



Exploring the Decision-Making Process of Job Seekers in Iberia: Insights for European Startups.

Annapaula Tenorio Barrio

Dissertation written under the supervision of professor Cristina Mendonça.

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the International MSc in Management with Major in entrepreneurship and innovation, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, June 1st, 2023.

ABSTRACT ENGLISH

The booming European startup ecosystem attracts global talent and investment. This thesis explores decision-making in the context of European startups and Iberia-based candidates. The main research questions focus on the attributes of European startups that affect job offer acceptance and the stages of the hiring process where candidates experience the most difficulties.

This study conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with Iberia-based young professionals who were either interested in or already working for European startups.

The study found that candidates primarily use job portals, company websites, and referrals for job search, considering job and company characteristics, career development opportunities, and job fit when evaluating new job opportunities. Candidates have a positive view of technology as a necessary tool in the hiring process, although fairness concerns exist, and use both AI and human help in their decision-making process. Finally, the research highlights the importance of complete job information, effective communication, and feedback to reduce candidates' uncertainty and improve recruitment clarity.

The findings inform recruitment strategies for startups, emphasizing optimized processes, accurate job descriptions, and a balance of AI and human assistance while ensuring fairness. However, the study's limitations suggest further research is needed, expanding sample size, using mixed research methods, and conducting in-depth interviews with diverse candidates.

Title: Exploring the Decision-Making Process of Job Seekers in Iberia: Insights for European Startups.

Author: Annapaula Tenorio Barrio

Keywords: startups, recruitment, attributes, employer branding, job seekers, technology, Iberia.

ABSTRACT PORTUGUESE

O crescente ecossistema europeu de startups, atrai talento e investimento a nível mundial. Esta tese explora a tomada de decisão no contexto das startups europeias e de candidatos baseados na Iberia. As questões principais de investigação centram-se nos atributos das startups europeias que afectam a aceitação de ofertas de emprego e nas fases do processo de contratação em que os candidatos sentem mais dificuldades.

Este estudo conduziu 10 entrevistas semi-estruturadas com jovens profissionais sediados na Iberia que estavam interessados ou já trabalhavam para startups europeias.

O estudo encontrou que os candidatos utilizam sobretudo portais de emprego, páginas web de empresas e referências para procurar emprego, considerando as características do emprego e da empresa, as oportunidades de desenvolvimento da carreira e a adequação ao posto de trabalho quando avaliam novas oportunidades de emprego. Os candidatos têm uma visão positiva da tecnologia como uma ferramenta necessária no processo de contratação, embora existam preocupações com a equidade, e utilizam tanto a IA como a ajuda humana no seu processo de decisão. Por último, a investigação salienta a importância da informação completa, comunicação eficaz e feedback para reduzir a incerteza dos candidatos e melhorar a clareza do recrutamento.

Os resultados informam as estratégias de recrutamento para startups, enfatizando processos otimizados, descrições precisas de empregos e um equilíbrio entre IA e assistência humana, garantindo a justiça. Porém, as limitações do estudo sugerem que é necessária mais investigação, aumentando o tamanho da amostra, usando métodos de pesquisa mistos e conduzindo entrevistas em profundidade com candidatos diversos.

Título: Explorando o processo de tomada de decisão dos candidatos a emprego na Península Ibérica: Insights para Startups na Europa.

Autor: Annapaula Tenorio Barrio

Palavras-clave: startups, recruitment, attributes, employer branding, job seekers, technology, Iberia.

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Problem statement	7
1.2 Managerial and academic relevance	8
1.3 Structure	9
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Startups	10
2.2 Recruitment processes	11
2.3 Employer branding and attractiveness	13
2.4 Applicant decision-making	16
3. METHODOLOGY	17
3.1 Case study	17
3.2 Participants	18
3.3 Materials and procedures	19
4. RESULTS	20
5. DISCUSSION	29
5.1 Implications	31
5.2 Limitations	32
5.3 Future Studies	33
5.4 Conclusion	34
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
7. APPENDIX	39
7.1 Appendix A: Interview script	39
7.2 Appendix B: Interview summary	41
7.3 Appendix C: Informed Consent Form	45

1. INTRODUCTION

“We can never fall short when it comes to recruiting, hiring, maintaining, and growing our workforce. It is the employees who make our organization’s success a reality.” –

Vern Dosch, CEO at National Information Solutions Cooperative

The European startup ecosystem has seen tremendous growth over the past few decades, attracting a large pool of talent and investment from around the world (Rasmussen, 2020). A startup is usually defined as a provisional organization designed to look and test for a business model that is reliable and scalable (Salamzadeh & Kesim, 2015). Startups usually have limited resources to achieve growth and focus on product development instead of complicated management structures as the big companies (Reisdorfer-Leite et al., 2022; Salamzadeh & Kesim, 2015). This growth in the startup sector has led to an increase in competition among startups to attract the best candidates and assure top talent, making the recruitment processes a key factor in the success of such organizations (Rasmussen, 2020).

Europe has the most unicorn cities in comparison with the US (Dealroom.co et al., 2021). According to a report by the European Commission, the European Union were over 21,000 active startups in 2020, with a total investment value of 41.6 billion euros and a record amount of new funds raised, with a value of 12.8 billion euros (Dealroom.co et al., 2020). The startup sector in the Iberian market has been growing fast in recent years. Around 180 rounds of investment brought in a total of 1.5 billion euros for Iberian startups in Q1 2022 (Massano, 2022).

European startups are interested in hiring Iberia-based candidates due to their different range of skills and expertise, language skills, cultural fit, and cost advantages, making it a mutually beneficial deal for both the startups and the candidates (Dealroom.co et al., 2021).

Recruiting and retaining talented people has been affected by some factors, including the availability of skilled candidates, brand perception, salary conditions, and technological innovations. Competitive salaries, bonuses, and benefit packages are the most common financial incentives that are used to attract and motivate employees (Anderson, 2014). However, it is important to notice that only financial incentives might not be enough to retain employees in the

long term (Appelbaum & Kamal, 2000). Company's culture and value is another relevant attribute, which can create a sense of belonging and purpose for employees (Anderson, 2014). A positive and good work culture that aligns with employees' values can promote job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity, as well as attract individuals who share similar values (Phillips et al., 2014). In contrast, a negative work culture can push away talented people and generate to high turnover rates (Phillips et al., 2014).

In essence, to guarantee recruitment success and retain the best talent in the long term, companies need to consider relevant aspects such as financial incentives, company culture and values, flexibility, and opportunity to grow (Phillips et al., 2014).

This master's thesis will focus on the attributes that affect the most in the decision-making process of candidates based in Iberia when considering joining a European startup, as well as identifying the steps of the hiring process of startups in which candidates struggle the most. The study will analyze the different attributes that contribute to the attractiveness of startups for potential candidates, such as job security, salary and benefits, work-life balance, professional development opportunities, and company culture. The boundaries of the research will involve the recruitment process from the moment the startup receives the CV until an offer is sent to the candidate. Such process usually involves between three and five stages, depending on the startup and the job offer (Rocha, 2021; Hamilton & Davison, 2018; Holm, 2012).

I am currently working as a talent acquisition and account manager on the French startup Ignition Program, a startup focusing on two areas: recruitment and human resources culture consulting. In general, the human resources companies firstly source and identify potential candidates for a job opening, reviewing resumes and applications. Secondly, once they have identified potential candidates, they will typically screen them through interviews, background checks, and skills assessments, among other methods. Thirdly, a few companies also provide additional services to their clients, such as offering advice on salary negotiations and creating employment contracts. In general, human resources companies seek to simplify the recruitment process and find the best candidates for their clients, while also providing support and guidance throughout the hiring process.

Ignition has a different approach to most human resources companies as their focus is the candidate instead of the company. Firstly, they have a first interview with the candidate to discover their interests, motivations, background, and professional achievements to evaluate and ask for job referrals. Secondly, if the candidate is well-qualified, Ignition screens all potential job opportunities that are a fit with what the candidate wants. Thirdly, Ignition pitch the profile to the company. Once the company approves the profile, they present the job opportunity to the candidate and if both are interested, the recruitment process starts. Additionally, during the recruitment process with the companies, Ignition Program assists candidates giving them tips for each stage of the hiring process, and feedback.

During my first months of onboarding in this startup where I noticed a gap in the literature review about what attracts candidates to startups in the Iberian market. Despite the growing interest in the startup sector in Europe, there seems to be a lack of research specifically focused on the drivers of candidate attraction in the Iberian market to startups in the European ecosystem. While there is some literature on this topic in other countries and regions, ranging from countries such as Sweden (Gadibadi, 2020), Brazil (Faria et al., 2021), or Indonesia (Kurniawan et al., 2021), little is known about the specific factors influencing Spain and Portugal-based job seekers' decisions to join or reject startups.

1.1 Problem statement

To better understand the decision-making process of Iberia-based candidates in European startups, as well as their experiences during the recruitment process, I investigated the aspects that candidates living in Iberia, with 1 to 10 years of work experience valued the most when deciding to apply and accept a job offer in a European startup. I also examined their experiences during each stage of the recruitment process. To gather information, I conducted online interviews to better understand what aspects of European startups matter the most to the candidates in Iberia, what their main difficulties are, and what their experiences during each stage of the recruitment process with a European startup are.

Thus, this dissertation's study aims to answer two main research questions related to the decision-making process of candidates in the startup sector:

RQ1: Which attributes of European startups have the most impact in the decision-making process of accepting a job offer for a candidate living in Iberia?

RQ2: In which stage of the hiring process do Iberia-based candidates struggle the most?

Furthermore, two additional research questions have been identified. These questions focus on the factors of European startups that influence the candidate experience, as well as the impact that the use of technology has on the hiring process.

RQ3: What factors influence candidate experience during the hiring process in European startups?

RQ4: What impact does the use of technology in the hiring process have on the perceived fairness and effectiveness of the process by candidates in Iberia?

1.2 Managerial and academic relevance

Previous research on decision-making processes during job search and recruitment has mostly focused on candidates and employees from specific regions, and on startups located in the same country as the candidates (Phillips et al., 2014). Additionally, the literature does not evaluate the whole process candidates go through, they just cover a few stages putting more focus on the decision stage. Additionally, the literature does not evaluate the whole process candidates go through, they just cover a few stages putting more focus on the decision stage. However, there is a lack of information on the decision-making process of candidates when evaluating job offers from national and foreign startups and how different factors influence decisions. Thus, the results of this study will be relevant for both managers and academics, as they will gain knowledge about the factors that influence the decision-making process of candidates living in Iberia starting with the awareness and ending with the acceptance of the job offer. This way they will be able to detect areas of opportunity in their recruitment process and attract the best talent. The results of this thesis will provide useful information for business owners and managers, understanding the factors that influence job seekers' decisions can inform their recruitment and retention strategies, helping them to attract and retain top talent. Additionally, owners and managers can acquire insights into which

attributes an organization needs to have to be well perceived in the job market, allowing them to improve their employer branding accordingly.

Furthermore, the results of this study will also provide valuable insights for European startups looking to attract candidate talent based in Iberia because they wish to expand their operations to this region, as well as for job seekers who are considering working for a European startup based in Iberia. By gaining an in-depth understanding of the candidate decision-making process in Iberia, startups can design their image branding, application and hiring process to better meet the needs and preferences of potential candidates.

Finally, job seekers can make use of the literature review to gain new insights into the recruitment process of European startups and the attributes that impact hiring decisions by understanding the factors that are most valued by startups and the stages of the recruitment process where candidates struggle the most, job seekers can better prepare themselves for interviews and improve their chances of being selected for a job.

1.3 Structure

The decision-making process that candidates in Iberia undertake when searching, applying, and ultimately accepting a job offer in a European startup is complex and multifaceted. By identifying the key factors that have the greatest impact on candidates' decision-making, and understanding the specific stage in the hiring process where Iberian candidates face the most challenges.

To research these questions, the remaining of this work will be divided into four main sections:

Chapter one exhibits the literature review about what a startup is, recruitment processes in enterprises and startups, employer branding and attractiveness, and applicant decision-making models.

Chapter two explains the development of the research's methodology, the data collection procedure (via interviews), the sample and profiles of the participants, the structure of the interview, and the analysis of the methodology.

Chapter three describes the interviews' results regarding the main attributes considered when deciding to join a European startup, the main steps in which candidates in Iberia struggle during the recruitment processes, the factors that influence the candidate experience and the impact of the use of technology throughout the hiring process.

The final chapter explains the results obtained in the interview process, implications, limitations, future studies, and the main conclusions of the analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the modern and highly competitive business world of startups, attracting and retaining top talent is fundamental for growth and success.

2.1 Startups

According to the recognized definition by Blank (2010) a startup is a temporary company that intends to discover a business model that can be replicated and scaled. The startup stage is characterized by the introduction of innovative ideas to the market, which are then developed into profitable and viable businesses (Spender et al., 2017).

Currently, startups have increasingly become an important element of societies worldwide (Vekić et al., 2022). Many studies have indicated the crucial role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs in all economies, recognized as the primary source of job growth in recent years (Vekić et al., 2022). Governments have begun to change their focus from conventional to growth-focused business policies as the importance of startups in the global economy has increased. The goal of such policies is to establish a more favorable environments for startup expansion (Grilo et al., 2017).

Recently, Europe has demonstrated a significant dedication to encourage sustainable growth and innovation in the territory (Chatzistamoulou & Tyllianakis, 2022). It has made important steps in establishing startup ecosystems that promote entrepreneurship, research and development, and innovation (Grilo et al., 2017). European startups have the advantage of accessing the world's largest economy with a population of 500 million and a per capita GDP of €25,000 (Grilo et al.,

2017). Additionally, Europe has been proven to be a more effective starting point than the USA for expanding into other global markets, including fast-growing emerging markets in Africa and Asia (Vekić et al., 2022). In conclusion, Europe is making significant progress towards becoming the top startup ecosystem globally (Chatzistamoulou & Tyllianakis, 2022).

Having good human resources is critical for the success of startups (Rasmussen, 2020). Startups require a team of skilled and motivated employees who can work collaboratively to achieve common goals (Hamilton & Davison, 2018). Good human resources practices can help promote a positive company culture and support the growth of the business (Hamilton & Davison, 2018). Overall, the recruitment process is crucial for startups as they seek to attract and hire top talent in a competitive market and can have a significant impact on the success and growth of the company (Aurand et al., 2005).

2.2 Recruitment processes

Human resources procedures play a critical role in building a strong company brand and attracting the best candidates (Aurand et al., 2005; Parmar, 2014). In particular, the focus is on creating a positive hiring experience for candidates, from the application process through to onboarding (Wang et al., 2020). Research has shown that a candidate's hiring experience is closely linked to their perception of a company's brand and culture (Childs, 2019; Palmeri, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, startups must prioritize creating a positive candidate experience to build a strong brand and attract top talent. This section provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the topic, highlighting what are the common human resources procedures in typical companies and comparing them with the human resources processes of startups.

The recruitment, search, and selection processes used to obtain employees who develop and use knowledge in their area of expertise have not materially changed for many years, with human resources frequently automating legacy procedures (Wang et al., 2020). Current selection practices are typically focused on what may be considered mass screening in which large numbers of external applicants are screened for a smaller number of entry-level jobs (Rocha et al., 2021). Screening is designed to eliminate the unqualified candidates. Screening and selection operations often focus on whether applicants possess the minimum qualifications for the job, or achieve passing scores

on selection tests, and assume that all employees who meet those minimum standards are likely to be sufficiently successful (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). These operations can include assessment centers used for smaller samples of candidates in the later stages of selection (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

Hamilton and collaborators (2018) analyzed the effectiveness of the current human resources procedures and focused on the concept of knowledge stars, which are highly skilled individuals who possess expertise in a particular area (Hamilton & Davison, 2018). These authors' review discusses how knowledge stars can bring significant innovation to an organization and how companies can attract and retain them. It also examines the challenges companies face when hiring and integrating knowledge stars into teams. The steps these authors identify in the human resources process of companies can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Steps of a traditional hiring process. Adapted from Hamilton and Davidson (2018).

In a similar fashion, Holm studied the benefits and differences of e-recruitment compared with traditional paper-based processes in companies (Holm, 2012). The main steps of a typical hiring process Holm identified can be seen in Figure 2.

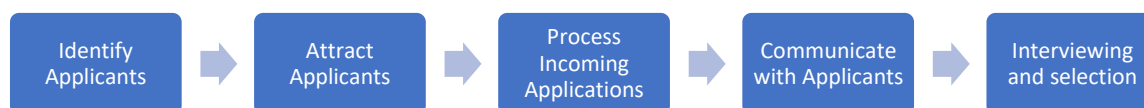


Figure 2. Steps of a traditional hiring process. Adapted from Holm (2012).

After the analysis of the previous literature and after talking to acquaintances about how the procedure in the traditional recruitment process is in the big companies they applied to, the process can be summarized in five main steps:

1. Identification of the needs
2. Attraction of applicants
3. Screening and processing of applications

4. Interviewing and tests process
5. Selection and communication of results

Usually, candidates participate in the last two steps of this procedure, which typically involves several steps of interviews and tests to assess skills, knowledge, attributes, and competences with people from the human resources department of the company and with other areas related to the job offer (Caballero & Walker, 2010). It is worth highlighting that, due to the pandemic, most companies have implemented fully-online hiring processes, including pre-recorded interviews and online testings (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

In contrast to the typical procedure, many startups include several interviews, theoretical and practical tests, forms, and group dynamics as part of their human resources processes to select candidates (Rocha, 2021; Kaul, 2021; Medeot, 2021). It is important to mention that startups usually have less resources to go deeply through the steps described in the previous paragraphs, thus making the procedures more efficient but not always obtaining the expected results (Rocha et al., 2021).

Even though some research regarding hiring processes has been identified by the current literature review, there is still little information regarding what makes candidates struggle the most during this procedure. Additionally, no previous research was found on the specific case of hiring processes of job seekers living in Iberia and looking to apply for startups in the European ecosystem.

Still to attract good human resources it is not only important to have a correct recruitment procedure, but also to have a good employer brand.

2.3 Employer branding and attractiveness

The idea of employer branding has been used in human resources practices and it refers to the process of establishing and promoting a company's reputation as an employer to attract and keep top talent (Theurer et al., 2018). Similarly, employer branding is defined as all the activities a company assumes to take the message that it is an attractive workplace to both current and potential employees (Berthon et al., 2005). It involves creating a unique identity that establishes the company apart from its competitors and positioning the company as an attractive place to work (Berthon et

al., 2005). Employer attractiveness refers to the perceived advantages that a prospective employee associates with working for a particular company (Berthon et al., 2005). Employer branding is seen as a major style for responding to recruitment and retention challenges (Theurer et al., 2018).

Recruitment researchers were the first to take an interest in people's perceptions of employer branding, believing that these perceptions could impact a job seeker's attraction to a company as a desirable place of employment (Parmar, 2014). This interest in employer image led to the emergence of employer branding as a popular topic in human resources practice (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

During the 1990s, employees were mainly attracted to functional, economic, and psychological benefits such as opportunities for professional growth, financial rewards, and a sense of belonging (Dabirian et al., 2019). Later, the number of attractive factors expanded to five: economic, social (collaborative work environment and smart colleagues), application, development, and interest value of work (Dabirian et al., 2019). Nowadays, the list has been further extended to six benefits, which are: economic, social connections, interesting and challenging work, opportunities for career growth and development, work-life balance, and effective management (Dabirian et al., 2019).

One of the most common challenges for startups is attracting and retaining top talent (Rasmussen, 2020). Thus, it is essential for startups to recognize what factors make them attractive to potential candidates and what attributes make them different from other companies. Even though several studies have explored the factors related to talent attraction to startups, there is still a lack of comprehensive reviews of the existing literature to identify key themes and gaps in the research. Five previous studies have studied what factors contribute the most to the attractiveness of startups as a workplace.

Gadibadi (2020) conducted an exploratory study of 209 startups' employees in Sweden. According to the study, the most significant factors that make an employer attractive include engaging and stimulating work, a company that values and utilizes creativity, and a high degree of flexibility. In contrast, the least attractive attributes were the opportunity to share learned knowledge with others and the ability to apply academic learning in a workplace setting (Gadibadi, 2020).

Kurniawan and collaborators (2015) conducted a study using online questionnaires with 200 generation Z participants. These authors found that work culture and salary incentives have less impact in the decision-making process of such candidates than ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and diversity.

With a focus on the German market, Tumasjan and collaborators (2011) conducted a search of the academic and practitioner literature to identify different and attractive job attributes of small and emerging firms using databases and mixing keywords denoting employer branding and startups. Then, they conducted 7 qualitative interviews with entrepreneurs, scholars, and experts on small firms. They demonstrate that team climate, responsibility/empowerment and flexibility are a startup's most attractive job attributes for potential applicants (Tumasjan et al., 2011).

Faria and collaborators (2021) explored the factors that attract candidates to startups in the Brazilian market, based on a qualitative study on eight startups located in the Minas Gerais area in Brazil. The authors identified seven key attributes that are significant in the recruitment process: social media and employer branding, management culture, diversity, flexibility, good working conditions, and learning and personal development (Faria et al., 2021).

Finally, Monteiro and collaborators (2020) investigated 74 employees in Portugal to explore the importance of different firm attributes in attracting employees to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), developing an employer branding model to increase and enhance the attraction and retention of talents. The authors found that four attributes were essential to attraction and retention of candidates: 'organizational culture, business strategy, company reputation and incentive systems, which were used in the creation of the support tool (Monteiro et al., 2020).

This previous research has shown that the factors: engaging and stimulating work, a company that values and utilizes creativity, flexibility, team climate, empowerment, learning and personal development, company reputation, and incentive systems determine the attractiveness of startups as workplaces. The next section turns to the decision-making process that is influenced by these factors.

2.4 Applicant decision-making

It is a curious fact that candidates' perspective in the decision-making process during selection procedures has received less attention than organizational decisions (Rozario et al., 2019). Both candidates and organizations reach outcome decisions, and therefore, it is important to understand the models of the decision-making process from the applicant's point of view. In this section, I will explore some models that can help understand the applicant's decision-making process during job search and selection.

When examining the way candidates make decisions, it is possible to distinguish five categories of model (Anderson, 2014):

1) Rational-economic model

This model mentions that people are rational and make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. From the candidate's point of view, it means that they will evaluate options such as salary range, benefits, perks, role responsibilities and growth opportunity. The candidate will then choose the option that offers the most benefits at the lowest cost (Anderson, 2014).

2) Rational-psychological models

This model reveals that people use affective processes when making decisions. Also, indicates people have a set of values and beliefs that guide their decision making and they evaluate alternatives based on how well they fit with those values and beliefs. According to this model, candidates evaluate job offers by considering their personal preferences, such as job security, organizational culture, or career opportunities, and use these preferences to assess how attractive the job offer is (Anderson, 2014).

3) Person-organization fit models

This model is focused on the fit of individual's values, goals, type of management, and personality traits with the culture and demands of the organization (Anderson, 2014).

4) Individual differences models

This model studies individual differences such as personality traits, abilities, and values and how these influence job search and selection. This model highlights the importance of self-awareness and understanding one's values, strengths, and weaknesses in making effective job search and selection decisions (Anderson, 2014).

5) Negotiation process models

This model represents the negotiation between the candidate and the company. This implies evaluating the salary range and the benefits of the position to know if other alternatives to the job offer should be considered or if the agreement should be finalized by signing the contract (Anderson, 2014).

Anderson (2024), presented these different models as categories that represent various methods to understanding the decision-making process of individuals. Each model offers a diverse perspective and highlights different factors in decision-making. The selection of an appropriate model will depend on the specific context and characteristics of the company and the people involved.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case study

Ignition Program is a Human Resources 360 Agency offering recruitment, human resources consultancy, management training, and workshops for startups. It is a French startup launched in Paris 10 years ago, operational in Iberia since 2020. After having worked in the startup for 8 months as a talent acquisition coach and having conducted +200 interviews to candidates looking for opportunities in European startups based in Iberia, it was clear there was the need to have better information and data about the Iberian market (i.e., both startups and candidates). The following gaps were identified during this period:

- Little online information (i.e., articles, reports, studies, etc.) about the Iberian startup ecosystem.

- Lack of clarity about what attracts candidates to apply for startups in the Iberian market in the first place.
- Uncertainty about the main drivers for the candidates to continue or not with the recruitment processes with startups in the Iberian market.
- Vagueness about the reason for the low percentage of candidates finishing recruitment processes.

This study and its data provide valuable information for startups and job seekers. Startups can use the findings to improve their brand image and recruiting strategies, optimize processes, and attract quality talent. Job seekers can use the advantage of understanding the decision-making process and the factors influencing each phase of the decision process, allowing them to make informed decisions and navigate the job market effectively. In addition, these data should provide important information to improve the practices of Ignition Program in the Iberian market, promoting the efficiency of the company, resource management, and attracting talented people. In general, the ideas of the study contribute to improving practices and results for Ignition Program, new European startups, and job applicants.

3.2 Participants

I conducted 10 interviews of around 30 minutes with Iberian candidates applying or working for European startups. The demographic profile were Iberia-based candidates who wish to join a European startup. These candidates have diverse cultural backgrounds, speak different languages, and have a range of educational and professional experiences. In general, they are likely to be young professionals with an entrepreneurial spirit who are seeking challenging and innovative work opportunities.

The candidates that participated in this thesis' study are Iberian candidates interested in joining a European startup and candidates living in Iberia with junior and mid-senior profiles, this means people between 1 and 10 years of work experience. Finally, they had at least completed a university degree, because for most startups is the minimum educational level requirement.

To recruit participants, I used the sales navigator feature on LinkedIn to prospect potential candidates in Iberia with different levels of seniority and field experience. Next, I sent a three-

message sequence on LinkedIn to introduce myself and explain the goal of the meeting. Once the candidate expressed interest, I shared a Calendly link to schedule a 30-minute interview. During the interview, I recorded and followed a pre-determined meeting script, and, after the meeting, took notes on the candidate's responses and insights. By following this approach, I aimed to attract a diverse range of candidates with varying levels of work experience, all of whom have completed a university degree because, for most of the startups, it is the minimum educational level requirement.

3.3 Materials and procedures

Research is a methodical procedure that involves gathering, examining, and understanding data, and it can be categorized into two main types: qualitative and quantitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Qualitative research and quantitative research are two distinct methods used in the research process. While they share some similarities, they differ in their fundamental nature and emphasis. According to Yilmaz (2013), qualitative research is interpretive and inductive, meaning that it focuses on interpreting and deriving meaning from the data rather than testing preconceived hypotheses. In contrast, quantitative research, emphasizes measuring and analyzing causal relationships among variables (Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative research uses a collection of techniques to gather data, including observing participants, conducting deeper interviews, analyzing documents, and organizing focus groups. In general, qualitative research is a valuable tool for generating detailed insights into complex social phenomena (Gephart, 2004).

Based on the research questions and the nature of the data being investigated, qualitative research has been selected as the most appropriate approach for this study, as it enables a deep exploration of the:

1. Decision making process of candidates in Iberia in a recruitment process in a European startup.
2. Stages in which candidates struggle the most in recruitment processes in startups.

To gain a deep understanding of this topic, I implemented semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. To develop the interview script, I started by researching and identifying a

suitable model of applicant decision making. This helped me to split the process into different stages, including awareness, consideration, application, recruitment process, offer, and decision. For each of these stages, I developed a set of questions that helped me to answer my research questions.

This approach allowed me to provide valuable insights into the factors that influence the decision-making process of candidates in startups, and how this process can be improved to attract and retain top talent.

The interviews were conducted individually via the online platform Zoom and lasted approximately 35 minutes on average. To ensure accuracy and detail in the data collection, the interviews were recorded and transcribed manually. By using Zoom, the interviews were conducted remotely, allowing for greater flexibility and convenience for the participants.

Overall, this approach provided valuable insights into the decision-making process of Iberian job seekers in Europe when considering employment opportunities and insights about their experience through hiring processes in European startups.

4. RESULTS

The following section describes the findings of the 10 interviews conducted. The findings were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The findings are structured by categories and themes (see Appendix B for these plus some examples of each theme).

In the first stage of the decision-making process, awareness, interviewees were first asked about how they typically learn about new job opportunities. All the interviewees mentioned job portals, and three participants mentioned other things, such as company's website, referrals, and events. Job portals are online platforms where job vacancies are posted, and candidates can browse and apply to relevant openings. The job portals mentioned by participants were LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Welcome to the Jungle, Indeed, and Infojobs. Company websites refers to the official website of a company, which includes detailed information about the organization, its culture, values, and available job positions. Referrals are job leads that come through personal connections or recommendations from friends, family, or colleagues. Finally, events are about career fairs or

networking events. Thus, the results show the importance of job portals for the awareness of job opportunities.

Then, participants were asked about what aspects of startups matter the most to them in the awareness stage. They mentioned job characteristics, company characteristics and career development. The job characteristics category includes all aspects related to the specific job position. The most relevant characteristics for interviewees were job description, modality, flexibility, location, and salary, as one participant said: “I prioritize job listings that provide clear information about the work arrangements, whether it's hybrid, remote, or on-site” (P8). The company characteristics category contains all the aspects related to the company, in particular the type and size of the company, industry, culture and values, and work environment, as one participant noted: “I would never consider a company that has more than 100 employees, I prefer something smaller” (P1). Lastly, career development includes all aspects related to potential opportunities for career growth and development, in their words: “I feel more attracted to a job if I see that I could have chances to grow and learn” (P7). It can be concluded that all three categories are important to job seekers in the awareness stage when considering startups. There doesn't appear to be a dominant category, as each one was mentioned by multiple participants, but it is notable that job characteristics, such as job description, modality, flexibility, location, and salary, were specifically highlighted by participants, indicating their significance in the decision-making process.

Participants were then asked about what are the main difficulties they typically experience in the stage of learning about new job opportunities. Seven of the interviewees mentioned lack of information and four mentioned challenges. The lack of information refers to the lack of knowledge or awareness about job opportunities. Participants mentioned that: “Job descriptions are not fully complete because there is always missing important details about the job description such as salary range” (P3). Finally, the challenges category is about the obstacles that job seekers may face during their search for new job opportunities. One of the participants mentioned: “One of the main difficulties I experience at this stage is finding jobs related with their profile” (P4).

In the second stage, consideration, interviewees were first asked about an example of a time when they were considering applying for a job and how the process was then. They mentioned job portals, company website, materials, company characteristics and job characteristics. Job portals and

company websites were the main answers for this question because 100% of the interviewees used LinkedIn to look for and consider jobs and always visited the website from the company to read more about it, “I applied via easy apply on LinkedIn to all the jobs related with the role of my experience and interest. Then, I went to each company website to see other aspects” (P10). Materials describes all the documents and information that candidates provide to potential employers: Two participants mentioned they prepare all their application materials such as CV, cover letter, and online questionnaires, “I develop my CV, and cover letter for the type of roles. Then, I set up a time in my calendar to apply and also do the online assessments” (P6). Finally, the company characteristics and job characteristics were relevant because candidates considered type and size of the industry, culture and values, and the job role to decide.

They were then asked about if they do any extra research on the company or job position, or if they just stick to the information provided in the place where they first learn about the job opportunity. They were also asked about what they check on the company’s website or if they try to find experiences of previous workers. They mentioned company characteristics, job portals, and efficiency. Efficiency refers to the ease and speed of the application process. All participants affirm they always do extra research on the company and evaluate aspects such as type and size, industry, work environment, founders, “I do a lot of investigation about the company, news, raising funds, company’s mission, who are they working with, information about founders, field of company, advantages of the company” (P8). For the efficiency, three mentioned that they prefer fast processes and six of the participants also look for extra information and reviews in job portals such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor, “I look for reviews and comments in Glassdoor and I look for more information in LinkedIn” (P3).

Participants were then asked about what they value the most when they consider applying to work in a European startup. They mentioned company characteristics, job characteristics, and career development. All participants, mentioned company such as type and size of the company, mission, track-record, work environment, founders and internationalization, the most important aspects were type and size of the company, “because working in a multinational it is not my thing anymore” (P6). Additionally, the most relevant job characteristics for participants were modality, job role, requirements, autonomy, and stability, “I consider jobs that help me with the sponsor of my visa because that would allow me to stay in Europe” (P5). Ultimately, participants mentioned that career

development was important to see that they will have potential to grow within the company, “when I am evaluating different aspects of the company, for me it is relevant to see that the people currently working there has been building a career” (P9).

Afterwards, participants were asked about what are the main difficulties they experience in the stage of deciding whether to apply to a job position. All participants mentioned they have experienced difficulties. Seven of the participants mentioned lack of information, three lengthy and unresponsive processes, and two mentioned uncertainty. In terms of lack of information, as a participant mentioned, sometimes the “job description tells general tasks and then it is another job role or another tasks” (P8). Lengthy, and unresponsive processes relate to situations where the recruitment process takes an excessive amount of time or where candidates experience delays or unresponsiveness from the hiring team. Participants mentioned that “a lot of hiring processes have a lot of steps and are very specific, processes are super long. So, you must adapt your CV, cover letter, questionnaires, and the application itself and demand a lot of my time” (P6). Then, uncertainty is about situations where a candidate is unsure about whether or not they should apply for a job position. Candidates reported being insecure about the opportunity and about the expectations between the employer and them, “as I can't see here the salary, maybe they have one budget in mind, and I have another one” (P1).

In the third stage, application, interviewees were first asked about how they typically approach the tasks involved in submitting an application. They mentioned job portals, company websites, materials, referrals, and efficiency. The category job portals were the most common answer, as candidates mentioned they always use LinkedIn to apply, “I just go one by one and complete each process. For example, if there is an apply easy, I just submit the documents and information required” (P1). The second source that they use is the company website, “I organize applications directly in the company website” (P10). Nonetheless, candidates mentioned they contact current employees or the hiring manager to increase the chances of being considered, “I try to find people that are directly involved with the hiring” (P8). Finally, about efficiency, some participants schedule times and days to apply and submit the material, “I block some time in my agenda to do it and finishing during the week” (P4).

Interviewees were then asked about if they ever use help (AI or human help) to develop application materials and what are their thoughts on the fairness of using AI to help in applications. Most of

the participants use human and AI help in the process of developing application materials such as cover letters, CV, and motivation letters. Regarding fairness, there was a diverse range of opinions. Some candidates believe that using AI or human help is beneficial as it can provide guidance and make the process easier. Others believe that it is not fair to use AI as it can lead to candidates being accepted without putting in the necessary effort.

Candidates were then asked about what they value the most in companies when deciding whether to submit an application to a company. They mentioned company characteristics, job characteristics, career development, and job fit. The job fit category refers to the match between a job role and the candidate's skills, qualifications, experience, and needs. The category company characteristics is the most mentioned answer for this question because candidates valued aspects such as industry, mission, values and culture, history and reputation of the company, work environment, and have a good team. Then, the job characteristics category was also relevant as candidates valued having good conditions, job role, and responsibilities. Career development is included because candidates mentioned that for them, it is important to have opportunities to grow in the company through the years. Finally, the job fit category was present, as candidates mentioned they prefer to apply if the requirements are aligned with their skills and experience.

Participants were then asked about the main difficulties they typically experience in the stage of submitting applications. They mentioned lack of communication, challenges and job fit. Lack of communication was the most frequent category of answers because they mentioned they face difficulties in obtaining results, feedback, or updates on their application status from the company they applied to, "you just receive an automatic message saying that your application has been successfully submitted but then you never hear from them" (P2). Candidates also mentioned challenges because they consider it was difficult to remember all the applications that they submitted after a few weeks or even months, which was usually the time it took for recruiters to contact them, "my problem is that I apply to hundreds of jobs and weeks or months later they contact me but at that moment I do not remember from which opportunity are they talking about" (P10). Job fit was also a main difficulty, as interviewees said the salary expectations and some job descriptions were vague, so they did not really know if their profile was a match with the needs of the company.

In the fourth stage, recruitment process, interviewees were first asked about how the recruitment processes were or, in other words, which were the steps or stages of the hiring process. The most common categories were interviews, business cases, and online questionnaires. Interviews were the most frequent response, and they can take place with different people within the organization, such as the CEO, manager, team lead, or recruiter. Business cases are also a common step in the recruitment process, as they allow the employer to evaluate the candidate's problem-solving skills and ability to think critically. Online questionnaires, including analytical and logical tests and surveys, are often used to assess a candidate's skills and personality traits. These answers suggest that these three categories are critical in the hiring process.

Candidates were then asked about what they thought were the most important factors that contribute to a positive candidate experience during the hiring process for a startup. They mentioned efficiency, transparency, and personal connection. Efficiency is related with this question as interviewees mentioned that, for them, it would be better to have shorter time frames in the recruitment process and less stages as well, there are processes with more than five stages, and it is exhausting. "I would prefer to have less stages and efficient evaluations" (P1). Transparency indicates the organization is open and honest about the various stages of the hiring process and the expectations they have from candidates. Transparency is related as well, as candidates said that it would be much better if the recruiter would give them feedback throughout the whole process, "hiring people must communicate with candidates in a timely and transparent manner, keeping them informed of the hiring process and providing regular updates" (P5). Personal connection refers to the relationship candidates and people involved in the process create. Personal connection is included in this question because interviewees consider the experience would be better if the C-levels such as the founders were involved in the process and have a good relationship with the members that were participating in the hiring stages because the candidates could feel more valuable or connected with, "in my last experience, my last interview was with the CEO and I enjoyed it" (P9).

Participants were then asked about how, in their experience, technology has been used in the recruitment process for roles they have applied for. They mentioned that technology is widely used in the recruitment process, particularly in the form of video interviews. Candidates considered that this technology provides a more convenient way to conduct interviews, especially when

geographical barriers exist. Participants reported that online assessments and software tools were also commonly used to assess a candidate's skills and knowledge. In addition, candidates mentioned that social media platforms were increasingly being used by recruiters to find and engage with potential candidates. Finally, they mentioned that internet in general was used by both recruiters and candidates to find job opportunities and to learn more about the hiring process. Overall, these answers show that technology is playing a significant role in restructuring the recruitment process and making it more efficient.

Interviewees were then asked about if they feel that technology has impacted the fairness and effectiveness of the process. Some interviewees felt that technology has made the process more efficient, allowing for easier access to job opportunities and saving time and resources for both candidates and companies. However, others expressed concern about the impact of technology on fairness, with some suggesting that automated screening processes may introduce biases or fail to accurately capture the interpersonal skills of candidates. Additionally, some interviewees highlighted the importance of human contact in the hiring process and suggested that technology should be used as a complement rather than a replacement for face-to-face interactions.

Participants were then asked about what they think about the use of technology in the recruitment process. They mentioned that technology is a necessary and indispensable tool in the recruitment process. Interviewees believe that technology can make the process more efficient, accessible, and easy to follow using various software applications and tools. However, some candidates also acknowledge that the use of technology can create biases and inequities in the recruitment process and may result in a lack of personal interaction and human touch. Largely, the answers indicate that technology is viewed as a necessary tool to modernize and improve the recruitment process.

Candidates were then asked about if they ever encountered technical issues or problems during the recruitment process that impacted their perception of the fairness or effectiveness of the process? If so, they were also asked if they could describe the situation and how it was resolved (if at all). Most interviewees reported not experiencing any technical issues or problems during the recruitment process that impacted their perception of the fairness or effectiveness of the process. However, a few respondents informed me about technical issues that affected their ability to complete assessments or business cases, which impacted their perception of the fairness and effectiveness of the process. These issues included broken links, internet connectivity problems,

and interviewers not paying attention, “one time I was doing a one-try online test and my internet shut down. For this reason, I couldn’t do it again” (P2).

Interviewees were then asked if they ever struggled with any part of the recruitment process, and, if so, which part and why. The most common struggles in the recruitment process were related to business cases or mock interviews, as candidates may feel overwhelmed with too much or too little information, or not having enough time to prepare. Some candidates also struggled with speaking to very senior people, feeling nervous and intimidated. Others had difficulty with specific components of the process, such as analytical and logical tests, questionnaires, online assessments, and discussing salary expectations. Additionally, some candidates have struggled with the ambiguity surrounding business cases, including uncertainty about the information provided and feeling hesitant to ask for clarification. Finally, pre-recorded interviews were also identified as a potential source of difficulty in the recruitment process, “I struggle with the pre-recorded interviews because you have less than 30 seconds to think and create a very elaborated answer with no extra information or extra sources, so you start feeling super nervous and with a lot of pressure” (P10).

In the fifth stage, offer, interviewees were first asked about their general process of considering whether to accept a job offer. They mentioned they consider a variety of factors that include job characteristics such as job responsibilities, flexibility, benefits, and salary. They also evaluate the company characteristics such as industry, work environment, type and size and the team. Many interviewees also indicated that they reach out to their family and friends, network, or other employees at the company to get a better sense of job and company characteristics.

Candidates were then asked about the most important aspects for them to consider accepting a job offer. They mentioned company characteristics, job characteristics and career development. Company characteristics were relevant because the interviewees considered that values and culture, work environment, the team, and the company's international presence were important for them to decide. People want to work for a company that aligns with their values and has a positive work environment with a supportive team. A few participants mentioned the international presence of a company. Job characteristics were relevant as well, as candidates mentioned that the job role, location, the salary offered, the flexibility of the work arrangement were also aspects they

considered when making a decision. Finally, career development was also important as candidates mentioned it was relevant for them to have opportunities to grow and advance in their career.

Interviewees were then asked about what were the main difficulties they typically experienced in this step of considering a job offer. They mentioned uncertainty, referring indecision regarding whether the opportunity was the right fit for them and managing their salary expectations. Candidates reported struggling with deciding whether the job aligned with their interests, long-term plans, and career goals, and whether the company culture, work-life balance, and potential impact of their work were in line with their expectations. Additionally, sometimes candidates had different salary expectations than what was being offered, which can make the decision more difficult.

In the sixth and last stage, decision, they were first asked about if they could describe the process, they went through to make their final decision about whether to accept a job offer. All participants mentioned that they review the job offers and analyze the job, and company characteristics. Four of the interviewees mentioned at the end they contact referrals. This process includes considering factors such as salary, benefits, job responsibilities, culture, team, flexibility, autonomy. Three of the candidates also sought advice and input from trusted sources such as friends, family members, mentors, or current employees. Lastly, two of the candidates emphasized the importance of speaking with the manager or recruiter to clarify any doubts or ask questions.

Participants were then asked about the main difficulties they typically experience in the step of making a decision on a job offer. They mentioned uncertainty and job fit. Uncertainty can stem from insecurity about the job or doubts about the company. This may cause hesitation in deciding, “it can be challenging to make a decision when there are unknown factors, and you really do not know if the things that they are offering you are completely true” (P3). Job fit is another important consideration as candidates may be tempted to accept a job offer out of urgency rather than a genuine desire to work in the position, “I was unemployed. I completed a hiring process, and they offered me a bad salary, but I had needs and bills to pay so I decided to take it no matter if it was not my ideal job at that moment” (P10).

5. DISCUSSION

This thesis' ten interviews documented the decision-making process which candidates go through.

The existing literature related to employer branding and job attributes is consistent with the outcomes. Other studies have identified important attributes such as work environment or flexibility but evaluated them only at the final stage of the decision-making process or even with people already working in the company, while my findings show that candidates value job characteristics, company characteristics, and career development throughout the different stages of the decision-making process. Job fit was also identified as an important factor but with less relevance than other characteristics. Regarding employer branding, the literature review emphasizes that candidates consider attributes such as salary range, opportunities for career growth and development, and work-life balance when evaluating employer brands. The results are like previous research conducted on employer branding and provides insights about factors influencing the decision-making process of candidates.

This study added several contributions to the existing knowledge in the field. Firstly, the literature review provided insights from studies conducted in different regions and contexts, such as Sweden (Gadibadi, 2020), Germany (Tumasjan et al., 2011), Brazil (Faria et al., 2021), and small and medium-sized enterprises (Monteiro et al., 2020), this study focused specifically on Iberia-based candidates in the European startup context. By limiting the scope to this specific demographic, the study gave a unique perspective on the factors influencing job offer acceptance and the difficulties faced during the hiring process within this region and industry. Additionally, this study provided a comprehensive examination of the decision-making process from the perspective of job seekers while the literature review explored employees, entrepreneurs, scholars, experts, and job seekers' points of view. Also, explored deeper into the whole decision-making process, evaluated specific stages of the hiring process where candidates experience the most difficulties, and highlights the challenges faced by Iberia-based candidates. Furthermore, this study contributed to the understanding of the role of technology in the hiring process. While the literature review acknowledged the positive view of technology as a necessary tool, this study explored the use of both AI and human assistance in the decision-making process. It provided insights into how

candidates use technology to make informed decisions and the potential fairness concerns associated with automated screening processes.

The study added multiple insights to the field by combining these unique elements. The elements combined include: the focus on Iberia-based candidates, the examination of the full decision-making process, specific stages and difficulties of the hiring process, and the exploration of technology's impact. In addition, the study enhances the understanding of the factors that influence job seekers' decisions in the European startup context.

The findings of the study align with some of the existing literature on the recruitment process. For instance, the study identified that startups use numerous stages in the hiring process, including interviews, business cases, and online questionnaires, which is consistent with the e-recruitment model outlined in the literature review (Holm, 2012). Also, the use of technology in the recruitment process is highlighted in both the literature review and my study, with online assessments and interviews, software tools, and job portals identified as commonly used by recruiters.

However, the study also provided some new insights into the recruitment process, particularly from the perspective of the candidates. For example, the study identified that candidates consider efficiency, transparency, clear communication, and personal connection as important factors contributing to a positive experience, which is not always clearly stated in the existing literature. The study also highlights some of the challenges that candidates face during the recruitment process, such as struggling with ambiguity surrounding business cases, online questionnaires, and technical issues. Such challenges may impact their perception of the fairness and effectiveness of the process.

The study mainly added to the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of the recruitment process from the candidates' perspective, particularly in the context of startups. My findings also indicate that the use of technology in the recruitment process can bring benefits such as increased efficiency and accessibility, but it should be used carefully to ensure fairness and avoid biases.

Based on the literature, the rational-psychological model and the person-organization fit model look to be more relevant and applicable to the decision-making process of the interviewees.

The rational-psychological model and the person-organization fit model are supported by the fact that the interviewees mentioned some factors that influence their decision-making process, including job characteristics, company characteristics, career development, job fit, and salary expectations when deciding whether to apply for a job or accept a job offer. They also took input from family, friends, network, or employees at the company to help them make a decision, which shows their commitment to assess the compatibility between themselves and the company.

Alternatively, the rational-economic model, individual differences model and negotiation process model are less supported by the interviews.

5.1 Implications

The current research shows that studies in the future should consider all the different stages of the decision-making process of candidates. While there are some similarities in the difficulties and factors assessed by candidates across stages, it is important to recognize that the decision-making process has multiple facets and can change in how complex it is at each stage. Researchers can discover relevant insights and identify specific challenges and opportunities that candidates meet during their job search and decision-making process by examining each stage separately. This complete understanding of the decision-making process can contribute to the development of more accurate strategies to support both job seekers and employers in directing the recruitment process more effectively. Therefore, future studies should continue to explore the different stages of the decision-making process to gain a deeper understanding of the specific dynamics throughout the candidate's journey.

The findings of this research have significant management effects for startups and employers. First, the results point out the importance of paying attention to the multiple different channels with which candidates find job opportunities such as company websites, job portals, and career fairs. Also, an updated and informative company website can help as a valuable tool for attracting potential candidates. Second, the study highlights the significance of transparency in job descriptions, salary, benefits, and job tasks. While there may seem necessary to keep certain aspects unknown, providing clear and accurate information can contribute to a positive candidate experience and increase the probability of job acceptance. Startups could optimize their recruitment

strategies, enhance their employer brand, and effectively attract and retain talented candidates in the competitive job market if they consider these implications. Finally, the research findings also have important implications for Iberia-based job seekers in the European job market. The study provides valuable insights into the decision-making process and the factors that influence employment decisions. Candidates can benefit from this knowledge by gaining a better understanding of the job market dynamics, the importance of job and company characteristics, career development opportunities, and job fit. Candidates can make more informed decisions about their career paths and effectively navigate the recruitment process by using this information. Additionally, the insights about the use of technology and AI in the hiring process and concerns about fairness can encourage job seekers to seek transparency, fairness, and unbiased recruitment practices during their job search.

5.2 Limitations

It is important to emphasize the limitations present in the study. First, the small sample of candidates interviewed may limit the possibility to generalize the results to all candidates in Iberia or those interested in startups in the region. Also, using already semi-structured interviews possibly had an impact on the limitation of the understanding of all factors influencing the decision-making process, as candidates might have seen it as a single process instead of a process with multiple steps. Second, the study was conducted within a specific timeframe, so potential changes in the job market and search processes may affect the results over time. Furthermore, the division of the interview script into six stages of the decision-making process led to some level of confusion among participants, with some repeating answers to some of the questions. Additionally, some participants were interested in applying for jobs, but they had not been involved in a recruitment process in the past months and may not have remembered all the details, leading to potential recall bias. Finally, the approach used to contact participants via LinkedIn sales navigator resulted in a low response rate, as some candidates who initially showed interest did not have the necessary time availability to participate in the study.

5.3 Future Studies

Researchers could consider using different qualitative research methods to lessen the impacts mentioned before regarding the limitations of using semi-structured interviews. Some of the qualitative methods that could be used are focus groups, that might help them gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the decision-making process for candidates. In addition, to address the issue of interview script repetition, researchers could modify the script to avoid redundancy and ensure that questions are relevant and specific to each stage of the decision-making process. For example, when exploring the consideration stage of the decision-making process, instead of asking a generic question such as: "What do you value the most when consider applying to work in a European startup?", researchers could ask more tailored and context-specific questions. They could ask: "In the consideration stage, which attributes do you value the most when you are considering applying for a job?". Regarding the timeframe, researchers could consider conducting follow-up interviews or surveys to gather additional information from participants while the market continues to evolve. Finally, researchers could recognize the potential impact of time on the study's results and discuss the implications of any changes that may occur in the job market or job search process.

Future studies can also address the limitations of the present research by increasing the sample size to get a more representative sample of candidates including a more diverse range of candidates from different backgrounds, seniorities, and industries. Additionally, the use of multiple recruitment methods and platforms could also help to expand the response rate and attract a larger pool of candidates. Researchers could consider using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to reduce the limitations of using semi-structured interviews. Some of the methods they could use include focus groups and surveys, that can help them gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the decision-making process for job seekers. Finally, future studies could conduct longer interviews or multiple interviews with each participant to allow for a deeper exploration of the decision-making process.

5.4 Conclusion

The main findings of this study provide important insights into the decision-making process of job applicants in the startup industry. The study identified the various stages of the decision-making process, including awareness, consideration, application, recruitment process, offer, and decision. The results highlight the importance of job characteristics, company characteristics, career development opportunities, and job fit in attracting candidates. The study also emphasizes the difficulties faced by candidates during the decision-making process, such as incomplete job descriptions, lengthy and unresponsive recruitment processes, and uncertainty about job fit. Furthermore, the study highlights the use of technology, particularly, AI, in the recruitment process and its impact on fairness and effectiveness.

These findings have important implications for management. Startups need to prioritize the provision of complete job descriptions, effective communication, and transparency in the recruitment process to attract top talent. Finally, incorporating technology in the recruitment process can improve efficiency, but there is a need to ensure fairness and minimize bias. Companies that prioritize candidates' needs and expectations in their decision-making process are more likely to attract and retain the best talent, and ultimately improve their organizational performance.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, N. R. (2014). *Recruitment and selection: Applicant perspectives and outcomes*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232430958>
- Appelbaum, S. H., & Kamal, R. (2000). An analysis of the utilization and effectiveness of non-financial incentives in small business. *Journal of Management Development*, 19(9), 733–763. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710010378200>
- Aurand, T. W., Gorchels, L., & Bishop, T. R. (2005). Human resource management's role in internal branding: An opportunity for cross-functional brand message synergy. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 14(3), 163–169. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510601030>
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M., Li, & Hah, L., Chao, P., Wührer, G., Werani, T., Coulter, K., Sarkis, J., Veloutsou, C., O'donnell, C., Itt, L. F. P., Caruana, A., & Berthon, J.-P. (2005). *Captivating Company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer brandin*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*. (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Caballero, C. L., & Walker, A. (2010). Work readiness in graduate recruitment and selection: A review of current assessment methods. In *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability* (Vol. 1, Issue 1).
- Chatzistamoulou, N., & Tyllianakis, E. (2022). Commitment of European SMEs to resource efficiency actions to achieve sustainability transition. A feasible reality or an elusive goal? *Journal of Environmental Management*, 321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.115937>
- Childs, S. (2019). *Why The Candidate Experience Matters To An Organization (And How To Improve Yours)*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2019/04/09/why-the-candidate-experience-matters-to-an-organization-and-how-to-improve-yours/?sh=5052f97d4d18>
- Dabirian, A., Paschen, J., & Kietzmann, J. (2019). Employer Branding: Understanding Employer Attractiveness of IT Companies. *IT Professional*, 21(1), 82–89. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MITP.2018.2876980>
- Dealroom.co, Sifted, & European Startups. (2021). *Startup cities in the Entrepreneurial Age*. <https://dealroom.co/uploaded/2021/07/Dealroom-sifted-startup-cities-in-the-entrepreneurial-age.pdf>

- Dealroom.co, Sifted, European Startups, & Index Ventures. (2020). *Can Europe be the most entrepreneurial continent?* <https://dealroom.co/blog/can-europe-become-the-most-entrepreneurial-continent>
- Faria, S. G. de, Marra, A. V., Ássimos, B. M., & Souza, M. M. P. de. (2021). Attracting talents in startups: Discourses of seduction. *Contextus – Revista Contemporânea de Economia e Gestão*, 19, 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.19094/contextus.2021.61610>
- Gadibadi, C. (2020). *Identifying Dimensions of Employer Attractiveness in Startups. The Case of Swedish Tech Startups*. www.kth.se
- Gephart, R. (2004). *Qualitative Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2004.14438580>
- Grilo, António., Águeda, André., Zutchi, Aneesh., & Nodehi, Tahereh. (2017). *Relationship between Investors and European Startup - Ecosystem Builder*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ice.2017.8279932>
- Hamilton, R. H., & Davison, H. K. (2018). The search for skills: Knowledge stars and innovation in the hiring process. *Business Horizons*, 61(3), 409–419. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.006>
- Holm, A. B. (2012). *E-recruitment: Towards an Ubiquitous Recruitment Process and Candidate Relationship Management*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/23279203>
- Kaul, K. (2021). Refining the referral process: Increasing diversity for technology startups through targeted recruitment, screening and interview strategies. *Strategic HR Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/shr-04-2021-0016>
- Kurniawan, D. T., Agil, A., Rakhmad, N., Ii, O. F., & Kusnayain, Y. I. (2021). *How Employer Branding Attract the Generation Z Students to Join on Start-up Unicorn*. 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.21070/jbmp.v7vi2.1531>
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2015). Practical research. Planning and design (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2018.1.2.15>
- Lievens, F., & Slaughter, J. E. (2016). Employer Image and Employer Branding: What We Know and What We Need to Know. In *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 3, pp. 407–440). Annual Reviews Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062501>
- Massano, S. (2022). *The 2022 Iberia Unicorn Founder Roadmap: A New Unicorn-Land Takes Flight*. <https://www.antler.co/blog/the-2022-iberian-unicorn-founder-roadmap#:~:text=The%202022%20Iberia%20Unicorn%20Founder%20Roadmap%3A%20A%20New%20Unicorn%20Land,funds%20in%20the%20past%20year>.
- Medeot, F. (2021). *How to Build a Hiring Process: The Ultimate Startup's Guide*. Comeet Elastic Recruiting.

- Monteiro, B., Santos, V., Reis, I., Sampaio, M. C., Sousa, B., Martinho, F., Sousa, M. J., & Au-Yong-oliveira, M. (2020). Employer branding applied to smes: A pioneering model proposal for attracting and retaining talent. *Information (Switzerland)*, *11*(12), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info11120574>
- Palmeri, S. (2021). *What is Candidate Experience in Recruitment?* CareerPlug. <https://www.careerplug.com/blog/candidate-experience-statistics/>
- Parmar, A. (2014). *The Role of HR Department in Employer Branding at Public and Private Sector* (Vol. 2, Issue 2). Online. http://jhrmls.com/journals/jhrmls/Vol_2_No_2_June_2014/13.pdf
- Phillips, J. M., Gully, S. M., & Castellano, W. (2014). Improving Recruiting Effectiveness for Innovative Startups: The Importance of Job Advertisement Wording. *American Journal of Entrepreneurship*. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=242692>
- Rasmussen, M. Thyregod. (2020). Recruitment Communication and Psychological Contracts in Start-Ups: Dark Side Challenges of Selling a Job and Creating Realistic Expectations. In *Communication & Language at Work* (Vol. 7, Issue 1). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7146/claw.v7i1.123246>
- Reisdorfer-Leite, B., Marcos De Oliveira, M., Rudek, M., Szejka, A. L., Junior, O. C., Canciglieri, O., & Startup, J. (2022). *Startup Definition Proposal Using Product Lifecycle Management*. 426–435. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62807-9_34
- Rocha, C., Moreira, M. Â. L., & dos Santos, M. (2021). Selection of interns for startups: An approach based on the AHP-TOPSIS-2N method and the 3DM computational platform. *Procedia Computer Science*, *199*, 984–991. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2022.01.124>
- Rozario, S. D., Venkatraman, S., & Abbas, A. (2019). Challenges in Recruitment and Selection Process: An Empirical Study. *Challenges*, *10*(2), 35. <https://doi.org/10.3390/challe10020035>
- Salamzadeh, A., & Kesim, H. K. (2015a). *Startup Companies: Life Cycle and Challenges*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2628861>
- Salamzadeh, A., & Kesim, H. K. (2015b). *Startup Companies: Life Cycle and Challenges*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2628861>
- Sinha, V., & Thaly, P. (2013). *A Review on changing trend of recruitment practice to enhance the quality of hiring in global organizations*. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/194daae2d6f272c845487a45b7f9a94b/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=55100>
- Spender, J. C., Corvello, V., Grimaldi, M., & Rippa, P. (2017). Startups and open innovation: a review of the literature. In *European Journal of Innovation Management* (Vol. 20, Issue 1, pp. 4–30). Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-12-2015-0131>
- Theurer, C. P., Tumasjan, A., Welpe, I. M., & Lievens, F. (2018). Employer Branding: A Brand Equity-based Literature Review and Research Agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *20*(1), 155–179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12121>

- Tumasjan, A., Strobel, M., & Welpel, I. M. (2011). Employer brand building for start-ups: which job attributes do employees value most? *Zeitschrift Für Betriebswirtschaft*, 81(S6), 111–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11573-011-0507-2>
- Vekić, A., Borocki, J., Đorđić, K., & Cikota, O. (2022). *European Startup Ecosystem as a Star of Economic Development* (pp. 332–339). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97947-8_44
- Wang, Y., Kim, S., Rafferty, A., & Sanders, K. (2020). Employee perceptions of HR practices: A critical review and future directions. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(1), 128–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1674360>
- Yilmaz, K. (2013). *Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014>

7. APPENDIX

7.1 Appendix A: Interview script

- **Introduction**

- + Good morning/afternoon. Introduce myself and Ignition Program (I am coach & talent acquisition for a French startup. Our mission is to connect the best candidates with the most promising startups in Europe)
- + Ask the candidate to briefly introduce himself/herself and their background. (Ask about age, gender education (highest level achieved and areas)

- **Awareness**

- + How do you typically learn about new job opportunities? Do you use any particular websites? Social media? Career fairs?
- + What aspects of startups matter the most for you in this step?
- + What are the main difficulties you typically experience in the stage of learning about new job opportunities?

- **Consideration**

- + Can you provide an example of a time when you were considering applying for a job and how was the process then?
- + Do you do any extra research on the company or job position, or do you just stick to the information provided in the place where you first learn about the job opportunity? What do you typically do?
- + Do you check the company's website, try to find experiences of previous workers, etc?
- + What do you value the most when you consider applying to work in a European startup?
- + What are the main difficulties you experience in the stage of deciding whether to apply to a job position?

- **Application**

- + How do you typically approach the tasks involved in submitting an application?
- + Do you ever use help (AI or human help) to develop application materials? What are your thoughts on the fairness of using AI to help in applications? (e.g., using chatGPT to help write a motivation letter)
- + What do you value the most in companies when deciding whether to submit and application to a company?
- + What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this stage of submitting applications?

- **Recruitment process**

- + In how many recruitment processes with startups have you been?

- # Which were the steps or stages of the hiring process?
- # What do you think are the most important factors that contribute to a positive candidate experience during the hiring process for a startup?
- # In your experience, how has technology been used in the recruitment process for roles you have applied for? (e.g., video interviews)
Do you feel that it has impacted the fairness of the process? What about the effectiveness?
- # What do you think about the use of technology in the recruitment process?
- # Have you ever encountered technical issues or problems during the recruitment process that impacted your perception of the fairness or effectiveness of the process? If so, can you describe the situation and how it was resolved (if at all)?
- # Have you ever struggled with any part of the recruitment process? If so, which part and why?

- **Offer**

- # What is your general process of considering whether to accept a job offer?
- # What are the most important aspects for you to considering accepting a job offer?
- # What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this step of considering a job offer?

- **Decision**

- # Can you walk me through the process you went through to make your final decision about whether to accept the job offer?
- # What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this step of making a decision on a job offer?

- **Closure**

7.2 Appendix B: Interview summary

In the following, the codes and respective themes will be displayed.

Awareness		
How do you typically learn about new job opportunities? Do you use any particular websites? Social media? Career fairs?		
Category	Theme	Example
Job Portals	Linkedin	"I always use Linkedin because it helps me to become aware of the companies and job opportunities available in my field of interest".
	Glassdoor	"I use Glassdoor to get aware of the reviews and comments about the company and practices"
	Welcome to the Jungle	"I look for jobs in Welcome to the Jungle because it provides comprehensive information about companies and job openings"
	InfoJobs	"I find InfoJobs to be a great resource for finding job opportunities in my area. I appreciate the user-friendly interface and the ability to filter job listings"
People/Referrals	Friends and Family	"In the last two opportunities, people from my network recommended me a job"
Website	Company's website	"On the company's website includes detailed information about the job requirements, responsibilities, and qualifications on their website. For this reason, I prefer to look here"
Events	Career Fairs	"When I was at the university, I always attend the career fairs to get to know more companies from different industries and explore options"
What aspects of startups matter the most for you in this step?		
Job characteristics	Job description	"The job description is crucial in this stage. It helps me understand the role, responsibilities, and requirements, and evaluate if I have the necessary skills and experience".
	Modality	"I prioritize job listings that provide clear information about the work arrangements, whether it's hybrid, remote, or on-site".
	Flexibility	"Work-life balance is a top priority for me"
	Location	"I like to be in a place where I am comfortable, close to my friends and family"
	Salary	"I believe that fair compensation not only acknowledges the value of my work, but also allows me to achieve financial stability and support my personal goals."
Company characteristics	Type and size of the company	"I would never considerate a company that has more than 100 employees, I prefer something smaller"
	Industry	"The industry has to be a match with my studies and background, because it is very specific"
	Culture and Values	"I make sure to research the values and culture of the companies I'm interested in, and look for signs of a positive company".
	Work environment	"Feeling connected with colleagues and work it is essential for me"
Career Development	Opportunity to grow	"I feel more attracted to a job if I see that I could have chances to grow and learn"
What are the main difficulties you typically experience in the stage of learning about new job opportunities?		
Lack of information	Job description incomplete	"A lot of job posts just talk about the role but they do not mention nothing about what they offer, the company and other important factors".
Challenges	Find jobs related with you	"As my profile and experience are very specific or attached to an industry, it is hard to find opportunities".

Consideration		
Can you provide an example of a time when you were considering applying for a job and how was the process then?		
Job Portals	Linkedin	"Last month, I was considering applying to a startup and the application was via LinkedIn on easy apply".
Company website	Company website	"I prefer to look directly on the company's website the open positions and opportunities"
Materials	Documents	"First, I develop my CV for the type of roles I want to apply, then I evaluate which processes have extra things such as cover letters or online surveys".
	Lists	"First of all I create a list with all the companies of my interest, open positions and links"
Company characteristics	Industry	"The industry must be related with my expertise and interest"
	Values and Culture	"At this point is a little bit hard to know what are the values and culture of the company, but for sure it is the most relevant factor to take a decision later"
Job characteristics	Job role	"The job characteristics must be aligned with my skills and relevant experience"
Do you do any extra research on the company or job position, or do you just stick to the information provided in the place where you first learn about the job opportunity? What do you typically do? Do you check the company's website, try to find experiences of previous workers, etc?		
Company characteristics	Type and size of the company	"I investigate the role and culture of the company, type of people working there, what are their values and how is it to work in that company"
	Industry	
	Culture and Values	
	Work environment	"Check the profile of the founders give me a very solid idea of the startup and a bit of confidence"
Efficiency	Fast processes	" I prioritize fast processes and startups".
Job Portals	Linkedin	"I am super picky with the information that they have on LinkedIn"
	Glassdoor	"I use Glassdoor for reviews, comments, and salary information"
What do you value the most when you consider applying to work in a European startup?		
Company characteristics	Type and size of the company	" It's crucial to consider the company's size and type to ensure a good fit for both the short and long term".
	Mission	"The mission has to have an impact in the world for me to be interesting"
	Track-record	"If I see that a company has good financial resources, solid clients and background, years of experience I will feel more confident"
	Work environment	"I really like to go to the office if I know that I will have fun and good moments, not just go to work"
	Founders	" I want to work for a company whose founders are passionate and driven, with a clear vision for the future".
	International	"I value to have the chance to collaborate with people from different backgrounds and learn about new cultures".
Job characteristics	Modality	"If the job is fully on-site it's not something I feel attracted to anymore"
	Job role	"I will not consider a job role that I know I won't enjoy or in which I do not fit"
	Requirements	"If I found that I have the necessary requirements I already feel that I have more opportunities"
	Autonomy	"I really hate the micromanaging, I prefer to be the owner of my time"
	Stability	"I consider jobs that help me with the sponsor of my visa because that would allow me to stay in Europe"
Career Development	Potential to grow	"See that the people currently working there has been building a career"
What are the main difficulties you experience in the stage of deciding whether to apply to a job position?		
Lack of information	Incomplete job description	"Job description tells general tasks and then it is another job role or another tasks".
	Salary not visible	"In job description the salary is not there".
Lengthy and unresponsive processes	Processes with a lot of steps	"Processes are super long. So you have to adapt your CV, cover letter, questionnaires, and the application itself and demand a lot of my time".
	Very specific applications	"Some roles are so specific, so you have to customize all the material and it is exhausting"
Uncertainty	Not the right opportunity	" I feel sometimes I do not fit to the roles that I find".
	Different expectations	"As I can't see here the salary, maybe they have one budget in mind and I have another one"

Application		
How do you typically approach the tasks involved in submitting an application?		
Job Portals	Linkedin	"I just go one by one and complete each process. For example, if there is a "Apply easy" I just submit the documents and information required".
Website	Company's website	"I organize applications directly in the company website".
Materials	Lists	"I do an excel with different columns such as: status, link of the job, date in which I applied and comments".
People/Referrals	Employees	"I try to find people that is directly involved with the hiring"
Efficiency	Time schedule	"I block some time in my agenda to do it and finishing during the week".
What do you value the most in companies when deciding whether to submit and application to a company?		
Company characteristics	Industry	"If my profile is tech, for sure I will not submit my application to an industry about fashion"
	Mission	"The mission of the company is important for me"
	Values and culture	"The values and the culture of the company give me an idea of how is it going to be working there"
	History and reputation	"I like to know about company's past successes and challenges"
	Work environment	"I feel very lucky when you have a job in which you can be creative and innovative"
Job characteristics	Team	"See your teammates as a family is amazing"
	Conditions	"Having access to necessary resources and equipment, fair compensation, and benefits that prioritize my physical and mental health".
	Job role	"I like to feel valuable having a job that potentializes my skills and experience"
Career Development	Job responsibilities	"It is about the tasks and responsibilities but also about your daily basis"
	Opportunity to grow	"I want to move on from junior positions to senior ones"
Job Fit	Match with my profile	"I just submit an application if the requirements are aligned with me because I know I will have more chances to be seen or considered".
What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this stage of submitting applications?		
Lack of communication	Result of application	"It is really weird to know if they saw your application or not".
	Feedback	"You just receive an automatic message saying that your application has been successfully submitted but then you never hear from them"
Challenges	Remember each application	"My problem is that I apply to hundreds of jobs and weeks or months later they contact me but at that moment I do not remember from which opportunity are they talking about"
Job Fit	Salary expectations	"I can't see the salary in the job description"
	Profile related with the job	"Some roles are very vague so I really do not know if my profile could be a fit".
Recruitment process		
How were the recruitment processes? OR Which were the steps or stages of the hiring process?		
Interviews	Call with recruiter	"My first approach with the startup was with the HR area"
	Call with future manager	"The interview with the person who is going to be my manager was amazing to know him"
	Call with CEO	"Having a call with the CEO of the startup gave me a good impression and experience in the process"
Business cases	Problem to solve	"They send me a current sales problem of the company and I had to develop a new strategy and present it to them. I just had 2 days".
Online assesments	Analytic and logical	"The mathematical test are very common"
	Aptitude test	"I did 3 skills test online for different startups".
What do you think are the most important factors that contribute to a positive candidate experience during the hiring process for a startup?		
Efficiency	Short-time frames	"The current proceses last from 1 to 6 months, this can't be possible. It would be better to have a shorter time"
	Less steps	"There are processes with more than 5 stages and it is exhausting. I would prefer to have less stages and efficient evaluations".
Transparency	Feedback	"Hiring people must communicate with candidates in a timely and transparent manner, keeping them informed of the hiring process and providing regular updates."
	Structure	"Sometimes the hiring processes do not even have a clear structure".
Personal Connection	Involvement of C-levels	"In my last experience, my last interview was with the CEO and I enjoyed it".
	Good relationships with members	"The recruiter and the manager are important people. If during the process they were responsive and friendly make the candidate feel fulfilled"

Offer		
What is your general process of considering whether to accept a job offer?		
Job characteristics	Job responsibilities	"I want to do marketing tasks and have the responsibilities I should in the role".
	Flexibility	"I appreciate to have the possibility of being working from different geographies and at different times".
	Benefits	"Having extra things such as health insurance, gym pass, meal allowance, more holidays".
	Salary	"If I feel they are not value me and paying me what I deserve I prefer to decline"
Company characteristics	Industry	"I have been in the energy field for so many years, so I want to continue in this field".
	Work environment	"Have friends and good colleagues, enjoy going to the office".
	Type and size	"I prefer to work in early-stages and small startups".
Referrals	Team	"Have a team that motivates you is really important".
	Employees	"I like to reach out people working there to here more opinions about the company".
	Friends and Family	"I asked to my family some advice"
What are the most important aspects for you to considering accepting a job offer?		
Company characteristics	Values and culture	"My values have to be similar with the company values"
	Work environment	"A positive and supportive work environment can greatly impact my job satisfaction and overall well-being".
	Team	"Getting along with my colleagues and feeling valued as a team member is essential to me".
	International	"Working for an international company can open up opportunities for global career advancement".
Job characteristics	Job role	"I want to ensure that the role aligns with my skills, experience, and career goals".
	Location	"While remote work has become more common, there are still benefits to being physically located near a company's headquarters or in a specific city or region".
	Salary	"Fair compensation allows me to feel valued and motivated".
	Flexibility	"In terms of work hours, remote work options, and the ability to balance work and personal life can make a huge difference".
Career Development	Opportunity to grow	"I want to join an organization that values professional development and provides opportunities for me to learn and advance my career".
What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this step of making a decision on a job offer?		
Uncertainty	Not the right opportunity	" It can be challenging to make a decision when there are unknown factors".
	Salary expectations	"It can make it difficult to plan for the future and make informed choices about the job offer".
Job Fit	Urgency	"I had needs and bills to pay so I decide to take it no matter if it was not my ideal job at that moment".

Decision		
Can you walk me through the process you went through to make your final decision about whether to accept the job offer?		
Job characteristics	Job responsibilities	"The responsibilities and tasks should be clear for me to take an informed decision"
	Benefits	"I always check the whole package to see what includes"
	Salary	"The salary should compensate my knowledge and skills"
	Autonomy	"I want to be working by my own, not having someone checking everything that I do"
	Flexibility	"If I have to go the office everyday, for me it is a no-go"
Company characteristics	Culture and values	"The values must be aligned with my beliefs and personal mission"
	Team	"Work with people with amazing skills and values is fundamental"
Referrals	Employees	"It is an important asset having a brief chat with someone working there"
What are the main difficulties you typically experience in this step of making a decision on a job offer?		
Uncertainty	Insecurity about the job	"I don't feel 100% sure that the job is the ideal for me".
	Company in real	"Sometimes you just have external and good comments about the company, but you do not have internal or closer opinions of what is real".
Job Fit	Urgency	"I was afraid of just accepting the offer because I needed the money in that moment".

7.3 Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

Welcome and thank you for participating in this interview. I, Annapaula Tenorio Barrio am conducting this interview as a part of my Master Thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics, under the supervision of Cristina Mendonça.

Please answer as honest as possible. All answers will be kept strictly confidentially and are anonymous. This means that there will be no way to link your responses to your identity. The information collected will be used for research purposes only. There are no expected side effects of participating in this study. If you wish, you are free to leave the interview at any point without providing a reason.

Do you agree to participate in this study by being interviewed by me?

Do you confirm that this interview gets recorded for research purposes only?

Hereby I agree and confirm:

Signature

Annapaula Tenorio Barrio