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A Web of Applicant Attraction: Person–Organization Fit in the Context of Web-Based Recruitment

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Applicant attraction was examined in the context of Web-based recruitment. A person–organization (P-O) fit framework was adopted to examine how the provision of feedback to individuals regarding their potential P-O fit with an organization related to attraction. Objective and subjective P-O fit, agreement with fit feedback, and self-esteem also were examined in relation to attraction. Results of an experiment that manipulated fit feedback level after a self-assessment provided by a fictitious company Web site found that both feedback level and objective P-O fit were positively related to attraction. These relationships were fully mediated by subjective P-O fit. In addition, attraction was related to the interaction of objective fit, feedback, and agreement and objective fit, feedback, and self-esteem. Implications and future Web-based recruitment research directions are discussed.

The importance of recruitment in organizations is receiving increased recognition from both the popular and academic press (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Martinez, 2000; Taylor & Collins, 2000). Researchers have called for more attention to issues pertaining to the applicant generation stage of recruitment and to individuals' attraction to organizations in particular (e.g., Barber, 1998). Several studies have adopted a person–organization (P-O) fit framework to examine antecedents of applicant attraction. These studies generally have found that higher levels of P-O fit are associated with greater attraction to organizations (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997; Turban & Keon, 1993; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow, & Si, 2001). Researchers have also begun to call for an increased emphasis on the cognitive processes through which recruitment sources influence outcomes such as attraction. For example, Breaugh and Starke (2000) suggested that when sources provide specific, personally relevant recruitment information to potential applicants, those applicants are likely to engage in more systematic processing of the information.

One recruitment source that is receiving increased use is the World Wide Web. The advent of Web technology over the last decade has resulted in its rapidly growing use for both recruitment purposes (Cappelli, 2001; Martin, 1998) and job search (Crispen & Mehler, 2000). In fact, recent statistics point out that 90% of large U.S. companies now use the Web in their recruitment efforts (cf. Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000) and that 12% use online screening tools (Cappelli, 2001). Furthermore, the Web can reduce costs by up to 95% over those of traditional recruitment sources and has narrowed hiring cycle time by approximately 25% (cf. Cober et al., 2000). However, despite the growing popularity of Web recruitment, researchers know little about its potential to influence applicant attraction.

The few studies that have focused on Web-based recruitment have been descriptive in nature. For example, Kuhn and Skuterud (2000) compared job seekers' use of online and traditional recruitment sources and found that Internet use rates exceeded those of traditional sources such as employment agencies and professional organizations. Scheu, Ryan, and Nona (1999) studied relationships between organizational familiarity, Web site aesthetics, and applicant attraction. They found that applicant perceptions of a company changed after viewing the company's Web site and that site design impressions were positively related to application intentions.

Issues related to P-O fit also should be evaluated when considering Web-based recruitment. This is particularly important because it is now possible for potential applicants to provide information regarding their value preferences via the Web and to receive tailored feedback regarding their potential P-O fit. This necessitates an extension of past P-O fit research because this research has primarily considered P-O fit that is inferred by individuals instead of explicitly provided to them in the form of tailored feedback.

When considering the provision of feedback to potential applicants regarding their likely P-O fit, issues such as an individual's

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level of agreement with the feedback also become important. That is, P-O fit feedback might not be consistent with an individual's actual or perceived fit. Agreement with P-O fit feedback might therefore influence the degree to which an individual internalizes the feedback, and thus, the degree to which such feedback might influence his or her attraction level (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Furthermore, an interactionist perspective suggests that individual difference variables and situational variables interact to predict individual and organizational outcomes (Chatman, 1989). Specifically, individual differences in self-esteem might affect the degree to which P-O fit feedback influences attraction. For example, it might be the case that an individual with high self-esteem is less likely to be influenced by P-O fit feedback when determining attraction (Brockner, 1988). Finally, it is important to differentiate between objective P-O fit and subjective P-O fit and to examine how each relates to attraction. Consistent with past research, our use of objective P-O fit refers to an individual's actual, or measured, values congruence with an organization, whereas subjective P-O fit refers to the level of perceived values congruence (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996).

This study had four goals. First, consistent with past research, we examined objective P-O fit and its relationship to applicant attraction. Second, we extended past work on P-O fit by considering the effects of providing personally relevant environmental cues in the form of P-O fit feedback to potential applicants prior to any formal contact with organizational representatives. Third, we considered how an individual's level of agreement with P-O fit feedback and his or her self-esteem might moderate relationships between the feedback, objective P-O fit, and attraction. Finally, we examined subjective P-O fit as a potential mediator of relationships with attraction.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

To examine the utility of the World Wide Web for addressing issues of applicant attraction, we drew on several theoretical frameworks and based our hypotheses on the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, the model predicts that both objective P-O fit and level of P-O fit feedback relate to attraction. The model also suggests that agreement with P-O fit feedback and self-esteem act as moderators of relationships between objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and attraction. Furthermore, subjective P-O fit is predicted to fully mediate all of the relationships with attraction.

Objective P-O Fit and Attraction

Studies by Schneider and other researchers have suggested that work values are a primary characteristic by which individuals judge their P-O fit (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Kristof, 1996; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). The expected outcomes of P-O fit are described by Schneider's (1987) attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) theoretical framework and Byrne's (1971) similarity–attraction paradigm. Both of these theories suggest that individuals are attracted to and seek employment with organizations that exhibit characteristics similar to their own. Previous research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between an individual's objective P-O fit with an organization and outcomes such as attraction, commitment, and decreased turnover (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). We expected a similar relationship to hold with attraction in the present study.

Hypothesis 1: Objective P-O fit with an organization is positively related to attraction.

Level of P-O Fit Feedback and Attraction

Normally, attraction is based on inferences about the available information in one's environment regarding an organization. Information such as recruitment brochures, advertisements, word of mouth, or corporate reputation provide environmental cues that individuals use in determining relative levels of attraction to organizations or decisions to interview with organizations (e.g.,

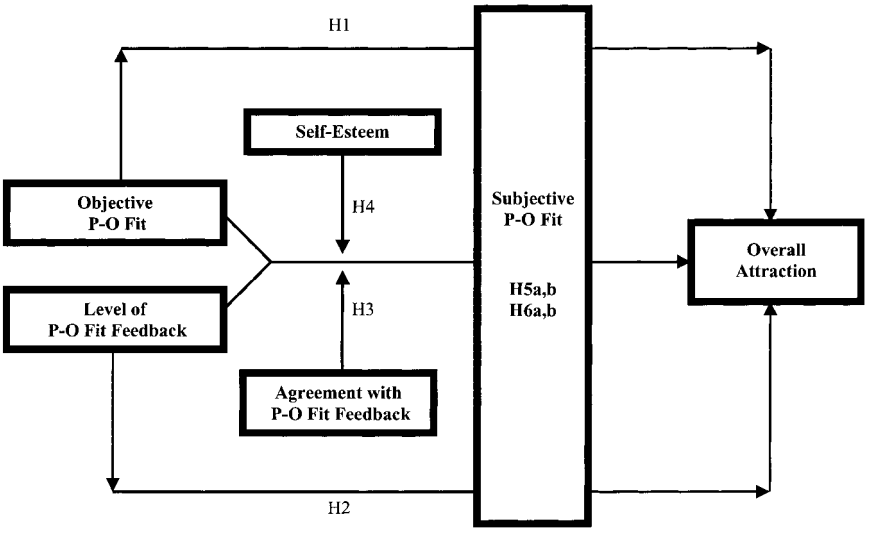


Figure 1. Proposed relationships among study variables. H = hypothesis; P-O = person–organization.

Barber & Roehling, 1993; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Turban & Greening, 1996). These cues, however, usually are not directed toward specific individuals, especially prior to contact with organizational representatives.

Given that many of these cues, which are not directed toward specific individuals, have been shown to link to outcomes such as attraction, it is even more likely that environmental cues that are directed specifically toward an individual influence his or her attraction level. This follows from Eagly and Chaiken's (1984) systematic–heuristic model of persuasion, which suggests that messages that are specific and provide personally relevant information are more likely to elicit systematic information processing. Systematic processing should, in turn, cause this information to play a greater role in determining attraction. Also, social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that individuals rely on salient cues from their environment when forming attitudes. Therefore, we expected that the provision of specific feedback to an individual regarding his or her potential P-O fit would influence them to assimilate that feedback into their overall determination of attraction.

Hypothesis 2: Level of P-O fit feedback influences individuals' levels of attraction such that those receiving feedback indicating a high P-O fit are more attracted, whereas those receiving feedback indicating a low P-O fit are less attracted.

Moderating Effects of Agreement and Self-Esteem

Because P-O fit feedback may differ from an individual's perception of fit, agreement with the feedback provided is a potentially important moderating variable that may determine the degree to which an individual is influenced by either his or her level of objective P-O fit or the level of P-O fit feedback in determining attraction. Specifically, to the degree that P-O fit feedback deviates from an individual's perception of fit, cognitive dissonance likely exists (Festinger, 1957). Dissonance theory and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981) predict that feedback discrepancies might motivate the use of sense-making techniques to either discount and disagree with the feedback or rationalize and accept the feedback (Brett & Atwater, 2001; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The level of agreement with the feedback that emerges from this sense-making process should moderate the degree to which attraction is influenced by either the feedback or by an individual's level of objective P-O fit.

Hypothesis 3: P-O fit feedback, objective P-O fit, and level of agreement with fit feedback interact in predicting attraction such that the level of fit feedback relates more strongly to attraction when agreement is higher rather than lower, whereas objective P-O fit relates more strongly to attraction when agreement is lower rather than higher.

Individual differences in self-esteem also might predict the degree to which individuals are influenced by either objective P-O fit or feedback regarding potential fit. Brockner's (1988) behavioral plasticity theory suggests that individuals with low self-esteem may be more "behaviorally malleable" than those with high self-esteem. As a result, low self-esteem individuals may be more influenced by P-O fit feedback when determining attraction. Turban and Keon (1993) found support for the behavioral plasticity theory in a recruitment context. They found that, compared with high self-esteem individuals, low self-esteem individuals attended more to salient environmental characteristics (e.g., firm size) in determining attraction.

Brockner (1988) advanced several reasons for the behavioral plasticity effect, including (a) low self-esteem individuals are more likely to be uncertain about the appropriateness of their thoughts and actions and thus rely on environmental or social cues to guide them and (b) low self-esteem individuals are more susceptible to negative feedback and are more likely to believe that the feedback is valid or self-diagnostic than are high self-esteem individuals. Thus, in the present study, self-esteem should interact with the level of P-O fit feedback and an individual's objective P-O fit in influencing attraction.

Hypothesis 4: P-O fit feedback, objective P-O fit, and self-esteem interact in predicting attraction such that the level of fit feedback relates more strongly to attraction among low rather than high self-esteem individuals, whereas objective P-O fit relates more strongly to attraction among high rather than low self-esteem individuals.

Mediating Effects of Subjective P-O Fit

As previously noted, research has found that individuals' attraction to an organization varies depending on the fit between the characteristics of the organization and their own characteristics (Barber, 1998). Additionally, researchers have suggested that objective P-O fit exhibits more distal effects on attraction, with subjective P-O fit acting as a more proximal influence (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996). For example, Judge and Cable (1997) found that subjective P-O fit mediated the relationship between objective P-O fit and attraction. This follows from Schneider's (1987) ASA framework, which suggests that selection into organizations is largely based on perceptions of fit, which in turn are based on objective fit.

Hypothesis 5: The relationships between (a) objective P-O fit and attraction and (b) P-O fit feedback and attraction are mediated by subjective P-O fit.

Hypothesis 6: The three-way interaction effects of (a) objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and agreement on attraction and (b) objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and self-esteem on attraction are mediated by subjective P-O fit.

Method

Participants

The sample included 312 students who were enrolled in either an undergraduate capstone business course at a large midwestern university or a graduate business course at a smaller regional university. Extra course credit was given for participation. Two hundred thirty-four students actually completed the study for an overall 75% participation rate. Twenty-eight participants failed to provide complete information about their values and had to be dropped from analyses involving objective P-O fit. The average age of the sample was 23.5 years old, and 53% of participants were female. The racial composition of the sample was as follows: 79% Caucasian, 16% Asian, 2% African American, and 3% other. Seventy-eight

percent of participants anticipated interviewing for their next job within a year, and prior work experience averaged 2.2 years.

Web Site Development and Study Procedure

For purposes of this study, we created three versions of a "careers" section of an organizational Web site, naming the organization OfficePro, Inc. The three versions represented two treatment conditions (high and low P-O fit feedback) and a control condition (no P-O fit feedback). We collected data at two different times, including a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that was administered prior to the start of the study and a Web-based questionnaire that was administered after participants' visit to the OfficePro Web site. Prior to data collection, we conducted a pilot study using 97 undergraduate students to gauge participant understanding of questionnaire items and to ensure the functionality of the Web site. On the basis of comments and issues raised during this pilot study, we made slight changes to the prestudy paper-and-pencil questionnaire, Web site, and Web-based questionnaire that participants completed after visiting the OfficePro site.

Web site design and content. The three versions of the study Web site were modeled after a similar section of a Fortune 500 organizational Web site that discusses values information and offers an interactive "fit check" tool to job seekers. Specifically, this tool elicits values preference information from job seekers and offers tailored feedback regarding the likely fit with the culture of the organization. We used Microsoft FrontPage to design the OfficePro Web site and included graphics and font commensurate with actual organizational Web sites. The pages making up the site were linked serially to ensure that participants visited all parts of the site.

The first page constituting OfficePro was a home page that conveyed background information about the organization. A segment of the home page is illustrated in Figure 2A. The second page contained general information about employment opportunities. Next, in two of the versions of the site (treatment conditions), a fit check was introduced. This assessment consisted of 32 values-related items derived from values found in the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1991). The OCP is an instrument used to render holistic values profiles of individuals or organizations. An example item from the present assessment is, "I prefer a work environment that doesn't demand constant adaptation" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). After participants in the two treatment conditions completed this assessment, they were linked to a different page where feedback was provided regarding likely P-O fit with OfficePro. Ostensibly, this feedback was based on responses to the assessment. However, the feedback was actually provided irrespective of participant responses and was designated as either a high (80% condition) or low (40% condition) P-O fit with the organization. Whereas the two treatment condition versions of the Web site included the fit assessment and subsequent P-O fit feedback, the third version of the Web site was a control condition. Participants in this condition viewed the exact same background information about OfficePro but were offered neither a fit assessment nor feedback regarding potential fit.

For the two treatment conditions, the 80% and 40% feedback figures were determined in the following way. First, we asked 10 doctoral students to indicate the "percent fit" at which they would start to consider an individual to be a low or high fit with an organizational culture. The mean responses were 39.7% (low) and 82.8% (high). Second, 30 students were randomly drawn from the study population and were asked the same question on a prestudy questionnaire. The student responses corroborated with the doctoral student responses (M = 43.4% and 76.4%, respectively), and the 40%/80% distinction was adopted. The feedback was presented in written form, (e.g., "Your responses indicate that your likely fit with the OfficePro culture would be 80%[40%]") and further illustrated with a horizontal bar graph (0–100% scale) as shown in Figure 2B. Whereas past research has tended to operationalize P-O fit as a correlation (i.e., −1.00–1.00; e.g., O'Reilly et al., 1991), we presented fit feedback on a 0–100% scale to facilitate participant understanding.

To further depict the culture of OfficePro, a final Web site page in all three study conditions provided additional in-depth values information about the organization. This values information was the same across conditions and was organized to reflect the seven dimensions of the OCP identified by Chatman and Jehn (1994). An example segment of a values statement is as follows:

> *Innovation Orientation*
>
> The most elusive thing in today's business world is a good opportunity. "The fastest prevail" is no longer simply a catch phrase but an absolute truth and means of survival . . . Take a quick walk through our "Innovator Hall of Fame" when you come to visit OfficePro . . . Perhaps you have a future place in the Hall of Fame if this type of work suits you.

Primary study procedure. Seven weeks prior to visiting the study Web site, participants were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that included a self-esteem measure, control variables (e.g., work experience, grade point average, comfort with the World Wide Web, and time until planning to interview for a job), and a measure of individual work values preferences using the OCP (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Participants were randomly assigned to either one of the two treatment conditions (high or low P-O fit feedback) or the control condition. Participants were cued to visit the OfficePro Web site corresponding to their assigned condition by an e-mail that contained a link to the appropriate version of the site and were given a 1-week period in which to visit the site on their own time. After browsing the site, participants were linked directly to a Web-based questionnaire that measured subjective P-O fit, agreement with fit feedback (except for the control condition), perceived employment opportunities, time spent browsing the site, and overall attraction. We also asked participants to provide comments about their experience on the site.

After electronic submittal of this questionnaire, participants were sent a follow-up e-mail that fully debriefed them; explained the intent, manipulations, and basic hypotheses of the study; and invited questions regarding the study. Further, participants were asked not to discuss the debrief information with anyone else until completion of the study. During the next class meeting, we informed participants that the study was complete and asked if there were any additional questions or clarifications.

Measures

Objective P-O fit. Consistent with past research (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 1991), we measured objective P-O fit for each participant by computing the profile correlation between their personal values profile and that of OfficePro (Block, 1978). The values profile of each participant and OfficePro was assessed by using a 40-item version of the OCP. This version was introduced by Cable and Judge (1996), who later (Judge & Cable, 1997) provided evidence that it adequately represents the dimensionality of culture preferences found by O'Reilly et al. (1991). The OCP uses a Q-sort procedure whereby values are sorted into nine categories ranging from most to least characteristic of an individual or organization.

Q-sort methodology has been criticized for several reasons. For example, it fails to account for the possibility that unequal distances between items may exist, and it may not accurately depict individuals' values profiles (e.g., Edwards, 1993). However, we used the Q-sort methodology because it may avert socially desirable responses by forcing participants to rank order values in an ipsative manner instead of rating each one individually (Cable & Judge, 1997). In addition, a holistic approach is consistent with the notion that fit implies similarity across values profiles, not similarity in considering one value at a time (Judge & Cable, 1997).

Because the measurement of objective P-O fit consists of a correlation between an organizational and individual values profile, we used the OCP to determine what the organizational values profile of OfficePro appeared

A

Welcome to OfficePro Inc.

A World Class Provider of the Finest in Office Products and

Office Communication Solutions

A message from James Knight, President and CEO of OfficePro, Inc.

Welcome to the cutting edge of Office Communications Solutions and Office Products. We're riding the next wave of the digital revolution – a wave that's drawing much of its energy and power from the people and technology of OfficePro. Our people are excited about our prospects and more committed to winning than ever.

We are well on our way to being considered one of the world's premier office solutions companies – we are proud to say that we're growing 20% per year, and consistently delivering significant increases in value for OfficePro's shareholders.

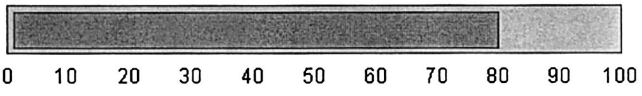
What is the reason for our success? One big reason is the quality of the OfficePro people. I personally have many opportunities to meet and interact with our peers in the industry. I see them at trade meetings. I see them present to the financial community. And I can honestly tell you that when it comes to talent, OfficePro doesn't take a back seat to anybody in this industry. Without question, the people who are leading our businesses, and the people who are developing new innovations, are hands down the best in the business.

B

Fit Check Result and OfficePro Culture

Thank you for exploring our fit check!

Below are the results of the match between you and the OfficePro organization.



Your responses indicate that your likely fit with the OfficePro Culture would be **80%**.

This appears to indicate that OfficePro's overall culture is a **HIGH** match with your individual wants and need

Figure 2. A: Home page of the Web site developed for the study. B: Person–organization fit feedback provided as part of the Web site developed for the study (high feedback condition).

to be. It was necessary to demonstrate adequate reliability and agreement among several raters to establish that the Web site was portraying a clear values profile (e.g., Kristof, 1996). We asked 10 doctoral students to browse the Web site and sort the 40 values represented on the OCP into nine categories ranging from most to least characteristic of what OfficePro appeared to value. Consistent with O'Reilly et al. (1991), responses of the raters were averaged, and the Spearman–Brown formula for profile reliability (Block, 1978) revealed high reliability ($\alpha = .97$). To assess interrater agreement, we computed $R_{(wg)}$ (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984) and found sufficient justification for aggregation ($R_{(wg)} = .99$). These results indicated that a clear values profile was being depicted on the Web site.

To assess individual values profiles, each participant was asked to sort the 40 OCP values into nine categories ranging from most to least characteristic of what they value. Each individual values profile was then correlated with the OfficePro values profile to arrive at a measure of objective P-O fit for each participant. Notably, the range of participant objective fit correlations (−.28–.63 in the present study) was consistent with past research that used the OCP (e.g., in O'Reilly et al., 1991, the range was −.36–.62).

Subjective P-O fit. To measure subjective P-O fit, we adapted an item used by Cable and Judge (1996): "Based on what you know, how well do you think the values of this organization reflect your own values?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely well*). Past research has demonstrated the adequacy of one-item measures of subjective P-O fit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997) and has noted that single-item scales are not inherently deficient (Judge & Ferris, 1993).

Agreement with P-O fit feedback. Two items developed for this study assessed the level of agreement with the fit feedback provided to participants in the feedback conditions, including "To what extent did you agree with the evaluation of your fit with OfficePro provided by the site?" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .88.

Self-esteem. We assessed self-esteem by using Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale. Previous recruitment researchers have also used this scale (e.g., Turban & Keon, 1993). Coefficient alpha in the present study was .85. An example item rated on a four-point Likert scale is "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

Overall attraction. To measure overall attraction, we adapted five items from previous P-O fit research (Cable & Judge, 1994; Cable & Turban, 2000; Judge & Cable, 1997). An example item, measured on a seven-point Likert scale, is "Based only on what you know about OfficePro, rate your overall attraction to this organization." Coefficient alpha was .92.

Control variables. In addition to controlling for participant institution, we controlled for several variables that have been suggested by prior recruitment research. These included age, gender, ethnicity, grade point average, work experience, perception of current job opportunities, and time until participants anticipated interviewing for their next full time job. We also measured and controlled for comfort with the World Wide Web and had participants report the time they spent browsing the Web site.

Results

Validity Evidence From the Study Web Site

In addition to the high reliability and agreement among raters with regard to the Web site values profile, three primary pieces of evidence demonstrate that the site was a valid and sufficient medium to conduct tests of our hypotheses. First, correlational evidence demonstrates that we were able to replicate, using the Web site, certain relationships between constructs that have been found in prior research. Specifically, past research has consistently shown a relationship between an individual's objective P-O fit and both his or her subjective P-O fit and certain outcomes, such as attraction or job choice intentions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997). For example, Judge and Cable (1997) found correlations of .37 and .26, respectively, for correlations between objective P-O fit and subjective P-O fit and objective P-O fit and attraction. In an earlier study, Cable and Judge (1996) found correlations of .33 and .23 between objective P-O fit and subjective P-O fit and objective P-O fit and job choice intentions. In the control condition of the present study (i.e., in the absence of fit feedback), the correlations of objective P-O fit with subjective P-O fit and objective P-O fit with attraction were .32 and .24, respectively. This provides evidence of convergent validity by demonstrating that participants were able to accurately discern the values profile of OfficePro and relate it to their own independently measured values profile in a manner consistent with past research involving actual organizations.

Second, qualitative comments provided by study participants suggested that the Web site had face validity. In total, 44% of participants ($n = 103$) provided comments. We asked three doctoral students to categorize any comments that suggested that a participant did not see OfficePro as being a real organization. Most comments suggested that participants believed that OfficePro was realistic. For example, a participant in the low feedback condition commented, "I was very interested in the organization and thought it to be a good fit. I was surprised to see only a 40% fit." Another noted, "I liked that they provided the list of their values; however, I just do not think that I would fit into this organization." Only 3 participants made comments indicating that they found the Web site to be unrealistic.

Third, we asked participants to report the amount of time that they spent browsing the Web site. The mean reported times (in minutes; $M = 10.85$, $SD = 6.39$ for the control; $M = 14.58$, $SD = 8.78$ for the low feedback; and $M = 14.14$, $SD = 7.26$ for the high feedback conditions) suggest that participants were sufficiently attending to the information provided on the site.

Tests of Hypotheses

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among all study variables are presented in Table 1. We used moderated hierarchical regression analysis, entering control variables in the first step of all analyses. We dummy coded the three study conditions (using the control condition as the baseline) and effects coded for analyses involving agreement with P-O fit feedback (i.e., analyses without the control condition included). A $p < .05$ level of statistical significance was used for all tests, except for those involving agreement. Because the control condition was not included in these particular tests, the sample size was reduced by over 30% ($n = 71$). As a result, we adopted a more lenient alpha level ($p < .10$) for these tests (Stevens, 1986) and report exact p values when they fall between .05 and .10.

Main effects. Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between objective P-O fit and attraction. This hypothesis was supported. Specifically, individuals were significantly more attracted to the organization when their values profiles better matched the organizational values profile (adjusted [adj.] $R^2 = .06$, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $\beta = .23$), $t(201) = 3.18$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the provision of P-O fit feedback to individuals would influence their level of attraction in the direction

of that feedback. This hypothesis was also supported (adj. $R^2 = .08$, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .01$). To identify differences among the three experimental conditions, we examined the mean levels of attraction in the control condition ($M = 4.35$) compared with the treatment conditions, as well as the beta weights for both dummy variables in step two of the regression equation. Mean differences were significant and in the expected direction: For high P-O fit feedback ($M = 4.75$; $\beta = .15$), $t(226) = 1.99$, $p < .05$; for low P-O fit feedback ($M = 3.95$; $\beta = -.17$), $t(226) = -2.27$, $p < .05$. That is, those receiving feedback indicating high P-O fit were significantly more attracted to the organization than participants in the control condition. Those receiving low fit feedback were significantly less attracted than those in the control condition.

To further investigate the relative influence of objective P-O fit and P-O fit feedback on attraction, we conducted post hoc analyses to check for an augmentation effect. That is, we tested to see whether either of these independent variables remained significant after controlling for the other. Both independent variables exhibited an augmentation effect: For objective fit (adj. $R^2 = .13$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $\beta = .25$), $t(201) = 3.65$, $p < .01$; for fit feedback (adj. $R^2 = .13$, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .01$). More specifically, with objective P-O fit controlled, the effects of fit feedback on attraction were as follows: For high feedback ($\beta = .15$), $t(201) = 1.86$, $p < .07$; for low feedback ($\beta = -.18$), $t(201) = -2.33$, $p < .05$. Taken together, these additional analyses suggest that both objective P-O fit and P-O fit feedback are important antecedents of attraction.

Interaction effects. Hypothesis 3 predicted a three-way interaction between objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and agreement with fit feedback on attraction. This hypothesis was supported, and effects were in the expected direction. Table 2 presents the results, and the form of this interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 3. As shown in Table 2, the addition of the three-way interaction term explained significant additional variance in attraction (adj. $R^2 = .31$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .06$). Level of P-O fit feedback was more strongly related to attraction when agreement with the feedback was higher rather than lower. In contrast, objective P-O fit was more strongly related to attraction when agreement was lower rather than higher. It is important to note that this is a conservative test because it reached the .05 level of significance when we excluded the 3 participants who made comments indicating that they believed the Web site to be unrealistic (adj. $R^2 = .32$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$). Notably, all other study results were similar with and without inclusion of these 3 participants.

Results also were supportive of Hypothesis 4, which predicted a three-way interaction between objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and self-esteem. Table 3 presents the results, and the form of this interaction effect for the high and low feedback conditions is illustrated in Figures 4A and 4B. As shown in Table 3, the addition of the two 3-way interaction terms in the fourth step of the regression analysis explained significant additional variance in attraction (adj. $R^2 = .16$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p < .05$).

Consistent with Brockner's (1988) suggestion that behavioral plasticity primarily manifests in the face of low feedback, the low feedback condition exhibited the expected effect. That is, objective P-O fit was positively related to attraction among individuals in the high feedback condition and high self-esteem individuals in the low feedback condition, as indicated by the positive slopes in Figures 4A and 4B. Although not illustrated, the relationship between objective P-O fit and attraction was similarly positive among control condition participants. However, low self-esteem individuals in the low feedback condition exhibited a significant departure from the overall pattern of results. Specifically, objective fit had less of an influence on attraction among these individuals, in contrast to high self-esteem individuals. Instead, low P-O fit feedback had a greater influence on attraction among low self-esteem individuals. That is, when low self-esteem individuals received feedback indicating that they would be a poor fit with the organization, they tended to report low levels of attraction, even if their objective P-O fit was high. Overall, this pattern of findings supports Hypothesis 4.

Mediating effects of subjective P-O fit. Hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that subjective P-O fit would mediate all predicted main and interactive effects. Using Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation procedures, we found support for Hypotheses 5a and 5b. First, both objective P-O fit and P-O fit feedback significantly related to subjective P-O fit (adj. $R^2 = .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .01$, for objective P-O fit; adj. $R^2 = .09$, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .01$, for P-O fit feedback). Second, as shown in Table 1, subjective P-O fit was positively related to attraction. Finally, the effects of both objective P-O fit on attraction and P-O fit feedback on attraction failed to reach statistical significance after controlling for subjective P-O fit.

Hypotheses 6a and 6b were not supported. Specifically, Baron and Kenny's (1986) requirement that the independent variable be significantly related to the mediating variable was not met. Neither of the three-way interaction terms (objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and agreement, nor objective P-O fit, fit feedback, and self-esteem) were significantly related to subjective P-O fit.

Discussion

Attracting desirable job candidates continues to be a critical organizational concern (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991; Turban et al., 2001). The use of organizational Web sites as a tool for attracting applicants, although still novel, is growing rapidly (e.g., Cappelli, 2001). The present study contributes to the recruitment literature by addressing issues of Web-based applicant attraction within a person–organization fit framework. Furthermore, it meets all of Barber's (1998) guidelines for future recruitment research, such as focusing on attraction in a specific (e.g., applicant generation) phase of the recruitment process.

The findings suggest that feedback regarding individuals' potential fit with an organization influenced their level of attraction. Further, post hoc analyses revealed that this effect held even when controlling for individuals' level of objective P-O fit. However, we also found that individuals do not rely solely on such feedback but rather are influenced by both level of fit feedback and objective P-O fit in determining attraction.

In a more general theoretical sense, these findings largely follow the logic of Schneider's (1987) ASA framework, Byrne's (1971) similarity–attraction paradigm, and Eagly and Chaiken's (1984) systematic–heuristic information processing model. That is, individuals were more attracted to an organization that provided personally relevant environmental cues suggesting high similarity

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age (months)	281.64	54.93					
2. Gender (1 = female)[a]	0.53	0.50	−.08				
3. Ethnicity (1 = Caucasian)[a]	0.79	0.41	.07	−.08			
4. Grade point average	3.33	0.36	.38**	.09	.06		
5. Time until interview (< 1 year)[a,b]	0.78	0.41	−.07	−.07	−.15*	.02	
6. Time until interview (> 1 year or other)[a,b]	0.14	0.34	.01	.03	.05	−.07	−.75**
7. Work experience	2.18	4.46	.88**	−.02	.10	.35**	−.08
8. Perceived employment opportunities	5.52	1.26	−.03	.05	.12	.07	−.02
9. Comfort with the World Wide Web	4.45	0.69	.02	−.04	−.02	.00	.06
10. Sampling source (1 = large university)[a]	0.90	0.30	−.74**	−.08	−.10	−.52**	.10
11. Time spent browsing Web site (min)[c]	13.29	7.75	−.06	.06	−.20**	−.10	−.00
12. Subjective P-O fit	4.68	1.15	.08	−.04	−.06	−.11	−.03
13. Objective P-O fit[d]	0.60	0.08	−.08	.05	.04	.04	−.01
14. High P-O fit feedback condition[a]	0.33	0.47	.10	−.19**	−.12	−.04	.00
15. Low P-O fit feedback condition[a]	0.37	0.48	−.13*	.14**	.07	−.01	−.03
16. Agreement with P-O fit feedback	4.48	1.36	.13	−.04	−.18*	−.01	−.02
17. Self-esteem	3.44	0.43	−.07	−.08	.22**	−.04	−.03
18. Overall attraction	4.33	1.30	.01	−.02	−.10	−.11	.04

Note. N = Between 204 and 234; N = Between 140 and 162 for correlations with agreement. Individual correlation matrices from each of the three study conditions are available from Brian R. Dineen upon request. P-O = person–organization.
[a] Dummy coded variable. [b] Time until anticipated date of interviewing measured categorically. [c] Correlations based on times that are standardized within both the control condition and treatment conditions. [d] Linearly transformed to 0–100% scale.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

between the individual and organization. At the same time, objective P-O fit still exhibited a relationship with attraction across conditions. This is consistent with past research (Judge & Cable, 1997) and suggests that individuals do not blindly accept fit feedback, but instead are still somewhat discerning consumers of feedback.

To investigate determinants of when attraction is more or less likely to be influenced either by objective P-O fit or P-O fit feedback, we examined two moderating variables—agreement with feedback and self-esteem. We found that the level of fit feedback is more predictive of attraction when agreement with that feedback is higher rather than lower, whereas objective P-O fit is more predictive of attraction when agreement with feedback is lower rather than higher. This result is consistent with both cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981), which suggest that individuals discount feedback thought to be inaccurate. It also highlights the importance of providing accurate feedback to facilitate internalization of that feedback for recruitment purposes.

Self-esteem similarly moderated the relative effects of objective P-O fit and P-O fit feedback level on attraction. Specifically, whereas a high level of P-O fit feedback was related to greater attraction across all individuals, objective P-O fit was also consistently related to attraction among high self-esteem individuals. Further, high objective fit was more strongly associated with attraction among high rather than low self-esteem individuals. Low self-esteem individuals tended to be influenced by their objective fit when given feedback indicating a high fit or when given no feedback but were not influenced by objective fit when given low fit feedback. In other words, when faced with a low level of P-O fit feedback, low self-esteem individuals tended to report lower attraction levels, even if their objective fit was high. This supports an interactionist perspective (Chatman, 1989; Turban & Keon, 1993) and is highly consistent with behavioral plasticity theory, which predicts that low self-esteem individuals are more susceptible to the internalization of negative feedback (Brockner, 1988). Although the behavioral plasticity theory was developed to predict behavior, these findings are consistent with studies suggesting that the theory also applies to determinations of attraction (e.g., Turban & Keon, 1993).

Finally, we found mixed support for the mediating effects of subjective P-O fit. First, subjective P-O fit fully mediated the relationship between objective P-O fit and attraction, replicating Judge and Cable's (1997) finding. The relationship between P-O fit feedback and attraction also was fully mediated by subjective P-O fit. In general, these two findings are consistent with a distal–proximal conceptualization, whereby objective P-O fit and P-O fit feedback act as more distal forces that influence subjective P-O fit, which, in turn, influences attraction (Kristof, 1996).

In contrast, subjective P-O fit did not mediate the relationship between either of the three-way interactions and attraction. The single-item subjective fit measure may have contributed to this result. However, it is also possible that an individual's agreement with feedback and his or her self-esteem are more determinate of attraction but not subjective P-O fit. For example, individuals likely perceive varying levels of subjective P-O fit, regardless of their level of self-esteem. In contrast, individuals might be more or less discerning in their reported level of attraction depending on their level of self-esteem. In support of this suggestion, we generally found stronger correlations between agreement and attraction, as well as self-esteem and attraction, rather than between these two variables and subjective P-O fit. For example, the correlation between agreement and subjective fit was .14, whereas the correlation between agreement and attraction was .21. Although the correlations between self-esteem and subjective P-O fit and self-esteem and attraction were similar for the sample as a whole, the correlations among control condition participants were −.07 (self-esteem and subjective P-O fit) and −.20 (self-esteem and attraction). This suggests that although subjective fit is strongly correlated with attraction, these two constructs are dis-

6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
−.02												
−.06	.00											
−.06	.00	.15*										
.01	−.72**	−.01	−.06									
.02	−.06	−.12	−.07	.12								
.00	.09	−.03	−.06	−.01	.10							
−.05	−.04	.07	−.10	−.05	−.05	.23**						
.01	.11	.02	.12	−.07	−.02	.29**	−.05					
.01	−.18**	.00	−.06	.10	.02	−.25**	.14*	−.53**				
−.02	.15	.04	.04	−.12	.03	.14	−.07	.44**	−.44**			
.06	−.06	.11	.14*	.08	−.12	.09	.12	.01	.02	.03		
−.02	.01	−.09	−.09	.01	.17**	.67**	.21**	.22**	−.23**	.21**	−.06	

tinct, with attraction being more related to agreement and self-esteem. Because these latter two variables were part of the three-way interaction analyses, this might explain why these interactions related to attraction but not subjective P-O fit.

Implications and Future Research

Several implications and directions for future research emerged from this study. First, the results suggest that practi-

Table 2
Results of Regression Analyses Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction Effect of Objective P-O Fit × P-O Fit Feedback × Agreement With Feedback on Attraction

	Dependent variable: Attraction				
Independent variable	β[a]	*SE B*	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2
Control			.10	.02	.10
Age (months)	0.07	0.00			
Gender (1 = female)[b]	0.09	0.20			
Ethnicity (1 = Caucasian)[b]	0.00	0.25			
Grade point average	−0.03	0.32			
Time until interview (< 1 year)[b]	0.10	0.36			
Time until interview (other)[b]	0.01	0.42			
Work experience	−0.02	0.04			
Perceived employment opportunities	−0.15†	0.08			
Comfort with World Wide Web	−0.05	0.15			
Sampling source (1 = large source)[b]	−0.05	0.53			
Time spent browsing Web site	0.17*	0.11			
Main effects			.25	.16	.15**
Level of P-O fit feedback[c]	−6.07*	3.32			
Objective P-O fit	0.62†	5.68			
Agreement with P-O fit feedback	1.06	0.72			
Two-way interaction terms			.39	.30	.14**
Level of P-O Fit Feedback × Objective P-O Fit	4.89†	5.51			
Level of P-O Fit Feedback × Agreement	6.27*	0.69			
Objective P-O Fit × Agreement	−0.95	1.17			
Three-way interaction term			.40	.31	.02†
Level of Fit Feedback × Objective Fit × Agreement	−4.76†	1.14			

Note. $N = 136$. P-O = person–organization; Adj. = adjusted.
[a] Standardized regression coefficients from simultaneous entry of variables (Step 4). [b] Dummy coded variable. [c] Effects coded variable.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

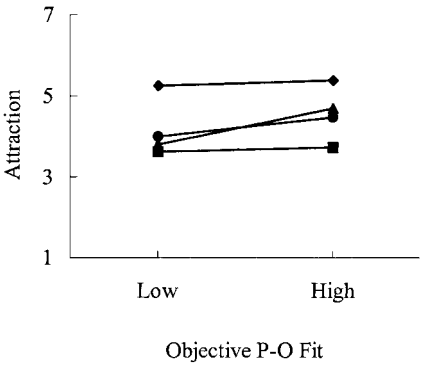


Figure 3. Interaction of objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and agreement. A diamond symbol represents high feedback, high agreement; a square symbol represents low feedback, high agreement; a triangle symbol represents high feedback, low agreement; and a circle symbol represents low feedback, low agreement. P-O = person–organization.

tioners have the ability to influence attraction levels by making tailored feedback regarding potential P-O fit available to job seekers. The capability to tailor P-O fit feedback to individuals fundamentally differentiates the Web from other traditional recruitment sources, such as the newspaper or recruitment brochures. Future research should continue to examine how tailored feedback influences attraction. Work also should extend to consider how tailored information influences applicant self-selection and ultimately financial outcomes. For example, financial benefits might accrue to organizations if more accurate applicant self-selection helps to narrow applicant pools prior to interpersonal contact with organizational representatives. As a start, studies designed to gauge the utility of a P-O fit assessment tool should examine actual pre- and postimplementation applicant pool characteristics of organizations. In addition, determining how Web-based recruitment best fits into an organization's larger strategic recruitment network is vital.

The use of Web technology to provide P-O fit feedback is a potentially powerful recruitment tool that has only recently become available. Caution is therefore warranted in implementing such a tool. For example, as demonstrated, the provision of feedback that is lower than an individual's objective P-O fit is likely to reduce attraction levels, even after considering the effects of an individual's objective fit. On the other hand, providing all job seekers an indication of high potential fit is unlikely to help in achieving the goal of a leaner, better fitting applicant pool. In addition, the provision of high fit feedback to "lure" applicants might backfire if applicants later get the sense that they were "roped in" (e.g., if they find that they do not fit once they start work). In general, as Cable et al. (2000) noted, "recruitment managers should carefully calibrate the pre-interview information they disseminate to applicants" (p. 1084).

Table 3
Results of Regression Analyses Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction Effect of Objective P-O Fit × P-O Fit Feedback × Self-Esteem on Attraction

	Dependent variable: Attraction				
Independent variable	β[a]	*SE B*	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2
Control			.07	.02	.07
Age (months)	0.09	0.00			
Gender (1 = female)[b]	0.06	0.18			
Ethnicity (1 = Caucasian)[b]	−0.01	0.23			
Grade point average	−0.10	0.29			
Time until interview (< 1 year)[b]	0.03	0.33			
Time until interview (other)[b]	−0.06	0.40			
Work experience	−0.02	0.04			
Perceived employment opportunities	−0.08	0.07			
Comfort with World Wide Web	−0.10	0.13			
Sampling source (1 = large source)[b]	0.02	0.49			
Time spent browsing Web site	0.16*	0.10			
Main effects			.19	.13	.12**
High P-O fit feedback[b]	−2.33	13.87			
Low P-O fit feedback[b]	9.31*	11.37			
Objective P-O fit	1.63	14.78			
Self-esteem	1.09	2.48			
Two-way interaction terms			.22	.13	.02
High P-O Fit Feedback × Objective P-O Fit	1.13	23.32			
Low P-O Fit Feedback × Objective P-O Fit	−10.50*	19.00			
High P-O Fit Feedback × Self-Esteem	2.02	3.94			
Low P-O Fit Feedback × Self-Esteem	−9.59*	3.25			
Objective P-O Fit × Self-Esteem	−2.06	4.20			
Three-way interaction terms			.25	.16	.04*
High Fit Feedback × Objective Fit × Self-Esteem	−0.63	6.60			
Low Fit Feedback × Objective Fit × Self-Esteem	10.68*	5.42			

Note. $N = 201$. P-O = person–organization; Adj. = adjusted.
[a] Standardized regression coefficients from simultaneous entry of variables (Step 4). [b] Dummy coded variable.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

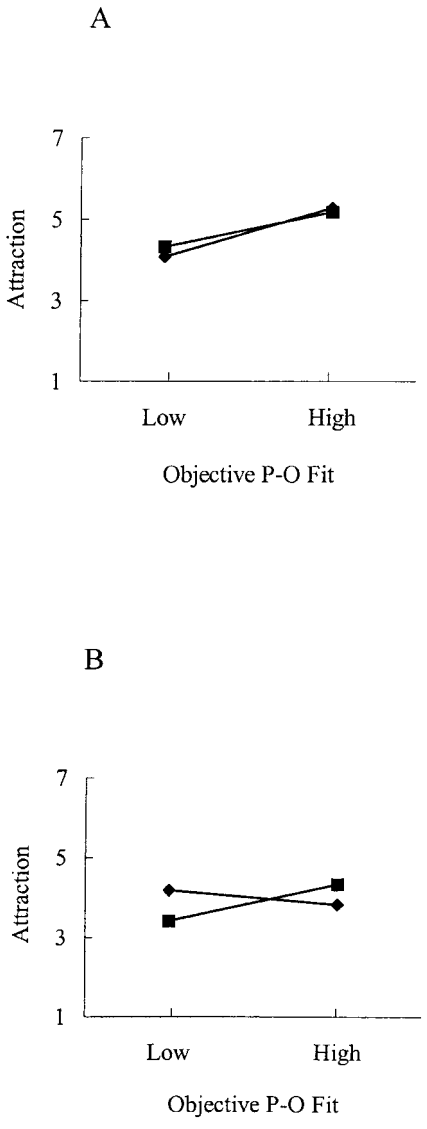


Figure 4. A: Interaction of objective P-O fit and self-esteem, high feedback condition. B: Interaction of objective P-O fit and self-esteem, low feedback condition. A diamond symbol represents low self-esteem and a square symbol represents high self-esteem. P-O = person–organization.

Despite potential pitfalls, providing P-O fit feedback might have additional benefits that are interesting from both a practical and research standpoint. For example, researchers have suggested that honesty during the recruitment process might strengthen the psychological contract between a new employee and organization (Rousseau, 1995) or lead to greater commitment (e.g., Breaugh, 1983). In addition, honesty might enhance an organization's reputation. One participant highlighted these points in commenting, "It is one of the better company Web sites I have seen . . . I believe it's a strength for the company to be straight about what they seek and have to offer."

Potential applicants who take advantage of a P-O fit feedback tool prior to application also stand to benefit by saving time and energy that might otherwise be spent in more fruitful job pursuits (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Martinez (2000) noted that applicants are "desperate for tools that help them determine their 'fit' in an organization" (p. 48). Consistent with this observation, our participants seemed to favor the P-O fit feedback idea. For example, one thought it was a "good organizational introduction and job preview," whereas another commented, "The job fit survey was a great idea."

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it does not address issues of how individuals initially get to an organizational Web site. Specifically, it is likely that individuals visiting organizational Web sites already feel at least a slight degree of attraction toward the organization. Thus, on an actual organizational Web site, the range of attraction might be more restricted. In addition, because we created a fictitious organizational Web site for purposes of the study, results might not fully generalize to the use of actual organizational Web sites.

Second, we assessed the time participants spent on the Web site with a self-report measure. Thus, social desirability might have inflated the time data. Further, although we built serial links into the Web site to ensure that participants visited each page, we do not know how long they spent on each page or how carefully they scrutinized the information provided. Future Web-based recruitment research should objectively track time and movement of participants through Web pages and include this in statistical analyses.

A third limitation is that we measured subjective P-O fit at the same time as attraction. Common method variance is therefore a concern and caution is called for when interpreting the results of the mediation analyses. However, we measured these variables at the same time because we were mostly interested in examining participant attraction at the time of viewing the Web site rather than at a later time. Also, we generally avoided common method variance concerns in testing other study hypotheses by measuring variables at different times by using different instruments (e.g., three-way interaction of objective P-O fit, P-O fit feedback, and self-esteem).

Conclusion

To our knowledge, this study is the first to apply a theoretically grounded approach to issues of P-O fit and applicant attraction in the context of Web-based recruitment. By demonstrating the potential for P-O fit feedback to influence attraction toward an organization, it extends past recruitment and P-O fit research and introduces new avenues of investigation. One study participant expressed the opinion that "the fit test should be on each employer's Web site along with their values." Although such a statement might be somewhat premature, it nonetheless highlights the importance of continuing to investigate Web-based recruitment and, specifically, the provision of P-O fit feedback via organizational Web sites.

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