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Now You See Them, Now You Don't: Understanding New Hire Ghosting and Its Antecedents

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ABSTRACT

New hire ghosting, in which applicants accept an offer and then quit before their first day without notice, is an emerging and consequential staffing phenomenon. Drawing on job embeddedness theory, we conceptualize new hire ghosting as a form of pre-entry withdrawal influenced by dispositional risk and the fragile fit, links, and sacrifice factors characteristic of the post-offer, pre-entry phase. Across two complementary studies, we examine ghosting's prevalence, drivers, and implications. In Study 1, using a multi-year archival dataset ($N = 157,154$), we found that 4.1% of accepted offers at a large telecommunications company ghosted, resulting in staffing disruptions costing over \$6.9 million each year. Hires with longer offer-to-start delays and customer-facing roles experienced greater ghosting risk. Building on these findings, Study 2 surveyed a broad sample of adults in the US to compare recent ghosters to employed non-ghosters ($N = 434$). Fit (lower perceived organizational attractiveness), links (non-referral hires, weaker pre-entry communication), and sacrifice (greater financial insecurity, the presence of external offers) were all associated with ghosting outcomes, with impulsivity further attenuating the protective benefits of embeddedness effects. Collectively, these findings extend embeddedness theory into the post-offer, pre-entry period and help identify targeted staffing practices that can mitigate ghosting.

1 | Introduction

Consider the following scenario. After an intensive recruitment process and negotiations, a candidate formally accepts the offer, and a start date is agreed upon. On the morning of the planned start date, the hiring manager works to ready the organization for the new employee's arrival: finalizing onboarding documents, setting up the workstation, and outlining initial tasks. However, as they wait for the new employee to arrive, the clock hits 9:00, then 10:00, then noon. No message, no call, no sign of the new hire. Silence. The new beginning quietly transitions into an unfilled position.

Increasingly, organizations are encountering this new form of withdrawal behavior, commonly referred to by practitioners as

“no-call, no shows” or “new hire ghosting,” where an individual accepts an offer but fails to report on their first day. For employers, this behavior is both unexpected and disruptive, as offer acceptance is widely regarded as the formal end of the hiring process and a signal that onboarding can proceed (Bauer 2010). For new hires, however, early attachment is often still fragile, and an offer acceptance decision may not carry the same weight of final commitment. Supporting this notion, industry surveys report that new hires frequently continue their search after accepting an offer, with a substantial share later reneging when presented with a preferred alternative (Maurer 2023). Professional norms have long discouraged candidates from backing out of accepted offers (Marchesani 1995; National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2017). Thus, a new hire who

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Practitioner Notes

- What is currently known about the subject matter:
 - New hire ghosting occurs when candidates accept a job offer but fail to report on the first day without notice.
 - Psychological factors influencing this form of early turnover remain underexplored.
 - Using job embeddedness theory, we frame new hire ghosting as driven by dispositional risk and fragile fit, links, and sacrifice present after offer acceptance.
- What this paper adds:
 - Establishes new hire ghosting as a distinct form of early turnover.
 - Across two complementary studies, examines ghosting prevalence, drivers, and implications.
 - Embeddedness fit, links, and sacrifice were associated with ghosting outcomes, with impulsivity further attenuating the protective benefits of embeddedness.
- Implications of study findings for practitioners:
 - Shortening time between job offer and start date can reduce ghosting.
 - Consistent, proactive post-offer communication helps maintain engagement.
 - Establishing embeddedness post-offer is likely to reduce ghosting.
 - Using integrity and impulsivity assessments could lower ghosting risk.

withdraws post-acceptance must withstand the social and reputational costs of informing the employer. Increasingly, however, many new hires are electing to avoid these costs by simply not showing up, often with little to no advance notice (Cutter et al. 2022; Maurer 2023; Indeed, 2023).

This behavior poses far-reaching implications for organizations, as the absence of notice further amplifies the already substantial costs of renegeing (e.g., lost recruitment and onboarding expenses; Baker and Weinberger 2023). Yet, despite its relevance in practitioner circles, the phenomenon has yet to receive commensurate attention in the academic literature. Moreover, prevailing turnover and onboarding theories are currently not well situated to explain a post-acceptance, pre-entry exit that occurs without contact. Existing research has examined similar phenomena, such as applicant withdrawal without notice (e.g., Karl et al. 2021; Lyons et al. 2024). Likewise, there is a rich history of employee turnover research (e.g., Harrison et al. 2006; Holtom et al. 2017; Hulin 1991; Jackofsky 1984; Lee et al. 1999; Mitchell et al. 2001; Rubenstein et al. 2018), including research on early turnover (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Porter et al. 1976; Vandenberg and Self 1993) and pre-entry perceptions of organizational commitment and socialization (Feldman 1976; Lee et al. 1992). However, these bodies of research do not fully account for individuals who accept a job offer but quit before the first day without notice. Consequently, the psychological dynamics of new hire ghosting remain underexplored.

We contend that new hire ghosting is best conceptualized as a form of early, voluntary turnover that occurs prior to the start

date but is governed by similar attachment-related mechanisms that shape traditional quitting behavior (e.g., Lee et al. 1999; Mitchell et al. 2001; Rubenstein et al. 2018). Relative to other phases in the employment lifecycle, perceived fit with the organization, links to the company and coworkers, and sacrifice costs associated with leaving the newly accepted job are nascent and thus conspicuously tenuous immediately following offer acceptance, which lowers the friction of withdrawal and makes a silent exit more feasible (Mitchell et al. 2001; Bauer et al. 1998). Contemporary hiring practices likely heighten these conditions. Technology-mediated processes shorten and depersonalize applicant-organization interactions, reduce opportunities to build human ties, and delay experiences that would increase perceived loss from leaving (Allen et al. 2007; Stone et al. 2015; Walther 1996), resulting in offer acceptance feeling more provisional. Under these circumstances, the perceived consequences of withdrawal without notice are often minimal, especially relative to the social and reputational discomfort that accompanies a renegeing notification. The result is that non-contact withdrawal becomes easier for the applicant to justify and enact. Moreover, we argue that individual differences in dishonesty and impulsivity further reduce frictions associated with early embeddedness, yielding higher ghosting risk across the embeddedness continuum.

To test these ideas, we conducted two studies to examine ghosting during the post-offer, pre-entry period. Study 1 uses archival data from a large service employer to establish a meaningful base rate of ghosting within an operational context and establishes the organizational costs of this behavior when experienced at scale. Study 2 builds out a theoretical explanation for these findings within a sample of recent ghosters compared to employed non-ghosters across jobs and industries. Together, the studies provide complementary evidence to show that underdeveloped pre-entry embeddedness factors elevate the likelihood of withdrawal and the propensity to take a non-contact form of exit. In doing so, we contribute a pre-entry extension to job embeddedness theory that explains why some new hires choose a non-contact mode of exit.

1.1 | What New Hire Ghosting Is and Is Not

New hire ghosting is positioned within the larger nomological network of organizational withdrawal, with similarities and differences to both applicant withdrawal (e.g., Ryan et al. 2000) and traditional employee turnover (e.g., Holtom et al. 2017). Similar to new hire ghosting, applicant withdrawal can take a non-contact form, such as when applicants suddenly cut off communication during the hiring process or fail to show up for interviews (Lyons et al. 2024). However, ghosting and applicant withdrawal diverge on the dimensions of timing, contract formation, and organizational impact. Applicant withdrawal occurs before an offer decision, when attachment is tentative and the psychological contract is underdeveloped (Baskin et al. 2014; Schmit and Ryan 1997; Rousseau 1995). Although disruptive, the impact of applicant withdrawal on organizational function is confined to hiring. New hire ghosting, on the other hand, occurs after a formal acceptance. At that stage of the process, the employer has begun role-specific scheduling and onboarding, expectations of reciprocity are more salient, and silent exit carries a different, more disruptive meaning. In the post-

acceptance window, a non-contact exit ruptures an emergent pre-entry contract and produces greater operational strain.

In this respect, ghosting parallels turnover, as both involve formally hired employees exiting the company. However, traditional accounts of turnover behavior presume at least some on-the-job experience. Even cases of early turnover involve initial exposure to work tasks, colleagues, and organizational systems, which initiates the accumulation of embeddedness-related experiences (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Porter et al. 1976; Vandenberg and Self 1993). Evidence indicates that these first exposures strongly shape subsequent retention intentions (Allen 2006; Bauer et al. 2007). However, when withdrawal occurs during pre-entry, these initial experiences are noticeably absent. Theoretical models of employee turnover, which are implicitly based upon accumulated experiences and ties, therefore require adaptation in order to adequately explain withdrawal that occurs during the post-offer pre-entry period (Harrison et al. 2006; Hulin 1991; Jackofsky 1984; Lee et al. 1999; Mitchell et al. 2001). In this respect, an extension of embeddedness theory may help explain why new hire ghosting remains feasible within this narrow interval of the staffing cycle.

1.2 | Extending Embeddedness to New Hire Ghosting

Job embeddedness theory holds that fit, links, and sacrifice generate frictions to exit that help tether employees to organizations (Mitchell et al. 2001). As shown in Table 1, we argue that these frictions begin to emerge before organizational entry, but in a form that is more anticipatory (and thus more fragile) than traditional post-entry embeddedness. Even in the absence of on-the-job experiences, candidates can still develop early attachment through expectations of fit with the organization and role, nascent social links to recruiters, hiring managers, referrers, and other organizational contacts, and anticipated sacrifice associated with abandoning a secured employment opportunity. In this sense, pre-entry embeddedness is grounded

more in expectations, obligations that accompany offer acceptance, and anticipated utility than in lived organizational experience. Although these pre-entry forms are thinner, more sensitive to changes in environmental states, and easier to disrupt than their post-entry counterparts, they are nonetheless present. Contemporary hiring practices likely further contribute to the development of these tenuous links. Technology-mediated selection processes compress and depersonalize interactions, limiting opportunities for incoming employees to form meaningful ties, while onboarding experiences that would create concrete losses are often deferred until day one or later (Allen et al. 2007; Stone et al. 2015; Walther 1996). As a result, relationship-based frictions to exit within modern job markets are becoming increasingly underdeveloped, making silent withdrawal comparatively easier to justify and enact than before.

Drawing on the conceptual model shown in Figure 1, the following sections detail how we propose that each dimension of embeddedness (fit, links, sacrifice) manifests during the post-offer, pre-hire phase to influence no-contact withdrawal decisions prior to organizational entry.

1.2.1 | Fit Factors

Fit refers to perceived compatibility between the person and the organization, including value congruence, cultural alignment, and role expectations that align with the person's goals and preferences (Mitchell et al. 2001). Fit beliefs have been shown to change across recruitment stages, with the changes in these perceptions having a meaningful impact on subsequent job choices (Swider et al. 2015). Early attitudes that newcomers carry into the organization have also been shown to predict subsequent withdrawal, suggesting that pre-entry beliefs have downstream consequences (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Lee et al. 1992; Porter et al. 1976). Moreover, meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that organizational attraction emerging from strong perceived fit is a central

TABLE 1 | Comparison of embeddedness during the pre-entry and post-entry job phases.

Dimension	Post-offer, pre-entry phase	Post-entry phase
Nature of attachment	Anticipatory, thin, and fragile. Grounded in expectations, role-based obligations, and anticipated utility. More sensitive to changing environmental signals and easier to disrupt.	Realized and experience-based. Grounded in lived, accumulated work experiences, established routines, and sustained organizational involvement.
Fit	Based on expected compatibility with the role and organization, inferred from recruitment signals, employer reputation, interactions during the hiring process, and early communication. Speculative.	Based on lived compatibility with actual tasks, culture, supervisor behavior, and everyday work experiences. Reality-tested and stable.
Links	Nascent, role-based ties to recruiters, hiring managers, referrers, onboarding contacts, and sometimes future teammates. Can still create interpersonal obligation, reputational accountability, and discomfort if broken.	Dense, ongoing ties to coworkers, supervisors, mentors, and teams, which are reinforced through repeated interaction and shared routines.
Sacrifice	Forward-looking. Rooted in anticipated income, relief from financial strain, completion of the job search, anticipated access to benefits or hours, and social capital tied to honoring an accepted offer or referral. May be recalibrated by competing offers or negative signals.	Realized and accumulated. Involves pay continuity, benefits, routines, status, workplace relationships, and other organization-specific resources that have been built up over a period of time.

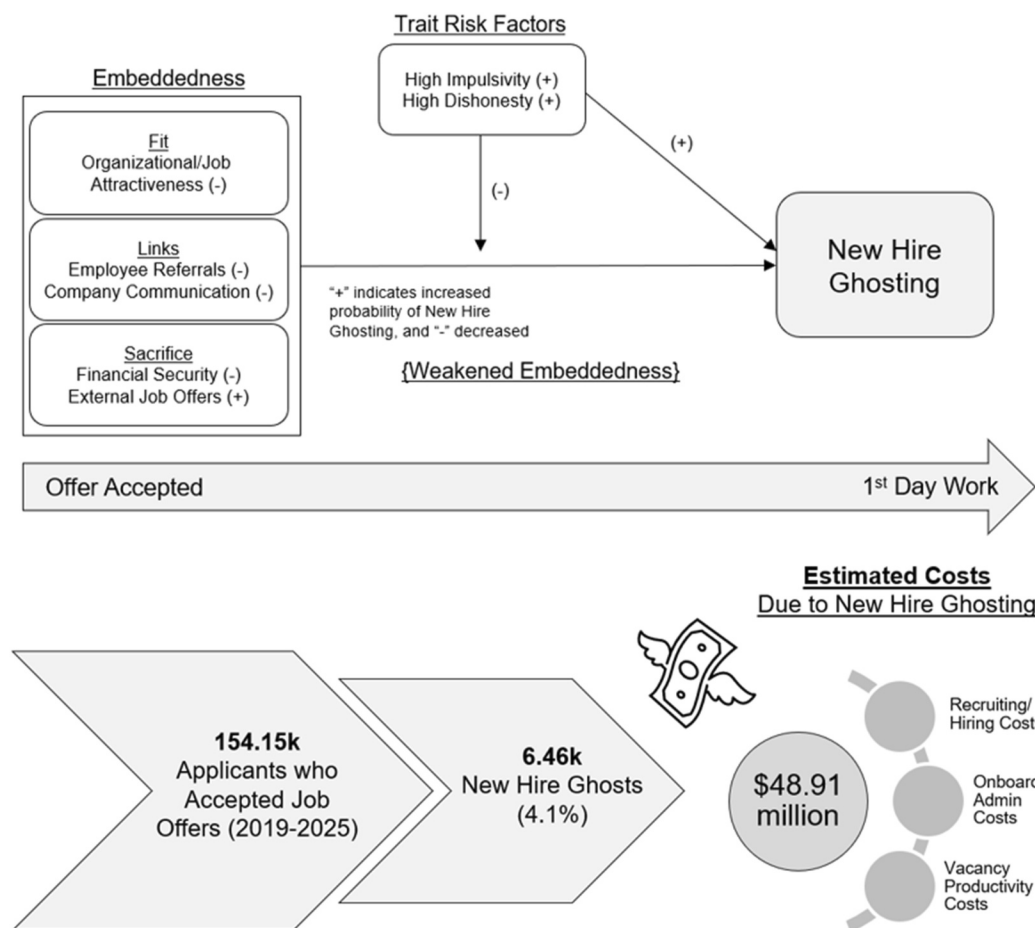


FIGURE 1 | Base rate, implications, and conceptual mechanisms of new hire ghosting.

driver of job choice (Chapman et al. 2005), with attractiveness effects being especially salient in early recruitment stages (Uggerslev et al. 2012). During pre-entry, fit perceptions and their associated attractiveness bonds are often underdeveloped and speculative. As a result, they are more prone to disruption, which reduces the hold of frictions that normally deter exit and encourage civility in communications.

Without on-the-job experiences to anchor judgments, pre-entry evaluations are often anticipatory. As a result, early signals such as recruiter follow-through, the quality of interview exchanges, and the cadence and clarity of manager communication carry greater weight than they will after entry. Applicants also incorporate public and interpersonal signals that have not yet been tested by firsthand experience. Expectations of organizational characteristics formed through reputation, branding, and employee word of mouth shape attraction and perceived fit, which then influences job choice (Cable and Turban 2001; Turban and Cable 2003; Lievens and Slaughter 2016). Word of mouth from employees and friends can be especially influential when other information is sparse (Sullivan and Swider 2025; Van Hove and Lievens 2007).

The computer-mediated nature of modern hiring can intensify these dynamics. Text-based and platform interactions filter nonverbal and contextual cues and can foster idealized or miscalibrated impressions. Web-based recruitment and screening

compress and depersonalize contact, thereby altering fairness perceptions, weakening interpersonal cues, and limiting opportunities to surface value congruence and cultural alignment before day one (Allen et al. 2007; Dineen et al. 2004; Walther 1996). When attraction is based primarily on these lean signals, small negative cues can lower the perceived fit and weaken the frictions that normally deter non-contact exit. Conversely, clear and consistent positive signals of fit can strengthen organizational attractiveness, foster early identification with the organization, and increase perceived obligation to reciprocate, raising the likelihood that candidates communicate if withdrawal becomes necessary (Allen 2006; Bauer et al. 2007; Chapman et al. 2005; Uggerslev et al. 2012). Accordingly, higher pre-entry fit should be associated with a lower risk of new hire ghosting.

Hypothesis 1. *Embeddedness fit factors are negatively related to new hire ghosting.*

1.2.2 | Link Factors

Within embeddedness theory, links refer to the interpersonal connections that bind individuals to their organizations (Mitchell et al. 2001). In the post-offer pre-entry phase, links to the organization are beginning to form, but are still tenuously thin. By the time the offer is accepted, candidates have often already begun to develop some connections with recruiters,

hiring managers, referrers, onboarding contacts, and, in some cases, future teammates. These ties may not yet be deep or routine-based, but they can still create interpersonal obligation, reputational accountability, and discomfort associated with disappearing without notice. Embeddedness links during the pre-entry phase are therefore best understood as nascent, role-based connections that can either strengthen into fuller attachment or dissipate before day one. Here, again, modern computer-mediated hiring likely contributes to weaker pre-entry links by filtering nonverbal and contextual cues and compressing contact, which limits rapport building and continuity with insiders (Allen et al. 2007; Short et al. 1976; Sproull and Kiesler 1986; Walther 1996). Under these conditions, relational restraint that would otherwise inhibit ghosting remains fragile.

Establishing social connections, such as employee referrals, is one way organizations can leverage links to combat ghosting behavior. A referral is a hiring pathway in which a current organizational member recommends a candidate, endorses fit, and brokers contact, thereby importing a preexisting social tie into the firm. Named contacts, informal information, and reputational stakes create social expectations that raise the perceived costs of exit without notice. Prior work has treated referrals as link-building forces within embeddedness accounts and found support for the notion that referred employees are less likely to quit (Mitchell et al. 2001; Breaugh and Starke 2000). Extending this logic to the pre-entry period, we expect that employee referrals reduce the likelihood of new hire ghosting by increasing the social costs of silence.

Effective communication during onboarding is another mechanism for strengthening links before day one. Sustained and high-quality contact after acceptance helps convert an acceptance decision into a felt relationship (Bauer 2010). Timely responses, a named point of contact, and early introductions to teammates personalize connections and increase feelings of belonging (Bauer et al. 1998; Bauer 2010). In contrast, sparse or delayed communication signals distance and can allow nascent ties to fade (Bauer et al. 1998). In a similar vein, idle time between acceptance and start represents a structural gap that also weakens embeddedness. Longer gaps create a social and cognitive vacuum in which emerging ties fail to consolidate, and initial enthusiasm gives way to ambivalence, which increases the ease of silent withdrawal. Supporting this notion, prior evidence has linked extended hiring timelines to a higher risk of applicant withdrawal (Arvey et al. 1975; Chapman et al. 2005).

When links are stronger during the pre-entry phase, the social and reputational costs of leaving without notice increase, and candidates are more likely to both stay or communicate their intentions early should withdrawal prove unavoidable. However, when links remain tenuous, a non-contact exit becomes easier to both justify and enact. Accordingly, we expect that stronger pre-entry links, reflected by employee referral status, stronger pre-start communication, and shorter offer-to-start intervals, should be associated with a lower likelihood of new hire ghosting.

Hypothesis 2. *Embeddedness link factors are negatively related to new hire ghosting.*

1.2.3 | *Sacrifice Factors*

Sacrifice refers to the perceived losses from leaving an employment relationship (Mitchell et al. 2001). In traditional post-entry settings, sacrifice is realized and accumulated through pay, benefits, routines, status, and workplace relationships. In the post-offer pre-entry interval, candidates have not yet accumulated organization-specific resources. However, they may still perceive meaningful losses from abandoning an accepted offer, including the anticipated utility of near-term income, relief from financial strain, access to scheduled hours or benefits, completion of the job search, and the social capital associated with honoring a commitment made to the employer or a referrer. Pre-entry sacrifice is therefore forward-looking rather than accrued. It is also more easily recalibrated than post-entry sacrifice, because greater abstraction in sacrifice perception means that competing offers or negative signals have the potential to more sharply reduce what the candidate believes would be lost by walking away.

Financial insecurity may make pre-entry sacrifice especially unstable. Although an accepted job can carry high anticipated utility for financially insecure candidates, these individuals are also less able to tolerate delays, ambiguity, or signals that the role may not promptly resolve their economic needs (Munyon 2008). Under such conditions, the perceived value of the accepted offer may erode quickly, particularly when a more immediate or attractive alternative becomes available.

External labor market conditions also shift the sacrifice calculations. In strong markets with abundant job alternatives and quick reemployment, the perceived loss from ghosting is reduced. For example, a candidate with other job offers will experience less sacrifice by ghosting a previously accepted job offer. In weak markets with scarce opportunities, the perceived loss from ghosting becomes more significant. These contextual forces are especially influential when pre-entry ties are tenuous and on-the-job benefits have not yet been realized. Accordingly, we expect that factors that facilitate stronger pre-entry sacrifice expectations will reduce the likelihood of new hire ghosting.

Hypothesis 3. *Embeddedness sacrifice factors are negatively related to new hire ghosting.*

1.2.4 | *Dispositions as Amplifiers of Embeddedness Effects on Ghosting*

New hires may encounter similar hiring conditions, yet only some engage in new hire ghosting, which suggests dispositional tendencies play a role in shaping whether pre-entry embeddedness translates into action. As shown in Figure 1, we expect personality to moderate the tendency to choose a non-contact exit when embeddedness is tenuous. Person-situation theories of personality propose that stable traits interact with situational features to shape behavior, such that individual dispositions influence how people respond to contextual cues (Funder and Colvin 1991; Tett and Burnett 2003; Wright and Mischel 1987). Consequently, traits influence whether situational pulls are enacted as norm-consistent behavior, particularly because professional and ethical norms discourage reneging without notice (Marchesani 1995; National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2017). Traits linked to honesty/integrity and

impulsivity are therefore relevant to the embeddedness-ghosting relationship, as they calibrate individual sensitivity to civility expectations and shape whether early fit, links, and sacrifice are converted into ghosting.

Trait integrity/honesty refers to sincerity, fairness, and adherence to norms. Lower integrity is associated with greater moral disengagement and lower anticipated guilt, which is likely to reduce attention to the organization's potential losses from ghosting (Ashton et al. 2007; Bandura 1986; Berry et al. 2007; Moore et al. 2012). When pre-entry ties are weak, early fit, links, and sacrifice exert less of a restraining effect, lowering the psychological barriers that would otherwise prompt open communication. In this reduced-restraint context, lower integrity further shifts focus away from employer harm, making avoidant non-contact withdrawal feel acceptable when reconsidering an accepted offer.

Impulsivity refers to a tendency toward limited premeditation and a focus on immediate outcomes. Higher impulsivity promotes snap action and undermines planning. These tendencies disrupt the process by which early embeddedness factors translate into retention, or at least into communicative forms of withdrawal, when candidates reconsider an offer (Marcus and Schuler 2004; Cyders et al. 2007). Evidence from applicant contexts is consistent with this view, as lower self-control and lower conscientiousness predict disengagement without contact during recruitment (Lyons et al. 2024; Karl et al. 2021).

Collectively, these arguments suggest that pre-entry embeddedness serves as a baseline source of restraint, while personality determines the degree to which that restraint is perceived and acted upon. Higher integrity heightens attention to mutual obligations and perceived employer loss, which strengthens the inverse association between embeddedness and new hire ghosting. Higher impulsivity increases the motivation to avoid discomfort from notifying the employer, weakening this inverse association. Therefore, individuals with low integrity and high impulsivity are at greatest risk of engaging in new hire ghosting because they are less affected by embeddedness factors.

Hypothesis 4a. *The negative association between overall embeddedness and new hire ghosting is stronger among individuals higher in trait honesty.*

Hypothesis 4b. *The negative association between overall embeddedness and new hire ghosting is weaker among individuals higher in trait impulsivity.*

2 | Overview of Studies

Across two complementary studies, we examined new hire ghosting during the post-offer, pre-entry period by integrating organizational data with individual-level assessments of embeddedness and trait risk factors (see Table 2 for a summary of the studies). Study 1 used large-scale archival HR records from a large telecommunications company to document the base rate of new hire ghosting. Study 1 also tracks temporal patterns, compares ghosting across job families and age groups, and estimates the organizational costs of ghosting. In addition, Study 1 conducts an ancillary analysis of idle time as a predictor of ghosting risk, examining it as a factor that weakens pre-entry

embeddedness. Study 2 extended these findings by directly assessing the psychological mechanisms underlying new hire ghosting. Comparing a targeted sample of recent ghosters against a group of currently employed non-ghosters, we examined the three pre-entry embeddedness dimensions: Fit (organizational attractiveness), Links (employee referrals, pre-entry company communication), and Sacrifice (financial security, external job offers). We also assessed trait risk factors, specifically impulsivity and honesty. Study 2 further incorporated open-ended qualitative explanations to contextualize these quantitative patterns. Together, the studies provide a comprehensive account of how embeddedness factors and trait risk jointly shape the likelihood of new hire ghosting.

3 | Study 1

In Study 1, we draw on multi-year organizational records of ghosting incidents to quantify the prevalence of new hire ghosting in a contemporary high-volume hiring context, examine temporal patterns in this behavior, and assess its practical impact on the organization.

3.1 | Methods—Study 1

3.1.1 | Data and Sample

The archival dataset used in Study 1 consisted of all applicants who accepted an entry-level job in a large telecommunications company between May 2019 and June 2025 ($N = 157,154$). Positions were located across 1400+ metropolitan markets spanning 200+ strategic management units in the US and Canada. Several major job families were represented among the accepted offers, including customer service, telemarketing, and field service technician roles. The average age at time of hire was 33.1 years ($SD = 10.6$). The sample was majority female (54.1%) and racially/ethnically diverse (34.3% Black or African American, 29.3% White, 24.0% Hispanic or Latino, 6.0% Two or More Races, 3.1% chose not to identify, 1.7% Asian, and less than 1% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander).

3.1.2 | Measures

3.1.2.1 | New Hire Ghosts. New hire ghosting was operationalized as a form of employee behavior that occurs when an individual accepts a job offer but fails to show up for their first day of work without notifying the employer. The organization's human resources information systems (HRIS) recorded time, dates, and detailed information regarding changes in employee status and (when applicable) documented the reason for departures. Using this information alongside supporting HR data, we worked with a representative from the partner organization to identify instances where an applicant who had accepted a job offer from the organization failed to report on their first day without providing advance notice.

3.2 | Study 1—Results

3.2.1 | Base Rate and Temporal Patterns of New Hire Ghosting

Across the full observation window (May 2019 to June 2025), 6455 of the 157,154 accepted offers resulted in a no-call no-

TABLE 2 | Overview of studies.

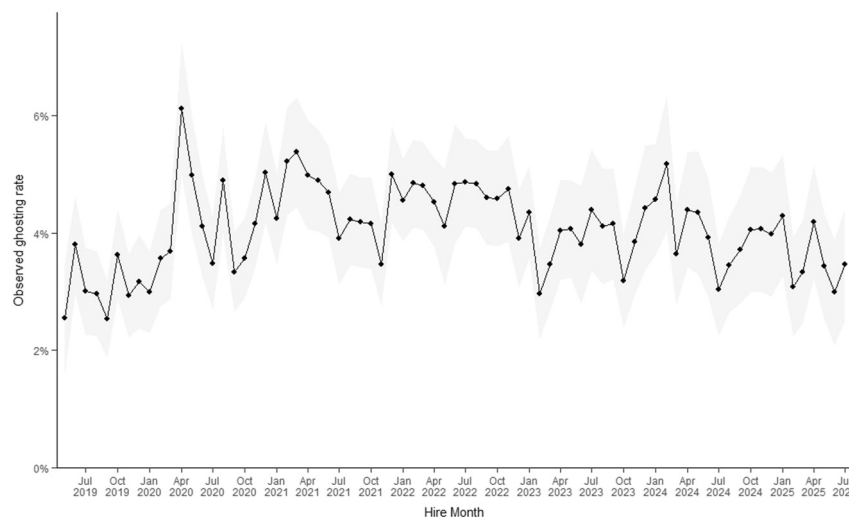
Study	Overview	Data source	Key variables
<i>Study 1:</i> Base rate and implications	Examination of new hire ghosting base-rate, trends, and cost implications	Call center applicants ($N = 157,154$) who accepted job offers at a large telecommunication company from 2019 to 2025	• New hire ghosting • Idle time
<i>Study 2:</i> Empirical tests of embeddedness-based mechanisms of new hire ghosting	Extend job embeddedness factors to new hire ghosting and examine how dishonesty/impulsiveness amplifies ghosting risk	Comparison sample of adults in the US ($N = 434$) who had either engaged in new hire ghosting behavior within the last year ($n = 205$) or who have never ghosted and are currently employed ($n = 229$)	Embeddedness factors: • Fit: Organizational attractiveness • Links: Employee referrals, company communication • Sacrifice: Financial security, external job offers Trait risk factors: • Impulsivity, dishonesty

show, yielding an overall new hire ghosting rate of 4.1%. As shown in Figure 2, monthly ghosting rates rose prominently at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from its pre-pandemic baseline, briefly exceeding 5% in April and May 2020, peaking at 6.1% in April 2020. Ghosting rates then declined from this peak in subsequent years but remained at elevated levels relative to pre-pandemic months through 2021, 2022, and into 2025. Taken together, these patterns suggest that new hire ghosting is an emerging and novel, but persistent and stable feature of modern organizational staffing outcomes.

Next, we examined whether there were observable differences across major job families in our data. Using the recoded groupings, telemarketing roles had the highest ghosting rate, with 3573 ghosting events out of 78,772 accepted offers (4.5%). Customer service roles showed a slightly lower rate, with 2432 ghosting events among 64,382 offers (3.8%), and field service

technician roles had the lowest rate, with 286 ghosting events out of 9651 offers (3.0%). These substantive differences in job family ghosting rates support the idea that job characteristics influencing perceived fit and overall job appeal affect the likelihood of new hire ghosting.

Finally, because discussions about ghosting behavior often gravitate toward differences in generational characteristics, we briefly looked at whether ghosting rates vary across different age groups. Contrary to this narrative, we found the overall correlation between linear age at hire and new hire ghosting behavior was essentially zero ($r = -0.02$), and our results also indicate that all age groups show at least some level of ghosting. Baby Boomers (new hires born 1946–1965) had the lowest rate at 1.6%, followed by Gen X (born 1965–1980) at 3.6%. Millennials (born 1981–1996) had the highest rate at 4.6%, followed by Gen Z (born 1996–2012) at 3.9%. These results support the idea that

**FIGURE 2** | Monthly new hire ghosting rates among accepted offers, with 95% confidence intervals (shaded).

ghosting rates do indeed differ as a function of new hire age. However, these differences are more nuanced than often assumed. For example, in our data, Gen Z's ghosting rates were consistently lower than Millennials' and only slightly higher than Gen X, and significant ghosting rates were observed across all four generations. This challenges the assumption that ghosting is exclusively a characteristic of younger generations.

3.2.2 | Estimating the Impact of Ghosting on Organizational Staffing Functions

To translate new hire ghosting into financial impact, we followed the turnover cost logic outlined by Cascio, Boudreau, and Fink (2019). Specifically, we decomposed the incremental cost of a ghosted hire (relative to that person starting as planned) into three components.

Recruitment costs (C_R) represent direct selection-related expenses associated with the hire (e.g., recruiter labor, advertising, assessments, and background checks). For this value, the partner organization supplied an average cost-per-hire estimate for these roles (\$5877).

Onboarding and administrative costs (C_O) reflect post-acceptance, pre-start administrative effort (HR and supervisor time for onboarding paperwork, scheduling, systems setup, and first-day preparation). We estimated C_O using an estimate of the average fully loaded hourly pay of staffing administrators supplied by the organization (\$50), multiplied by hours spent on these activities. We then varied these inputs across conservative, moderate, and aggressive scenarios. In the conservative scenario, we assumed that HR, supervisors, and IT staff together spent approximately 4 h on post-acceptance onboarding activities for the ghosted hire, yielding an estimate of $C_O = \$200$ (4 h $\times$ \$50). The moderate and aggressive scenarios assumed 8 and 12 total hours of combined effort, respectively, corresponding to $C_O = \$400$ and $C_O = \$600$.

Productivity shortfall (C_P) captures output lost when ghosting extends the vacancy beyond the planned start date. To estimate this, we approximated the average employee financial contributions due to job performance, the degree to which existing employees could cover the expected work from the ghosted employee, and the length of time the role was vacant because of ghosting. As a conservative estimate, we assumed that employee monetary value was equal to their compensation, even though monetary value is likely much greater (e.g., Roth et al. 2002; Schmidt et al. 1979; Schmidt et al. 1982). This was estimated as \$200 per day (\$50,000 annual role salary divided by 250 work-days). Next, we estimated the degree of work that coworkers, overtime, or temporary arrangements could cover during the period between ghosting and refilling the role. We varied this from a conservative estimate of 50% to a more aggressive estimate of 20% replicated productivity. Finally, we used the organization's average offer-to-first day of work interval (25.27 days) as a benchmark for vacancy length and varied this across conservative to aggressive scenarios.

In the most conservative scenario, we assumed that ghosting generated 15 days of additional vacancy and that coworkers, overtime, or temporary arrangements could effectively cover

half (50%) of the role's work, which yields $C_P = \$1500$ per employee ($\$200 \times 15 \text{ days} \times 0.50$). In the moderate scenario, we assumed that ghosting extended the vacancy by the full average offer-to-first day interval (25 days). We once again assumed 50% productivity coverage via coworkers, overtime, or temporary arrangements. In this moderate scenario, C_P was estimated as \$2500 per employee. In the aggressive scenario, we assumed that the company had to re-open the job position and therefore go through the entire hiring, offer, and post-offer cycle again, with 25 days estimated for hiring and 25 days for offer-to-start date, resulting in 50 total days of lost/reduced productivity. Furthermore, we assumed that only 20% of the work could be covered, so that 80% of the work was effectively lost. This more aggressive estimate resulted in $C_P = \$8000$ per employee ($\$200 \times 50 \text{ days} \times 0.8$).

To avoid double-counting, activities assigned to C_O were not included in C_R . We also omit a separate ramp-up term commonly used in other utility analyses, because the replacement's time-to-proficiency is unchanged by ghosting. Thus, the total incremental cost of ghosting was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Total Ghosting Cost} = N_{\text{ghost}} \times (C_R + C_O + C_P).$$

As shown in Table 3, the conservative scenario yielded an estimated cost of \$7577 per ghosted hire. Multiplying this figure by the 6455 new hire ghosts accumulated over the seven years of our data collection window resulted in an estimated total cost of \$48.9 million (\$6.9 million per year). In the moderate scenario, the per-ghost estimate rose to \$8,777, resulting in a total of \$56.7 million in ghosting-related costs (\$8.1 million per year). The aggressive scenario reflects more intensive onboarding activities and greater productivity loss, yielding a cost of \$14,477 per ghosted hire, or \$93.4 million in total costs (\$13.3 million per year). Taken together, these scenarios demonstrate that new hire ghosting can impose substantial cumulative financial costs on organizations. In high-volume staffing systems, even relatively modest ghosting rates can result in multimillion-dollar losses each year, underscoring the value of better understanding the context and causes surrounding this emerging staffing phenomenon.

3.2.3 | Ancillary Analysis

Finally, we conducted an ancillary analysis exploring a practical lever that organizations can target to reduce ghosting behavior, specifically reducing the length of time between offer acceptance and start date. From an embeddedness perspective, longer idle periods are expected to weaken emerging fit, links, and sacrifice, creating more opportunities for candidates to disengage before day one.¹ Supporting this notion, both the bivariate correlation ($r = 0.11$) and the results of a logistic regression showed that longer offer-to-hire intervals were indeed associated with higher odds of ghosting ($b = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$, odds ratio = 1.22). Specifically, this finding suggests that each additional week of delay accumulated between the accepted offer and the hire date was associated with a roughly 22% increase in the odds that an accepted candidate would ultimately ghost. This pattern suggests that compressing the time from

TABLE 3 | Estimated financial impact of new hire ghosting under alternative cost assumptions.

Scenario	C_R	C_O	C_P	Cost per ghosted hire	Annual cost	Total cost
Conservative	\$5877	\$200	\$1500	\$7577	\$6,987,076	\$48,909,535
Moderate	\$5877	\$400	\$2500	\$8777	\$8,093,647	\$56,655,535
Aggressive	\$5877	\$600	\$8000	\$14,477	\$13,349,862	\$93,449,035

Note: Estimates are based on 6455 new hire ghosts observed over a 7-year period. All monetary values are in US dollars. Abbreviations: C_O , onboarding and administrative costs; C_P , vacancy-period productivity shortfall; C_R , recruitment costs.

offer to start may be a practical means of strengthening pre-entry embeddedness and reducing the risk of ghosting.

3.3 | Discussion—Study 1

The results of Study 1 demonstrate that new hire ghosting is neither rare nor trivial in this context. Roughly 1 in 25 accepted offers resulted in a no-call, no-show. Rates increased around the onset of COVID-19 and remained elevated thereafter, and plausible cost scenarios suggest substantial recurring financial losses. We also observed patterned variation in ghosting across job families and age cohorts and found that longer offer-to-hire intervals were associated with higher odds of ghosting, highlighting speed to start as a promising structural lever. However, these archival data provide only indirect insight into the psychological forces that make ghosting more or less likely. Job family and generation serve as crude proxies for perceived fit and individual tendencies, and the archival nature of the data obscures pre-entry ties, perceived sacrifice, or trait risk. In Study 2, we therefore turn to a targeted survey of recent ghosters and a comparison of non-ghosters to examine embeddedness and trait risk mechanisms more precisely.

4 | Study 2

In Study 2, we directly examine the psychological forces that lead to new hire ghosting by comparing a sample of individuals across industries and jobs who had recently ghosted with those who had never done so. Guided by our embeddedness framework (Figure 1), we examined pre-entry fit, links, and sacrifice, alongside dispositional tendencies of honesty and impulsivity, and their influence on new hire ghosting. Given the limited research on new hire ghosting, we also inductively explored qualitative ghosting justifications to provide a richer foundation of detail regarding ghosting mechanisms and nuances that existing theory might overlook.

4.1 | Methods—Study 2

4.1.1 | Participants

Study 2 compared a sample of individuals who had recently engaged in new hire ghosting against a sample of currently employed adults who had never ghosted. We began by sending out a broad screening survey to identify individuals that might fall within each of these groups. A total of 9040 Prolific (Palan and Schitter 2018) respondents from the United States were surveyed in late 2024. The screening survey asked respondents a series of questions regarding their employment status. First, they were asked, “Have you ever accepted a job with an organization but did not show up for the first day of work without telling them?” To ensure comprehension, if respondents

selected “Yes,” we asked a confirmation question to ensure they had understood the question. If they positively endorsed both questions, the respondent was categorized as a “new hire ghost.” We then asked how recently the last event occurred. Of the respondents in the screening sample, 352 (3.9%) indicated they had new hire ghosted within the past year.

Approximately 5–7 days after the pilot study, these 352 respondents were then sent a second survey asking them questions about the job they ghosted. Participants were paid \$3.00 for completing the second survey. In the second survey, respondents were informed they were sampled because they had indicated that they had recently accepted a job with an organization, but did not show up for the first day of work without notifying the employer.

In addition to the group of respondents who had ghosted, a random subset of respondents who indicated they had never ghosted an organization and were currently employed was identified as an “employed sample.” They were sent the same survey but responded with respect to their current job. Of the new hire ghosts, 205 responded to the second survey and passed attention checks (reading comprehension check, directed responding). Of the employed adults, 229 responded to the second survey and passed attention checks. This resulted in a final sample of 434 respondents. In our analyses, a new hire ghosting variable represented whether the individual had ghosted a job in the last year (1 = ghosters, 0 = non-ghosters). Overall, the sample was diverse in terms of race (60% White, 21% Black, 9% Hispanic), gender (52% female), and age (average = 37.6).

4.1.2 | Embeddedness Measures

All participants responded to self-report measures to assess embeddedness factors associated with links, fit, and sacrifice. For the new hire ghosting sample, situational variables were responded to with respect to the job they ghosted. For the employed sample, all embeddedness variables were responded to with respect to their current job.

4.1.2.1 | Fit Measures. Perceptions of organizational attractiveness were used to represent embeddedness-based fit using Lievens et al. ’s (2005) four-item measure of organizational attractiveness. The measure addresses perceptions of both job and organizational fit (e.g., “a job at the company is appealing to me”, “the company is attractive to me as a place for employment”). Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Internal consistency (α) was 0.89.

4.1.2.2 | Link Measures. Several measures were included to reflect embeddedness links. First, we measured whether an

existing employee at the company referred respondents when hired. A referral imports existing social ties into the organization, therefore raising the social and reputational costs of no-contact exit. Referrals were coded 0–1, with 1 coded as referral = yes. Of the respondents, 24% were referred by an employee at the company.

Second, we measured applicant satisfaction with the quality of company communications. This was operationalized using Bauer et al.'s (2001) scale of two-way communication, which addresses satisfaction with the quality and quantity of communication. When communication is sparse or delayed, embeddedness ties fail to solidify, lowering the interpersonal friction that would otherwise deter a silent exit. The five-item measure, using a 7-point Likert scale, exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$).

4.1.2.3 | Sacrifice Measure. Several measures were incorporated to account for embeddedness-based sacrifice. First, we assessed financial security. Individuals with lower financial security tend to be more sensitive to delays and uncertainty before their first paycheck, which reduces the perceived cost of walking away. We measured financial security by writing items based on work by Munyon (2008). The items included “I have enough savings for an emergency”, “I have financial stability”, and “I struggle paying for unexpected expenses.”² Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Note that judgments were based on current levels of financial security and not recollections at the time of ghosting. However, the ghosting sample had ghosted within the previous year, and therefore, financial security levels are likely to have remained relatively consistent over time. Nonetheless, this is a limitation.

Because this was a new scale, we gathered content validity judgments and collected pilot sample data before administering it to the primary sample. Two trained industrial & organizational psychologists, independent from the author team, made content validity judgments of each item regarding the degree to which the item assessed financial security, with all items being judged as “Well” or “Very well.” Additionally, a pilot data collection of 178 employed Prolific respondents was also performed. The scale had acceptable internal consistency reliability (0.94) and a strong first-factor eigenvalue (variance = 87%). In the primary sample, the scale exhibited a reliability (α) of 0.93.

Second, we measured external job offers. External offers function as a pre-entry sacrifice factor because they alter what candidates believe they would forfeit by honoring the original offer. When a competing opportunity promises better pay or conditions, the perceived loss from abandoning the first employer shrinks, therefore weakening the restraint that might discourage ghosting. In contrast, when no compelling alternative exists, the anticipated loss of a secured role heightens the cost of walking away without notice. External offers were measured using the external offers items from Griffeth et al. (2005, $\alpha = 0.80$) on a 7-point Likert scale.

4.1.3 | Trait Measures

In addition to the embeddedness factors, we assessed dispositional characteristics likely to amplify ghosting risk.

4.1.3.1 | Integrity/Honesty. First, we measured integrity/honesty. Dishonesty weakens the moral restraint that normally amplifies early embeddedness, making a silent exit feel more permissible. To assess integrity/honesty, we used the 10-item IPIP HEXACO Honesty scale based on Ashton et al. (2007). Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.89$).

4.1.3.2 | Impulsivity. Second, we assessed impulsivity. Higher impulsivity short-circuits deliberation, increasing the likelihood that candidates act abruptly and withdraw without communicating. Impulsivity was assessed using the Impulsive Behavior scale from Cyders et al. (2014). Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.86$).

4.1.4 | Qualitative Analysis of New Hire Ghosting Justifications

Finally, we asked the ghosting sample to describe their reasons for ghosting. Responses to these questions allowed for a rich, inductive analysis of ghosting reasons that could provide color to our expansion of the embeddedness theory, while potentially identifying alternative explanations for new hire ghosting. Specifically, respondents were asked to explain their ghosting behavior using an open-ended comment box. One of the study authors first reviewed all comments to gain familiarity with the data, then re-reviewed each comment, identifying common themes. The identified categories were refined for clarity and reduced for parsimony. Upon doing this, a second author independently reviewed all comments and assigned them to the categories. Finally, another author coded a random subset of the comments to assess interrater agreement, with an agreement of 93%. These comments were qualitatively reviewed alongside the quantitative analysis to understand how experiences aligned with or expanded the embeddedness-based mechanisms identified in the quantitative results.

4.2 | Results—Study 2

We organize our analysis around the three embeddedness dimensions: fit, links, and sacrifice. We then examine trait factors as amplifiers of the risk of new hire ghosting. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all Study 2 variables, and Table 5 presents logistic regression results testing the interaction between embeddedness and trait risk (low honesty and high impulsivity). Throughout, we integrate insights from participants' open-ended comments to add nuance and illustrate how these mechanisms appear, with a summary of qualitative analysis in Table 6. Finally, we conducted supplemental robustness checks that incorporated available organizational, background, and demographic covariates (organizational size, education, age, gender, and race). These checks did not alter the pattern of results. However, because Study 2 was not designed to support exact matching on offer timing or job start timing, group comparisons should still be interpreted with caution.

4.2.1 | Weak Pre-Entry Embeddedness Underlies New Hire Ghosting

4.2.1.1 | Fit Factors. First, we examined fit as a differentiator of new hire ghosting. Organizational attractiveness demonstrated a moderate-to-strong Pearson correlation with the dichotomous new hire ghosting variable ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$,

TABLE 4 | Descriptive statistics and correlations with new hire ghosting (Study 2).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. New hire ghosting (yes = 1)	0.47	0.50								
2. Fit—attractiveness	4.71	1.62	−0.40**							
3. Link—referral (yes = 1)	0.25	0.43	−0.18**	0.19**						
4. Link—company communication	5.55	1.24	−0.31**	0.45**	0.13**					
5. Sacrifice—financial security	4.10	1.90	−0.14**	0.32**	0.09	0.13**				
6. Sacrifice—external offers	4.54	1.54	0.12*	0.09	0.00	0.02	0.21**			
7. Honesty	5.80	1.04	−0.22**	0.26**	0.07	0.30**	0.12**	−0.01		
8. Impulsivity	2.81	0.82	0.28**	−0.12**	0.08	−0.28**	−0.09	0.08	−0.56**	

Note: ** and * indicate $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$. $N = 434$.

TABLE 5 | Predicting new hire ghosting (Study 2).

Variable	β (SE)	Odds Ratio	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	−0.14		
Embeddedness composite	−1.11	0.33	0.00
Honesty	0.04	1.04	0.79
Impulsivity	0.52	1.69	0.00
Embeddedness x honesty	0.05	1.05	0.75
Embeddedness x impulsivity	0.40	1.49	0.01

Note: All scores are standardized.

Table 2). Using logistic regression, we found support for the notion that new hires who had negative attractiveness perceptions were more likely to ghost ($\beta = -0.56$, $p < 0.01$, odds ratio = 0.57), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Consistent with these findings, a large percentage of the qualitative comments brought up concerns around the company's reputation (24%, “I also heard about recent scandals relating to diversity”) and critical perceptions of the work itself (23%, “I realized that the job wasn't what I truly wanted to do”). In many cases, job perceptions became increasingly negative post-offer, contributing to the decision to ghost. For example, several respondents indicated that things they learned after the offer, either from familiar others or through increased exposure to the company, resulted in a change of heart (e.g., “I was able to talk to various people who knew the company well and they had given me enough information to change my mind about wanting to work for this employer”), therefore leading to a weakening of attractiveness and attachment (“after some deliberation I decided I really didn't like or want this job and didn't feel it would be a good place or fit for me”). These patterns reinforce that early fit perceptions are pivotal and that declines in perceived compatibility can quickly erode pre-entry attachment.

4.2.1.2 | Link Factors. Next, we examined relationships between embeddedness link factors and new hire ghosting. As expected, logistic regression revealed that referrals were significantly less likely to engage in new hire ghosting behavior ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.86$, $p < 0.01$, odds ratio = 0.42). Similarly, better company communications were found to be negatively associated with new hire ghosting ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.57$, $p < 0.01$, odds ratio = 0.56), such that poorer-quality communications were related to increased

probability of new hire ghosting. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Consistent with this finding, communication issues were identified in 14% of the open-ended comments. In some cases, respondents mentioned delayed or poor company communication as a rationale for ghosting. For example, one respondent said, “I told her I had appointments set that week and if I could start later. She never responded so I never went.” Another indicated, “I never got a response even with a follow up email. Since I couldn't get my simple questions answered by the company, I decided not to report for work.” In other cases, the tone of the communication was emphasized “I kept getting emails with passive aggressive verbiage on how they want me to perform in training. I automatically started getting group messages that weren't directed toward me but to other team members and they seem too aggressive.” Interestingly, respondents also discussed how perceptions of future coworkers could make the job less appealing (“The way the staff, who were suppose to be my coworkers, treated me made me hesitant”; “The coworkers were also not the most desirable types of people, and it was a warehouse setting”). Together, these patterns suggest that inconsistent or inconsiderate communication, as well as perceived incompatibility with other people in the organization, undermines interpersonal links that might otherwise typically deter silent withdrawal.

External “pull factors” were also mentioned as a source of weakening links, resulting in ghosting. Unexpected life events or family issues were recurring examples of this. Major life events were listed in 11% of ghosting rationales, including examples such as family sicknesses and losing childcare (“A family member fell seriously ill, demanding my immediate attention and support”) or family scheduling issues (“family emergency became a primary concern, necessitating a shift in focus to personal responsibilities”). In these cases, external situations diminished the likelihood of developing strong internal bonds within the newly hired company, therefore increasing the probability of ghosting behavior.

4.2.1.3 | Sacrifice Factors. Finally, we examined financial security and external offers as factors undermining embeddedness. Perceptions of strong personal financial security were found to be weakly but significantly related to new hire ghosting ($r = -0.14$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.15$, odds ratio = 0.86), such that individuals who felt more secure were slightly less likely than those who felt less secure. The presence of an external job offer

TABLE 6 | Summary of qualitative descriptions of ghosting (Study 2).

Theme	Example comments	% discussed	Embeddedness mechanism
Alternate job	“...I had not heard back from my first choice for several weeks and figured that I had not been selected for the job. Two days before I was supposed to start the accepted position, my preferred job called and let me know I could start immediately if available. I Said no problem, and never showed up to my first day at the job I originally accepted” ... “I applied for [COMPANY] seasonal Package handler position and I got a job at another place, so, I didn't show up at all for my scheduled route or onboarding or any of that”	39%	Sacrifice
Pay	...”The company that I am currently working for offered to pay me a higher hourly amount to stay” ... “... became clear that it wouldn't be worth my time as the pay was low and they were wanting to working me way to much when it came to hours i just felt like i should be getting paid more”	29%	Sacrifice
Negative company perception	 “I found out from a friend that worked there that the establishment was a bit shady” “doubts about the company's culture”	24%	Fit
Work itself	... “the position met some of my requirements, but not all” ... “I decided I couldn't actually handle the job with the additional details sprung on me after I accepted”	23%	Fit
Family or scheduling issues	... “I did a dry run of the commute the day before my start date and it took nearly three and a half hours. I Have children and childcare duties that are not conducive with such a commute.” ... “Surprisingly my application was accepted but i was told to start less than 24 h when I got the email. There is no way I can start the following day since the job is outside my state”	17%	Individual characteristic
Communication issues	...”She said it would just take 30 min... She told me to show up 5 h early. I Was dumbfounded. I Had to work a 15 h day?” ... “She wanted me to start on Monday at 5 am and she told me Saturday afternoon. I Told her I had appointments set that week and if I could start later. She never responded so I never went.”	14%	Links
Anxiety/mental health/ substance abuse	... “I was nervous and anxiety took over.” ... “I also was struggling with alcoholism, and had relapsed as soon as I returned from out of state. I Woke up mildly still drunk but sober enough to ignore my new supervisor's phone call”	13%	Individual characteristic
Major life event	... “A family member fell seriously ill, demanding my immediate attention and support” ... “I did not show up on the first day of resumption because of family emergency, I needed to take my daughter to the hospital after she sustained some injuries from a car accident that morning”	11%	Individual characteristic
Advancement opportunity	“However, after accepting the offer, I received another job offer that aligned better with my long-term goals” ... “I was very conflicted toward my career. What move should i ultimately make was the question. i Thought the new job was the answer, but i decided against going in the end”..	9%	Fit
Other	... “I got a crucial email that would violate my NDA” ... “I came to believe that job was a scam”	7%	Other

(Continues)

TABLE 6 | (Continued)

Theme	Example comments	% discussed	Embeddedness mechanism
Coworkers	... “the way the staff, who were suppose to be my coworkers, treated me made me hesitant” ... “the coworkers were also not the most desirable types of people”	5%	Fit Links

post acceptance was also weakly but positively related to new hire ghosting ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.16$, odds ratio = 1.18). These results suggest that sacrifice-related factors contribute to new hire ghosting by affecting the perceived cost of exit, albeit to a lesser extent than the other factors. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Consistent with these findings, open-ended comments revealed that external offers were often cited in the rationale for reneging. In fact, the most common explanation for ghosting was having an alternate job offer (39%, “I applied for several jobs at the same time and accepted a position for a job that was all right, but not my first choice”). These were not always planned either, with 21% of respondents indicating that they received an unexpected job offer (“out of the blue I received a response from one manufacturing plant I had applied for multiple times over the years and asked me to come in that day for an interview”). One respondent said, “My current job then offered me a promotion, including a significant raise in pay. I accepted the terms of the promotion and discarded the existing job”, indicating a weakening of the sacrifice factor for the ghosted position. Additionally, pay considerations were commonly described in the comments (29%, “we realize the money won’t be enough for our expenses and paying of bills”), reinforcing the role of financial security as a meaningful pre-entry sacrifice factor.

4.2.2 | Trait Amplifiers of New Hire Ghosting

Next, we examined the relationship between personality traits and new hire ghosting. Bivariate correlations and logistic regressions both showed that impulsivity positively predicted new hire ghosting ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.71$, odds ratio = 2.05), whereas honesty negatively predicted new hire ghosting ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.43$, odds ratio = 0.63).

In Hypotheses 4a and 4b, we predicted that dishonesty and impulsivity would interact with embeddedness, such that the negative relationship between embeddedness and ghosting would be weaker for individuals with low honesty and high impulsivity. To test this prediction, we first formed an overall embeddedness composite score by summing fit, links, and sacrifice factors into an aggregate score. All measures were z-scored prior to forming the composite. We then computed interaction terms between embeddedness and honesty, as well as between embeddedness and impulsivity.

As shown in Table 5, trait honesty did not significantly moderate the relationship between the embeddedness composite and ghosting ($\beta = 0.05$, $p > 0.05$, odds ratio = 1.05). As such, Hypothesis 4a was not supported. In contrast, impulsivity was found to moderate the embeddedness-ghosting relationship

($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.05$, odds ratio = 1.49). As shown in Figure 3, this pattern of effects suggests the mitigating influence of embeddedness factors on ghosting was substantially more pronounced among individuals lower versus high in impulsivity (plotted at -1 and $+1$ standard deviations). Thus, Hypothesis 4b was supported. Interestingly, we also found that the main effect of honesty on ghosting outcomes became statistically non-significant when impulsivity was included in the model.

Although traits exhibited relevance to ghosting within the quantitative analysis (both via zero-order effects and an interactive effect for impulsivity), respondents did not frequently describe themselves in trait-based terms within their narrative responses. When they did, they tended not to identify their own personality as the primary cause described for the ghosting behavior. This tendency is consistent with the idea that people are prone to maintain positive views of themselves (e.g., Paulhus 1984) and to attribute poor behavior to external causes (Gawronski 2004). For instance, when someone chooses to ghost an employer, it is expected that they are more likely to attribute the cause to situational factors (e.g., blaming the company or job) rather than personal, dispositional flaws (e.g., low integrity, high impulsivity). Nonetheless, there were a few examples of people within the ghosting sample describing themselves as hasty (“I am someone who will change their minds last minute and change my plan if my mood calls for it”) or making decisions based on limited premeditation (“I had completely forgotten that I had accepted the job”; “just didn’t think about it”).

Furthermore, 13% of the comments brought up explanations built around personal experiences of anxiety (“I was nervous and anxiety took over”), mental health issues (“I have a problem with self-sabotaging jobs due to anxiety and low self-esteem”), or substance abuse issues (“I also was struggling with alcoholism, and had relapsed as soon as I returned from out of state. I woke up mildly still drunk but sober enough to ignore my new supervisor’s phone call”). Some respondents articulated strong conflict avoidance, reporting feeling ashamed and regret about their decision (“I still feel terrible to this day. I think I always will”; “I should have at least called them. My anxiety and stress took over and I was weak in the moment”). Taken together, these narratives illustrate how higher impulsivity and lower honesty, anxiety, and conflict-avoidant tendencies press against social norms to influence new hire ghosting.

4.3 | Discussion—Study 2

Study 2 offered support for the notion that embeddedness theory can be meaningfully extended to the post-offer acceptance period. Poor perceived fit (lower organizational attractiveness),

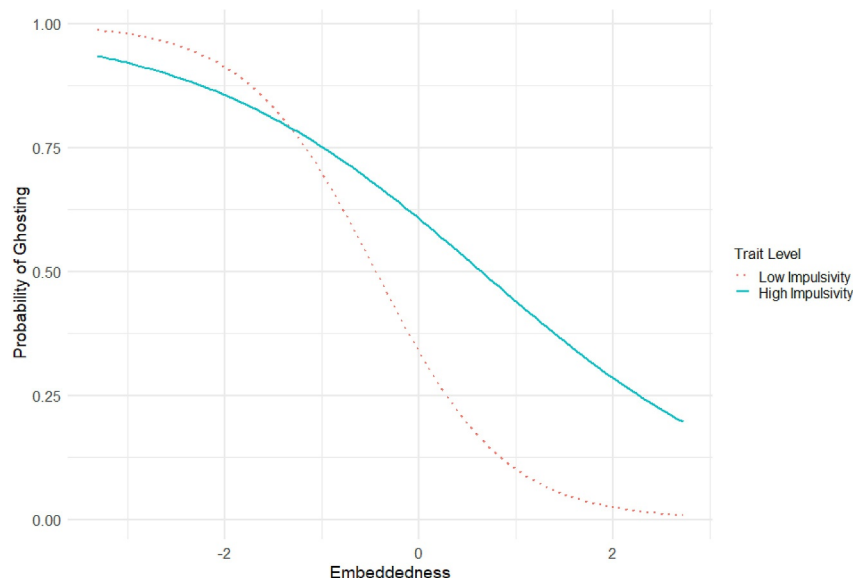


FIGURE 3 | Embeddedness and new hire ghosting as a function of impulsivity. Embeddedness is an equally weighted composite score of the fit, link, and sacrifice variables. Impulsivity scores are plotted at -1 and $+1$ standard deviations.

weaker links (e.g., absence of referrals, lower-quality pre-entry communication), and changes to sacrifice (greater financial insecurity, more external job opportunities) were associated with a higher likelihood of ghosting. Furthermore, dishonesty and high impulsivity were associated with ghosting, with impulsivity moderating the embeddedness-ghosting relationship, such that the relationship was weaker for those who were more impulsive. Qualitative responses reinforced these patterns, demonstrating, using the ghoster's own words, how declining perceptions of fit, negative pre-entry interactions with existing employees, financial strain, alternative offers, and anxiety combined to make silent withdrawal feel easier.

5 | General Discussion

New hire ghosting poses significant organizational challenges, and yet it remains understudied in the academic literature. This paper offers the first detailed theoretical and empirical examination of new hire ghosting. Framing new hire ghosting as a form of early withdrawal (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2005; Porter et al. 1974; Vandenberg and Self 1993), we examined the base rate and financial implications of this phenomenon within a real world operational setting. Additionally, we extend job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al. 2001) to the post-offer, pre-start date period, demonstrating that weak pre-entry embeddedness heightens withdrawal tendencies and increases the likelihood of non-contact exits. In the following sections, we describe the major theoretical and practical implications of this work.

5.1 | New Hire Ghosting Is Frequent and Costly

This research showed that new hire ghosting is both common and consequential. In a call center setting, 4.1% of accepted offers resulted in a no-call, no-show. This rate was similar to the proportion of individuals identified in the Study 2 sample, which spanned various industries and job types (3.9%). These rates suggest that new hire ghosting warrants closer scrutiny,

particularly given the apparent rising trend in ghosting over time and since the COVID-19 Pandemic (Study 1), where rates rose and stayed elevated. Even under conservative assumptions, the projected financial impact is substantial, amounting to over \$7500 per worker, and \$48.9 million (\$6.9 million annually) over the 7-year observational window, underscoring that ghosting represents a meaningful organizational cost.

5.2 | Extending Embeddedness Theory to the Post-Offer Pre-Start Period

The psychological mechanisms of new hire ghosting have remained largely unexplored. To address this limitation, this research extended job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al. 2001) to the post-offer pre-start period, therefore establishing several important findings.

First, organizational attraction was negatively related to new hire ghosting. Before entry, perceptions of the organization and job are tentative and unsettled, therefore weakening the usual frictions that discourage no-show withdrawal. Many new hires who ghosted described the organization and job negatively, and often learned new information post-offer. This information was discovered via various sources, including conversations with employees in the company, interactions, and poor communication by hiring managers, or based on general reassessment of existing signals. Thus, emerging negative cues can erode attraction during this fragile period, lowering psychological barriers to no-show withdrawal.

Second, embeddedness links were also found to be associated with the likelihood of ghosting. Links, or the interpersonal connections that bind individuals to their organizations (Mitchell et al. 2001), are generally weak before entry, as new hires have had limited contact with coworkers and routines that would otherwise build attachment. These concerns have become more pronounced over the last few decades, as the application process becomes increasingly computer-mediated,

stripping away traditional nonverbal cues, depersonalizing interactions, and reducing early opportunities to establish ties with the company. In turn, the relational restraints that might deter ghosting remain fragile, and as such, strong communication and connections within the company become paramount to link-based embeddedness.

We also found that poor organizational communication was related to higher ghosting rates (Study 2), as was idle time between acceptance date and start date (Study 1). Consistent, high-quality contact after acceptance helps to build a stronger connection. On the other hand, there were several instances where new hires expressed frustration with poor communications from hiring managers, leading to ambiguity about expectations or adverse reactions. Delayed or minimal communication leaves ties thin and enthusiasm fading, making silent withdrawal easier. On the other hand, hires referred by existing employees had lower ghosting likelihood, demonstrating that social ties established through referrals help reinforce early organizational commitment. The information shared by referrers and the reputational pressures tied to those relationships lead to friction that decreases the likelihood of leaving without notice.

Third, financial circumstances matter during the pre-entry period. Financially insecure candidates were more likely to ghost. This finding supports the idea that limited resources heighten sensitivity to delays and uncertainty during the pre-start period. This perceived urgency can lead to abandoning prior commitments without warning, as the need to improve financial situations outweighs the potential consequences of damaging employer relationships. Similarly, individuals with more external job offers were more prone to ghost, as greater outside options lower the perceived cost of abandoning the accepted role. In fact, the most frequently expressed reasons for new hire ghosting were receiving a better job offer elsewhere. Together, these patterns indicate that pre-entry sacrifice expectations shape whether new hires silently withdraw.

Finally, even though new hires encounter similar hiring conditions, only some ghosts, indicating that dispositional tendencies influence how pre-entry embeddedness translates into behavior. We found that impulsivity and dishonesty increased the likelihood of new hire ghosting. Importantly, embeddedness interacted with impulsivity, such that embeddedness was most preventative of ghosting among less impulsive individuals. On the other hand, individuals higher in impulsivity were less affected by embeddedness. Higher impulsivity is associated with poor planning and spur-of-the-moment decisions, therefore disrupting the way early embeddedness fosters commitment. Taken together, individual differences play a pivotal role in new hire ghosting decisions, underscoring how organizations might use targeted strategies for managing new hires based on trait predispositions.

5.3 | Practical Implications to Reduce New Hire Ghosting

The current research identified specific strategies that may help organizations prevent the likelihood of new hire ghosting. First, because longer offer-to-start delays were associated with greater

ghosting risk in Study 1, organizations should treat time-to-start as a retention lever. In practice, this means streamlining onboarding processes by reducing unnecessary delay between offer acceptance and day one, accelerating background checks and onboarding paperwork where possible, and prioritizing fast starts for roles or labor markets in which ghosting risk is highest.

Second, because weaker pre-entry communication was associated with ghosting in Study 2, organizations should formalize communication during the post-offer window rather than leaving it ad hoc. For example, employers can assign a named point of contact, schedule at least one pre-start check-in, provide a clear first-day plan, and maintain contact when start dates are delayed. The process of building connections can include other engagement activities as well (e.g., meet-ups, communication with the direct supervisor in case there are questions, and assigning a current employee as a “buddy” as part of onboarding). Collectively, these actions strengthen embeddedness links that are likely to prevent new hire ghosting.

Third, providing realistic job previews (Wanous 1973) should also reduce the risk of new hire ghosting. Respondents frequently cited learning negative information about work conditions post-offer as reasons for ghosting. Therefore, providing more information to applicants and new hires via realistic job previews, offering clearer discussion of work conditions, and more transparently communicating role demands should prevent mismatches in fit prior to offer acceptance.

Finally, this research suggests that organizations can use pre-hire assessments to identify applicants who are less likely to ghost. Specifically, pre-hire measures of honesty/integrity and impulsivity may be useful in identifying individuals with low ghosting propensity, which is particularly important given the observed interaction with embeddedness. There is a rich history of using trait-based measures to predict employee turnover (e.g., Zimmerman 2008), often with great success (e.g., Gibson et al. 2019). This study extends such applications to the phenomenon of new hire ghosting.

5.3.1 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study established new hire ghosting as an important organizational phenomenon and demonstrates that it can be understood by extending existing theory. However, several limitations should be noted. First, the archival and phenomenological data limit our ability to firmly establish causal relationships. Establishing strong evidence of causality is an important next step. Future research should employ experimental or longitudinal designs, especially to determine the effectiveness of specific strategies in preventing ghosting.

Second, our measure of financial security reflected participants' current financial status rather than their exact status at the time they ghosted. Although the ghosting events occurred within a year of the survey, making it likely that their financial circumstances remained relatively stable, this mismatch still represents a limitation. As such, future research should measure financial security closer to the time of the ghosting event or ask for retrospective accounts of participants' financial security.

Timing is another important factor that requires further exploration. Our study provides an overview of ghosting antecedents, but more research is needed to understand how timing affects new hire ghosting. For instance, how does embeddedness change throughout the application phase, at the time of offer acceptance, and when respondents actually decide to ghost? Investigating these temporal dynamics can help identify critical points in the onboarding process where interventions might be most effective. Additionally, Study 1 data were collected during the core of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the nature of work, communication patterns, and employment rates across the economy. Thus, the pandemic substantially altered hiring practices and candidate behavior. Changes in remote work prevalence, communication norms, and the labor market may have influenced both embeddedness formation and withdrawal decisions. As such, the generalizability of our findings should be interpreted with caution, and future research could model how macro events interact with pre-entry withdrawal dynamics.

Finally, future research should consider a broader range of factors that influence new hire ghosting. Although we focused on embeddedness factors and individual traits, other elements, such as more specific job perceptions (e.g., pay satisfaction), other personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness), industry-specific trends, specific shock events, cultural differences, and economic conditions, might also play significant roles in new hire ghosting.

6 | Conclusion

Similar to traditional forms of turnover, new hire ghosting presents a major challenge to organizations. Together, these results highlight the complex nature of new hire ghosting and how it is shaped by fragile early embeddedness and individual trait factors. By extending embeddedness theory, organizations gain a theoretical understanding of this phenomenon, enabling them to develop proactive strategies to predict and reduce ghosting during the pre-start period. Collectively, this research lays a foundation for further exploration into new hire ghosting, and we urge for more research attention going forward.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Endnotes

¹ Regarding communication between the company and new hire during this period, most new hire communication was handled centrally by the company's HR team, with a focus on completing required onboarding steps. Recruiters typically maintained some outreach during onboarding to remind new hires of pending tasks, though frequency and quality varied substantially and were not measured. Although company communication protocols existed, there was no mechanism to verify whether they are followed.

² Note that judgments were based on current levels of financial security and not recollections at the time of ghosting. However, the ghosting sample had ghosted within the previous year, and therefore, financial

security levels are likely to have remained relatively consistent over time. Nonetheless, this is a limitation.

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