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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Review of the Literature</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Rationale and Hypotheses</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Method</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Results</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Discussion</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Summary</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correlations and Reliabilities of Key Variables</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Informed Consent</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Directions to Participants</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. IRB Approval Letter</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Although Person-Organization (PO) fit has been studied over the last few decades, the majority of the research has focused on the organization selecting the person, rather than the person selecting the organization. Therefore, the present study sought to focus on the applicant side of PO fit and investigate how employee referrals influence an applicant’s experience in the hiring process. The sample consisted of 179 job seeking applicants with fulltime work experience who completed an online survey posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Contrary to predictions, there was no difference in valuing fit between applicants who had negative PO fit experiences and those who did not have negative PO fit experiences. There was also no significant relationship between applicants’ years of work experience and importance of fit, nor between applicants’ age and importance of fit. It was also found that there were no differences in value of PO fit between those who had an employee referral and applicants who did not have an employee referral. A positive relationship, however, was found between applicants’ perceptions of referrer PO fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own fit, suggesting that employee referrals may impact perceived PO fit. This research has implications for advertising from an employer perspective, as well as for increasing the strength of recruiting employees through an employee referral. Future research should further investigate what factors specifically impact the referrer fit and self-fit relationship.
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Today’s job search process has become increasingly internet based with the creation of online job boards such as Career Builder and Monster, as well as social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, which have surpassed the online job boards in terms of popularity (Brotherton, 2012). In fact, a recent Jobvite survey of 800 HR professionals showed that 55% of recruiters aimed to spend more money on using social media sites for recruiting purposes in 2011 than in 2010, whereas only 16.4% planned to increase their budgets for online job boards (employment websites where organizations can post job openings for potential applicants; Brotherton, 2012). This survey also showed that even though employee referrals (a recruitment method whereby internal employees recommend applicants for a position) were recruiters’ second most popular recruiting technique, it is the source that yields the highest quality applicants. Indeed, one out of every 10 applicants who had employee referrals was hired, whereas only one out of 100 applicants who did not have a referral was hired (Brotherton, 2012). It is thus evident that having personal connections is still an integral part in finding a job.

In addition to employee referrals, research has highlighted other factors that can influence an applicant getting hired for a job. One such factor is person-organization fit (PO fit), which is the compatibility of an individual and an organization (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Although this construct has been studied over the last few decades, the majority of the research has focused on the organization selecting the person, rather than the person
selecting the organization. For example, Cable and Judge (2007) developed and tested a model of PO fit and organizational hiring decisions to discover that interviewers compare their own perceptions of applicants’ values with the organizations’ values to assess the applicant’s PO fit with the company. Another study examined PO fit and Person-Job (PJ) fit (the compatibility of an individual and a job) between and within interview stages from a recruitment perspective (Chuang & Sackett, 2005). It was found that the importance recruiters place on applicants having either PJ and/or PO fit differs depending on the stage of the interview process (Chuang & Sackett, 2005). Moreover, the applicants’ PJ fit was perceived to be more important than their PO fit in the initial interview. The importance of applicants having PO fit became higher, however, when comparing the initial interview (when more than one interview was conducted before a job offer is made) to the single interview (only one interview is conducted before a job offer is made), and from the initial interview to the final interview, whereas the importance of applicants having PJ fit declined through these stages (Chuang & Sackett, 2005). O’Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) also focused on the organization selecting new employees by developing the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) which contains a set of value statements to assess an organization’s values as well as those value preferences of the individual. The OCP is used as a measure for PO fit to better select individuals into an organization. All of these examples omit the individual’s perspective on reasons to apply and ultimately choose to accept a job offer with an organization.

This gap in the PO fit literature leaves the following questions unanswered: “How does an applicant select an organization?” and “Does an applicant consider PO fit during the job search process?” In particular, when deciding to pursue an employment
opportunity within an organization, how do employee referrals, if at all, affect the level of importance an applicant places on PO fit and/or the applicant's perceptions of PO fit with the company? More research on how the person selects the organization is needed to address these questions. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate whether employee referrals affect an applicant's perceived fit and/or the value an applicant places on having person-organization fit with an organization. Studying these constructs will help close the gap between pre-entry PO fit (perceived fit before an employee enters an organization) and post-entry PO fit (perceived fit after an employee has started working in an organization) because employee referrals have the potential to explain why applicants choose to accept a particular offer and why these applicants may thrive with good fit while working in the organization.

Employee Referrals

An employee referral "denotes a situation in which the employees' source of work-related information is provided by an existing employee of the organization prior to the applicant's joining of the company" (Hsieh & Chen, 2011, p. 327). Yakubovich and Lup (2006) examined the impact of referrals on the recruitment process by specifically studying five stages of the hiring process for a sales agent at a virtual call center. In Stage 1, the applicant decides whether to take reading and logic tests and must pass both to move on to the next stage. Stage 2 is the voice test stage where applicants decide whether to take this test. Once this test is taken, the application package is complete and ready for screening. In Stage 3, the application gets either approved or denied. Applicants in Stage 4 have received a job offer and applicants accept the offer before moving to the final stage. In Stage 5, the newly hired employees completed online training for the sales agent
position. Yakubovich and Lup (2006) found that as applicants proceed through stages of the hiring process, the referrer’s performance on the job gradually increases. This suggests that the referrer’s job performance is positively related to the applicant’s chances to succeed at the job. It was also found that applicants who were referred to the position by experienced agents performed better at all stages of the recruitment process than applicants who were not referred. This study also showed that 48.8% of participants applying to a sales agent position found out about the job from a personal contact (Yakubovich & Lup, 2006). This demonstrates the importance of referrals in the selection process and shows that they may significantly impact the applicant’s experience and increase the chance to continue through the recruitment process.

Breaugh, Griesing, Taggart, and Chen (2003) focused on sources organizations use when recruiting new employees and found that employee referrals, followed by job fairs, were the most commonly used sources for recruiting purposes. Contrary to findings of Yakubovich and Lup (2006), Breaugh et al. did not find applicants who were recruited via employee referral performed better than applicants recruited using other methods. In fact, employees recruited from colleges and direct applicants (i.e., unsolicited resumes) performed higher than applicants recruited by employee referrals on a cognitive ability test, whereas applicants recruited from newspaper ads performed about the same as applicants recruited by employee referrals. In addition to this, there was also no difference between recruiting source and applicant interview score, thus demonstrating that source did not influence performance in an interview. In support of employee referrals, however, Breaugh et al. found that applicants recruited via employee referrals received a higher percentage of job offers than applicants recruited via colleges,
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

newspapers, and job fairs, but a lower percentage than direct applicants. It is possible, however, that other factors such as applicant fit with the organization mediated the relationship between applicant recruiting source and the likelihood of the applicant getting hired. Thus, PO fit should be examined in combination with research on employee referrals.

PO Fit

Kristof (1996) defines PO fit as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (p. 4). For clarification purposes, “compatibility” has been conceptualized by Kristof in two ways: the supplementary vs. complementary fit perspective and the needs-supplies vs. demands-abilities perspective. Supplementary fit occurs when an individual embellishes, adds to, or possesses characteristics that are similar to those of others in an environment, whereas complementary fit occurs when an individual’s characteristics add to what the environment is missing to make it “whole.” In the needs-supplies perspective, “PO fit occurs when an organization satisfies individuals’ needs, desires, or preferences,” whereas “the demands-abilities perspective suggests that fit occurs when an individual has the abilities required to meet organizational demands” (Kristof, 1996, p. 3). These conceptualizations of compatibility take both the individual and the organization into account as they are both critical to the construct of person-organization fit. When examining PO fit, the characteristics that are typically taken into account for the individual are values, goals, personality, and needs, whereas values, goals, climate, and culture are looked at when examining the organization (Kristof, 1996).
PO fit resides under the umbrella term of person-environment fit, which is defined as “the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when the characteristics are well matched” (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005, p. 281). Over time, several distinct types of fit grew from this definition including: person-occupation fit, person-job fit, person-organization-fit, person-group fit, person-supervisor fit and person-person fit. Of these types of fit, researchers have primarily focused on PO fit and PJ fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000). PJ fit is the compatibility between an individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and the demands of the job. It is judged relative to the tasks performed for the job rather than the organization in which the job resides (Kristof, 1996). PJ and PO fit have been identified as the two most important types of fit to consider when making hiring decisions (Kristof, 1996).

Before the late 1980’s, when selecting applicants for hire in organizations, managers focused on PJ fit to assess an applicant’s compatibility to do the particular job in question (Kristof, 1996). However, once organizations started to confront downsizing, quality initiatives, and change or removal of a job structure, managers found that an individual’s fit with the organization was the key to retaining a workforce that would be flexible and committed to the organization. This employee flexibility and commitment allowed organizations to more effectively overcome these obstacles (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991). A strong PO fit is connected with this mobility and flexibility and thus is a more important criterion in selection from an organizational standpoint, at least in terms of turnover. Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001) specifically looked at perceived person-job and person-organization fit and how they relate to one another for employees already selected into the organization. Perceived PJ and PO fit was defined as an individual’s
judgment of his or her fit with the job or the organization, respectively (Kristof, 1996). Findings showed that perceived PO and PJ fit were weakly related to one another ($r = .18, p < .05$; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001). This is similar to the relationship O’Reilly et al. (1991) found for an employee’s actual PO and PJ fit ($r = .16$, n.s.), which are an individual’s true fit with the organization or job based on indirect comparisons of the individual and the organization or job, respectively (Kristof, 1996). Therefore, it can be concluded that employees within an organization can distinguish between their different environments and how they fit with each given that both constructs are considered to be unique. PO fit can be assessed separately from PJ fit to assess the unique contributions this construct has on job search criteria, particularly employee referrals.

Previous research has shown that there are many benefits to PO fit that make the construct valuable and important to research. A meta-analysis by Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner (2003) showed that work attitudes (including job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and intent to turnover are among the most frequently considered criteria in PO fit research. Specifically, a meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found that PO fit has strong positive correlations with organizational commitment ($\rho = .51$) and job satisfaction ($\rho = .44$) and a moderate negative correlation with intentions to quit ($\rho = -.35$). PO fit was also found to be moderately correlated with employees’ satisfaction with coworkers ($\rho = .39$), employees’ satisfaction with their supervisor ($\rho = .33$) and employees’ trust in their managers ($\rho = .43$). In the pre-entry context (before an applicant is hired into an organization), high positive correlations were found with organizational attraction ($\rho = .46$) and intentions to hire ($\rho = .61$) and moderately correlated with job offers ($\rho = .32$).
Employee Perspective of PO fit

Although research has been conducted on both the pre-entry and post-entry (after an applicant has been hired into an organization) outcomes of PO fit, most of the research has focused on the organization selecting the best fit employee, rather than the employee selecting the best fit organization (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, 2000). To better understand the process involved in employee selection, as well as organization selection, Schneider’s (1987) Attraction Selection Attrition (ASA) model may be a good fundamental resource. This model is denoted by three constructs: attraction, selection, and attrition (Schneider, 1987). Individuals will desire organizations that are similar to them (attraction), will be chosen and hired by organizations that are similar to them (selection), and will leave organizations that are dissimilar to their attributes and values (attrition). According to Schneider’s model, both sides of PO fit (i.e., the person side and the organization side) are important to study because both sides affect one another. This model is based on the idea that employees and their attributes interact to form a personally unique organizational environment. Individuals also behave the way they do because they were attracted to the environment, were selected by it and chose to stay with it (Schneider, 1987). Schneider argues that studying the person side of fit is highly important because the individual has such a strong impact on creating the work environment.

Slaughter, Stanton, Mohr, and Schoel (2005) found support for the ASA model in that individuals and the organization are highly connected. Specifically, their findings suggest that homogenization of the organization (i.e., the organization growing to contain more individuals who are very much alike) may occur after individuals become attracted
to the organization. This means that after individuals identified the organization as a match for them (e.g., during the interview stage or at the job choice stage), the individuals who are admitted into the organization will be more similar as they will be the best fit for the job. This study thus adds additional support for the importance of examining the person-side of the ASA model in that it shows that individuals are attracted to an organization that is a good fit. More research, however, needs to be conducted on understanding the motives and reasoning behind individuals’ attraction to and decisions for selecting certain organizations.

**Importance of PO Fit in Organizational Attraction**

Organizational attraction is one aspect that may be related to fit and consequently help explain individuals’ desires to select a particular organization. Several studies have examined applicant attraction to organizations as well as a few antecedents of fit to explain conditions in which employees consider fit to be important to their job search process. Cable and Judge (1996) sought to discover what determines job seekers’ and new employees’ perceptions of fit as well as how important PO fit is to their job decisions. This study was based on the theory that job seekers prefer organizations that have similar characteristics and values to their own (i.e., value congruence from the ASA model). Results showed that perceived value congruence between job seekers and organizations predicted an applicant’s perceptions of PO fit, but demographic similarity between job seekers and organizational recruiters did not. Applicant perceptions of PO fit were shown to predict job choice decisions, demonstrating that if applicants sense a good fit to exist between them and the organization, then they are more likely to choose to work for that organization. It was also found that applicants who placed more emphasis
on PO fit when making job decisions experienced a higher level of PO fit after entering the organization than those who placed less emphasis on fit. Finally, job seekers' perceptions of PO fit were found to be significantly and positively related to organizational commitment \( (r = .75, p < .05) \), job satisfaction \( (r = .68, p < .05) \), and willingness to recommend the organization \( (r = .69, p < .05) \), and negatively related to turnover intentions \( (r = -.63, p < .05) \). This further emphasizes the value fit has for individuals and their experience with the organization, which supports the notion that applicants who consider fit, find it to be useful when searching for jobs.

Yet not all research on organization attraction and fit yields the same outcomes. For instance, Chapman et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the relationships between six broad predictors (i.e., job and organizational characteristics, recruiter characteristics, perceptions of the recruitment process, perceived fit, perceived alternatives and hiring expectancies) and several recruiting outcomes. These outcomes included: job-organization attraction, acceptance intentions, job pursuit intentions, and job choice. Results showed that PO fit and job-organization attraction \( (\rho = .46) \), along with organizational image \( (\rho = .48) \), and justice perceptions \( (\rho = .40) \) had medium effect sizes (Chapman et al., 2005). PO fit, however, did not show a significant effect size with job choice \( (\rho = .18) \). This finding suggests the opposite of the finding in Cable and Judge (1996), who found that PO fit was significantly predictive of job choice decisions. Although the finding in Chapman et al. is based on 71 studies, the discrepancy in results could have been due to the way fit was measured in each of these studies as there are several different ways to measure fit (Verquer et al., 2002). The discrepancy could also have been due to common method bias (which has been found to be quite prevalent in
direct measures of fit; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson, 2005), whereby researchers may not be measuring the construct correctly. For example, researchers could capture an employees’ skewed perception of fit that arose after recent situational influences made certain dimensions of fit more salient (e.g., a pay raise making the value of rewards more salient). Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) also comment on how perceived fit can be relatively inaccurate for PO fit based on employees’ difficulty with identifying organizational characteristics (e.g., managers may not spend much time discussing ethical values; therefore, employees may not be able to adequately assess the congruence of their own values with those of the company). Hence, more research should be conducted to ensure that proper methodologies, as well as diverse samples, were used to obtain these results.

In another study, the way PJ and PO fit affect applicants’ level of organizational attraction and intentions to accept job offers were examined across four stages of the selection process (Carless, 2005). Results showed that PJ and PO fit perceptions significantly and positively predicted organizational attraction; however, PJ fit perceptions were positively related to acceptance intentions, whereas PO fit perceptions were not. This finding suggests that perceptions of PJ fit are key to an applicant’s intentions to accept a job offer rather than the perceptions of PO fit. This finding is also contradictory to findings by Cable and Judge (1996), who found PO fit to be significantly predictive of choosing which job to select. This contradiction suggests that PO fit may not be the most important type of fit criterion in the selection process from an applicant’s perspective, but is still influential in the beginning stages. It is possible, however, that the
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

importance of a particular type of fit (e.g., PJ fit, PO fit) at certain stages varies with the influence of different antecedents.

In addition, very few studies have examined the ways applicants approach assessing a good fit with an organization. Backhaus (2003), however, specifically focused on the importance of fit and what criteria influence the degree to which fit is viewed as important from an applicant’s perspective. Results found no support for a relationship between years of work experience and importance of fit in the job search, or for age and importance of fit, yet statistical significance was found for the relationship between negative fit experiences (having poor fit with an organization in the past) and importance of fit. Finally, the relationship between need for control, which is the extent to which an individual is motivated to control situations in life, and importance of fit was the strongest relationship found ($b = 0.35, p < .01$; Backhaus, 2003).

Although a few antecedents of fit were confirmed in Backhaus’ (2003) study, it is possible that the results would have been different with another sample, as the Backhaus sample consisted of college students who were either expecting a change in job level or expecting an entry level position. It is thus plausible that results may have been different with a sample of full-time employees who have more work experience. It is evident that more research should be conducted on importance of fit to re-examine these antecedents, as well as the impact of different antecedents. Interestingly, research has not yet examined the importance of fit after receiving an employee referral. Therefore, it is possible that employee referrals influence the importance an applicant places on considering PO fit as a job search criterion.

PO Fit and Referrals
Hsieh and Chen (2011) examined the influence employee referrals have on PO fit by considering the information applicants received during the selection process via employee referrals. Hsieh and Chen specifically examined realistic job previews (RJPs), which are accurate depictions of what the job will be like for applicants. Although RJPs can vary in the amount of information provided, they are intended to provide both positive and negative aspects of the job. Results showed that the more information provided to an applicant about the job and organization, the greater the discrepancy grew between what was expected from the organization and what was actually received. Therefore, the information provided about the organization and the job before the applicant was recruited by the employee referral actually resulted in lower PO fit rather than higher PO fit. This was contrary to what Hsieh and Chen hypothesized. It is possible however, that the relationship between the referrer and the applicant caused the applicant to overly trust the information provided and thus influence the expectations the applicant formed about the organization (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). The possibility of expectations not being met may have led to the low PO fit found in the study for applicants with employee referrals, as opposed to applicants without employee referrals. In addition, Hsieh and Chen’s rationale behind why poor PO fit resulted was due to the referrers’ personal biases being included in the RJPs. These personal biases could cause incorrect information to be given to the applicant that could skew the applicant’s expectations of the job and organization, resulting in a poorer PO fit. Still, this explanation is inconsistent with Kristof’s (1996) proposition that RJPs may promote high levels of fit because they increase the salience of organizational values during recruitment and will thus increase the relevance of PO fit for the applicants.
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

These inconsistent results could be explained by the way PO fit is measured. In the Hsieh and Chen (2011) study, PO fit was measured as both an indirect measure using the OCP and as a direct measure by asking the employee if a good fit existed. Unfortunately, using the OCP is not an ideal method for measuring actual fit. First, Kristof-Brown (2005) notes that the wording of the original OCP asks respondents to indicate what values they prefer, rather than what their personal values actually are, thus causing the measure to not assess everything it is intended to measure. In addition, data was collected to assess fit after employees began working in their organizations, which Cable and Judge (1996) note could lead to skewed results. For instance, organizational socialization practices (the way an organization influences an employee’s values, attitudes and behaviors) could have caused individuals who may not have “fit” with the organization during the job search to experience increased levels of PO fit after beginning employment because of the effects socialization had on their values and/or perceived fit (Chatman, 1991). Socialization could have thus impacted employees’ responses on both the OCP and the direct measure of employee fit in the Hsieh and Chen study causing inconsistent results with Kristof’s (1996) research.

The inconsistent results could also be explained by the sample used by Hsieh and Chen (2011). The sample consisted of Taiwanese participants from industry unions; therefore, the generalizability of the results to the United States and other job domains is unknown. It is possible that results would be different in the US due to proposed cultural differences. Within cross-cultural psychology, Western cultures (e.g. USA, and Germany) are typically considered individualistic, in which individuals value autonomy and their social behavior is guided by their personal desires and needs (Triandis, 1995).
Individuals from these cultures are primarily characterized by independent self-construals, in which the sense of self is defined by personal needs, desires, and attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, Asian cultures (e.g., India, China, and Taiwan) are considered collectivistic, where individuals value group cohesion and interpersonal harmony, and their social behavior is guided by a focus on duties, norms, and expectations of others (Triandis, 1995). Individuals from these cultures are typically characterized by interdependent self-construals whereby the ‘self in relation to others’ is most salient (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It may be that these cultural differences could have influenced an applicant’s perceptions of fit because of the strong emphasis the Taiwanese participants may have placed on relationships with individuals within the organization, or the organization as a whole. Strong relationships with individuals within the company could elicit a strong desire or obligation to choose the organization, which could have biased responses to the PO fit measures. Hence, additional research should be conducted in the US to examine the relationship between employee referrals and PO fit to assess the generalizability of Hsieh and Chen’s results.

**Measuring PO Fit**

When considering PO fit, one must consider how it will be measured. Research, however, has provided contradictory results on the most accurate assessment. Ravlin and Ritchie (2006) examined both perceived and actual measures of fit on attitudes of organizational fit. Perceived fit is considered a direct measure of fit that is conceptualized as the individuals’ judgment that fit exists between the individual and a certain organization (Kristof, 1996). Actual fit or objective fit is typically measured as an indirect measure of fit that involves an explicit comparison between individual and
organizational characteristics that have been rated separately (Kristof, 1996). Results showed that the actual level of value congruence (how well the values of the organization matched their own) was irrelevant for those individuals who perceived there was a high degree of fit. Individuals who had low actual fit and low perceived fit tended to have the least positive attitudes towards their jobs (Ravlin & Ritchie, 2006). Similarly, individuals with high actual fit, but low perceived fit also showed low positive attitudes. Therefore, the proposition of fit existing as long as it is perceived to exist appears to hold true (Kristof, 1996).

Verquer et al. (2003) also studied measurements of fit in a meta-analysis; however, they examined subjective, perceived and objective fit instead of actual and perceived fit that have previously been discussed. They argued that these are quite different ways to measure fit and note that any disparate results obtained in previous studies could very well be due to how fit was measured. It is important to note, however, that the way fit is defined in Verquer et al. and Kristof (1996) are not identical. Subjective fit measures in Verquer et al. directly ask how well individuals think their own characteristics align with those of the organization. This definition of subjective fit matches Kristof’s (1996) definition of perceived fit. Verquer et al.’s perceived fit measures ask individuals to describe themselves and then to describe the organization and a fit measure is constructed based on their responses, which appear to lie somewhere in between Kristof’s definition of perceived and actual fit. Verquer et al.’s objective fit measures, on the other hand, ask individuals to describe their own characteristics but rather than having the same individuals describe the organization, another individual is asked to describe the organization on the same dimensions. This indirect measure of fit
appears to align rather closely with Kristof’s definition of *actual* fit. Results of the Verquer et al. study showed that type of fit moderated PO fit outcome relationships. Specifically, compared with perceived and objective fit, subjective fit measures had the highest correlations with PO fit outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction (+), organizational commitment (+) and turnover intent (-)), whereas perceived fit showed greater effect sizes with these outcomes than objective fit. Although these results are similar to other studies in that direct measures (subjective and/or perceived) are better predictors of fit than indirect methods (objective/actual), it is uncertain whether the discrepancy in defining perceived and subjective fit contaminated findings in studies such as the Hsieh and Chen (2011) study.

It is clear that researchers over the past few decades do not agree on which measurement types are best to use for PO fit assessment. A meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005), however, provides valuable insight into which methods the authors perceive are best. They examined the same three types of fit, perceived, subjective and objective, as the meta-analysis by Verquer et al. (2003), but once again defined the terms differently. Perceived fit was defined by Kristof-Brown et al. as an individual’s direct assessment of fit with an organization (Verquer et al.’s definition of *subjective* fit), whereas subjective fit was assessed indirectly by comparing one individual’s separate report of person and organization fit (Verquer et al.’s definition of *perceived* fit). Although some authors have used perceived and subjective fit interchangeably (e.g., Judge & Cable, 2007; Kristof, 1996), this inconsistency in definitions creates measurement concerns in the PO fit literature. The definition of objective fit, however, is consistent across sources (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

et al., 20036), but is used interchangeably with actual fit in Kristof (1996). Consistent with the results of Verquer et al., Kristof-Brown et al. found that direct measures of fit (e.g., perceived fit in Kristof-Brown et al. and subjective fit in Verquer et al.) provided stronger correlations with PO fit outcomes than did indirect measures (e.g., objective fit). However, Kristof-Brown et al. noted that direct measures of perceived fit are most susceptible to common method bias. As previously mentioned, Kristof-Brown et al. also commented on how perceived fit can be relatively inaccurate for PO fit based on the difficulty employees may have when identifying certain organizational characteristics. For example, employees, who were not yet trained on the ethical values of the organization may not know how to adequately respond to a fit question regarding the organization’s ethics.

It is also important to note that indirect measures (i.e., actual or objective fit) can lead to inconsistent and/or inaccurate results due to the methods of measurements used. Kristof (1996) suggests several ways in which actual or indirect measures of fit can be obtained (i.e., interactions, difference scores, or polynomial regressions). The potential use of difference scores to assess actual fit can lead to inconsistent results by masking psychologically meaningful results when subtracting one rating from another or when subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores (Cronbach & Furby, 1970; Wall & Payne, 1973). Cronbach and Furby (1970) note that obtaining a “raw change” or “raw gain” score can lead to inaccurate conclusions because these scores are systematically tied to any random error of measurement that can occur. Moreover, Wall and Payne (1973) strongly suggest that “deficiency,” “change,” and “gain” scores should be avoided and only raw scores should be used. By avoiding the calculation of difference scores, the
danger of inaccurately interpreting the scores as more than the sum or difference of their components is alleviated (Wall & Payne, 1973). Moreover, several authors suggest the use of part or partial correlation (Wall & Payne, 1973), polynomial regression (Edwards, 2001) or multiple regression (Cronbach & Furby, 1970) to obtain more accurate results than simply using a calculated difference score.

Some authors may attempt to use direct comparisons, as Verquer et al. (2003) used for perceived fit (a comparison of individual’s preferences and individual’s perceptions of the organization), to avoid the problems with difference scores. Edwards (2001), however, notes that there are also measurement concerns associated with this method. Measuring direct perceptions this way is problematic because the respondent is explicitly or implicitly calculating the difference between the components, which leaves the scores that result equally as inaccurate as those calculated from difference scores (Edwards, 2001). Obtaining one score from two distinct concepts (Lord, 1958) is double-barreled (DeVillis, 1991) and should be avoided to maintain the psychological meaningfulness of the information. In addition to this, subgrouping results (e.g., dichotomizing or trichotomizing into high, medium, low fit) depending on where self-ratings fall relative to organization scores, for example, creates similar problems despite attempts to avoid the low reliability concerns associated with difference scores (Edwards, 2001). Subgrouping also highlights the loss of information and reduces the amount of variance that can be explained (Edwards, 2001). Thus, to avoid many concerns regarding difference scores, raw scores should be used, to examine how two reports of PO fit relate.
The Current Study

It is evident that person-organization fit has an influence on hiring decisions, whether it is from the individual or organizational perspective (Cable & Judge, 2007; Chuang & Sackett, 2005; Hsieh & Chen, 2011; O’Reilly et al., 1991). PO fit may moderate the relationship between hiring elements such as employee referrals and the decision for an organization to extend a job offer to an applicant and/or an applicant to accept a job offer. Considering there is a lack of research on the applicant side of PO fit, the present study will focus on how PO fit and employee referrals influence an applicant’s experience in the hiring process. Particular attention will be paid to how PO fit (i.e., perceived, subjective, and objective/actual) is measured and defined to ensure effective and accurate measurement of the construct. The present study will be using the Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) definitions of the three types of fit instead of the Verquer et al. (2003) definitions because the Kristof-Brown et al. meta-analysis is not only more recent, but 172 studies were analyzed in the meta-analysis compared to the 21 studies used in Verquer et al. In addition, according to the Social Sciences Citation Index (2012), the Kristof-Brown et al. meta-analysis has been cited over three times as much (358 times) as the Verquer et al. meta-analysis (118 times); therefore, the present study aims to use the most widely used definitions of fit.
Chapter II
Rationale and Hypotheses

Findings by Cable and Judge (1996), in which PO fit was found to be predictive of acceptance intentions, and findings by Carless (2005), whereby PO fit was not found predictive of acceptance intentions, present the possibility that the importance of a particular type of fit (e.g., PO fit) varies with the influence of different antecedents. Therefore, the present study aims to largely replicate the Backhaus (2003) study in which several antecedents (e.g., years of work experience, age, and negative fit experiences in the past) were examined to assess their influence on the degree to which fit is viewed to be important from an applicant’s perspective. The present study seeks to extend the Backhaus study to a sample of applicants who have more extensive work experience (two or more years working full-time) than the college sample in the original study who were either expecting a change in job level or anticipating an entry level position. Backhaus found that experiencing poor fit in an organization in the past would cause an individual to avoid experiencing another such situation by placing a higher emphasis on PO fit. Hence, it is also expected that there will be a significant relationship between past negative PO fit experiences and applicants valuing fit as important. Consequently, the following is hypothesized:

H1: Applicants who have had negative PO fit experiences in the past will value PO fit as more important than applicants who have not had negative PO fit experiences.
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

In addition, two exploratory hypotheses were tested in the present study as a result of the nonsignificant results found in Backhaus (2003). Research by Feldman and Arnold (1978) suggest that previous work experience is related to relative importance of the job and organizational variables, such that the more full-time work experience individuals have, the better they are at self-reporting the importance of job and organizational characteristics. Since 92% of the sample in Backhaus (2003) reported not having work experience, the present study examined whether previous work experience in a sample of applicants with two or more years of work experience is related to the perceived importance of PO fit in the following hypothesis:

H2: Applicants’ years of work experience will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on person-organization fit during the selection process.

Similarly, Backhaus (2003) proposed that as job seekers accrue experience through age, they will come to appreciate the importance of fit. However, Backhaus did not find a significant relationship between age and importance of fit. The present study seeks to retest this hypothesis with a broader sample of applicants with at least two years of job experience as well as applicants who are likely to vary in age. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Applicants’ age will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on person-organization fit during the selection process.

The present study also seeks to extend the list of antecedents of hiring decisions explored by Backhaus (2003) to include employee referrals, as research has shown that employee referrals are quite prevalent in the selection process and can increase an applicant’s chances of getting hired (Brotherton, 2012; Yakubovich & Lup, 2006). It has
also been found that PO fit has high correlations with an organization’s intentions to hire an applicant \((r = .61)\), as well as an applicant’s attraction to an organization \((r = .46)\); Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Since both constructs influence intentions to hire certain applicants, it is likely that there is a relationship between PO fit and employee referrals. However, few studies have addressed employee referrals and PO fit together and no studies have examined whether the presence of an employee referral influences the importance applicants place on finding organizations with similar characteristics to their own. Consequently, the present study seeks to further investigate this relationship with the following hypothesis:

\[ H4: \text{Applicants who have an employee referral will value PO fit more highly than applicants who do not have an employee referral.} \]

Unexpected results from Hsieh and Chen (2011) showed that employee referrals have a negative relationship with PO fit such that perceived PO fit was low when applicants were recruited through employee referrals. Hsieh and Chen however, indicated that it is unclear whether this effect was due to the amount/type of information the referrer provided to the applicant, or if it was due to the PO fit of the referrer. The present study seeks to partially address this limitation with the following hypothesis:

\[ H5: \text{There will be a significant positive relationship between applicants’ perceptions of referrer PO fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own PO fit.} \]
Chapter III

Method

Participants

Participants for the present study were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). A description was posted on the site asking for voluntary participation in return for $0.25 compensation. The present study sought to study individuals who are currently searching for jobs. This would allow for a more accurate assessment of importance of fit without the interference of hindsight bias that can be present from the recall of experiences. Only participants who were seeking full-time jobs (including individuals who were unemployed and individuals already employed but looking for a different job) were included to control for the influence of extraneous and unique variables that accompany part-time job-seekers. Participants must have also applied to at least one job in the past six months and had a specific career field of interest. These restrictions were included in a pre-survey to limit the individuals who were allowed to respond to the survey.

The sample consisted of 179 job seeking applicants, 45.8% female and 54.2% male. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 61 ($M = 31.98, SD = 9.09$), and varied in career field of interest with 60 different career fields reported (e.g., IT, education, and nursing). All participants had full-time work experience; however, the number of years of full-time job experience in an applicants’ career field of interest ranged from 0 to 36 years ($M = 6.95, SD = 6.79$). One participant completed the survey twice and the second
response was thrown out. For the first, second, and third hypotheses, 33 participants were omitted from the analysis for reporting less than two years of full-time work experience in their career field of interest.

A majority of the sample indicated they were employed for wages (44.1%) or unemployed but looking for work (35.2%), whereas other participants indicated self-employed (14.5%), student (4.5%), and homemaker (1.7%) as their current employment status. The sample primarily consisted of individuals who indicated having a 4-year college degree such as a B.S. or B.A. (34.1%), or having some college (32.4%), whereas others indicated having a 2-year college degree (12.8%), a Master's degree (11.2%), a high school diploma/GED (8.9%) and some high school (0.6%). A majority of the sample identified themselves as White (79.3%), with a few who identified themselves as Black/African American (10.1%), Asian/Asian American (6.7%), Hispanic (5.6%), American Indian or Alaska Native (2.2%), other/multiracial (0.6%) and 0.6% preferred to not respond.

Measures

**Job information sources.** To assess how prevalent employee referrals were to an applicant’s attainment of information about the job, a job information source measure was adapted from Saks and Ashforth (1997) and used in the present study. This measure has been successfully used in at least two studies (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, and Phillips, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). This measure consisted of one item with 12 response options, which were adapted from Saks and Ashforth (1997) because their adapted items related more closely to the present study than did the original items in Barber et al. (1994). Participants were asked to identify which external sources are used
in their job search to acquire more information about the job. Applicants were allowed to respond to more than one option. Scoring for these responses included a 1 for checked boxes (denoting sources that do apply) and 0 for unchecked boxes (denoting sources that do not apply). Employee referral analyses were divided into two categories: employee referrals present (coded as a 1) and employee referrals not present (coded as a 0).

**Importance of employee referrals.** Three exploratory items were added to this measure to further inquire about the importance of employee referrals. These questions included: “How important do you feel it is to have an employee referral when applying to jobs?” “How important are employee referrals to your personal job search process?” and “How important do you feel employee referrals are to the hiring decision?” These items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*highly important*). The coefficient alpha reliability for these items was .77.

**Importance of fit.** The extent to which applicants valued PO fit as an important criterion in their job search was measured by a 4-item scale adapted from Cable and Judge’s (1996) 2-item scale. The first question inquired about how important fit is in general with no specific organization in mind. The second item in the 2-item scale was extended to three separate questions to inquire about individual aspects of PO fit (i.e., values, personality, and goals). Responses to the first item was on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely unimportant*) to 5 (*completely important*) and responses to the remaining three questions were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*). The 2-item scale had been shown to have an internal consistency of .79 (Cable & Judge, 1996). The 2-item measure had also been validated across several
different studies (e.g., Backhaus, 2003; Cable & Judge, 1996; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001). In the present study, the coefficient alpha reliability for the 4-item scale was .85.

**Perceptions of PO self-fit.** An applicant’s self-perception of PO fit was measured using a 4-item scale validated by Saks and Ashforth (1997). This scale was slightly modified to better fit the focus on applicants rather than newly hired individuals. Participants were instructed to have one particular job in mind (their top choice out of the jobs to which they have applied) when responding to these questions. Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little extent*) to 5 (*very large extent*). The coefficient alpha reliability for this scale was .91 (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). An additional question was added to this scale regarding goals to remain consistent with the PO fit definition in the Importance of Fit scale. This item was also measured using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little extent*) to 5 (*very large extent*). A single general PO fit item ("To what extent does your new organization measure up to the kind of organization you were seeking?") from Saks and Ashforth was also used to assess perceptions of PO self-fit. This item correlated strongly with the 4-item scale ($r = .81$; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In the present study, the coefficient alpha reliability for the 4-item scale was .87 and .91 for the 5-item scale, including the question on goals. Similar to the results that Saks and Ashforth (1997) found, the one item correlated highly with the 4-item scale ($r = .82$), as well as with the 5-item scale, including the additional item ($r = .83$).

**Perceptions of referrer fit.** Participants’ perception of their referrer’s fit had not been previously measured in the literature. The Saks and Ashforth (1997) 4-item PO fit measure was used, along with the additional item on goals, and had adjusted verbiage to
change the target of the question to the referrer rather than the self. Responses to these questions were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very little extent) to 5 (very large extent). A single general PO fit item ("To what extent do you perceive the individual who referred you to the organization fits with the organization he or she works for?") adapted from Saks and Ashforth was also used to assess perceptions of referrer PO fit. In the present study, the coefficient alpha reliability was .80 for the 4-item scale and .84 for the 5-item scale. The correlation between the one item and the 4-item scale was $r = .57$ and $r = .56$ for the 5-item.

**Work experience.** Work experience was measured with the two items used in the Backhaus (2003) study. The first item asked the applicants whether or not they had full-time work experience, requiring a yes or no response. This item was included in the prescreening survey for both the referral and non-referral groups. The second item asked applicants to indicate the number of years of full-time work experience they had for the job they were applying. This question was asked along with the other demographic questions.

**Negative fit experiences.** Negative fit experiences were measured using the item, "Have you had a work experience in which you felt that you did not match or fit with the organization and/or the employees in the organization?" which was adapted from Backhaus (2003). Applicants were asked to respond yes or no to this item. A follow-up question asked, "To what extent do negative fit experiences best represent your past work experiences?" Responses to this question were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very little extent) to 5 (very large extent).
Demographics. Six demographic questions were also included in the survey to obtain information on a participant’s age, race, gender, educational background, employment status, and specific career field of interest. Age and career field of interest were open ended, whereas, the remaining demographics questions were in multiple choice format, requiring a single response.

Selection criteria pre-survey. Five pre-screening questions were asked before participants were directed to the survey. These questions asked participants whether they had full-time work experience, were currently seeking full-time employment, had applied to at least one job in the past six months, had a specific career field of interest, and whether they had received an employee referral. Responses to these questions were either yes or no. For inclusion in the survey as an individual who had an employee referral, participants must have responded yes to all five questions. For inclusion in the survey as an individual who did not have an employee referral, participants must have responded yes to the first four questions and no to the last question.

Procedure

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought through Xavier University’s IRB. The exempt process was requested because the study had a simple design, was anonymous and caused minimal harm to the participants involved. After IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix C), the 31-item questionnaire was posted as an online survey on MTurk, requesting voluntary participation. The survey was intended to take participants approximately 10 minutes to complete, however, the average completion time was 5.01 minutes. An IRB modification was submitted to change the original intended completion time from 10 minutes to 5 minutes, since participants did not need
as much time. Responses were not tied to any personal identification information such as an email address in order to protect participants and their responses. Participants were compensated $0.25 for completion of the survey through MTurk.

A 31-item questionnaire created in SurveyGizmo was administered electronically via MTurk. Participants received the survey following a set of five questions if the selection criteria were met. One survey was administered with logic built in to present a separate set of questions to two separate groups based on the selection criteria of whether or not participants had an employee referral. This resulted in a sample of participants who received an employee referral and a sample of participants who had not received an employee referral. Participants who received an employee referral received a set of 31 questions including 6 questions about the individual who provided the referral, whereas the sample of participants who had not received an employee referral received 25 questions, omitting these six questions regarding referrer fit. The questionnaire began with the job information sources measure, followed by the importance of employee referral items, importance of fit items, perceptions of PO self-fit items, negative fit experiences items, perceptions of referrer fit items and ending with demographic questions. An IRB modification was submitted for the job information sources measure to include 3 additional items on social media websites, company websites, and online job boards to ensure the response options were more inclusive to what applicants. Two quality check items were included throughout the survey to ensure the participant was still engaged. If participants failed the quality checks, they were not compensated and their data were not used. This survey was administered in English. Only participants who
were fluent in English and living in the US were recruited to take the survey to avoid any misinterpretations due to a language barrier.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Before beginning the survey, all participants read a short form describing the survey and the confidential nature of all responses (see Appendix A). An IRB modification was submitted for this form to instruct participants that completing the survey more than once was prohibited and all additional submission would be rejected from the MTurk system. Participants then electronically provided consent by clicking a button next to the statement “I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and I give my consent to voluntarily complete this survey”. Responses to all questions (excluding a few demographics questions with “prefer not to respond” options) were required in order for the participant to receive compensation. Directions were provided for specific items and sets of items to add additional guidance and clarification (see Appendix B). The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Questions were presented in sets by item category to limit participant fatigue from responding to a long list of items on one page. Upon completion of the survey, participants saw a “Thank you!” screen and were presented with information about the study. The researchers’ contact information was also provided in case any questions or concerns arise.
Chapter IV

Results

The first hypothesis, proposing that applicants who have had negative PO fit experiences in the past would value PO fit as more important than applicants who have not had negative PO fit experience, was analyzed using an independent samples $t$-test. Results show that there is no difference in the value applicants place on importance of fit, $t(144) = .65, p = .257$, for participants who have had negative fit experiences in the past ($M = 14.99, SD = 3.13$) and participants who have not had negative fit experiences in the past ($M = 14.55, SD = 3.11$).

The second hypothesis, proposing that applicants’ years of work experience would be positively related to the degree of importance they place on person-organization fit during the selection process, was analyzed using a Pearson Product Moment correlation. A nonsignificant relationship was found, $r(144) = -.05, p = .274$.

The third hypothesis, proposing that applicants’ age would be positively related to the degree of importance they place on PO fit during the selection process, was analyzed using a Pearson Product Moment correlation. Results showed a nonsignificant relationship, $r(144) = .05, p = .269$.

The fourth hypothesis, proposing that applicants who had an employee referral would value PO fit as more important than applicants who did not have an employee referral, was analyzed using an independent samples $t$-test. Contrary to expectations,
results showed that there was no significant difference between groups \( t(177) = .46, p = .323 \). Individuals who have had an employee referral did not report PO fit as significantly more important \( (M = 14.90, SD = 3.15) \) than applicants who did not have an employee referral \( (M = 14.67, SD = 3.41) \).

The fifth hypothesis, proposing that there would be a significant positive relationship between applicants’ perceptions of referrer PO fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own PO fit, was analyzed using a Pearson Product Moment correlation. This statistical test was only conducted on those participants who received an employee referral, as the questions were not relevant to those who did not receive a referral. This analysis demonstrated that there was a significant, positive relationship between applicant perceptions of the referrer PO fit and applicant perceptions of their own PO fit, \( r(88) = .51, p < .001 \), thus providing support for Hypothesis 5.

**Supplemental Analyses**

A correlation matrix displaying the correlations between all continuous variables can be found in Table 1. Significant positive relationships were found between importance of PO fit and perceptions of self PO fit \( r(177) = .58, p < .001 \), importance of PO fit and perceptions of referrer PO fit \( r(177) = .37, p < .001 \), and importance of employee referral and importance of PO fit \( r(177) = .25, p = .001 \). An additional analysis was conducted to investigate whether receiving an employee referral has an influence on where applicants view employee referrals as important. Significance was found whereby applicants who had received an employee referral \( (M = 12.33, SD = 2.08) \) reported employee referrals to be more important than applicants who had not received an employee referral \( (M = 10.61, SD = 2.43) \), \( t(177) = 5.11, p < .001 \).
### THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

#### Table 1.

*Correlations and Reliabilities of Key Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Means &amp; Standard Deviations</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$M = 31.98$</td>
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<td>2. Years of Full-time Work Experience&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$M = 6.95$</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.70&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$SD = 6.79$</td>
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<td>3. Frequency of Past Negative Fit Experiences&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$M = 2.75$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<td>$SD = 1.18$</td>
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<td>4. Importance of Employee Referral</td>
<td>$M = 11.47$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(.77)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$SD = 2.42$</td>
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<td>5. Importance of PO Fit</td>
<td>$M = 14.79$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<td>.25&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>(.85)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$SD = 3.28$</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Perceived PO Fit</td>
<td>$M = 27.13$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.58&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$SD = 5.41$</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Perceived Referrer Fit&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$M = 22.83$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.03&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.03&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.14&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.37&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.51&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>a</sup>. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup>. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

a. N = 146
b. N = 90
c. N = 78
The first four hypotheses focused on whether or not applicants find having person-organization fit with a company an important factor to consider when applying to jobs. Although no significant difference was found for the importance of fit between applicants who had received an employee referral and applicants who had not received an employee referral, it is possible that applicants who had an employee referral would perceive that they fit better with a company than applicants who had not received an employee referral. An additional independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to investigate whether such a difference between groups exist and a nonsignificant effect was found, \( t(177) = 1.26, p = .089 \).
Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether employee referrals affect an applicant's perceived fit and/or the importance an applicant places on having PO fit with an organization. The first hypothesis proposed that applicants who have had negative PO fit experiences in the past will value PO fit as more important than applicants who have not had negative PO fit experiences. Contrary to findings from Backhaus (2003), no support was found for Hypothesis 1 in the present study. In contrast to Backhaus (2003), this sample had more extensive work experience (two or more years working full-time) than the college sample in the original study but found individuals who had negative fit experiences in the past did not report PO fit as more important during the application process than individuals who had not had negative fit experiences in the past. This was unexpected but could have been due to the work experience of the present sample. It is possible that the more work experience an individual has the less negative fit experiences influence the importance placed on fit. Or, it could be that past negative fit experiences are simply more salient than work experience. That is, it could be that once someone has a negative fit experience, it is so salient that it is not dependent on length of work experience. Indeed, Backhaus (2003) speculated this to be the case in her research. This finding also could have been a result of extraneous factors such as the economic conditions of the time. In 2003, the unemployment rate, according to the United States
Department of Labor (July, 2013), was around 6% on average across the year, whereas in 2013 it is around 7.7% on average. Therefore, when considering past negative fit experiences, it is possible that the individuals in the Backhaus study felt as though they could be more selective in the job they were seeking and thus were valuing fit with the company more than individuals in 2013. Future research could further investigate applicants’ perceptions of economic conditions to investigate whether this factor could have an influence on person-organization fit.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that applicants’ years of work experience will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on PO fit during the selection process, whereas Hypothesis 3 proposed that applicants’ age will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on PO fit. These hypotheses, on the other hand, were consistent with findings from Backhaus (2003), where no significance was found. Analysis of Hypothesis 2 showed that there was not a positive relationship between years of work experience and the importance applicants place on PO fit. It is possible, that there is simply no difference between the importance of PO fit for individuals of different experience levels. Similar to Hypothesis 2, despite having a sample with a wide range of ages from 20 to 61, no positive relationship between age and the importance applicants placed on PO fit was found. Like work experience, it is possible that age simply does not have an influence on how individuals perceive PO fit when searching for jobs. Given the strong positive correlation between age and years of work experience, it is likely that the nonsignificant finding for age is due to similar reasons. Perhaps some employees recognize the importance of PO fit regardless of their levels of work experience or their age. If this is the case, then perhaps there are other factors that determine why an
employee values PO fit. These factors could include personality characteristics, personal goals, individual needs, and personal interests. Hence, future research should further examine these factors, as well as others, to investigate what specifically differentiates individuals who value PO fit from individuals who do not value PO fit.

In regards to Hypothesis 4, individuals who had received an employee referral and individuals who had not received an employee referral did not differ significantly in reports of the degree of importance of PO fit. It is possible that individuals value PO fit to the same degree, as both groups reported near a 3.70 on average on a 5-point scale when evaluating the importance of PO fit. However, it was found that applicants who had received an employee referral reported employee referrals to be more important than applicants who had not received an employee referral. It can be concluded that applicants who have had an employee referral find them to be important. The employee referral itself, however, does not necessarily impact how important the applicants think the referral is to assessing the importance of PO fit. This could have been due to the quality (or lack of quality) of information provided to the applicant through the employee referral. For instance, results by Hsieh and Chen (2011) found that the more information provided to an applicant about the job and organization, the greater the discrepancy between what was expected from the organization and what was actually received. Hsieh and Chen (2011), though, attributed this to the applicant overly trusting the information provided that thus influenced the expectations the applicant formed about the organization. Or it could also be due to the employee realizing the employee referral is providing information that either conflicts with the employee’s existing knowledge base or that the information is inconsistent over time. Hence, the amount/type of information
the referrer provided to the applicant could have also influenced whether or not the applicants who received an employee referral valued fit differently than applicants who had not received information from an internal employee. Future research should investigate whether the amount or type of information influences the importance applicants place on PO fit.

Similarly, the quality of information provided in an employee referral can also differ considerably across referrers, which could have influenced applicant perceptions of the company, as well as their perceived fit. Indeed, the quality of information received about a job has been examined in other contexts, such as realistic job previews (RJPs), which have been found to be “related to lower levels of attrition from the recruitment process, initial expectations, voluntary turnover, and all turnover, and to higher performance” (Phillips, 1998, p. 684). Therefore, it is possible that the information conveyed in an employee referral could affect an applicant’s perceptions of their own fit with the organization. Future research should further examine the content of employee referral information and how it influences the applicant’s fit, as well as the importance applicants place on fit during the job search process. In addition, future research should also investigate the discrepancy between what an applicant expected from the organization and what was actually experienced to see if any cognitive dissonance may have occurred that could have affected the importance placed on fit, as well as the perceptions of self-fit.

Support was found for Hypothesis 5, in which there was a significant positive relationship between applicants’ perceptions of referrer fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own fit. This finding shows that employee referrals may impact perceived PO fit to
some degree and has positive implications for individuals who have received an employee referral. Individuals who have received an employee referral will have stronger PO fit if they perceive theirreferrer to fit with the organization. Therefore, for recruitment purposes, companies should utilize employees that are perceived to fit well with the company to recruit applicants into the organization. Since previous research has shown that perceived PO fit has strong positive correlations with job satisfaction ($r = .68$, $p < .05$) and organizational commitment ($r = .75$, $p < .05$; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), it is possible that using highly satisfied and committed employees to recruit applicants will help increase the applicants’ perceived fit. In addition, companies may also be able to increase fit of new recruits if they only use referrals from satisfied employees and/or employees that have been with the company for a long period of time. It is plausible that an increased perceived fit of new recruits through the use of these methods could result in higher levels of satisfaction and commitment for newly hired employees.

Supplemental analyses showed that there was no difference between applicants who had an employee referral and applicants who had not received an employee referral in terms of perceptions of PO fit. It is possible that just because participants were applying to jobs, does not mean that they would accept a job offer with that company. Therefore, it is possible that applicants did not perceive that they fit with the organization they were referred to because they realized they were not a good fit with the organization, assuming that information was accurate. This suggests that there may be a difference between simply being referred to an organization and being attracted to an organization. Just like RJPs may lead some employees to realize they are not a good fit with an organization, it is possible that information collected from an employee referral may be
equally useful in helping the employee to rule out one’s attraction to an organization. Previous research has examined what attracts an applicant to an organization such as what is written in advertisements (Stevens & Szmerekovsky, 2010) or what is known about the company’s reputation (Coldwell, Billsberry, van Meurs, & Marsh, 2008), however, future research should assess applicant attraction in relation to information collected via employee referrals to further investigate how they differ or relate to one another.

In addition, since previous research found that applicants who placed more emphasis on PO fit when making job decisions experienced a higher level of PO fit after entering the organization than those who placed less emphasis on fit (Cable & Judge, 1996), future research should expand on the present study and investigate an applicant’s actual fit with the organization after the applicant has been hired with an employee referral.

Results of the present study raise an interesting question as to whether it is possible to convince people they are a good fit with an organization and if that by itself can influence factors such as satisfaction and commitment. The present study found a significant positive correlation between the importance applicants place on fit and the applicant’s perception of self-fit, which suggests that the importance of fit may may be construed as important only if it is positive. Previous research has found that individuals who had low actual fit and low perceived fit tended to have the least positive attitudes towards their jobs (Ravlin & Ritchie, 2006), whereas individuals with high actual fit, but low perceived fit also showed low positive attitudes. Therefore, as Kristof (1996) proposed, it seems that fit exists as long as it is perceived to exist. If this is true, it is
possible that fit may not be on a continuum from negative fit to positive fit but instead consists of two separate dimensions of fit existing or fit not existing. This proposition could further explain why no significance was found for individuals with negative fit experiences valuing fit more than individuals without negative fit experiences, and that no relationship was found between the frequency of negative fit experiences and importance of fit. Perhaps fit can be conceptualized as existing on two separate dimensions, similar to Herzberg's 2-factor theory of job satisfaction in that one dimension results in neutral satisfaction only if certain conditions are met and the other dimension results in satisfaction if other conditions are met, rather than a single continuum. If that is the case with fit, it is conceivable that negative fit experiences may result in neutral attitudes, whereas the presence of fit (positive fit) could produce positive attitudes by increasing the importance placed on fit and potentially an applicant's actual fit. Future research should examine this further and investigate the possibility of fit existing on two separate dimensions.

Moreover, it may be possible to influence an employee's satisfaction and commitment if they can be convinced they are a good fit with the company. Employers may be able to convince their employees that they are a good fit with the company if they highlight company actions that may align with their values, such as being environmentally responsible, performing community service, or even having a company outing at a baseball game. If an employer can make positive experiences salient, then employees may perceive they fit with the organization. This consistency between values and fit is the premise behind cognitive dissonance theory in that individuals strive to be consistent in their attitudes and behaviors (Festinger, 1957). If the values of the company
appear to be aligned with the employee’s values, perceived fit may exist which would then likely result in higher employee satisfaction and commitment.

Contributions

Despite these limitations, the present study makes several important contributions to the fit literature. First of all, the present study can be generalized to various organizations and applicants across the United States. The sample acquired from MTurk varied in age from 20-61, with the modes falling at 24 (7.3%), 29 (7.3%), and 31 (7.3%), and varied in career field with 60 different careers reported such as accounting, IT, education, and nursing, as the most frequently reported fields. The sample was predominately White (79.3%) and Black/African American (10.1%), however, based on data from the 2010 Census, the U.S. population is 72.4% white and 12.6% Black/African American (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011). Therefore, the present study is fairly generalizable to race within the U.S. It is also apparent that both employed (44.1%) and unemployed individuals looking for work (35.2%) use MTurk which further increases the generalizability of this study.

The present study raised concerns about how fit was measured and defined across various studies. The present study pointed out that definitions of the types of fit (e.g., perceived, objective, subjective, direct, and indirect) differ across studies. This is a concern because it is unclear whether inconsistencies found in results across studies are due to how fit was defined and measured or due to other variables. The present study also pointed out that several studies had methodological issues in how fit was measured. Specifically, measuring fit using difference scores when subtracting one rating from another or when subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores can be problematic
because these scores are systematically tied to any random error of measurement that can occur (Cronbach & Furby, 1970; Wall & Payne, 1973). Using direct comparisons (a comparison of individual’s preferences and individual’s perceptions of the organization) also have methodological concerns (Edwards, 2001). The present study avoided both of these measurement methods and instead measured fit solely from self-perceptions. Still, this study raises an important concern that more attention should be placed on how fit is measured to ensure results are consistently interpreted accurately.

In addition, the present study addressed employee referrals and person-organization fit together which few studies have done. It was also the first to examine whether the presence of an employee referral influences the importance applicants place on finding organizations with similar characteristics to their own. Although significance was not found between employee referrals and reports of PO fit being important to the job search process, finding significance for the fifth hypothesis in which perceptions of referrer fit had a positive relationship with perceptions of self-fit shows that a relationship between the two variables exists. This result has implications for increasing the strength of recruiting employees through an employee referral. Since employee referrals have shown to be the second most popular recruiting method and is the source that yields the highest quality applicants (Brotherton, 2012), knowing that referrer fit can increase applicants’ perceptions of their own fit with the company can further improve the benefits of the recruiting method.

Limitations

A few potential limitations exist in the present study. One such limitation is that it is possible that participants may have been untruthful in the pre-screening survey in order
to advance to the survey and receive compensation. These pre-screening questions, however, were strictly yes or no responses with minimal prior cues to how they should be answered to advance to the survey. Action was also taken to prevent users from taking the pre-screening survey more than once by adjusting the settings in Survey Gizmo to not allow a second submission based upon a cookie in the user’s browser after a successful submission. Upon possibility that users can clear their cookies, additional action was taken to also prevent duplicate submissions by only allowing unique identifying IDs, associated with the user’s MTurk login account, to complete the pre-screening survey.

In addition to this, it is also possible that participants did not adequately reflect on their responses to the survey questions. The survey was intended to take approximately 10 minutes to complete, however, the average completion time was 5.01 minutes. This short completion time may have caused the survey to not capture the participants’ true thoughts as adequately as intended. In addition to this, there are also some concerns with whether participants actually view PO fit as important. It is possible that even though participants had full-time work experience, that work experience may not have been meaningful, such as completing trivial tasks. This raises some concerns with how individuals see themselves in relation to the organization, which may have affected how PO fit was captured.

It is also possible that some participants misunderstood what was meant by an employee referral. Although a specific definition of an employee referral was provided, some participants (n = 17) responded “yes” to having an employee referral but did not choose using a current or former employee as a source for information about a job. It is possible that these individuals received an employee referral, but used other sources,
other than the referrer to gain additional information about the job. A similar pattern was found for some individuals \((n = 9)\) who responded “no” to having an employee referral but reported using a current or former employee as a source for gaining information about a job. It is possible that these individuals did not get referred for the job by the individuals they talked to when acquiring more information. Analyses were conducted both with and without these individuals to examine the impact they may have had on the findings but no differences in results were found.

Another possible limitation is the tradeoff of participant perceptions of referrer fit rather than actual PO fit of the referrer with his or her current organization. Assessing actual fit would have required an additional survey to be administered to the participant’s referrer, which was not feasible using the methodology of this study. Collecting these data without using online surveys such as MTurk would also be challenging, as asking a referrer to complete a survey could jeopardize a participant’s chance of getting hired. Thus, it seemed most feasible to assess perceptions of referrer fit. In addition, asking participants to report on their perceptions of referrer fit is consistent with asking them to report on their own perceptions of fit, as well as perceptions of importance of fit. Still, acquiring this information from a different perspective would provide additional insight on the factors that contribute to an applicant’s intentions to select a particular organization.

One final possible limitation is that this survey required self-report responses on all study variables from the participants at the same time, which can be influenced by common method variance (CMV). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) explain CMV as “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to
the constructs the measures represent” (p. 879). These authors suggest that obtaining the predictor and criterion variables from the same person, which is the case in this study, is problematic and can result in error due to shared variance across measures. Spector (2006), however effectively argues that CMV has become exaggerated and distorted and even deems it an “urban legend” (p. 222). He supports the idea that biases are real and can be present in our research; however, not all studies are subject to the same errors and should not be treated as such. Regardless, as Podsakoff et al. (2003) advised, efforts were made in the present study to prevent potential effects of CMV by ensuring anonymity, instructing participants that there are no right or wrong answers, clarifying potentially ambiguous terms in the instructions, and carefully constructing items to ensure clarity and avoid any double-barreled items. In addition to this, obtaining self-report responses was not a concern because this study was specifically examining perceived fit and applicant’s perceptions of referrer fit, thus obtaining objective information or data from different respondents, as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003), would provide irrelevant data for this study.

Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that the level of importance applicants place on PO fit when job searching may not differ across various groups of individuals, as expected. From an employer perspective, it is important to note that applicants do consider fit important when searching for jobs and therefore, should advertise accordingly. In addition to this, employers should also be aware that applicants feel that employee referrals are important in the job search process and can potentially increase applicant fit with the organization. Future research should expand upon this study and continue to investigate employee
referrals and referrer fit to determine what factors specifically impact the referrer fit and self-fit relationship.
Chapter VI

Summary

Although today's job search process has become increasingly internet based with the creation of online job boards such as Career Builder and Monster, and social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, employee referrals (a recruitment method whereby internal employees recommend applicants for a position) are the source that yields the highest quality applicants (Brotherton, 2012). Indeed, one out of every 10 applicants who had employee referrals was hired, whereas only one out of 100 applicants who did not have a referral was hired (Brotherton, 2012).

Person-organization fit (PO fit), which is the compatibility of an individual and an organization (Kristof-Brown, 2000) has also been shown to influence an applicant getting hired for a job. Although this construct has been studied over the last few decades, the majority of the research has focused on the organization selecting the person, rather than the person selecting the organization. More research on how the person selects the organization is needed to address this gap. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether employee referrals affect an applicant's perceived fit and/or the value an applicant places on having PO fit with an organization. Employee referrals have the potential to explain why applicants choose to accept a particular offer and why these applicants may thrive with good fit while working in the organization.
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

Organizational attraction is one aspect that may be related to fit and consequently help explain individuals' desires to select a particular organization. Few studies have examined the ways applicants approach assessing a good fit with an organization, however, Backhaus (2003) focused on the importance of fit and what criteria influence the degree to which applicants view fit as important. Results found no support for a relationship between years of work experience and importance of fit in the job search, or for age and importance of fit, yet statistical significance was found for the relationship between negative fit experiences (having poor fit with an organization in the past) and importance of fit.

Although a few antecedents of fit were confirmed in Backhaus' (2003) study, it is possible that results would have been different with another sample, as her sample consisted of college students who were either expecting a change in job level or expecting an entry level position. The present study thus aims to largely replicate and extend this study to a sample of applicants who have more extensive work experience (two or more years working full-time). Backhaus found significance for past negative fit experiences and importance of fit; therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Applicants who have had negative PO fit experiences in the past will value PO fit as more important than applicants who have not had negative PO fit experiences.

In addition, two exploratory hypotheses will be tested in the present study as a result of the nonsignificant results found in Backhaus (2003). Since 92% of the sample in Backhaus (2003) reported not having work experience, the present study will examine the following hypothesis with a more experienced sample:
H2: Applicants’ years of work experience will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on person-organization fit during the selection process. Similarly, Backhaus (2003) proposed that as job seekers accrue experience through age, they will come to appreciate the importance of fit. However, Backhaus did not find a significant relationship between age and importance of fit. The present study seeks to retest this hypothesis with a broader sample of applicants who are likely to vary in age. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Applicants’ age will be positively related to the degree of importance they place on person-organization fit during the selection process.

The present study also seeks to extend the list of antecedents of hiring decisions explored by Backhaus (2003) to include employee referrals, as research has shown that employee referrals are quite prevalent in the selection process and can increase an applicant’s chances of getting hired (Brotherton, 2012; Yakubovich & Lup, 2006). The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Applicants who have an employee referral will value PO fit more highly than applicants who do not have an employee referral.

Hsieh and Chen (2011) examined the influence employee referrals have on PO fit by considering the information applicants received during the selection process via employee referrals. They specifically examined realistic job previews (RJPs), which are accurate depictions of what the job will be like for applicants. Unexpected results showed that the more information provided to an applicant about the job and organization, the greater the discrepancy grew between what was expected from the organization and what was actually received, resulting in lower PO fit rather than higher PO fit. It is possible
that the relationship between the referrer and the applicant caused the applicant to overly trust the information provided and thus influence the expectations the applicant formed (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). The possibility of expectations not being met may have led to the low PO fit found for applicants with employee referrals, as opposed to applicants without employee referrals. It is unclear whether the effect of low perceived fit was due to the amount/type of information the referrer provided to the applicant, or if it was due to the PO fit of the referrer (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). Therefore, the present study sought to partially address this limitation with the following hypothesis:

H5: There will be a significant positive relationship between applicants’ perceptions of referrer PO fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own PO fit.

When considering PO fit, one must consider how it will be measured. Research, however, has provided contradictory results. Ravlin and Ritchie (2006) examined perceived and actual measures of fit, whereas Verquer et al. (2003) and Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) examined subjective, perceived and objective measures in their meta-analyses. These terms were also defined differently across studies. Perceived fit was defined by Kristof-Brown et al. as an individual’s direct assessment of fit with an organization (Verquer et al.’s definition of subjective fit), whereas subjective fit was assessed indirectly by comparing one individual’s separate report of person and organization fit (Verquer et al.’s definition of perceived fit). Although some authors have used perceived and subjective fit interchangeably (e.g., Judge & Cable, 2007; Kristof, 1996), this inconsistency in definitions creates measurement concerns in the PO fit literature. The definition of objective fit, however, is consistent across sources (Kristof-Brown et al.,
2005; Verquer et al., 2003), but is used interchangeably with actual fit in Kristof (1996). For clarification, the present study will use the Kristof-Brown et al. definitions of fit.

Verquer et al. (2003) and Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found that direct measures of fit (e.g., perceived fit in Kristof-Brown et al. and subjective fit in Verquer et al.) provided stronger correlations with PO fit outcomes than did indirect measures (e.g., objective fit), but Kristof-Brown et al. note that direct measures are most susceptible to common method bias. Indirect measures (i.e., actual or objective fit), on the other hand, can lead to inconsistent and/or inaccurate results due to the methods of measurements used. The use of difference scores to assess actual fit can lead to inconsistent results by masking psychologically meaningful results when subtracting one rating from another or when subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores (Cronbach & Furby, 1970; Wall & Payne, 1973). This can be problematic because these scores are systematically tied to any random error of measurement that can occur (Cronbach & Furby, 1970). Some authors attempt to use direct comparisons (e.g., a comparison of individual’s preferences and individual’s perceptions of the organization) to avoid the problems with difference scores. This, however, is problematic because the respondent is explicitly or implicitly calculating the difference between the components, which results in scores that are equally as inaccurate as those calculated from difference scores (Edwards, 2001). Subgrouping results (e.g., dichotomizing or trichotomizing) depending on where self-ratings fall relative to organization scores, for example, also creates similar problems, such as highlighting the loss of information and reducing the amount of variance that can be explained (Edwards, 2001). To avoid many concerns regarding difference scores, raw scores should be used (Wall & Payne, 1973).
THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT

Method

Participants

The present study sought to study individuals who are *currently* searching for jobs. Participants must have also applied to at least one job in the past six months and had a specific career field of interest. The sample consisted of 179 job seeking applicants, 45.8% female and 54.2% male. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 61 ($M = 31.98, SD = 9.09$). All participants had full-time work experience; however, the number of years of full-time job experience in an applicants’ career field of interest ranged from 0 to 36 years ($M = 6.95, SD = 6.79$).

Measures

*Job information sources.* To assess how prevalent employee referrals were to an applicant’s attainment of information about the job, a job information source measure, adapted from Saks and Ashforth (1997), and Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, and Phillips (1994) was used. This one item measure consisted of 12 external source options and applicants were allowed to respond to more than one option.

*Importance of employee referrals.* Three exploratory items were added to this measure to further inquire about the importance of employee referrals. These items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*highly important*). The coefficient alpha reliability was .77.

*Importance of fit.* The extent to which applicants valued PO fit in their job search was measured by a 4-item scale adapted from Cable and Judge’s (1996) 2-item scale. The second item in the 2-item scale was extended to three separate questions to inquire about individual aspects of PO fit (i.e., values, personality, and goals). Responses
to all items were on a 5-point scale. The first item ranged from 1 (completely unimportant) to 5 (completely important) and the remaining three ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely). The reliability for the 4-item scale was α = .85.

**Perceptions of PO self-fit.** A 4-item self-perception of PO fit scale that was validated by Saks and Ashforth (1997) was modified to better fit the focus on applicants rather than newly hired individuals. An additional question was added regarding goals to remain consistent with the PO fit definition in the Important of Fit scale. Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very little extent) to 5 (very large extent). A general PO fit item from Saks and Ashforth (1997) was also used to assess perceptions of PO self-fit. The reliability for the 4-item scale was .87 and .91 for the 5-item scale. The one item correlated highly with the 4-item scale (r = .82), and the 5-item scale, (r = .83).

**Perceptions of referrer fit.** The Saks and Ashford (1997) 4-item PO fit measure was used, along with the additional item on goals, and had adjusted verbiage to change the target of the question to the referrer rather than the self. Responses to these questions were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very little extent) to 5 (very large extent). A single general PO fit item adapted from Saks and Ashforth (1997) was also used to assess perceptions of referrer PO fit. The coefficient alpha reliability was .80 for the 4-item scale and .84 for the 5-item scale. The correlation between the one item and the 4-item scale was r = .57 and r = .56 for the 5-item.

**Work experience.** Work experience was measured with two items used in the Backhaus (2003) study. The first item asked the applicants whether or not they had full-time work experience, requiring a yes or no response. The second item asked applicants
to indicate the number of years of full-time work experience they had for the job they were applying.

**Negative fit experiences.** Negative fit experiences were measured using one item adapted from Backhaus (2003). Applicants were asked to respond *yes* or *no* to this item. A follow-up question inquired about the frequency of these experiences. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little extent*) to 5 (*very large extent*).

**Demographics.** Six demographic questions were included in the survey to obtain information on a participant’s age, race, gender, educational background, employment status, and specific career field of interest.

**Selection criteria pre-survey.** Five pre-screening questions asked participants whether they had full-time work experience, were currently seeking full-time employment, had applied to at least one job in the past six months, had a specific career field of interest, and whether they received an employee referral. Responses were either *yes* or *no*. Individuals must have responded *yes* to the first 4 questions to advance to the survey. The last question determined whether or not the employee had an employee referral, and either response was accepted.

**Procedure**

A 31-item questionnaire was administered electronically via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants received the survey if the selection criteria were met. The survey for individuals who had not received an employee referral did not include the questions regarding referrer fit. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through Xavier University’s IRB exempt process prior to posting
the online survey. Responses were anonymous and participants were compensated $0.25 for completing the survey.

Results

Results of the first hypothesis suggest that there was no difference in the value applicants place on importance of fit, t(144) = .65, p = .257, for participants who have had negative fit experiences in the past (M = 14.99, SD = 3.13) and participants who have not had negative fit experiences in the past (M = 14.55, SD = 3.11). A nonsignificant relationship was found for the second hypothesis, proposing that applicants’ years of work experience would be positively related to the degree of importance they place on PO fit during the selection process, r(144) = -.05, p = .274. The third hypothesis tested whether applicants’ age would be positively related to the degree of importance they place on PO fit during the selection process and results showed a nonsignificant relationship, r(144) = .05, p = .269. The fourth hypothesis, found that there was no difference in the value of PO fit for applicants who had an employee referral (M = 14.90, SD = 3.15) and applicants who did not have an employee referral (M = 14.67, SD = 3.41), (t(177) = .46, p = .323). The fifth hypothesis, however, proposing a significant positive relationship between applicants’ perceptions of referrer PO fit and applicants’ perceptions of their own PO fit, was supported, r(90) = .51, p < .001.

Discussion

Contrary to findings from Backhaus (2003), no support was found for Hypothesis 1. It is possible that the more work experience an individual has, the less negative fit experiences influence the importance placed on fit. Or, it could be that past negative fit experiences are simply more salient than work experience, which Backhaus (2003)
speculated to be the case in her research. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were consistent with findings from Backhaus (2003), where no significance was found. Hypothesis 2 showed that there may simply be no difference between the importance of PO fit for individuals of different experience levels. Similarly, it is possible that age simply does not have an influence on how individuals perceive PO fit when searching for jobs. Moreover, since there is a strong positive correlation between age and years of work experience, it is likely that the nonsignificant finding for age is due to similar reasons. Perhaps some employees recognize the importance of PO fit regardless of their levels of work experience or their age. If this is true, then perhaps there are other factors that determine why an employee values PO fit, such as personality characteristics, personal goals, individual needs, and personal interests. Future research should further examine factors such as these to investigate what specifically differentiates individuals who value PO fit from individuals who do not.

In regards to Hypothesis 4, it is possible that individuals value PO fit to the same degree, regardless of whether they received an employee referral. This could have been due to the quality (or lack of quality) of information provided to the applicant through the employee referral or the employee realizing the employee referral is providing information that either conflicts with the employee’s existing knowledge base or that the information is inconsistent over time. The quality of information provided in an employee referral can also differ considerably across referrers and through the amount/type of information the referrer provided to the applicant. The information received about a job has been examined in other contexts, such as RJP. Therefore, it is possible that the information conveyed in an employee referral could affect an applicant’s
perceptions of their own fit with the organization. Future research should further examine the content of employee referral information and how it influences PO fit. In addition, future research should investigate the discrepancy between what an applicant expected from the organization and what was actually experienced to see if any cognitive dissonance may have occurred that could have affected the importance placed on fit or the perceptions of self-fit.

Finding support for Hypothesis 5 shows that employee referrals may impact perceived PO fit and has positive implications for individuals who have received an employee referral. Individuals who have received an employee referral will have stronger PO fit if they perceive their referrer to fit with the organization. Therefore, for recruitment purposes, companies should utilize employees that fit well with the company to recruit applicants into the organization. This may help increase fit of new recruits, which could then result in high levels of satisfaction and commitment for newly hired employees.

Just like RJPs may lead some employees to realize they are not a good fit with an organization, it is possible that information collected from an employee referral may be equally useful in helping the employee rule out one’s attraction to an organization. Future research should assess applicant attraction in relation to information collected via employee referrals to further investigate how they differ or relate to one another.

Limitations

A few potential limitations exist in the present study. One limitation is that it is possible that some participants misunderstand what was meant by an employee referral, such that 26 participants responded inconsistently to two items intended to measure the
presence of an employee referral. Despite the definition being provided, it is possible that these individuals did not meet the criteria to respond consistently to both items. Analyses were conducted both with and without these individuals but no significant differences in results were found. Another possible limitation is the tradeoff of participant perceptions of referrer fit rather than actual referrer PO fit. Assessing actual fit would have required an additional survey to be administered to the participant’s referrer, which was not feasible using the methodology of this study. Collecting this data without using online surveys would also be challenging, as asking a referrer to complete a survey could jeopardize a participant’s chance of getting hired. Thus, it seemed most feasible to assess perceptions of referrer fit, especially since it is consistent with asking for reports on their perceptions of self-fit, as well as perceptions of importance of fit. Requesting self-report responses from participants at the same time is another possible limitation because they can be influenced by common method variance (CMV). As Podsakoff et al. (2003) advised, however, efforts were made in the present study to prevent potential effects of CMV, by ensuring anonymity, instructing participants that there are no right or wrong answers, clarifying potentially ambiguous terms in the instructions, and carefully constructing items to ensure clarity and avoid any double-barreled items. Obtaining self-report responses was also consistent with this study examining perceived fit and applicant’s perceptions of referrer fit, whereas objective information or data from different respondents would provide irrelevant data.

Contributions

The present study makes several important contributions to the fit literature. Concerns were raised about how fit was measured and defined across various studies.
This is a concern because it is unclear whether inconsistencies found in results across studies are due to how fit was defined and measured or due to other variables. This study also pointed out that several studies had methodological issues in how fit was measured. The present study avoided using difference scores and direct comparisons, which have been shown to be problematic, (Cronbach & Furby, 1970, Wall & Payne, 1973; Edwards, 2001, respectively), and instead measured fit solely from self-perceptions. Still, more attention should be placed on how fit is measured to ensure results are consistently interpreted accurately.

Finally, the present study was the first to examine whether the presence of an employee referral influences the importance applicants place on finding organizations with similar characteristics to their own. Future research should expand upon this study and continue to investigate employee referrals and referrer fit to determine what factors specifically impact the referrer fit and self-fit relationship.
References


THE INFLUENCE OF REFERRALS ON IMPORTANCE OF PO FIT


Social Sciences Citation Index (2012). Thomson Reuters. Date Accessed: November 1, 2012.


Appendix A

Consent Form

You are being given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a project conducted by Michelle Crowe through Xavier University, as part of her Master’s thesis. Please read this form carefully before agreeing to complete the survey.

The purpose of this study is to investigate applicants’ experiences during the application process, by specifically focusing on person-organization fit and employee referrals. You were selected for this survey because you have met all of the selection criteria in the pre-screening survey.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a 31-question survey, which should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary, however you must respond to all questions, unless otherwise noted, in order to receive compensation. Volunteering in this study will provide insight on how applicants, such as yourself, think and behave when searching for and applying to specific jobs. There are no known risks in this survey. For most items, there are no right or wrong answers, therefore, please respond honestly and accurately. All responses will remain anonymous. Data will be kept on a private computer for a minimum of five years, after which, it will be destroyed.

You must enter your Worker ID twice (once in MTurk and once at the end of the survey) in order to get paid. You will only be compensated for your participation if your data passes all relevant quality checks. Upon completion of this survey, if all criteria are met, you will receive compensation in the amount of $0.25 from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from MTurk or Xavier University. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty; however, you will not receive compensation for this HIT. You may only take this HIT once. Any additional submissions will be rejected to uphold the validity of the study.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact Michelle Crowe (the principal researcher) at crowem1@xavier.edu or Dr. Mark Nagy (the research supervisor) at nagyms@xavier.edu or (513) 745-1958. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

If you agree to take part in this study, please check the box below.

☐ I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and I give my consent to voluntarily complete this survey.
Appendix B

Directions to Participants

Question 1:
Directions: Please select which of the following external source(s) you use in your job search to learn more about the job. Check all that apply.

Questions 2-4:
Directions: An employee referral denotes a situation in which work-related information is provided to an applicant by an existing employee of the organization before the applicant joins the company. With this definition in mind, please respond to the following questions about employee referrals.

Questions 10-15:
Please respond to the following questions having one particular job in mind (your top choice out of the jobs you have applied to).

Questions 19-24: (Only for applicants who have had employee referrals)
Please respond to the following questions about the individual that has referred you to the organization you have applied to. If you have not received an employee referral, please leave these questions blank.
Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

April 3, 2013

Michelle Crowe
3622 Stettinins Ave. Apt. 1
Cincinnati, OH 45208

Re: Protocol #1281, The Influence of Referrals on the Importance of Person-Organization Fit

Dear Ms. Crowe:

The IRB has reviewed the materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB. We appreciate your thorough treatment of the issues raised and your timely response.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

Please contact our office if you have any questions. We wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

MEM/ab

C: Mark Nagy, Advisor