



Turning Rejection into Resilience:

The Power of Feedback in Rejection Letters

The Effect of Feedback in Rejection Letters on a Job Applicant's Willingness to Reapply, and the

Role of Organizational Perception and Rejection Sensitivity

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Abstract

Rejection letters are a common communication tool used by organizations to inform job applicants about the outcome of their application. This study investigates the impact of the presence and form of feedback in rejection letters on job applicants' willingness to reapply, taking into account the mediating role of organizational perception and the moderating role of rejection sensitivity. An online between-subjects experiment with three experimental conditions (no feedback vs. general feedback vs. comprehensive feedback) was performed among 157 people between the age of 19 and 62 years old. To test the hypotheses, Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0 Model 4 mediation analysis & Model 1 moderation analysis were used. The results showed no significant main effects of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, a significant total effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception, and also a significant indirect effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception. Finally, the results showed a significant negative effect of rejection sensitivity on willingness to reapply, but no significant moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on the effect of feedback on willingness to reapply. For future research it might be interesting to look deeper into the aspects of comprehensive feedback that might have an effect on willingness to reapply, and also to research more participants that experience a higher sensitivity to rejection.

Keywords: Rejection letters, Job Applicants, Feedback, Organizational Perception,

Willingness to Reapply

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The Power of Feedback in Rejection Letters

According to the report of Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (UWV) in September 2022, the unemployment rate in the Dutch society had increased to 387 thousand, representing 3.8 percent of the working population. The number of unemployed individuals had risen by 18 thousand per month due to an increase in job losses and people unable to find employment despite actively seeking it (UWV, 2022). Additionally, in the second quarter of 2022, there was a scarcity of personnel across all occupational categories, indicating a significant shortage in all occupational groups of the labour market (UWV, 2022). Moreover, the Minister of General Affairs stated, in an article about unemployment in the Netherlands, that it is expected that unemployment in the labour market will remain a structural problem in the future in several sectors (Rijksoverheid, 2023). The fact that the unemployment rate is increasing, but there is also a shortage in all occupational groups in the Netherlands suggests that there is a gap between the supply and demand in the labour market. Because it is expected that this phenomenon will remain a structural problem in the future, it is important to understand why this problem is occurring and how this issue can be minimized.

A possible reason for this gap may stem from a job applicant's reluctance to reapply at organizations as a result of a received rejection letter on a previous application. Different studies suggest that there are several factors at play when it comes to the impact of a rejection letter on the job applicant's willingness to reapply at an organization. According to Cortini (2019), there is an effect among the latency, customization, and written form of rejection letters. Rejection letters that include a prompt response, a personalized salutation, and informal language positively affect the job applicant's willingness to reapply at the organization. Furthermore, most importantly, the contents of a rejection letter might have an effect on the willingness to re-apply. In a study of Ployhart et al. (1999) about

how participants' reactions to a selection decision are influenced by the presence and form of explanation features, it was discovered that receiving specific feedback that is personalized can have an effect on the person's experienced feeling of fairness, which means that the person receiving feedback feels treated fairly by the person giving feedback. When again applying this theory onto job seekers, this can indicate that taking the effort to provide personal feedback in rejection letters can have an effect on how the job seeker feels treated by the organization afterwards. Thus, the presence and form of feedback given in rejection letters might also have an effect on the feeling and perception the job applicant develops towards the organization, which may partly explain the effect of a job applicant's received form of feedback on their willingness to reapply at an organization.

In contrast, a study of Yonce (2005) about the effect of the amount of information and sensitivity in rejection letters on job applicant's organizational perception showed that there was no significant effect of quantity of information and quantity of sensitivity that is used in a rejection letter on the organizational perception. But, stated in the study of Yonce itself, a reason for the unfound significant effect might have been that participants had to take a selection test that was too difficult, which may have led into a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction in the process, and therefore there still remains a knowledge gap in the possible effect of rejection letters on organizational perception.

Another possible reason for not wanting to reapply at an organization might stem from the fear of rejection that the job seekers experience during the application process, resulting in a decrease in job applications. In a study of London et al. (2007), it is researched what the effect of rejection sensitivity can be on participating in social activities, where rejection sensitivity is defined as the person's fear of being rejected (Downey et al., 1998). According to London's study in 2007, rejection sensitivity has the potential to predict social withdrawal. This implies that when an individual perceives the possibility of rejection in a social relationship, they are more likely to withdraw from

social activities or society as a whole. Also, when a person is being rejected multiple times, it can stimulate the fear of being rejected again (Downey et al., 2004). If the theory of London (2007) is applied onto job seekers, it might be that having a history of multiple rejection can stimulate the fear of rejection, which has an effect on the job seeker's motivation to continue applying. This indicates that job seekers can feel discouraged in the application process and might apply less frequently.

In summary, various studies have examined rejection letters and their impact on job applicants. Yonce (2005) found that the quantity and sensitivity of information in rejection letters did not significantly affect applicants' perception of the organization. Cortini (2019) showed that different characteristics of rejection letters can influence applicants' willingness to reapply, but the study did not explore the impact of the explanation's nature. Whereas Ployhart (1999) suggested that receiving personal feedback in rejection letters can affect fairness perception but its effect on the organization's image is unclear. Lastly, when looking at the study of London (2007), rejection sensitivity may also play a role in applicants' willingness to reapply.

Therefore, investigating whether the presence and form of feedback provided in a rejection letter has an effect on the willingness to re-apply at the concerned organization, with a mediating effect of organizational perception could be an intriguing area for further research. Also, since rejection sensitivity is defined as the fear of being rejected in general or being rejected again, it might be interesting to see whether the effect of a rejection letters on willingness to reapply is different for people that score higher on rejection sensitivity compared to people that score low on rejection sensitivity. Thus, the research question of this study is as follows:

RQ: "Does the presence and form of feedback that an organization uses in a rejection letter have an effect on the job applicant's willingness to reapply, to what extent is this effect explained by organizational perception, and what is the moderating effect of rejection

sensitivity?"

Theoretical framework

This study examines the effect of the presence and form of feedback that is given in a rejection letter on the job applicant's willingness to reapply, and to what extent this effect can be explained by the job applicant's organizational perception. The study also investigates whether this effect is different for people that score high on rejection sensitivity compared to people that score low on rejection sensitivity. To research this effect, it first is important to mention what a rejection letter usually consists of in terms of characteristics and content to understand the concept of a rejection letter. Subsequently, the terms feedback and organizational perception will be explained along with the possible effect of feedback on organizational perception and the possible effect of organizational perception on willingness to reapply. To explain this effect, an important concept, which is "perceived fairness", will be explained further since this concept explains a possible connection between presence and form of feedback and organizational perception. The expected effect of feedback on perceived fairness and the expected effect of perceived fairness on organizational perception will be discussed, just as the mediating effect of organizational perception on willingness to reapply. Last, the concept "rejection sensitivity" will be explained along with the expected role this concept might have in this study.

Rejection letters

Rejection letters are formal communications in which an individual or organization is informed that their application, proposal, or request has been rejected (Flowers, 2006). Typical elements of these letters are mostly a formal tone, and a statement of appreciation for the interest or effort shown. They might also offer recommendations for improvement, feedback or motivation to apply again in the future (Jablin & Krone, 1984). In this study the focus will be on rejection letters as a

result of an individual's job application in the form of an e-mail, since this has been the most commonly used form of a rejection letter in the last decade and is therefore most relevant for this study (Joinson, 2004).

Characteristics of rejection letters

In 1984, Jablin and Krone conducted a study to examine which characteristics are common in rejection letters. In this study, the participants handed in the last rejection letter they received from an organization whereafter these letters were analysed. The analysis of these rejection letters showed twelve different variables that every letter included, such as the rationale given for rejection (mismatch, too many qualified applicants, qualifications), the number of paragraphs or whether the rejection was direct or indirect, for example. While the study showed that rejection letters can differ when it comes to these twelve variables, two consistent elements emerged among almost all rejection letters: expressing gratitude towards the applicant for their application and the majority of recipients preferring a formal greeting (Dear Mr./Ms.) rather than an informal greeting (Dear [name]).

Contents of rejection letters

Moreover, on the content of a rejection letter, the study of Jablin and Krone (1984) showed that there were two commonly used explanations that a rejection letter includes. About 50% of the letters explained the rejection by stating that there was no suitable match between the candidate and the vacancy, where about 30% of the letters explained the rejection by stating that a large number of qualified people had applied, and 20% of the letters did not include an explanation at all. Furthermore, on the content of a rejection letter, Feinberg et al. (1996) did a study on the effect of positivity, conveyed in a rejection or acceptance letter, for example starting the acceptance letter with “*Congratulations!*” or the rejection letter with “*I enjoyed talking to you about your career opportunities*”, on the applicant's perception of the organization and on their willingness to reconnect

with the organization. The study showed that positivity in rejection letters positively influences job applicant's perception of the organization and willingness to reconnect, which means that positive rejection letters can help reduce the negative impact of rejection letters on applicant's organizational perception.

Feedback

The term "feedback" describes information or comments given to a person, a group, or a system regarding their performance, activities, or behaviour, which can be positive, negative, or neutral (Ramaprasad, 1983). Feedback can help a person grow, learn and develop themselves in a personal context as well as a professional context (Poulos & Mahoney, 2008). As previously mentioned in the study of Jablin and Krone (1984), the rationale given in a rejection letter can vary which means that it is possible that a rejection letter may or may not include some form of feedback towards the applicant. On the subject of receiving feedback, it is expected that the receiver's experience of perceived fairness in the application process plays a role in the effect of presence and form of feedback in a rejection letter on the receiver's organizational perception. Therefore, the concept of perceived fairness will be elaborated upon below.

Perceived fairness

Perceived fairness refers to a person's perception of whether or not a situation is handled in a fair way (Greenberg, 1986). Although perceived fairness is based on the values, beliefs and experiences of a person it can also be influenced by external factors (Lemons & Jones, 2001). The decision-making process, how the conclusion was communicated, and the perceived motives and intents of people participating in the decision-making can all have an impact on perceived fairness (Gilliland, 1993).

As mentioned in the introduction, in a study of Ployhart (1999) it is shown that receiving a

rejection letter with an explanation that includes personal and specific feedback, as compared to receiving a rejection letter with an explanation that merely includes a justification, a procedural reason or no explanation at all, has a positive effect on a person's feeling of perceived fairness towards the sender of the feedback, and towards the process. The study examined the effect of explanation features included in rejection letters on the participants' reactions to the perceived fairness of the decision-based selection process. The study was a 2 (selection decision: selected or rejected) x 4 (information: control, justification, procedural, or personal) x 2 (sensitivity: sensitive or control) mixed design, where the selection decision was measured between the subjects, and information and sensitivity were measured within the subjects. The study showed that receiving personal feedback in either a rejection letter or an acceptance letter has a positive effect on the participant's feeling of perceived fairness in the selection process.

In addition, Ryu & Hong (2020) did a study on the effect of constructive performance feedback on perceived fairness of performance appraisal. In this study, constructive feedback is defined as the type of feedback that aims at achieving a positive outcome, and perceived fairness of performance appraisal is defined as to what amount a person feels fairly treated in an evaluation process (Ryu & Hong, 2020). The study shows that receiving constructive performance feedback has a positive effect on the receiver's perceived fairness of performance appraisal, which means that receiving feedback in a constructive way can have a positive effect on whether a person feels judged correctly on their performance. In summary, the studies of Ployhart (1999) and Ryu and Hong (2020) have found that receiving personal and constructive feedback have a positive effect on the receiver's perceived fairness. When looking at job application processes, these studies might suggest that receiving a rejection letter with personal and constructive feedback have a positive effect on the job applicant's feeling of perceived fairness in the process. To continue on perceived fairness, it is

expected that perceived fairness can affect organizational perception, which will be further discussed below.

Organizational perception

Frank et al. (1980) did a study on the effect of perceived fairness and accuracy on performance evaluation and selection processes. The goal of the study was to find out what the experienced amount of fairness and accuracy in a performance evaluation and an overall selection process can do to an individual's organizational perception, where organizational perception is referred to as the perception an individual has of an organization based on the organization's culture, communication style, policies, practices, and overall environment (Corley, 2004). The effect of accuracy in performance evaluation on organizational perception was tested using employees of the organization, and the effect of accuracy in selection processes on organizational perception was tested using job applicants. The study suggested that when the job applicant's selection process is perceived as inaccurate or unfair, job applicants will be less likely to accept a job offer, less likely to recommend a job to others, and also be less likely to apply again at this organization (Frank et al., 1980).

Additionally, a study of Lemmink et al. (2003) about the role of corporate image and company employment image on explaining application intentions showed that a job applicant's positive perception of a company has a positive effect on a job applicant's applying intentions. Therefore, the cause of not wanting to reapply might be explained by the job applicant's negative organizational perception, as a result of the feeling of being treated unfairly in the application process.

Effects of rejection letters on organizational perception

Since a person's organizational perception is partly based on the organization's communication style, receiving a rejection letter can have an effect on the receiver's organizational perception. In a study of Yonce (2005), it was argued that providing a job applicant with information

about their performance was positively related with the applicant's perception of fairness.

Subsequently, the study argued that the perception of fairness has an effect on organizational perception and therefore the study hypothesized that the amount of information in a rejection letter has an effect on organizational perception, however this turned out to be no significant effect. Stated in the study of Yonce (2005), a reason for the unfound significant effect might have been that participants had to take a selection test that was possibly too difficult. The selection test that the participants had to take for this study was an imaginary graduate school admissions test. After taking the test, all participants would receive a rejection letter from the graduate school. The study states in the discussion section that the difficult selection test may have led into a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction in the process. This could have disrupted the experience and thinking process of the participant in the study which may have harmed the validity of the study, and therefore the study might not have found a significant effect of amount of information on organizational perception. Although in this study there was no significant effect found of amount of information in rejection letters on organizational perception, it is expected that the test may have been a confound and therefore the hypothesis could not have been tested properly.

In summary, the study of Ployhart (1999) found a positive significant effect of receiving feedback on the receiver's perceived fairness, whereas the study of Frank et al (1980) showed that a job applicant's experience of perceived fairness of the selection process is positively related to a job applicant's organizational perception. Since the study of Lemmink et al. (2003) showed that a job applicant's positive organizational perception can have a positive effect on applying intentions, the first part of the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

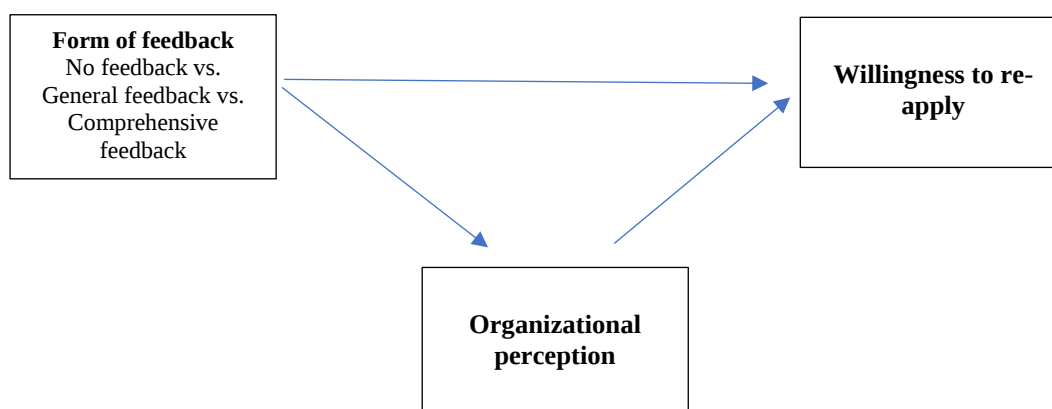
H1a: *'Job applicants that receive a rejection letter with no feedback will have a more negative organizational perception than job applicants that receive a rejection letter with feedback,*

which partly explains the lower score on willingness to reapply for job applicants that receive no feedback.'

Subsequently, the study of Ployhart (1999) showed that the specificity and personalization that is conveyed in feedback is positively related to the receiver's perceived fairness and therefore the second part of the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1b: *'Job applicants that receive a rejection letter with an invitation for comprehensive feedback will have a more positive organizational perception than job applicants that receive a rejection letter with general feedback, which partly explains the higher score on willingness to reapply for job applicants that receive comprehensive feedback.'*

Conceptual framework H1



Rejection sensitivity

According to Downey et al. (1998), rejection sensitivity refers to the degree of anxious or concerned feelings a person experiences in situations in which it is possible that the person will be rejected. When the degree of rejection sensitivity is high, this means that a person is fearful of being rejected in certain situations (Gao et al., 2017). These situations can occur in personal relationships, for example, the degree of fear or anxiousness someone experiences when asking their partner whether or not they still love them, but these situations can also occur in more superficial relationships, such as

the degree of fear or anxiousness someone experiences when asking their supervisor to help them with a certain subject they do not understand (Downey et al., 1998).

The degree of rejection sensitivity someone carries with them can be influenced by several factors, such as experiences with abandonment or rejection, having low self-esteem, and social anxiety (Marston et al., 2010). When a person scores high on rejection sensitivity, this can have an effect on their daily life. That being the case, people with a high degree of rejection sensitivity are more likely to avoid social situations and over-analyse conversations or interactions with people based on their fear of being potentially rejected (London et al., 2007). Also, the study of Downey et al. (1997) constructed a Rejection Sensitivity Model which suggests that prior experiences with being rejected, combined with a biological predisposition, leads an individual to become more aware of the fact that they might be rejected again by the source that rejected them in the previous experiences. As a result, these individuals protect themselves from ending up in a position where there is a possibility of being rejected again, by not putting themselves in a certain situation anymore (Downey et al., 1998). Therefore, it is expected that someone that scores high on rejection sensitivity is less likely to reapply at the concerned organization. However, for the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply it is expected that the interpretation of feedback might play a role in the decision-making process to reapply at the organization that rejected the individual. It is suggested that individuals that score high on rejection sensitivity might interpret feedback in a negative way, which is called negative interpretation bias. This concept will be elaborated on below.

Negative interpretation bias

Negative interpretation bias refers to a cognitive process which leads an individual to interpret ambiguous information or situations in a negative way (Normansell & Wisco, 2017).

For instance, if someone has a negative interpretation bias and receives feedback on a project they are

working on that is mostly favourable with a few areas for development, they may dismiss the positive aspects of the input and only pay attention to the places for improvement (Minihan et al., 2023). Since Downey et al. (1997) suggested that people with a high degree of rejection sensitivity have the tendency to over-analyse interactions, it is considered possible that when an individual that experiences a high degree of rejection sensitivity is being rejected, this person is more sensitive to receiving comprehensive feedback since they may mainly focus on the negative parts that are included. So, it might be that receiving comprehensive feedback in a rejection letter has a negative effect on willingness to reapply, when someone is highly sensitive to rejection.

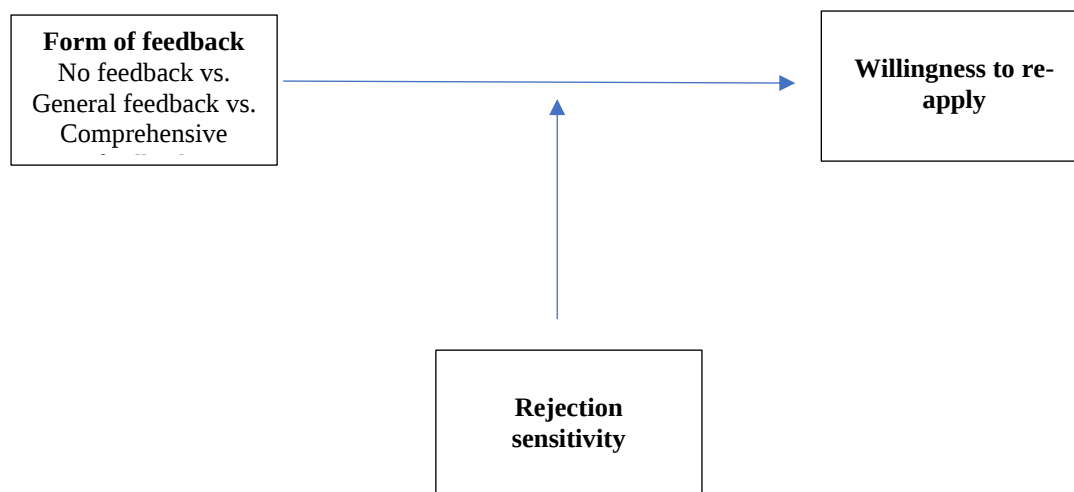
On the other hand, in a study of Downey et al. (2007) about the social causes of rejection sensitivity, it is examined that an individual that experiences a high degree of rejection sensitivity tends to expect negative feedback. Subsequently, when not receiving feedback at all, it is considered that an individual that scores high on rejection sensitivity might assume the worst-case scenario regarding their feedback. An individual that is highly sensitive to rejection might assume that the organization has a more negative image of him than is actually true, which may lead into not wanting to apply again at this organization.

Since previous studies have shown that rejection sensitivity can be influenced by several factors, and it can also influence various factors such as social withdrawal, feedback interpretations, and feedback expectations, it is expected that the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply may differ between individuals with high rejection sensitivity and those with low rejection sensitivity. In summary, since it is considered that the moderation effect of rejection sensitivity could be twofold: receiving comprehensive feedback having a negative effect on willingness to reapply for job applicants with high rejection sensitivity, or receiving no feedback or general feedback having a negative effect on willingness to reapply for job applicants with high

rejection sensitivity, the second hypothesis is formulated as an exploratory research question:

RQ2: *Is the effect of feedback on willingness to reapply different for people that score high on rejection sensitivity compared to people that score low on rejection sensitivity?*

Conceptual framework RQ2



Method

Participants

To answer the research question, a between-subject experiment was conducted in the form of an online survey, with three conditions where 222 participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. However, 65 participants were excluded from this study, as they did not complete the survey, which resulted in the final sample consisting of 157 participants. To participate in the study, the participants needed to be 18+ years old since people from the age of 18 years are considered adults. 54 participants were assigned to the condition ‘no feedback’, 50 participants to the condition ‘general feedback’ and 53 participants to the condition ‘invitation for comprehensive feedback’. The final sample consisted of 108 females (68.8%) and 49 males (31.2%) aged between 19 and 62 ($M = 26.37$, $SD = 7.63$).

Since the target group was not limited to a specific nationality, the survey was conducted in

English. The participants for this study were collected via the researcher's own online network on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp since these networks exist mostly of the target group of this study. Also, the survey was conducted on SurveySwap and SurveyCircle to collect participants.

Experimental design

This experiment was conducted in an independent measures design, where the independent variable was feedback in a rejection letter (no feedback, general feedback and an invitation for an appointment to receive comprehensive feedback) and the dependent variable was willingness to reapply, with a possible mediating effect of organizational perception (positive or negative). Additionally, the moderator, which is rejection sensitivity, was measured to test whether the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply is different for participants that score high on rejection sensitivity than for participants that score low on rejection sensitivity.

Materials

Before the experiment started, the study had been approved by the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, and the participants had to consent to participate in this study (see Appendix c). The experiment started with demographical questions about age and gender to describe the sample of the study.

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

After these questions, the participants were shown seven items of the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ), constructed by Downey and Feldman in 1996 (see Appendix B). This scale measures rejection sensitivity by giving the participant hypothetical scenarios, in which it is probable that someone declines their request for assistance, counsel, or company, e.g., *"You ask a colleague at your place of work to answer a question about the work routine to you."* or *"You ask a friend if you can borrow something of his/hers (e.g., a mountain bike)."* In these different scenarios, respondents

were questioned about their expectations of rejection. Two factors reflect how people react to these circumstances. First, their level of anxiety and worry about the outcome (e.g., “*How concerned or anxious would you be about the answer your colleague would give?*”). This was measured on a six-point Likert scale, that had a good reliability ($\alpha = .80$), where 1 was ‘very unconcerned’ and 6 was ‘very concerned’. Second, their expectations of approval or rejection (e.g., “*I would expect that my colleague would be willing to answer the question*”). This was measured on a six-point Likert scale, that had a good reliability ($\alpha = .81$), where 1 was ‘very unlikely’ and 6 was ‘very likely’.

The original scale exists of 18 items, whereas seven of these are used in this study. The reason for this is that the 11 items that were left out, are strongly related to personal relationships such as partners, parents or friends (e.g., “*You ask your partner, you have not been dating very long, if he/she wants to meet your parents.*”), whereas the other seven items were related to less personal relationships, such as co-workers, strangers or supervisors (e.g., “*In a lesson of your further education or retraining you do not understand a section of the course. You ask the supervisor to explain some contents to you after the lesson.*”). Since the study is about the effect of receiving rejection letters from organizations, these seven were deemed most relevant for this study and were used. To avoid undetected straight lining of this measurement, the scales of anxiety and worry about outcome were the opposite of each other, regarding the scale. This meant score 1 (very unconcerned) at the “anxiety” scale meant scoring lowest on rejection sensitivity, and score 1 (very unlikely) at the “worry about outcome” scale meant scoring highest on rejection sensitivity.

Conditions presence and form of feedback

After the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, the participants received a short case with the following text:

“Imagine you are looking for a job. Last week, you applied for a vacancy that interested you.

You feel like the vacancy fitted to your abilities and your interests. Besides, the organization that opened the vacancy is also in the sector of your interests. Unfortunately, today you receive the following rejection letter in your mailbox.”

After this text, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions which were tested in the study.

Condition 1 (no feedback)

Dear Mr./Ms.

Thank you for applying to our vacancy. Unfortunately, we have to inform you that we are not going to invite you for an interview at this time. Hoping to have informed you sufficiently.

Kind regards, Annabelle | HR

Condition 2 (general feedback)

Dear Mr./Ms.

Thank you for applying to our vacancy. Unfortunately, we have to inform you that we are not going to invite you for an interview at this time. We have looked at your motivation letter and résumé and we currently do not see a suitable match with your profile and the vacancy. Hoping to have informed you sufficiently.

Kind regards, Annabelle | HR

Condition 3 (invitation comprehensive feedback)

Dear Mr./Ms.

Thank you for applying to our vacancy. Unfortunately, we have to inform you that we are not going to invite you for an interview at this time. We would like to make an appointment for a phone call to provide you with more comprehensive feedback. If you are open to this, please let me know so we can schedule the appointment. Hoping to have informed you sufficiently.

Kind regards, Annabelle | HR

Organizational Perception Scale

After the participants had read the rejection letter, their organizational perception was measured. The organizational perception was measured with the Organizational Perception Scale of Ployhart et al. (1999). The scale, that had an excellent reliability ($\alpha = .94$), measured four items on a seven-point scale: quality, favourability, approvement, and positivity (see Appendix A). To avoid undetected straight lining, these four items had alternate scales of organizational perception scores.

Willingness to re-apply scale

After measuring organizational perception, the participants were asked if they would apply again at the concerned organization on a seven-point scale where 1 was ‘totally disagree’ and 7 was ‘totally agree’, with the following question: *“Imagine the organization opens up an interesting vacancy in the future. Would you be willing to apply again at this organization?”* On which the participants were given the statement: *“After receiving this rejection letter, when this organization opens up an interesting vacancy in the future, I would apply again at this organization.”* This statement was measured on a seven-point scale where 1 was ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 was ‘strongly agree’. After this question, the participants were asked to motivate their answer:

“Can you shortly motivate (max. 3 sentences) why you would or would not apply again at this organization?”

This question was added since it might help to understand what the possible reason could be that the hypothesized effects are significant or nonsignificant.

Data analysis

The collected data of 222 participants was converted to SPSS 27, after this data was collected

in Qualtrics. After cleaning the data by deleting the participants that did not finish the entire survey, there was a total of 157 participants left that had been taken into the analysis. Subsequently, to analyse the reliability of the items in the rejection sensitivity scale and organizational perception scale, the data was restructured and recoded. Then, the means of organizational perception and rejection sensitivity were calculated and the descriptive statistics were examined.

First, the assumptions such as normality, multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity were checked. After these assumptions were checked, a mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0 (Model 4) in which the independent variable was feedback, the dependent variable was willingness to reapply, and the mediator was organizational perception.

To test the second hypothesis about the moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on the effect of feedback on willingness to reapply, a moderation analysis was performed using again Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0 but this time Model 1. Last, to categorize the motivations for the willingness to reapply, a scheme was developed to see which motivations were commonly used, whereafter the answers were grouped into different categories in an overview.

Results

Descriptive analysis

A Pearson's correlation analysis was done, prior to the Hayes analysis. The coefficients show that organizational perception is significantly positively related to willingness to reapply ($r = .61, p < .001$) representing a moderate correlation. Further, willingness to reapply is significantly negatively related to rejection sensitivity ($r = -.17, p < .05$), representing a very low correlation, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson's Correlation Coefficients (N = 157)

Variable	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Willingness to reapply	1 - 7	3.99	1.75		
2. Organizational Perception	1 - 7	3.61	1.23	.610**	
3. Rejection Sensitivity	1 - 6	2.53	.62	-.170*	-.039

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed); * $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Additionally, the descriptive statistics for organizational perception and rejection sensitivity across the conditions were analysed and can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Conditions for the Dependent Variables

Condition	Organizational perception		Willingness to reapply	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
No feedback ($N = 54$)	3.03	0.99	3.67	1.77
General feedback ($N = 50$)	3.30	0.84	3.62	1.55
Comprehensive feedback ($N = 53$)	4.50	1.27	4.68	1.73

Mediation analysis: The effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply mediated by organizational perception

The mediation analysis was performed with Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0 (Model 4) mediation analysis, using the Helmert contrast which tested two contrasts. The first contrast was Condition 1 (no feedback) vs. the mean of Condition 2 (general feedback) and Condition 3

(comprehensive feedback) which in this study is called contrast 1 (C1), and the second contrast was Condition 2 (general feedback) vs. Condition 3 (comprehensive feedback) which in this study is called contrast 2 (C2). Before running the analysis, the corresponding assumptions were checked.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the standardized residuals were normally distributed as the p-value was .103. Also, the influential cases such as Cook's distance, Mahalanobis distance and Centered leverage value were analysed. Cook's distance showed all values were lower than 1.00, where the maximum distance was .068, meaning that there is no cause for concern. In addition, the Mahalanobis distance was checked. According to the Chi-square distribution, values must be lower than 13.82, where the Mahalanobis showed a distance of 16.35, with six cases higher than 13.82. However, these six cases did not have concerning Cook's distance or Centered Leverage values, so there is probably no cause for concern. The heteroscedasticity and linearity were checked by the predicted scores in the scatterplots and visual inspection and indicated that there was no linearity nor heteroscedasticity. In addition, the Durbin-Watson test showed that errors are uncorrelated since the test showed a value of 1.83, which is between 1.00 and 3.00.

Second, it was examined if the sample contained any outliers. Out of 157 participants, only six outliers were identified with a standardized residual exceeding 2.00, and no outliers exceeded 3.00. These six outliers account for 3.8 percent of the data, which is below the threshold of 5 percent. Therefore, there is no need for concern regarding the presence of outliers in the sample.

The overall model of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception, showed $F(2, 154) = 29.66, p < .001, R^2 = .28$. The first hypothesis was tested, and the mediation analysis showed that there was a significant positive effect of presence of feedback on organizational perception ($b = .87, t(154) = 4.95, p < .001$), which indicates that participants that receive a rejection letter with feedback score higher on organizational perception

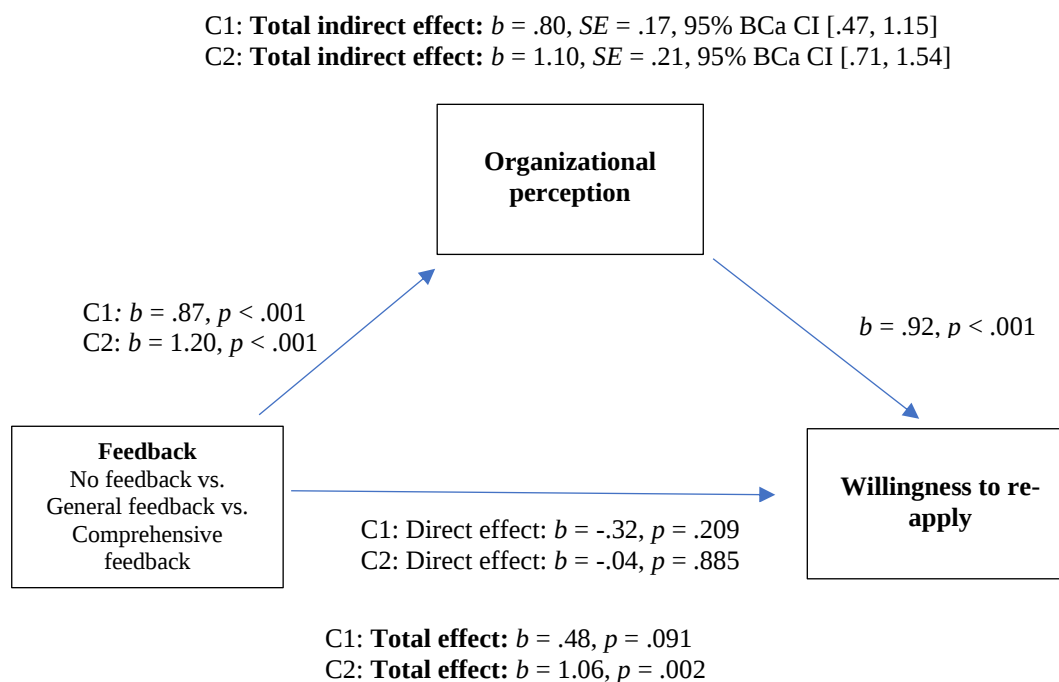
than participants that received a rejection letter without feedback. Also, there was a significant positive effect of form of feedback on organizational perception ($b = 1.20$, $t(154) = 5.81$, $p < .001$), which indicates that participants that receive a rejection letter with an invitation for comprehensive feedback scored higher on organizational perception than participants that received a rejection letter with general feedback. Then, there is a significant positive effect of organizational perception on willingness to reapply ($b = .92$, $t(153) = 8.58$, $p < .001$), which indicates that participants that scored high on organizational perception scored higher on willingness to reapply than participants that scored low on organizational perception. Also, the mediation analysis showed that there are no main effects of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = -.32$, $t(153) = -1.26$, $p = .209$) and form of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = -.04$, $t(153) = -.14$, $p = .885$). Furthermore, the mediation analysis showed that there was no total effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = .48$, $t(154) = 1.70$, $p = .091$), which means that H1a was not supported. However, there was a total effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = 1.06$, $t(154) = 3.18$, $p = .002$), which means that H1b is supported since there was a significant total effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply, which is explained by organizational perception, but there is no significant total effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply.

Last, the mediation analysis showed that there are significant positive indirect effects of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = .80$, $SE = .17$, 95% BCa CI [.47, 1.15]) and form of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = 1.10$, $SE = .21$, 95% BCa CI [.71, 1.54]) indicating that participants that received a rejection letter with feedback scored significantly higher on willingness to reapply ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.64$) than participants that received a letter without feedback ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.77$), and participants that received a rejection letter with an invitation for comprehensive feedback scored significantly higher on willingness to reapply ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.73$) than participants

that received a rejection letter with general feedback ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.55$). The effects can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Effect of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception



Moderation analysis: The effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply moderated by rejection sensitivity

The second research question was tested, which was an exploratory research question on whether the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply was different for participants that scored high on rejection sensitivity compared to participants that scored low on rejection sensitivity. The moderation analysis was performed with Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0 (Model 1) moderation analysis using the Helmert contrast which tested Condition 1 (no feedback) vs. the mean of Condition 2 (general feedback) and Condition 3 (comprehensive feedback), and Condition 2 (general feedback) vs. Condition 3 (comprehensive feedback).

Before running the moderation analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data was not distributed normally since the p-value was .003. To solve this, Hayes' PROCESS macro v4.0

analysis bootstrapped automatically when running the analysis and the confidence intervals will be reported. Cook's distance showed all values were lower than 1.00, where the maximum distance was .061, meaning that there is no cause for concern. Also, the Mahalanobis distance was checked.

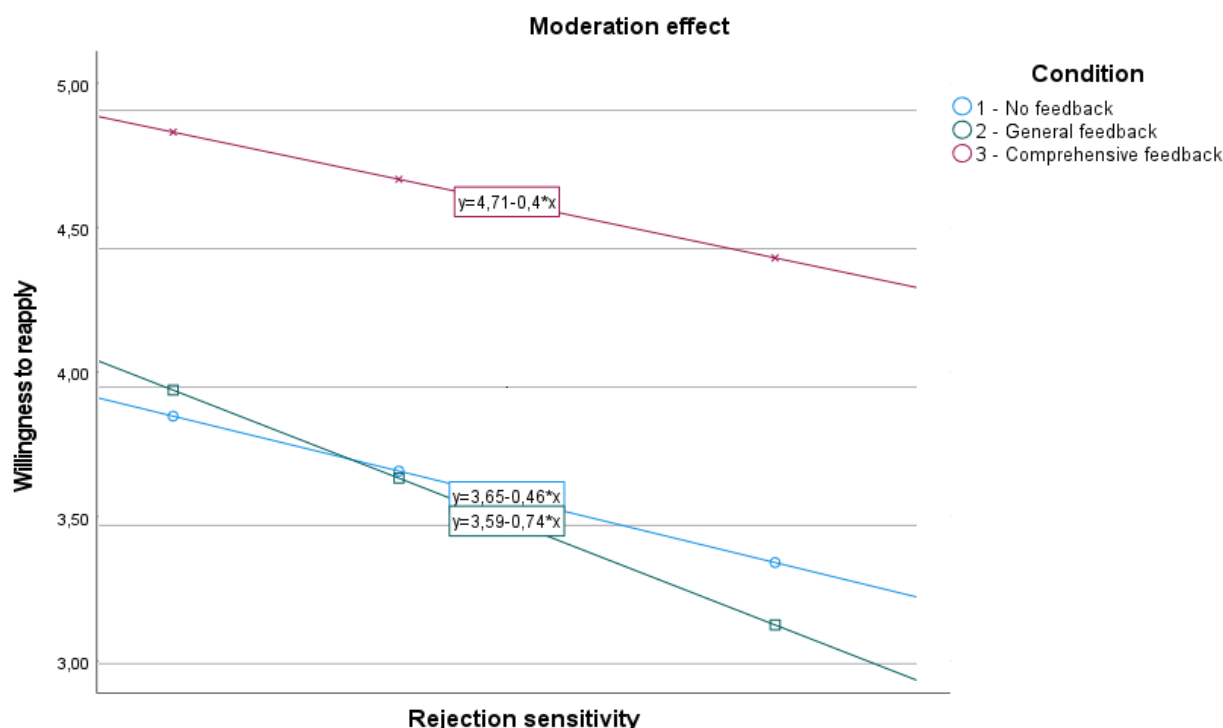
According to the Chi-square distribution, values must be lower than 20.52, where the Mahalanobis showed a distance of 17.96, with five cases higher than 20.52. However, these six cases did not have concerning Cook's distance or Centered Leverage values, so there is probably no cause for concern.

The scatterplots and visual examination were deployed to assess linearity and heteroscedasticity, revealing no evidence of either. In addition, the Durbin-Watson test showed that errors are uncorrelated since the test showed a value of 1.97, which is between 1.00 and 3.00.

The overall model of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, moderated by rejection sensitivity, showed ($F(5, 151) = 4.12, p = .002, R^2 = .12$). The moderation analysis showed that there was a significant negative effect of rejection sensitivity on willingness to reapply ($b = -.53, t(151) = -2.43, p = .016, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.97, -.09]$) which means that people that scored higher on rejection sensitivity scored lower on willingness to reapply than people that scored lower on rejection sensitivity. The model also showed there are no direct effects of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = -.32, t(153) = -1.26, p = .209, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.82, .18]$), and form of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = -.04, t(153) = -.14, p = .885 [-.64, .56]$). Last, the moderation analysis showed that there was no moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on presence of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = -.11, t(151) = -.22, p = 0.83, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.08, .87]$) and also no moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on form of feedback on willingness to reapply ($b = .34, t(151) = .68, p = .50, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.66, 1.35]$), which means that rejection sensitivity did not have an effect on the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Effect of feedback on willingness to reapply, moderated by rejection sensitivity



Motivation willingness to reapply

The results showed that 136 out of the 157 participants gave a short motivation for their willingness to reapply response, and their answers were categorized into different categories of given reasons. There were four main reasons that stood out, where two of the main reasons were focused on wanting to reapply, and the other two on not wanting to reapply. Participants that were given the rejection letter without feedback or the general feedback motivated mostly that they would not be willing to reapply at the organization since the letter was unpersonal, for example: “*Not personal at all, very unkind*” and “*The rejection letter was unpersonal and they did not give an exact explanation why they do not see a good match. This gives the impression that the organization is unpersonal.*” In addition, the answers showed that another common motivation for not wanting to reapply at the organization was the fear of being rejected again, regardless of what type of rejection letter they had

received, for example: *“I would try another organization, I don’t want to get rejected again by the same organization”* and *“I would be scared to get rejected again.”*

On the other hand, the third main motivation that stood out in the answers was that participants that received a rejection letter without feedback or general feedback reasoned that there could be many reasons why they were rejected, so why not try again, for example: *“They did not give arguments for why they did not invite which would stop me from applying but if it would be a very good organization to me, I would still want to apply because I don't know the reason why they didn't invited me, and I might still have a chance.”* and *“The rejection is very general, which gives the impression that they did not really looked or cared about my application. However, because it is very general, the rejection is not very personal so it is still possible that I would be invited next time.”* At last, another common motivation to reapply, regardless of what type of rejection letter they had received, was related to job urgency or job interest since participants that really need a job or really want this particularly job could overlook the rejection and would apply again, for example: *“Kind of depends on my work/life situation at the moment. If I am in desperate need of a job I would definitely apply.”* and *“Depends on the vacancy. In my opinion they could have elaborated more on why you have not been chosen, but on the other hand I understand that this takes a lot of effort for big companies with numerous of applications. If the vacancy is really interesting, I would still be willing to apply.”*

Discussion

This study examined the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, with a mediating effect of organizational perception among everyone above 18 years old. In addition, the study examined the possible moderating effect of rejection sensitivity on the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply.

Mediation effects

First, an indirect significant effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply was found in the mediation analysis, which means that job applicants that receive an invitation for comprehensive feedback in a rejection letter score higher on willingness to reapply, which can be explained by a positive organizational perception, than job applicants that receive a rejection letter with general feedback. Additionally, the mediation analysis showed an indirect effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply, which can be explained by a positive organizational perception. The indirect effects of presence and form of feedback can be explained by the study of Ployhart (1999), that suggested that receiving personal and specific feedback has a positive effect on the job applicant's perceived fairness of the selection process, which then has a positive effect on organizational perception. Subsequently, the significant positive effect of organizational perception on willingness to reapply can be explained by the study of Lemmink et al. (2003), that indicated that organizational perception has a positive effect on applying intentions. Another possible explanation for the positive effect of organizational perception on willingness to reapply can be explained through the Self-Consistency Theory, which was developed by Lecky (1945). The theory of Lecky (1945) explains that individuals are primarily motivated by a desire to keep their cognitions consistent or congruent. This means that it is important for people to be consistent in their thoughts and actions (Lecky, 1945). In this case, this can suggest that job applicants that have a negative organizational perception are more likely to indicate that they are less willing to reapply than participants that have a positive organizational perception since they generally feel the importance to stay consistent with their attitude. In summary, these findings might explain the indirect effects of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply.

Second, this study shows that there is no main effect of presence of feedback on willingness to

reapply, in contrast to the expectation of this study that receiving feedback in a rejection letter would have a different effect on willingness to reapply than receiving a rejection letter without feedback. Subsequently, this study shows that there is no main effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply, however there is a total effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply. This effect suggests that form of feedback affects willingness to reapply as to the extent that it affects organizational perception, but that form of feedback does not affect willingness to reapply in any other way. The study suggests that a possible reason for the nonsignificant main effects can be explained through the given motivations for whether or not the job applicant would reapply at the concerned organization. One of the main reasons to reapply for the participants that received a rejection letter without feedback or general feedback was the reasoning that if no explanation was given, then why not try again? The given motivations suggest that not receiving feedback or receiving general feedback could give participants the idea that the reason they were rejected was not personal, and they therefore might still have a chance at the organization. This reasoning can possibly be explained by Smithson's social theory of ignorance (2005), which suggests that in some situations not having certain information can have a positive effect on an individual since it keeps an optimistic mindset, for example, not knowing what the right answers are after making a test, which can result in keeping an optimistic mindset on the chance of passing the test.

In addition, when looking at the given motivations for whether or not to apply again, this study suggests that job urgency or job interest can exceed the rejection as a whole, no matter in what form. This can be explained by the study of Blai Jr. (1964) on job satisfaction and need satisfaction, which showed that having a suitable job is related to fulfilling basic needs for an individual, such as the feeling of importance and belongingness. The study of Blai Jr. (1964), along with the outcomes of the motivations for whether or not to reapply, can indicate that job applicants that need a job or apply for a

job of their interest, are willing to reapply at the same organization that rejected them since finding a suitable job is more important to them than the fact that they have been rejected before in any form.

Furthermore, this study indicates that there is no total effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply, but there is an indirect effect mediated by organizational perception. As mentioned before, the reason that the direct effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply is nonsignificant can be explained by the fact that urgency for a job or interest in a job are so important for a job applicant that the nature of a rejection letter is not significant for them when it comes to whether or not they would apply again at the organization that has rejected them before. However, the indirect effect does exist, which means that receiving a rejection letter with feedback has a positive effect on the job applicant's organizational perception, whereas organizational perception has a positive effect on willingness to reapply, but this effect combined with the direct effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply suggests that there might be no total effect.

Moderation effects

First, the current study shows a negative effect of rejection sensitivity on willingness to reapply, which suggests that people who are highly sensitive to rejection in general are less willing to apply again at an organization that rejected them, compared to people who are less sensitive to rejection. This finding can be explained by the study of Downey et al. (2004), which suggests that individuals who experience high sensitivity to rejection often take precautions to avoid situations where there is a possibility of being rejected from the same source that previously rejected them.

Furthermore, to answer the exploratory research question on the possible moderated effect of rejection sensitivity, the current study suggests that there is no moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply, which means that the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply is not different for job applicants

that score higher on rejection sensitivity compared to job applicants that score lower on rejection sensitivity. A possible reason for this nonsignificant effect might be explained by previous studies of Minihan et al. (2023) and Downey et al. (2007), that have highlighted the bidirectional nature of the moderation effect of rejection sensitivity. First, the study of Minihan et al. (2023) on the negative interpretation bias can suggest that job applicants scoring high on rejection sensitivity, tend to focus primarily on the negative aspects of the feedback they receive. Therefore, it is suggested that receiving comprehensive feedback can have a negative effect on willingness to reapply for job applicants that score high on rejection sensitivity.

Alternatively, the study of Downey et al. (2007) suggested that individuals highly sensitive to rejection often anticipate receiving negative feedback regardless. This study can explain that job applicants scoring high on rejection sensitivity that receive a rejection letter without feedback can have a negative effect on willingness to reapply since the absence of feedback might lead them to assume the worst-case scenario regarding the feedback. As can be seen, there are various explanations for the bidirectional effect of rejection sensitivity, which can suggest that there is a possibility that these different effects cancel each other out. Since it does not appear that one direction has a clearer reason to be stronger than the other, it might therefore be possible that there is no significant moderation effect of rejection sensitivity found.

Implications

The current study leads to several theoretical implications since the study adds to the existing literature on the positive and negative effects of feedback in rejection letters. As prior studies focused on the effects of form of feedback on perceived fairness, perceived fairness on organizational perception and organizational perception on willingness to reapply (see, for instance, Ployhart, 1999, and Frank et al., 1980), this study focused on the connection of these different variables and the

findings of this study may help us understand how the form of given feedback in a rejection letter may lead into a higher willingness to reapply, when the job applicant's organizational perception is taken into account. Theoretically, the current study suggests that providing a job applicant with an invitation for comprehensive feedback has a positive effect on how the job applicant perceives the organization and their willingness to reapply at this organization, when opening up a new vacancy. The current study also suggests that several other factors are taken into account when looking at whether or not a job applicant would reapply at an organization such as the urgency to find a job or the degree of interest in the concerned vacancy that will be opened in the future.

Additionally, the findings of the current study also lead to practical implications. The main practical implication of this study concerns the nature of a rejection letter that is sent to job applicants. This study shows that providing specific and personal feedback in a rejection letter has a positive effect on the way the applicant perceives the organization and therefore also on whether or not they would apply again. This finding can be useful information for an organization where there are often many similar vacancies since the organization can make sure that they do not lose potential interesting candidates for the future because of the way they communicate rejections towards job applicants. This means that it might be useful for an organization to provide the candidates they reject with comprehensive feedback, so potential candidates perceive the organization in a positive way and might apply again in the future when a suitable vacancy opens up. Second, this study suggests that rejection sensitivity does not have a moderating effect on the effect of presence and form of feedback on willingness to reapply. This means that there is no reason from this study to take the job applicant's degree of rejection sensitivity into account in the application process since this study suggests there is no reason to do so for an organization regarding the application process.

Limitations and future research

The strength of this study is that it has collected 157 participants, which is a sufficient amount of participants when looking at similar studies, to draw solid conclusions of the outcomes. However, the manner of collection of these participants may be questionable since some participants were collected via SurveySwap and SurveyCircle. These are platforms for collecting participants for one's own survey by filling in other people's surveys to ensure more participants for one's own survey. The downside of this method is that people are eager to participate in as many surveys in the shortest possible time, and therefore might not be accurate in their answers, which can violate the reliability of the study. In a future study it might be convenient to take more time to collect participants in a different way than via these platforms. To counter this problem, it could be useful to add control questions at the end of the survey to see if they have completed the questionnaire accurately.

Second, the study shows no significant moderation effect of rejection sensitivity, which may be due to the fact that the average of rejection sensitivity is quite low at all in this study ($scale = 1 - 6$, $M = 2.53$). The fact that the average is so low shows that very few participants scored high on rejection sensitivity, which means that it is hard to draw conclusions on the outcomes of the effect of rejection sensitivity. For future research, it might be interesting to collect more participants that score higher on rejection sensitivity to draw new conclusions on whether or not this can have a moderation effect and see a clearer difference between high and low scores on rejection sensitivity.

Furthermore, the participants in this study had to imagine themselves being in the situation where they had applied for a job and received a rejection letter. Since it was not a real application and there was not much information given about the content of the vacancy this might have violated the authenticity of the study. For future research it might be interesting to let participants send in real rejection letters they have once received from an organization where they had applied to analyse these

letters and investigate what the effects of presence and form of feedback that are used in these real letters are on willingness to reapply.

Last, since the current study suggests that form of feedback has a total effect on willingness to reapply, which is mediated by organizational perception, it might be interesting to look further into what kind of method of giving feedback has an effect on willingness to reapply. For example, investigating whether starting the rejection letter with negative feedback and following up with the positive feedback has a different effect on a job applicant's willingness to reapply than the other way around or than the sandwich method which means starting and ending with positive feedback and placing positive feedback in the middle.

Conclusion

The study of Ployhart (1999) has shown that receiving specific and personal feedback can have a positive effect on the receiver's feeling of perceived fairness, whereas the study of Frank et al. (1980) has shown that perceived fairness can have a positive effect on organizational perception. In addition, the study of Lemmink et al. (2003) showed that organizational perception has a positive effect on a job applicant's applying intentions. Last, research shows that a high degree of rejection sensitivity can have a negative effect on willingness to participate in social activities again. This study aimed to investigate what the effect of presence and form of feedback could be on willingness to reapply, to what extent this effect is explained by organizational perception, and whether there is a moderation effect of rejection sensitivity on the main effect. The findings show that there is an indirect effect of presence of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception, and there is total effect of form of feedback on willingness to reapply, mediated by organizational perception. Additionally, there is a negative effect of rejection sensitivity on willingness to reapply, but there is no moderation effect. Thus, this study implies that providing job applicants with

comprehensive feedback in rejection letters can be valuable for organizations that have recurring vacancies since receiving an invitation for comprehensive feedback can have a positive effect on the job applicant's willingness to reapply at the concerned organization.

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Appendix A: Organizational Perception Scale

“Upon the receipt of this letter, my attitude toward the organization is: ”

Bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Good

Unfavourable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Favourable

Disapproving 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Approving

Negative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Positive

Appendix B: Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

1. You ask a colleague at your place of work to answer a question about the work routine you perform.

How concerned or anxious would you be about whether or not your colleague would want to answer this question?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect that my colleague would be willing to answer the question.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

2. At a meeting you disagree with the team about a problem. You explain your opinion and expect statements of other participants.

How concerned or anxious would you be about whether or not other participants will come up with statements?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect that other participants would be willing to come up with statements.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

3. You ask someone you do not know well out on a date.

How concerned or anxious would you be about whether or not the person would want to go out with you?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect that someone would be willing to go on a date with me.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

4. You ask someone at work if you can borrow his/her notes.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not this person would want to lend you his/her notes?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect that the person would be willing to give me his/her notes.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

5. In a lesson of your further education or retraining you do not understand a section of the course. You ask the supervisor to explain some contents to you after the lesson.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your supervisor would want to help you out?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect my supervisor would want to help me out.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

6. You ask someone at your place of work to drink coffee.

How concerned or anxious would you be about whether or not the person would want to drink coffee with you?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect the person to drink coffee with me.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

7. You ask a colleague for help in a decision regarding your future career.

How concerned or anxious would you be whether or not your colleague would help you?

Very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Concerned

I would expect my colleague to help me out in this decision.

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

Appendix C: Informed consent

Information letter

Title online experiment (b): The experience of e-mails

Nature and duration online experiment (b): In this study, we investigate how people experience and judge e-mails they receive after a job-application. You will first be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Then, you will be asked to read an e-mail, to imagine you are the recipient of that e-mail, and to fill out a questionnaire about your reactions to this e-mail. We will additionally ask you for your gender and age. At the end of the study, you will receive more information on the exact aims of this study. We do not expect that participation in this study will pose risks or disadvantages. When you do experience negative consequences, we ask you to let the experimental leader know during or after the study so that we can find a way to resolve your concerns together. The entire study will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

This is a study by researchers of the Communication and Cognition department of Tilburg University. The principal investigator is Sara Bögels. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee (REDC) of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences (TSHD).

Your data will be treated confidentially and anonymized by replacing any identifiers by random numbers. The anonymized data can, in aggregated form, be shared with other scientists and possibly be published in a journal and online. All data collected for this study will be stored securely on password protected university servers and backed up on a secure server on Dataverse. Any potentially identifying information will be deleted prior to this. The data will be stored for a period of at least 10 years. These anonymized data may be shared with external researchers and used for future scientific research. If you are interested in the outcomes of this study, we can register your email address and store it on password protected university servers until we can share the results, after which your email address will be deleted.

Your participation is completely voluntary. This means that you have the right to decline to participate and withdraw from the research once participation has begun, without any negative consequences, and without providing any explanation. You can also request access to and rectification, erasure, restriction of or object to the processing of your personal data. More information on this can be found here www.tilburguniversity.edu/privacy

For questions or requests for additional information, you can contact the principal investigator, Sara Bögels, by email (s.bogels@tilburguniversity.edu). If you have any remarks or complaints regarding this research, you may also contact the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee TSHD via tshd.redc@uvt.nl. Please note that by making a complaint you might be no longer anonymous.

If you consent to participate in this study, you will need to complete the informed consent form on the next page. This consent is valid for the duration of the study.

Consent form

Title online experiment: The experience of e-mails

I have read and understood the study information and have been able to ask the researcher any remaining questions. I know that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I have the right to decline to participate and withdraw from the research once participation has begun, without any negative consequences, and without providing any explanation.

I give permission for the processing of my anonymized data as mentioned in the information letter. I give permission for storing the anonymized research data for a period of at least ten years.

By ticking the box below, I consent to participate in this study.

Date:

Name:

[Ticking box]

Appendix D: Demographical questions

1. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary/third gender

Prefer not to say

2. What is your age?

Appendix E: Debriefing

Thank you for participating in my study! This study examines the effect of different types of rejection letters, specifically whether no explanation, a general explanation, or an invitation for a specific explanation is given for the rejection, on participants' organizational perception and willingness to re-apply at an organization.

If you have any further questions or comments regarding this study, you can send an email to j.vanmaren@tilburguniversity.edu.