293 efficacy:

294 *Hypothesis 5:* Applicants' perceptions of applicant-enhancement will be positively related a) to their  
295 positive affect and b) to their interview self-efficacy after the interview.

296 Again, given the positive association that can be expected between the degree of IM sent by  
297 interviewers and the degree perceived by applicants based on Connelly et al.'s (2011) model, we also  
298 wanted to test the whole signaling timeline mechanism for applicant-enhancement. Extending the  
299 arguments above, we assume that interviewers' applicant-enhancement during the interview has an

300 indirect effect on applicants' positive affect and interview self-efficacy through perceived applicant-  
301 enhancement (see Figure 1):

302 *Hypothesis 6:* Interviewers' applicant-enhancement will be positively related to applicants'  
303 perceptions of applicant-enhancement, which, in turn, will be positively related a) to their positive  
304 affect and b) to their interview self-efficacy after the interview.

### 305 **3 Method**

#### 306 **3.1 Participants and Procedures**

##### 307 **3.1.1 Sample**

308 Data for this field study were collected from 153 applicants who applied for a selective Bachelor's  
309 study program in organizational psychology at a university in Switzerland. For this program,  
310 applicants are selected in one of three interview periods a year that each last two weeks. The study  
311 sample included applicants from all three periods (November 2011, February 2012, and April 2012).  
312 Applicants were markedly older than high school graduates because this study program targets  
313 people with at least one year of prior work experience. Applicants' age ranged from 19 to 48 ( $M =$   
314  $25.0$ ,  $SD = 6.2$ ), and their average work experience was 6.2 years ( $SD = 5.9$ ). Of the 153 applicants,  
315 74% were female. On average, they had participated in 5.0 interviews prior to this selection process  
316 ( $SD = 5.3$ ). Of the 153 applicants, 90 received an offer by the university. This study was carried out  
317 with written informed consent from all participants.

318 This sample was appropriate for our study for several reasons: 1) The selection process for this study  
319 program was solely based on selection interviews (i.e., no other selection tools or admission tests  
320 were used), which enabled us to isolate the effects of interviewer IM without any confounding  
321 influences of other selection procedures, 2) there was competition between this university and others  
322 who offer similar study programs, which is an important prerequisite for some IM behaviors (cf.  
323 Wilhelmy et al., 2016), 3) students had to pay very low tuition fees which makes the setting more  
324 similar to an application to a company.

##### 325 **3.1.2 Interviews**

326 Interviews had a selection focus, were fairly structured, and based on interview guides that consisted  
327 of six topical areas (see Appendix A). For each topical area there were two to five obligatory  
328 questions containing both past behavior and situational questions. In other words, the amount and  
329 kind of questions asked did not vary across interviews. In addition, interviewer appearance was  
330 consistent across interviews (i.e., professional clothing such as button-down shirts and blazers).

331 Interviewers were not instructed to use IM, but they were in a position where they could use IM. For  
332 example, interviewers had enough latitude to use IM behaviors because they were free in how to ask  
333 the interview questions and whether to add any other information and personal chit-chat.  
334 Furthermore, interviewers were aware of the fact that other universities offered similar study  
335 programs and that the university wanted to retain its popularity. All of the 153 interviews were  
336 videotaped. On average, the interviews were 40.0 minutes long ( $SD = 7.0$ ).

##### 337 **3.1.3 Interviewer Teams**

338 The unit of analysis of the present study was the individual interview because we were interested in  
339 the signals to which applicants were exposed to over the course of one interview. Each of the

340 interviews was conducted with a different applicant by a team of two interviewers out of a pool of 17  
341 interviewers. Interviewers alternated in asking the interview questions. Overall, there were 23  
342 different interviewer teams. Interviewers were assigned to the interview dates based on their  
343 availability. All of the interviewers were well trained. They had participated in an interviewer  
344 training by the university for which they were conducting the interviews. Furthermore, 12 of the  
345 interviewers had participated in additional interviewer training by other organizations or during their  
346 postgraduate training.

347 Eight of the interviewers were female (47%) and interviewer age ranged from 28 to 67 years  
348 ( $M = 40.7$ ,  $SD = 10.8$ ). All of the interviewers had an academic degree and were actively involved in  
349 the study program (13 of them as lecturers, 3 as Bachelor thesis advisors, and 1 as an examination  
350 committee member). On average, they had been working at the university for 5.9 years ( $SD = 7.2$ ).  
351 The interviewers were diverse regarding their interview experience, which ranged from less than a  
352 year to 27 years ( $M = 5.6$ ,  $SD = 7.5$ ), and had conducted an average number of 102 interviews in their  
353 lives ( $SD = 134.0$ ).

### 354 **3.2 Coding of Interviewer IM Behaviors**

355 Unlike prior studies on interviewer characteristics and behaviors, we wanted to directly observe  
356 interviewer IM behaviors in a real selection setting by videotaping interviews and behaviorally  
357 coding these videotapes. Our approach to code IM behaviors was in line with previous studies that  
358 focused on applicants' IM (McFarland, Yun, Harold, Viera, & Moore, 2005; Peeters & Lievens,  
359 2006; Stevens & Kristof, 1995): Specifically, six I/O psychology graduate students served as coders  
360 (two male and four females; mean age = 24.7 years,  $SD = 1.5$  years). They had gone through five-  
361 hours of frame-of-reference (FOR) training (Bernardin & Buckley, 1981) to recognize and record the  
362 frequency of interviewer IM behaviors. To record these behaviors, they used the INTERACT video  
363 coding software, which is a software to assess the frequency of behaviors by marking video sections  
364 with preassigned codes (Mangold, 2010). Using this software, the amount of interviewer IM  
365 behaviors per interview was assessed based on the number of specific keystrokes: Coders watched  
366 the video recording of an interview and any time they identified an IM behavior, they pressed a key  
367 that was programmed to represent the specific interviewer IM behavior, respectively.

368 During the FOR training, coders were provided with definitions and examples of IM behaviors.  
369 Interviewers' organization-enhancement included statements promoting the university and the study  
370 program (e.g., "We have partner universities all over the world, you know"). Interviewers' applicant-  
371 enhancement included statements flattering and encouraging applicants (e.g., "that's impressive",  
372 "very interesting", "nice"). In addition, we also coded for defensive IM behaviors, which included  
373 interviewers' justifications and apologies (e.g., "sorry for making you wait"). However, these codes  
374 were neither included in the conceptual model nor in the data analyses<sup>1</sup>. As part of the FOR training,  
375 several video sections (overall 25 minutes) that each focused on different IM behaviors were coded  
376 independently by each coder to practice how to recognize and record each IM behavior. Based on

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<sup>1</sup> Defensive IM behaviors were coded for the sake of completeness, but were not included in data analyses. Applicants usually comply with interviewers' control in the interview so that interviewers should feel no need to justify their behaviors (Kirkwood & Ralston, 1999). In line with this assumption, interviewers rarely engaged in defensive IM in the present study ( $M = 0.01$  per minute,  $SD = 0.03$ ). Thus, the main focus of this study was on organization-enhancement and applicant-enhancement.

377 these frequency-codings, coders received feedback. Any coding discrepancies were discussed to  
378 enhance coders' understanding of the IM behavior categories.

379 After the FOR training, ten 10-minute video sections representing different sections of the interview  
380 (e.g., opening sentences, interview questions, closing sentences) were frequency-coded  
381 independently by each coder to evaluate the reliability of the codings. The overall percentage of  
382 agreement was found to be good (.81 for organization-enhancement, .72 for applicant-enhancement,  
383 and .71 for defensive IM). The median of the interrater agreement of different pairs of coders was  
384 reasonable ( $\kappa = .66$ ) considering that organization-enhancement and defensive IM occurred rather  
385 seldom (cf. J. R. Landis & Koch, 1977). Furthermore, the level of interrater agreement found in the  
386 present research is comparable to previous studies on interviewees' IM (e.g., McFarland et al., 2005;  
387 Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

388 Afterwards, the actual coding took place. As agreement between the coders was shown to be good,  
389 each video of the 153 selection interviews was coded by one coder. The frequency of organization-  
390 enhancement, applicant-enhancement, and defensive IM per video were assessed as the sum of the  
391 IM behaviors of the two interviewers because overall, that was what applicants were exposed to  
392 during the interview. We then calculated the relative frequencies of IM behaviors (i.e., IM behavior  
393 use divided by interview duration in minutes) to control for interview duration.

### 394 **3.3 Survey Measures**

395 Applicants were asked to complete two surveys at two different points during the interview process.  
396 The first survey (Time 1) was mailed to applicants one to two weeks prior to the interview along with  
397 an informed consent form and a cover letter. This survey also assessed demographic information such  
398 as age, gender, and years of prior work experience. The interviews were video recorded and directly  
399 after the interview, a second survey was handed to the applicants (Time 2).

400 Unless noted otherwise, five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 =  
401 *strongly agree* were used in this study. The items from the different scales used in the final model of  
402 this study are listed in Appendix B. Table 1 presents internal consistency reliabilities for the  
403 measures for which they are applicable. All scales had adequate reliabilities.

#### 404 **3.3.1 Perceived Organization-Enhancement**

405 To measure applicants' perceptions of interviewers' organization-enhancement at Time 2, we  
406 selected two items that were particularly appropriate from Turban and Dougherty (1992) and one  
407 item from Liden and Parsons (1986). An example item is "The interviewers attempted to present the  
408 study program in a positive way". The internal consistency of this scale's ratings was good, with a  
409 coefficient alpha of .82.

#### 410 **3.3.2 Perceived Applicant-Enhancement**

411 To measure applicants' perceptions of interviewers' applicant enhancement at Time 2, we selected  
412 two items that were particularly appropriate from Harn and Thornton (1985) and supplemented these  
413 by generating one item to increase reliability. An example item is "The interviewers complimented  
414 me". The internal consistency of this scale's ratings was good, with a coefficient alpha of .86.

415 **3.3.3 Organizational Prestige**

416 Organizational prestige was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 with four items from a scale developed  
417 by Highhouse et al. (2003) that was adapted to the context of a university. An example item is  
418 “Students are probably proud to say they study at this university”. The internal consistency of this  
419 scale’s ratings was .77 for Time 1 and .85 for Time 2.

420 **3.3.4 Acceptance Intention**

421 Applicants’ acceptance intention was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 with a single item adapted  
422 from Powell and Goulet (1996). This measure has been widely used in previous studies (e.g.,  
423 Chapman, Uggerslev, & Webster, 2003; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). Participants  
424 were asked to indicate “How likely are you to accept an offer from this university based on the  
425 information you have so far?” on an 11-point scale ranging from 1 = 0% to 11 = 100%.

426 **3.3.5 Positive Affect**

427 Applicants’ positive affect was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 with 5 items from Thompson’s  
428 (2007) short-form of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988).  
429 Participants were asked to indicate to what extent each of the items described how they felt at the  
430 moment they completed the survey using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 =  
431 *extremely*. An example item is “At the moment, I’m feeling active”. The internal consistency for this  
432 scale’s ratings was .72 for Time 1 and .82 for Time 2.

433 **3.3.6 Interview Self-Efficacy**

434 Applicants’ interview self-efficacy was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 with two items that were  
435 particularly appropriate from Horvarth, Ryan, and Stierwalt’s (2000) self-efficacy measure and one  
436 item from Bauer et al.’s (1998) test-taking self-efficacy measure. We adapted the items to fit the  
437 context of an interview. An example item is “I believe I can perform well in interviews”. The internal  
438 consistency for this scale’s ratings was .75 for Time 1 and .78 for Time 2.

439 **3.3.7 Perceived Interviewer Competence**

440 Applicants’ perceptions of interviewer competence were measured at Time 2, but were not included  
441 in data analyses<sup>2</sup>. Perceived interviewer competence was measured with four items from Ridge and  
442 Reber (2002), Harris and Fink (1987), Carless and Imber (2007), and Turban and Dougherty (1992).  
443 Internal consistency of this scale’s ratings was satisfying with a coefficient alpha of .74.

444 **3.3.8 Control Variables**

445 As shown in Figure 1, several control variables were included based on theoretical justifications  
446 (Becker, 2005). We included applicants’ prior interview experience as a control variable because  
447 some correlational evidence suggests that applicants with less interview experience attend to different  
448 aspects of interviewers’ presentation than do applicants with more interview experience (Harris &  
449 Fink, 1987; Schreurs et al., 2005). Applicants interview experience was measured with an item  
450 developed by Harris and Fink (1987). Applicants were asked to indicate “How many prior interviews  
451 have you had in your life?”. Because applicants’ perceptions of interviewer IM and their reactions

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<sup>2</sup> Applicants’ perceptions of interviewer competence were measured, but due to a legitimate conceptual comment from the Editor in an earlier version of this manuscript, this variable was not included in further analyses.

452 may depend on their prior interview experience, we included interview experience into our model as  
453 a control variable for both mediators and outcomes.

454 In addition, we measured pre-interview baseline values of our recruiting outcome variables at Time 1  
455 and included them as control variables to acknowledge the fact that applicants differ in their attitudes,  
456 intentions, and emotions before the interview. To avoid psychometric problems that are associated  
457 with difference scores (cf. Edwards & Parry, 1993), we followed the recommendation for mediation  
458 designs to include baseline measures of the outcomes as control variables (MacKinnon, Coxe, &  
459 Baraldi, 2012). Specifically, we controlled each recruiting outcome for its respective baseline.

## 460 **4 Results**

### 461 **4.1 Preliminary Analyses and Analytical Approach**

462 Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study. To test our hypotheses in a  
463 methodologically rigorous manner and in one analytical model, we applied structural equation  
464 modelling (SEM). We analyzed the data using the statistical environment R (Version 3.3.2, R  
465 Development Core Team, 2016) and Mplus (Version 7.4, L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2015). Given that  
466 applicants were nested in interviewer teams, we first explored the degree of potential non-  
467 independence of the observations. We examined the variances in IM behavior within and between  
468 interviewer teams by inspecting the intraclass correlations coefficients (ICCs). These indicated  
469 substantive dependency of interviewers' organization-enhancement on the interviewer teams, ICC(1)  
470 = .28, ICC(2) = .71, as well as a comparable dependency of interviewers' applicant-enhancement on  
471 the interviewer teams, ICC(1) = .26, ICC(2) = .69. In other words, approximately 30% of the  
472 variance in the IM behaviors that interviewers used was dependent on the interviewer team. Because  
473 this dependency is not taken into account by classical SEM (e.g., Heck & Thomas, 2015; Kline,  
474 2016), we used the COMPLEX procedure and the MLR estimator in Mplus (B. O. Muthén & Satorra,  
475 1995; L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2015). This procedure corrects the  $\chi^2$  test of model fit, the resulting  
476 fit indices, and the standard errors for non-independence of observations to ultimately deliver  
477 unbiased parameter estimates.

478 In our study, some variables could only be measured with single indicators. Specifically,  
479 interviewers' organization-enhancement and applicant-enhancement were each measured as  
480 cumulative frequencies (i.e., number of IM behavior coded per interview), interview experience was  
481 measured as the number of prior interviews that applicants have had, and acceptance intention was  
482 measured as applicants' self-reported likelihood to accept an offer from the university. Given that the  
483 residuals of single indicators cannot be estimated in SEM and thus potential measurement error of  
484 these variables cannot be taken into account, we followed recommendations by Hayduk and Littvay  
485 (2012) and estimated the residual variance for the single indicators (see also Kline, 2016; Little,  
486 2013). By doing so, we estimated that 34% of the total variance of the interviewer IM variables was  
487 residual variance and 25% of the total variance of the single-item-indicators of acceptance intention  
488 and interview experience was residual variance. In addition, in light of the rather complex analytical  
489 procedure, we tried to reduce model complexity whenever possible (cf. R. S. Landis, Beal, & Tesluk,  
490 2000). We therefore followed the *construct-to-item-balance* approach (Little, Cunningham, Shahar,  
491 & Widaman, 2002; Williams & O'Boyle Jr., 2008) and created two parcels for the organizational  
492 prestige as well as for the positive affect measures.

493 To establish our postulated measurement model, we conducted three confirmatory factor analyses  
494 (CFAs; see Table 2). Residuals were not allowed to covary because there was no theoretical reason to

495 assume they would (Cornina, Green, Keeler, & Vandenberg, 2016). Following recommendations by  
496 Little (2013) regarding acceptable model fit, we evaluated our models in light of five fit statistics: (1)  
497 absolute test of fit,  $\chi^2$ , (2) CFI  $\geq$  .90, (3) TLI  $\geq$  .90, (4) RMSEA  $\leq$  .05, (5) SRMR  $\leq$  .05. First, we  
498 estimated a one factor CFA in which all variables of interest loaded onto a single factor. This CFA  
499 did not converge and was therefore considered to be a misfit to the data. Next, we estimated a four-  
500 factor model where the items of each category of variables (predictors, mediators, outcomes, and  
501 controls) loaded onto a corresponding category variable. This four-factor model converged but  
502 displayed unacceptable fit to the data. Ultimately, we estimated the postulated measurement model  
503 with 13 factors, that is, we specified all theoretically postulated variables as separate entities. This  
504 model displayed acceptable fit,  $\chi^2(138) = 191.93, p < .01, CFI = .96, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .05$  [90%  
505 CI: .03 - .07,  $p = .44$ ], SRMR = .04. Therefore, this measurement model was well-suited to test the  
506 SEM in the next step.

507 To test our hypotheses in a rigorous manner, we estimated the theoretically postulated structural  
508 model, which follows the one depicted in Figure 1, but also tested all potential direct as well as  
509 indirect effects. In addition, control variables<sup>3</sup> were taken into account by including paths from  
510 applicants' prior interview experience to the mediators and the outcome variables, and by also  
511 including paths from the respective baseline value (T1) of an outcome variable to its respective  
512 outcome at T2. This structural model displayed acceptable fit and was thus considered to be a valid  
513 representation of the data,  $\chi^2(117) = 221.30, p < .01, CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .05$  [90% CI:  
514 .03 - .07,  $p = .44$ ], SRMR = .06.

## 515 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

516 Table 3 and Figure 2 provide unstandardized as well as standardized path coefficients of the  
517 structural equation model. Our first two hypotheses referred to the question of whether applicants  
518 would notice the IM behaviors that interviewers used during the interview. Consistent with  
519 Hypothesis 1, interviewers' organization-enhancement in the interview was positively related to  
520 applicants' subsequent perceptions of organization-enhancement,  $b = 1.06, SE = .51, p < .05$ .  
521 Furthermore, and in line with Hypothesis 2, interviewers' applicant-enhancement in the interview  
522 was positively related to applicants' subsequent perceptions of applicant-enhancement,  $b = .70, SE =$   
523  $.27, p < .05$ .

524 In support of Hypotheses 3a, applicants' perceptions of organization-enhancement were positively  
525 related to organizational prestige,  $b = .14, SE = .06, p < .05$ . However, with regard to Hypothesis 3b,  
526 the association between applicants' perceptions of organization-enhancement and applicants'  
527 acceptance intention after the interview failed to reach significance at the conventional level ( $p =$   
528  $.06$ ).

529 Hypothesis 4 specified a positive indirect effect of interviewers' organization-enhancement on (a)  
530 organizational prestige and (b) acceptance intentions through applicants' perceptions of organization-  
531 enhancement. Although the COMPLEX procedure of Mplus corrects the standard errors and  
532 consequently provides unbiased parameter estimates, it does not provide confidence intervals (L. K.  
533 Muthén & Muthén, 2015). Therefore, we applied the distribution-of-product method for building  
534 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets,  
535 2002) based on the corrected parameters using the R package *RMediation* (Version 1.1.4, Tofighi &

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<sup>3</sup> We repeated the SEM analysis without any control variables and the pattern of results remained the same.

536 MacKinnon, 2011). Indirect effects and confidence intervals are shown in Table 4. Consistent with  
537 Hypothesis 4a, the 95% confidence interval excluded zero and therefore indicated a significant  
538 positive indirect effect of interviewers' organization-enhancement via applicants' perceptions of  
539 organization-enhancement onto organizational prestige after the interview,  $b = .15$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ .  
540 With regard to Hypothesis 4b, the 95% confidence interval included zero, which means that the  
541 indirect effect of interviewers' organization-enhancement via applicants' perceptions of organization-  
542 enhancement onto acceptance intention after the interview was not significant.

543 Consistent with Hypotheses 5a, applicants' perceptions of applicant-enhancement were positively  
544 related to their positive affect,  $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ . Furthermore, in support of Hypothesis 5b,  
545 applicants' perceptions of applicant-enhancement were positively related to their interview self-  
546 efficacy after the interview,  $b = .17$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .05$ .

547 Finally, Hypothesis 6 specified a positive indirect effect of interviewers' applicant-enhancement on  
548 applicants' (a) positive affect and (b) their interview self-efficacy after the interview through their  
549 perceptions of applicant-enhancement. In line with Hypothesis 6a, the 95% confidence interval  
550 excluded zero and therefore indicated that the indirect effect of interviewers' applicant-enhancement  
551 through applicants' perceptions of applicant-enhancement was positively related to applicants'  
552 positive affect after the interview,  $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ . Similarly, with regard to H6b, there was  
553 a positive indirect effect of interviewers' applicant-enhancement onto applicants' interview self-  
554 efficacy via applicants' perceptions of applicant-enhancement because the 95% confidence interval  
555 excluded zero,  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## 556 **5 Discussion**

557 Evidence from a growing number of studies suggests that the way interviewers are perceived by  
558 applicants can have tremendous effects on recruiting outcomes. However, this literature has yet to  
559 investigate how applicants respond to interviewer signals such as IM behavior. As a response to  
560 repeated calls for research on interviewer IM (e.g., Dipboye & Johnson, 2013; Macan, 2009;  
561 Rosenfeld, 1997) and, more specifically, on the mechanism by which applicants respond to  
562 interviewer IM (e.g., Celani & Singh, 2011; Gilmore et al., 1999; Tsai & Huang, 2014), our study  
563 offers a new perspective by not only incorporating IM behavior that interviewers apply, but also  
564 applicants' perceptions of interviewer IM and their reactions. Adopting a signaling perspective  
565 (Connelly et al., 2011), we conducted a field study to examine whether the signals that interviewers  
566 send (i.e., interviewer IM) were received by applicants (i.e., applicants' perceptions of interviewer  
567 IM), and how applicants reacted to the signals they receive (i.e., recruiting outcomes). We provide a  
568 conceptual model (Figure 1) that captures a signaling timeline of interviewer IM and delineates two  
569 interviewer goals (representing their organization and making the applicant feel good) that can each  
570 be achieved by using a different interviewer IM behavior (organization-enhancement and applicant  
571 enhancement). Our study goes beyond the two sole hitherto published studies on interviewer IM (i.e.,  
572 Stevens et al., 1990; Wilhelmy et al., 2016) by examining how applicants perceive and react to  
573 interviewer IM.

574 Our results yielded three key findings. First, we found that the signals that interviewers send are  
575 received by applicants. When interviewers enhanced the image of the organization to a stronger  
576 degree during the interview, applicants indeed reported more perceived organization-enhancement  
577 after the interview. Similarly, when interviewers praised and complimented the applicant to a  
578 stronger degree during the interview, applicants reported more applicant-enhancement after the  
579 interview. Second, we found that applicants react to the signals they receive. Applicants rated the

580 organization's prestige after the interview more positively when they perceived interviewers to be  
581 engaging in more organization-enhancement behavior during the interview, and this was true even  
582 after controlling for perceptions of prestige before the interview. In addition, when interviewers were  
583 perceived to be engaging in more applicant enhancing behaviors, applicants reported more positive  
584 affect and interview self-efficacy after the interview, even after controlling for initial affect and  
585 interview self-efficacy. Third, we found support for indirect effects delineated in our signaling  
586 timeline model for three of the four recruiting outcomes. We found an indirect effect of interviewers'  
587 organization-enhancement on organizational prestige through applicants' perceptions of  
588 organization-enhancement as well as indirect effects of interviewers' applicant-enhancement on  
589 applicants' positive affect and interview self-efficacy through applicants' perceptions of applicant-  
590 enhancement. To our knowledge, these results are the first to show that interviewer IM behaviors can  
591 influence recruiting outcomes through applicants' perceptions of these behaviors.

## 592 **5.1 Implications for Theory and Practice**

593 This study has several theoretical and practical implications. Our study relates to signaling theory  
594 (Bangerter et al., 2012; Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) by proposing and testing a signaling  
595 timeline model to explain the effects of interviewer IM. It sheds light on the effects of interviewer IM  
596 by considering both the interviewer's perspective in terms of sending signals and the applicant's  
597 perspective in terms of receiving and responding to signals. Specifically, we found that for  
598 interviewer IM (i.e., signals sent) to have an effect on recruiting outcomes, applicants need to  
599 perceive interviewers' IM behavior (i.e., signals received), and respond to it (i.e., reactions to  
600 signals). This finding emphasizes that in the context of the interview, it is important to conceptually  
601 and empirically distinguish the signals sent from the signals received because to have an effect,  
602 signals that are sent by interviewers need to be received by applicants.

603 Furthermore, we expand previous theoretical frameworks on IM (e.g., Gilmore et al., 1999; Tsai &  
604 Huang, 2014) by providing evidence that different kinds of interviewer IM (organization-  
605 enhancement and applicant-enhancement) are conceptually related to different goals of interviewers  
606 (representing the organization and making applicants feel good): Organization-enhancement seems to  
607 be particularly effective at influencing applicants' positive attitudes towards the organization,  
608 whereas applicant-enhancement seems to be particularly effective at influencing applicants' positive  
609 emotions. This is in line with and further corroborates prior propositions that one kind of IM behavior  
610 may not be relevant for every purpose (Tsai & Huang, 2014; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). In addition, our  
611 findings stress that it is crucial to consider various recruiting outcomes, including those that reflect  
612 organizations' perspective such as organizational reputation and prestige, but also criteria that reflect  
613 applicants' perspective such as their positive affect and belief in the ability to succeed with an  
614 interview.

615 The findings of the present study do not only benefit the research community but also have  
616 implications for practitioners. Our finding that interviewers' organization-enhancement and  
617 applicant-enhancement can influence recruiting outcomes provides indications on the opportunity of  
618 increasing organizations' competitive advantage through signals that are sent to applicants in the  
619 course of the interview process. For instance, organizations could conduct training sessions to  
620 enhance interviewers' IM skills. Specifically, organization-enhancement could help interviewers  
621 highlight strengths of the organization and attract the best applicants. Applicant-enhancement, in  
622 contrast, could help interviewers to make applicants feel wanted and thus foster positive emotions  
623 and feelings of self-confidence, which is, for example, important for word-of-mouth  
624 recommendations. Nonetheless, the effect sizes in the present study were relatively small, which

625 potentially limits the practical relevance of the findings. The small effect sizes, however, could also  
626 be due to the large number of factors that influence recruiting outcomes. In addition, a phenomenon  
627 can be important despite small effect sizes (Cortina & Landis, 2009). We therefore believe that  
628 interviewers' IM has the potential to be effectively used by organizations, but the findings presented  
629 in this paper should be bolstered by insightful future research before more specific practical  
630 recommendations can be made.

631 Despite these potential benefits, interviewer IM may lead to conflicts between the selection and  
632 recruitment needs of employers. Interviewer IM may enhance the recruitment function of the  
633 interview but may adversely affect the psychometric qualities such as inter-rater reliability (because  
634 of deviations from standardization) and criterion-related validity (because of the introduction of  
635 systematic error) and thus impede the selection function. For example, Marr and Cable (2014) found  
636 that interviewers' selling-orientation reduced their judgement accuracy and the interview's predictive  
637 validity. However, as Tsai et al. (2014) pointed out, this does not mean that employers have to  
638 sacrifice their recruitment needs for their selection needs. For example, in order to achieve a balance  
639 between the recruitment and selection functions, interviewers may consider conducting two separate  
640 interviews, "one designed strictly for prediction and the other designed to allow an informal question-  
641 and-answer session to meet the needs of applicants" (Kohn & Dipboye, 1998, p. 839). However, as  
642 separate interviews involve additional costs, another solution might be to conduct highly structured  
643 interviews but incorporate a more personal interview stage, for example at the beginning and the end  
644 of the interview (Chapman & Rowe, 2001; Schuler & Funke, 1989). In addition, some researchers  
645 and practitioners may argue against the use of interviewer IM because interviewers might exaggerate  
646 information and try to deceive applicants when applying IM behaviors. Unrealistic expectations can  
647 ultimately result in negative affective reactions on the part of employees (Wanous, Poland, Premack,  
648 & Davis, 1992). Thus, interviewers should avoid pursuing the wrong applicants on the wrong terms.  
649 A practical solution may be to combine IM with realistic job previews (RJPs, Wanous, 1976) in  
650 terms of presenting positive attributes while also informing applicants about possible downsides of  
651 the job and the organization (cf. Wilhelmy et al., 2016).

## 652 **5.2 Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

653 Although results of the present study provide valuable insights into the effects of interviewer IM, the  
654 study is not without limitations. For example, our data was based on real selection interviews that  
655 were conducted as part of the selection process for one specific academic organization. This may call  
656 the generalizability of our study into question, but it does not diminish the relevance of this sample  
657 because the challenges that universities face regarding their recruitment efforts are similar to those in  
658 private enterprises in terms of competition with other universities and the need to balance selection  
659 and recruitment aims (e.g., Colarelli, Monnot, Ronan, & Roscoe, 2012). Furthermore, it is important  
660 to note that even though we examined applicants who applied for a Bachelor's study program, our  
661 sample does not represent a student sample. In fact, in our study, applicants had work experience and  
662 were markedly older than high school graduates with an average age of 25 years. The reason for this  
663 is that the study program is specifically designed for individuals with prior work experience who  
664 want to complement their training and education with an additional Bachelor's degree.

665 Moreover, the present study was conducted in the field using pre-interview and post-interview  
666 applicant survey data and video coding of interviewers' IM behavior, but mediators were measured at  
667 the same time as the outcomes. This raises common method bias concerns. However, these concerns  
668 are alleviated to some extent by using two measurement points (before and after the interview) and  
669 two data sources (video recordings and applicant surveys) to separate the data collection on

670 predictors and outcomes (following recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff,  
671 2003) and to incorporate baselines of the outcome variables (following recommendations by  
672 MacKinnon et al., 2012). Nonetheless, future research should use a more rigorous research design  
673 with multiple measurement points to obtain predictors, mediators, and outcomes at different points in  
674 time to strengthen causal inferences (cf. Ployhart & MacKenzie, 2015).

675 A strength of the current study, which is also a potential limitation, is the fact that we focused on  
676 interviewer IM behavior that was actually applied during interviews and used an extensive behavioral  
677 video coding procedure to gain valuable insights into the frequency of these behaviors. Even though  
678 this methodology is in line with previous IM research (e.g., Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002;  
679 McFarland et al., 2005; Peeters & Lievens, 2006; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), it remains unclear what  
680 intentions interviewers had when they used these IM behaviors. Future research should put more  
681 emphasis on interviewer IM intentions, for example, by combining video ratings as used in the  
682 present study with self-ratings of IM behavior (Levashina & Campion, 2007).

683 In the present study, interview structure, interview questions, and the relation of selection and  
684 recruitment goals were held constant across interviews. However, interview structure and the ratio of  
685 recruitment versus selection aims may be important boundary conditions of interviewer IM and  
686 should therefore be studied. Specifically, researchers may focus on the possibility that there might be  
687 a minimum level of freedom regarding the interview content and a minimum level of recruitment  
688 objectives needed for interviewer IM to occur and to be effectively applied. Relatedly, the present  
689 study focused on the signals that were sent by a team of two interviewers who alternated in asking  
690 the interview questions. To understand how interviewer IM evolves in the first place, it is important  
691 to also consider the individual interviewer as unit of analysis. It could be that some interviewers use  
692 the same kind and degree of IM in every interview and that others adapt their IM behavior to every  
693 interview situation and every applicant. Thus, we encourage future research to study larger samples  
694 of interviewers and examine the degree to which an interviewer's IM behavior remains stable across  
695 interviews (e.g., depending on interview guidelines of the organization and the interviewer's  
696 personality), and to what degree interviewers adapt their IM from interview to interview (e.g.,  
697 depending on how much they want to win an applicant over).

698 The current study provides indications that interviewers' IM is indeed perceived by applicants, and  
699 that it can influence applicants' attitudes, intentions, and emotions. However, as a starting point for  
700 this line of research, we only focused on two central IM behaviors, namely organization-  
701 enhancement and applicant-enhancement. Qualitative findings revealed that interviewers use a broad  
702 range of different verbal IM behaviors that go beyond organization-enhancement and applicant-  
703 enhancement such as demonstrating humor and depreciating applicants (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). In  
704 addition, interviewers not only use verbal IM but also artefactual IM (i.e., using appearance and  
705 visual information to influence applicant impressions such as displaying application documents) and  
706 administrative IM (i.e., using timing of communication and providing services to influence  
707 applicants' impressions such as modifying the length of the interview). Future research should  
708 consider this broad range of interviewer IM behavior to provide more comprehensive insights into its  
709 effects.

710 In addition, future research should consider interactive effects and different combinations of  
711 interviewer IM. The current study examined the effects of organization-enhancement and applicant-  
712 enhancement on recruiting outcomes, but there could be different configurations of interviewer IM  
713 used by an interviewer team (e.g., mainly organization-enhancement vs. mainly applicant-  
714 enhancement vs. both organization-enhancement and applicant-enhancement vs. neither

715 organization-enhancement nor applicant-enhancement), and these different configurations could have  
716 different effects on recruiting outcomes. Therefore, to examine interactive effects with increased  
717 statistical power to detect those effects, we encourage future research to use experimental study  
718 designs to specifically vary and combine interviewers' IM behaviors. In addition, in real selection  
719 settings with large samples of interviewers, the prevalence and effects of different configurations of  
720 interviewer IM could be examined through latent profile analyses. Furthermore, Stevens et al. (1990)  
721 found that organization- and applicant-enhancement can have a positive influence on recruitment by  
722 increasing applicants' perceptions of interviewer competence, but can also backfire by appearing  
723 presumptuous to applicants. This raises the question of what kind of IM may tip the scale between  
724 perceiving organization-enhancement as valuable information and as a signal of interviewer  
725 competence versus arrogance. Future research exploring the interactive effects of different kinds of  
726 interviewer IM behavior and the role of perceived interviewer competence vs. arrogance is  
727 warranted.

728 Another potential limitation is that the current study examined the effects of interviewer IM on  
729 applicants' attitudes, intentions, and emotions, but not on behavioral outcomes. For example, we do  
730 not know the extent to which applicants' job choice decisions would be influenced by interviewer  
731 IM. Recent findings from a military context indicate that perceived recruiter characteristics such as  
732 personableness can influence applicants' acceptance decisions (Harold, Holtz, Griepentrog, Brewer,  
733 & Marsh, 2016). However, as Tsai et al. (2014) point out, it is possible that applicants' attitudes and  
734 intentions after the interview are influenced by interviewer IM, but that their actual job choice  
735 behavior will be primarily based on information provided by other sources than the interviewer such  
736 as friends or insiders that work at the organization. Future research should therefore employ  
737 longitudinal designs in selection settings where there is enough variance in applicants' job choice  
738 decisions to answer this important question.

739 Finally, several unexpected findings warrant attention. In the current study, applicants' perceptions of  
740 organization-enhancement were not significantly related to their intention to accept a potential offer.  
741 Stevens et al. (1990) found that only a few of the study participants opted for the university that was  
742 presented by a recruiter who used organization-enhancement, and that this was because the  
743 arguments presented were not seen as convincing. Thus, future research should consider how  
744 applicants interpret organization-enhancement, and how much weight this information carries for  
745 different applicants. Another interesting finding is that applicants' perceptions of organization-  
746 enhancement was related to applicants' positive affect after the interview. This may be because  
747 strengths and advantages of the study program and the organization that were pointed out by  
748 interviewers may increase applicants' excitement and enthusiasm for the interview and thus elicit  
749 positive affective reactions in applicants. Lastly, the mean level of the recruiting outcomes decreased  
750 after the interview. This is in line with prior studies: When comparing means before and after the  
751 interview, applicants' acceptance intention and ratings of organizational attractiveness were often  
752 found to decrease (Carless, 2005; Carless & Imber, 2007; Powell, 1991). In another study, applicants'  
753 test taking self-efficacy was found to decrease after the selection process (Bauer et al., 1998). A  
754 possible explanation for this decrease in recruiting outcomes is that after the interview, applicants are  
755 often overwhelmed and buried in information that they need to process. In addition, it could be that  
756 the interview helped applicants decide against the organization and select themselves out of the  
757 process, which might have decreased the mean level of recruiting outcomes. Furthermore, we do not  
758 know how much the mean level of the recruiting outcomes would have decreased without any  
759 interviewer IM during the interviews. Future research could therefore use longitudinal, quasi-

760 experimental designs with several groups that differ in the amount of interviewer IM to examine  
761 main effects of interviewer IM on recruitment outcomes.

## 762 **6 Conclusion**

763 The insights gained in this study do not only provide valuable implications for current interview  
764 practice and theory, but also lay the foundation for more multifaceted, insightful research on  
765 signaling processes in the future. Overall, our results suggest that interviewer IM behaviors can serve  
766 as effective means for recruitment through applicants' perceptions of interviewer IM. These effects  
767 should be tested across different organizations for different kinds of IM such as paraverbal and  
768 nonverbal, and by combining video ratings and self-report measures of interviewer IM. In addition,  
769 we encourage future research to further explore the conditions within organizations, interview  
770 settings, and interviewers that facilitate the use and effectiveness of interviewer IM. We hope that  
771 future research on the topics and questions that we have mentioned will provide further insight into  
772 how and when interviewer IM can lead to positive outcomes of the interview process for both  
773 applicants and organizations.

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995

996 **Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliabilities, and Zero Order Correlations**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<b>Demographic variables (T1)</b>																		
1. Gender (female = 0, male = 1)	.25	.44	–															
2. Age	25.07	6.18	-.04	–														
3. Work experience	6.19	5.95	-.04	.84**	–													
<b>Control variables (T1)</b>																		
4. Interview experience	5.07	5.30	.00	.11	.06	–												
5. Organizational prestige	4.23	0.53	-.03	-.09	.01	.12	(.77)											
6. Acceptance intention	10.48	1.15	.01	-.16*	-.14	.08	.34**	–										
7. Positive affect	3.92	0.58	.01	.07	-.03	-.09	.26**	.06	(.72)									
8. Interview self-efficacy	4.03	0.63	.04	.12	.14	.11	.20*	.05	.17*	(.75)								
<b>Interviewer IM (video coded)</b>																		
9. Interviewers' organization-enhancement	0.13	0.14	-.11	.04	.10	-.01	.02	.02	-.01	.14	–							
10. Interviewers' applicant-enhancement	0.66	0.60	-.06	-.11	-.03	.03	.07	.13	.08	.13	.13	–						
<b>Perceived interviewer IM (T2)</b>																		
11. Perceived organization-enhancement	3.41	1.05	-.09	.03	-.03	.11	.24**	.14	.11	.05	.18*	.09	(.82)					
12. Perceived applicant-enhancement	1.69	0.83	.17*	-.13	-.10	.03	.13	.18*	.08	.02	.01	.27**	.32**	(.86)				
<b>Recruiting outcomes (T2)</b>																		
13. Organizational prestige	4.30	0.59	-.03	.05	.06	.18*	.68**	.24**	.25**	.33**	.08	.07	.29**	.06	(.85)			
14. Acceptance intention	10.21	1.53	-.12	.01	.04	.05	.29**	.70**	.08	.10	-.01	.05	.17*	.06	.27***	–		
15. Positive affect	3.62	0.80	-.02	.01	.04	-.02	.12	-.02	.31**	.19*	-.02	.15	.23**	.13	.19*	.05	(.82)	
16. Interview self-efficacy	3.48	0.80	.13	.11	.14	.20*	.13	.04	.18*	.50**	.09	.10	.23**	.18*	.15	.07	.43**	(.78)

997 *Note.* *N* = 153. T1 = pre-interview applicant survey, T2 = post-interview applicant survey. Video coded = Trained raters coded IM behavior that interviewers used during  
998 the selection interviews on the basis of video recordings of the interviews. Work experience was measured in years. Interview experience indicates the number of interviews  
999 applicants had before this interview. Acceptance intention was measured on an 11-point scale. The interviewer IM variables assessed through video coding indicate  
1000 the number of times per minute that the IM behavior occurred during the interview. All other variables were measured on a 5-point scale. When appropriate, Cronbach's alpha  
1001 values are shown on the diagonal in parentheses.

1002 \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01 (two-tailed).

1003 **Table 2. Model Comparison Based on the Three Confirmatory Factor Analyses**

Model	$\chi^2$	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	CI 90%		SRMR
							lower	upper	
1 factor									
							Model did not converge		
4 factors	2109.86	67	< .001	.00	-.61	.24	.24	.25	.17
13 factors	191.93	138	< .01	.96	.93	.05	.03	.07	.04

1004 *Note.*  $N = 153$ . CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of  
 1005 approximation; CI = confidence interval; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual. The 90% confidence interval  
 1006 specifically refers to the RMSEA and tests whether close fit of the model to the data ( $RMSEA \leq .05$ ) can be accepted.

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1007 **Table 3. Structural Path Coefficients for Mediators and Outcome Variables**

	Unstandardized Estimate	SE	Standardized Estimate
<b>Perceived Organization-Enhancement (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	1.06*	.51	.22*
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	.22†	.12	.19*
Interview experience (T1)	.03*	.01	.21*
<b>Perceived Applicant-Enhancement (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.47	.99	-.06
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	.70*	.27	.36*
Interview experience (T1)	.01	.03	.03
<b>Organizational prestige (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	.19	.35	.04
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.05	.10	-.05
Perceived Organization-Enhancement (T2)	.14*	.06	.16*
Perceived Applicant-Enhancement (T2)	-.03	.03	-.05
Organizational prestige (T1)	.85*	.13	.80*
Interview experience (T1)	.01	.01	.08
<b>Acceptance intention (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.72	1.05	-.06
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.27	.29	-.10
Perceived Organization-Enhancement (T2)	.44†	.23	.18
Perceived Applicant-Enhancement (T2)	-.11	.09	-.08
Acceptance intention (T1)	1.28*	.20	.96*
Interview experience (T1)	-.02	.02	-.07
<b>Positive affect (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.43	.34	-.09
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	.01	.10	.01
Perceived Organization-Enhancement (T2)	.26*	.13	.27*
Perceived Applicant-Enhancement (T2)	.10*	.05	.18*
Positive affect (T1)	.45*	.14	.29*
Interview experience (T1)	-.01†	.01	-.10
<b>Interview self-efficacy (T2)</b>			
Interviewers' Organization-Enhancement (Video Coded)	.14	.52	.02
Interviewers' Applicant-Enhancement (Video Coded)	-.10	.16	-.07
Perceived Organization-Enhancement (T2)	.11	.10	.09
Perceived Applicant-Enhancement (T2)	.17*	.07	.22*
Interview self-efficacy (T1)	.70*	.14	.57*
Interview experience (T1)	.02	.02	.15

1008 *Note.*  $N = 153$ . Unstandardized and standardized parameter estimates stem from the final SEM. Estimates and standard  
 1009 errors account for clustering of applicants within interviewer teams,  $\chi^2(117) = 221.30, p < .01$ , CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA  
 1010 = .05 [90% CI: .03 - .07,  $p = .44$ ], SRMR = .06. *SE* = standard error.

1011 †  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed)

1012 **Table 4. Indirect Effects and Respective Confidence Intervals**

Indirect effect	Estimate	SE	CI 95%	
			lower	upper
<b>Organizational prestige</b>				
Organization-enhancement → Perceived organization-enhancement → Organizational prestige	.153*	.098	.002	.379
Applicant-enhancement → Perceived applicant-enhancement → Organizational prestige	-.017	.026	-.075	.029
<b>Acceptance intention</b>				
Organization-enhancement → Perceived organization-enhancement → Acceptance intention	.464	.350	-.051	1.288
Applicant-enhancement → Perceived applicant-enhancement → Acceptance intention	-.075	.071	-.237	.044
<b>Positive affect</b>				
Organization-enhancement → Perceived organization-enhancement → Positive affect	.273†	.197	-.018	.735
Applicant-enhancement → Perceived applicant-enhancement → Positive affect	.070*	.043	.003	.168
<b>Interview self-efficacy</b>				
Organization-enhancement → Perceived organization-enhancement → Interview self-efficacy	.114	.127	-.091	.412
Applicant-enhancement → Perceived applicant-enhancement → Interview self-efficacy	.117*	.069	.010	.274

1013 *Note.*  $N = 153$ . Indirect effects are controlled for direct effects of Interviewer IM (video coded) on the outcome  
 1014 variables (T2) as well as baseline values of the outcome variables (T1). Confidence intervals were computed applying  
 1015 the distribution-of-product method based on the unstandardized parameters. *SE* = standard error; *CI* = confidence  
 1016 interval.

1017 †  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

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1027 *Figure 1.* Proposed signaling timeline model of interviewer IM effects: Interviewer IM (signals sent) are  
1028 related to applicants' perceptions of interviewer IM (signals received) and, indirectly, with recruiting  
1029 outcomes (reactions to the signals received). Control variables are shown in the dashed box.

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1037 *Figure 2.* Unstandardized and standardized (printed in bold) structural path coefficients of the final  
1038 structural equation model. Only significant paths are shown based on the unstandardized estimates.  
1039 Dashed ellipses indicate control variables. Applicants' interview experience was used as a control  
1040 variable for the mediators and recruiting outcomes. The baseline value (T1) for each recruiting outcome  
1041 (T2) was used as a control variable. Path coefficients for control variables are presented in Table 3. \* $p <$   
1042  $.05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

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Appendix A

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**Sample questions from the interview guide sorted by topical areas**

1047

1. Interest in psychology

1048

*How would you explain what psychology actually is to someone who is not familiar with psychology?*

1049

1050

2. Realistic expectations regarding content and later occupation

1051

*How do you envision your future professional occupation?*

1052

3. Commitment

1053

*Was there a period in your life in which you were especially burdened (in the sense of having a lot to do or having to deal with many things at the same time)? How did you deal with this?*

1054

1055

4. Professional attitude

1056

*How do you define yourself (your role) as a psychologist in problem solving?*

1057

5. Social skills

1058

*How would others (e.g., good friends, peers, colleagues) describe you? Is there a difference between your own description and that of others? If so, how do you explain this?*

1059

1060

6. Interest in interdisciplinary collaboration

1061

*Can you think of specific fields of work where an interdisciplinary team would be ideal?*

1062

1063

## Appendix B

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### Survey Items

#### Perceived organization-enhancement (T2)

1. The interviewers attempted to present the study program in a positive way.
2. The interviewers expressed their enthusiasm about [name of university].

#### Perceived applicant-enhancement (T2)

1. The interviewers complimented me.
2. The interviewers indicated that I was a prime candidate for this study program.
3. The interviewers praised me.

#### Organizational prestige (T1 and T2)

1. Students are probably proud to say they study at this university.
2. This is a reputable university to study at.
3. This university probably has a reputation as having excellent study programs.
4. There are probably many who would like to study at this university.

#### Acceptance intention (T1 and T2)

1. How likely are you to accept an offer from this university based on the information you have so far?

#### Positive affect (T1 and T2)

At the moment, I'm feeling...

1. Active
2. Inspired
3. Alert

4. Determined

5. Attentive

Interview self-efficacy (T1 and T2)

1. I believe I can perform well in interviews.

2. I am not good at performing well at interviews like this.

3. I am confident in my abilities regarding interviews.

Interview experience (T1)

1. How many prior interviews have you had in your life?

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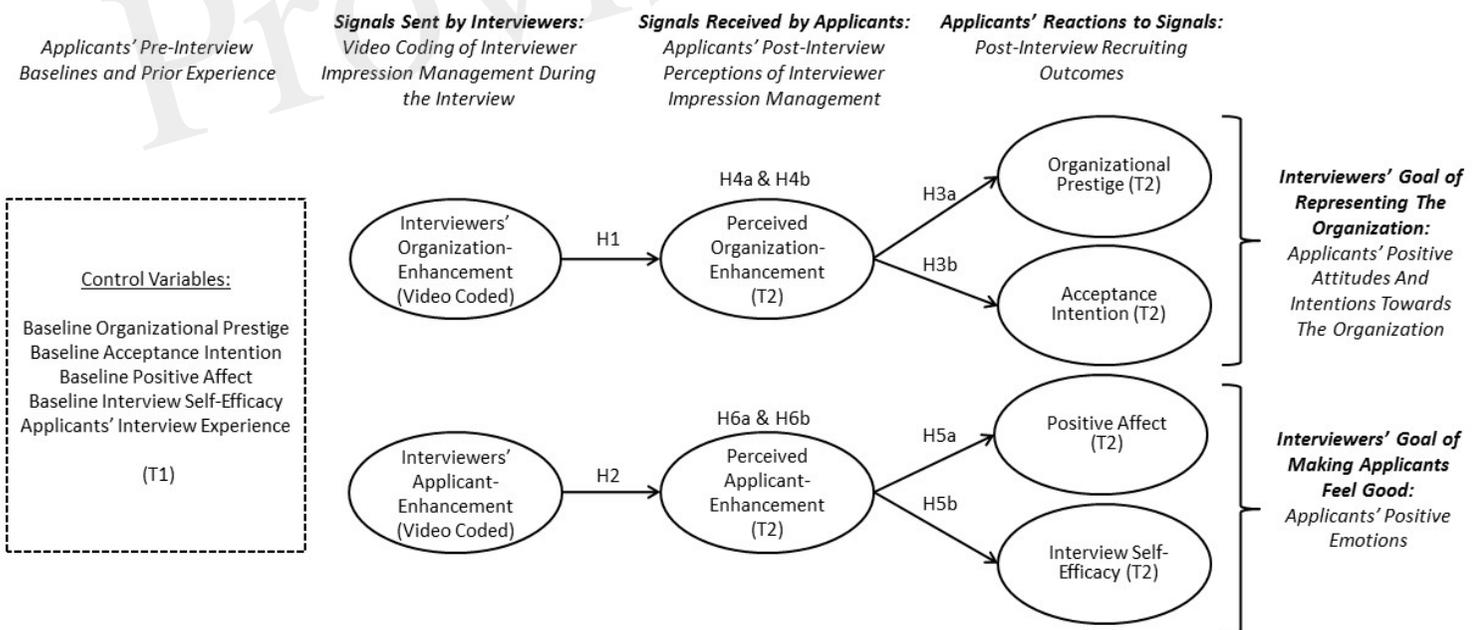


Figure 1. Proposed signaling timeline model of interviewer IM effects: Interviewer IM (signals sent) are related to applicants' perceptions of interviewer IM (signals received) and, indirectly, with recruiting outcomes (reactions to the signals received). Control variables are shown in the dashed box.

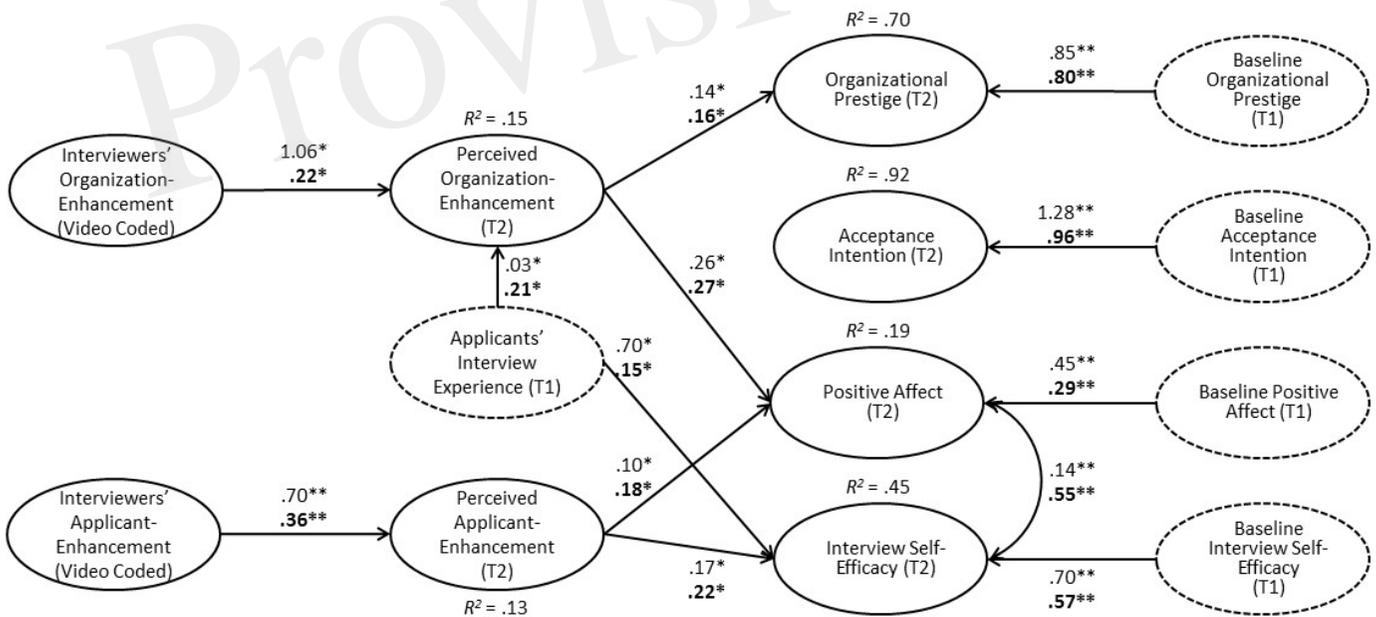


Figure 2. Unstandardized and standardized (printed in bold) structural path coefficients of the final structural equation model. Only significant paths are shown based on the unstandardized estimates. Dashed ellipses indicate control variables. Applicants' interview experience was used as a control variable for the mediators and recruiting outcomes. The baseline value (T1) for each recruiting outcome (T2) was used as a control variable. Path coefficients for control variables are presented in Table 3. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).