Person–job fit versus person–organization fit as predictors of organizational attraction and job acceptance intentions: A longitudinal study

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This longitudinal field study examined the relationship between perceived person–job (PJ) and person–organization (PO) fit and organizational attraction, intentions to accept a job offer, and actual job offer decision. Data were collected from 193 graduate applicants prior to the selection process, during the selection process, at the end of the selection process, and after job acceptance decision. The findings showed support for the hypothesis that perceptions of PJ and PO fit influenced attraction at different stages of selection. The second hypothesis that the relationship between perceptions of PJ and PO fit and intentions to accept a job offer are mediated by organizational attraction was partially supported. Mid-selection, the relationship between PJ fit perceptions and intentions to accept a job offer was mediated by organizational attraction; in contrast, at the end of the selection process, there was a direct relationship between PJ fit perceptions and intentions. PO fit perceptions were unrelated to intentions to accept a job offer. PJ and PO fit perceptions (before and during the selection process) were unrelated to actual job acceptance decision. These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that applicants have sufficient information about the job during the recruitment and selection process.

Person–environment (PE) fit theories propose that positive responses occur when individuals fit or match the environment. For example, PE fit theories of vocational choice propose that higher levels of satisfaction and mental and physical well-being will occur when there is a good fit between the person and the environment (e.g. Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997). Extensive research supports the proposition that individuals are satisfied with and adjust most easily to jobs that are congruent with their own career-relevant personality types (Spokane, 1985; Tinsley, 2000).

The notion of PE fit is conceptualized as a general term, under which fall more specific notions of fit. In the recruitment and selection domain, two common forms of fit have been identified: person–job fit (PJ fit), or the match between an individual and the requirements of a specific job; and person–organization fit (PO fit), or the match

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between an individual and broader organizational attributes. The main body of research on fit and recruitment and selection has been on PO fit. However, this approach provides a weak test of the congruence hypothesis. A stronger test of the hypothesis is to assess PJ and PO fit jointly (Barber, 1998). Using this approach we can assess the relative importance of PJ and PO fit perceptions in job choice decisions. Job openings vary on a range of dimensions, including knowledge, skills and abilities requirements, and organizational attributes. It is probable that job seekers evaluate the magnitude of overlap between their own characteristics and those of the job and organization conjointly (Breaugh, 1992). Hence, assessing PJ and PO fit simultaneously provides a more realistic account of their relative influence. Hence, the main aim of the study was to examine the relationship between applicant subjective perceptions of PJ and PO fit and job choice attitudes and intentions at multiple time points during the recruitment and selection process.

Job seeker’s fit perceptions

PO fit

Kristof (1996) defined PO fit as ‘the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both’ (pp. 4–5). Taking this approach recognizes the distinction between supplementary and complementary fit. Supplementary fit occurs when a person has similar characteristics to other individuals, and complementary fit occurs when the individual and the situation meet each other’s needs.

The application of PO fit to recruitment and selection has emerged from Schneider’s (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model. He proposed that attraction to, selection into, and remaining in an organization are all determined by the perceived similarity between the person and her/his work environment (i.e. PO fit). Specifically, individuals estimate the match between their personality, attitudes and values and the organization’s values, goals, structures, processes, and culture (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Studies have shown that PO fit influenced attraction to an organization (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Keon, Latack, & Wanous, 1982; Tom, 1971), job acceptance intentions (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1992) and hiring recommendations (Cable & Judge, 1997). However, none of these studies jointly examined PJ and PO fit perceptions.

PJ fit

PJ fit is conceptualized as the match between individual knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) and demands of the job or the needs/desires of an individual and what is provided by the job (Edwards, 1991; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). According to the literature on realistic job previews (RJP; Wanous, 1977, 1980, 1992), accurate and realistic job information enables applicants to assess the degree of congruence between their KSA and the job requirements (i.e. PJ fit; Breaugh, 1992; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Wanous, 1977, 1980, 1992). Applicants who perceive a fit between their KSA and the job requirements are probable to remain in the selection process and accept a job offer. RJP research has shown that accurate and realistic job information during recruitment and selection is associated with positive work outcomes (e.g. low attrition from...
recruitment process, high job satisfaction, low voluntary turnover, high work performance; Meglino, Ravlin, & deNisi, 2000; Phillips, 1998). However, these studies provide an indirect test of the PJ fit hypothesis, as it is assumed that RJP s enable the individual to assess the extent of PJ fit prior to job choice.

**Objective and subjective fit**

The underlying assumption of the literature on RJP and ASA theory is that applicants’ subjective assessments of the match between their own characteristics and those of the job and organization influence initial attraction, decision to remain in the selection process, and job acceptance decision. Schneider and his colleagues stated, ‘People’s preferences for particular organizations are based upon an implicit estimate of the congruence [emphasis added] of their own personal characteristics and the attributes of potential work organizations’ (Schneider et al., 1995, p. 749). It is subjective fit perceptions and not objective fit that influences whether or not an individual pursues work with an organization. Thus, subjective fit is a more accurate depiction of personal reality than objective fit (Caplan, 1987). Evidence indicates that compared with objective fit, subjective fit is a better predictor of applicant attitudes (Judge & Cable, 1997) and hiring outcomes (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1997; Kinnicki, Lockwood, Hom, & Griffeth, 1990).

**Review of past research and hypothesis development**

Only one study that examined applicant perceptions of PJ and PO fit and job choice attitudes and decision could be found. Cable and Judge (1996) surveyed job seekers (N = 96) at three time points: after initial campus interview, after final job choice and after the former job seeker had been in the job approximately 6 months. The findings showed that intentions to accept a job offer were related to perceptions of PO fit, but not PJ fit. Contrary to expectations, PJ fit was not related to actual job choice decision (r = -.18, p > .05), on the other hand PO fit was related, and in the expected direction (r = .32, p < .02). In a subsequent study (in which only PO fit was examined), Judge and Cable (1997) found that objective and subjective perceptions of PO fit were related to organization attraction, but not actual job decision.

Together, the Judge and Cable studies suggest that subjective PO fit perceptions influence job seeking attitudes and intentions, however, the findings of Cable and Judge (1996) suggest that subjective PJ fit perceptions may be of little importance. On the other hand, studies of employed individuals have shown that PJ and PO fit perceptions have a significant impact on job related outcomes (Chatman, 1991; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; O’ Reilly et al., 1991; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In addition, recent research by Cable and DeRue (2002) with employed individuals suggests that it is important to examine both types of fit as they may be associated with different outcomes. Specifically, they found that PO fit perceptions were related to organization-focused outcomes (e.g. organizational identification) and PJ fit perceptions were associated with job- and career-focused outcomes (e.g. career satisfaction, job satisfaction, and occupational commitment). Decision to accept a job offer is based on both job-related and organizational related issues (Barber, 1998; Breaugh, 1992).

The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991, 2001; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) posits that an individual’s beliefs about an object will manifest into either positive or negative attitudes toward that object. Based on whether these attitudes are
positive or negative, they will affect the individual’s attitude toward behaviours related to this object. An individual’s attitude toward a behaviour is then expected to influence whether or not he/she will form an intention to engage in this behaviour. Intentions are also influenced by subjective norms.

Applied to the selection context, the theory of reasoned action predicts that applicant attitudes towards the organization (i.e. attraction to the organization) will influence intentions to accept a job offer. Consistent with this line of thinking, Judge and Cable (1997) speculated that PO fit perceptions may influence job choice indirectly via attraction. An extension of Judge and Cable’s argument is that both PJ and PO fit perceptions influence job choice indirectly via attraction. Based on perceptions of job and organization congruence, applicants perceive an organization as a desirable place to work. In turn, this positive perception influences their intentions to accept a job offer. Thus, in this study it was proposed that perceptions of PJ and PO fit influence attraction to the organization, which in turn would directly influence intentions to accept a job offer. The hypothesized model is presented in Fig. 1.

The current study
Recruitment and selection is a series of activities over time. Any single activity may influence an applicant’s decision to seek employment with an organization, continue to remain in the selection process or to accept a job offer. Longitudinal research designs have several advantages (Barber, 1998; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt & Chan, 1998). First, we know little about how attitudes and intentions change over time as applicants gain new information, or how events change their attitudes and intentions (Powell & Goulet, 1996). A longitudinal approach enables us to track applicant perceptions as they move through the recruitment and selection process. In addition, longitudinal research reduces the possibility of method bias and gives greater confidence to attributions of causality. Thus the current study assessed attitudes and intentions at multiple time points during the recruitment and selection process.

A problem that plagues much of the fit studies of job choice is the heavy reliance on college students as a source for research data (Barber, 1998, p. 106). In addition, with few exceptions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997; Tom, 1971), studies have used hypothetical companies and information that has been closely controlled by the researchers. Asking ‘students for their perceptions does not appear to be a sufficient surrogate for asking actual applicants’ (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000, pp. 601-602). The subjective estimate approach to fit assumes that the perceived fit and attraction ratings given in an experimental situation reflect the values attached to these during an actual job search. Breaugh (1992) stated that ‘such an assumption seems implausible’ (p. 83). In summary, there are concerns about the generalizability of findings based on samples of college students. The current study addressed this problem by surveying actual job applicants.

![Figure 1. Model of the relationship between fit perceptions, attraction and intentions.](image-url)
The vast majority of applicant reaction research has emphasized attraction to an organization and intentions to accept a job offer as dependent variables. However, intentions are not the same as real job choices (Rynes, 1991). Thus, in addition to organizational attraction and job acceptance intentions, the current study examined actual job acceptance decision.

There are both strengths and limitations to Cable and Judge’s (1996) study. In terms of strengths, the sample consisted of genuine applicants involved in the job search process. Second, the authors assessed attitudes at three time points. This approach enabled them to examine the links between initial attitudes and actual job choice decision. Finally, the study examined the relationship between PJ and PO subjective fit perceptions and actual job choice decision. There have been very few studies that have examined the links between applicant attitudes and actual behaviour.

In terms of limitations, although the Cable and Judge study collected data at multiple time points, Time 1 data were collected after the initial interview. Hence, pre-selection process perceptions of PJ and PO fit were not assessed. Thus it is unknown whether or not pre-selection perceptions of PJ and PO fit influence attraction and intentions. Second, Cable and Judge used single items to assess perceived PJ and PO fit. The authors acknowledged that a disadvantage of this approach is that the variance in these measures may have been constrained. In addition, it is uncertain whether the domains of the constructs were fully sampled. Furthermore, PJ and PO fit perceptions and job acceptance intentions were assessed at the same time. It is possible that common method variance may have inflated the relationship between these variables. The current study addresses these limitations.

The design of the study was to survey applicants at four time points: before the selection process (Time 1), during the selection process (Time 2), at the conclusion of the selection process (Time 3), and after actual job offer (Time 4). Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**Hypothesis 1.** Subjective perceptions of PJ and PO fit assessed prior to, and during the selection process predict organizational attraction prior to, and mid-selection.

**Hypothesis 2.** Subjective perceptions of PJ and PO fit assessed prior to, and during the selection process predict intentions to accept a job offer mid- and end-of-selection.

**Hypothesis 3.** Perceptions of organizational attraction mediate the relationship between perceptions of PJ and PO fit and intentions to accept a job offer.

Due to the lack of research on fit perceptions and actual job choice, the study also aimed to explore whether perceived PJ and PO fit influenced job choice decision.

**Control variable**

It is reasonable to expect that number of alternative job offers would influence employment seeking attitudes (e.g. job acceptance intentions). That is, applicants with fewer alternative offers would be more likely to accept a job offer compared with those who have more alternatives. Powell and Goulet (1996) found that the number of alternative job offers (including current and expected job offers) influenced job acceptance intentions. Other studies have also reported that alternative employment options influence job acceptance intentions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Liden & Parsons, 1986). In the current study, total number of alternative job offers (expected and current) was controlled for.
Method

Sample
Graduate applicants for an Australian national telecommunications company were invited to participate in the study. For Stage 1, 193 applicants agreed to participate in the project. The sample consisted of a similar number of females ($N = 95, 49\%$) and males ($N = 98, 51\%$). The average age of applicants was 26 years ($SD = 4.2$). Applicants applied for a range of positions, including information technology (27\%), engineering (20\%), human resources (15\%), marketing (14\%) and research (12\%). The initial questionnaire was mailed by an external consulting organization. Due to changes in personnel, the number of applicants who were sent the questionnaire is unknown, and therefore, so is the response rate to the first questionnaire.

Procedure
Data were collected at four time points: Time 1 - after application was received and prior to any selection procedures; Time 2 - after first selection interview; Time 3 - after all selection procedures had been completed; and Time 4 - after job acceptance decision was made. The current study was part of a larger study of applicants (see Carless, 2003). The selection process was managed by an external consulting firm. On receipt of an application, the individual was either invited for an interview with a representative of the consulting firm or informed that his/her application was unsuccessful. Those who were invited for an interview were sent a questionnaire (Time 1). Instructions asked applicants to complete the questionnaire before their selection interview.

A cover letter on University letterhead attached to each questionnaire informed participants that the research was intended to help the consulting organization and the sponsoring organization to improve the effectiveness of their selection procedures. They were assured that participation was voluntary and would not affect their application for employment in any way. They were assured of confidentiality and that only myself and my assistant would see their responses. A reply-paid self-addressed envelope was supplied. Participants were informed that I was interested in looking at the links between initial attitudes and job acceptance intentions and tracking their perceptions throughout the selection procedure. Participants were asked to identify themselves in order that responses from different points of time could be linked.

The Time 2 questionnaire was mailed to applicants approximately 4 months after the first questionnaire. Of the 193 applicants who were sent the second questionnaire, 140 were returned (73\% response rate). The sample consisted of 78 females (55\%) and 62 males (45\%). The next stage of the selection process consisted of personality and ability testing, followed by an interview with an internal line manager and representative of the human resource department. Scores for selection procedures (e.g. psychological test scores) were used to reduce slightly the applicant pool at each successive stage of the selection process.

The third questionnaire (Time 3) was sent to applicants after psychological testing and the internal interviews were completed. This was approximately 1 month after the second questionnaire. Of the 140 questionnaires sent out, 81 responses were received (58\% response rate). Again, the sample consisted of a similar number of females ($N = 45, 56\%$) and males ($N = 36, 44\%$).

Approximately 3–4 weeks after the final questionnaire, 81 applicants were contacted about whether they had received a job offer and whether they had accepted it.
(Time 4), 65 responses were received. Of these, 34 received a job offer and 31 did not, 20 accepted the offer (59%) and 14 declined the offer (41%).

As concerns have been raised about the effects of subject attrition on the relationship among variables in longitudinal analyses (Goodman & Blum, 1996), two types of analyses were used to check for differences between respondents and non-respondents. These were student’s $t$ test and multiple regression. $t$ Test analyses were conducted to determine if there were any differences between respondents and non-respondents at Time 2 and Time 3. Scores on all of the variables under consideration were examined. The first set of analyses compared scores on Time 1 variables for respondents and non-respondents at Time 2. No significant differences were found. The second set of analyses compared scores on Time 2 variables for respondents and non-respondents at Time 3. Again, no significant differences were found.

Goodman and Blum (1996) recommend comparing a multiple regression model for the whole sample to a model including only those who responded to both data collections. Two sets of analyses were performed. In the first set of analyses the dependent variable was attraction to the organization at Time 1, in the second set the dependent variable was attraction to the organization at Time 2. The first set of analyses involved comparing the significance of the standardized beta weights of the independent variables (alternative offers $T_1$, $PJ$ and $PO$ fit $T_1$) for the full sample at Time 1 compared with Time 2 sample. There was no difference in significance for the coefficients. The second set of analyses involved comparing the significance of the standardized beta weights of the independent variables (alternative offers $T_2$, $PJ$ and $PO$ fit $T_2$) for the Time 2 sample compared with Time 3 sample. Again, there were no differences in significance for the coefficients. Thus, attrition does not appear to have affected the underlying relationships among the variables of interest.

The first questionnaire (Time 1) asked for applicants’ demographic information and assessed number of expected and received alternative job offers, perceptions of $PJ$ and $PO$ fit and organizational attraction. The second questionnaire (Time 2) assessed number of expected and received alternative job offers, attraction to the organization, job acceptance intentions and perceptions of $PJ$ and $PO$ fit. The final questionnaire (Time 3) assessed job acceptance intentions. Table 1 provides a summary of the data collection.

**Measures**

*Organizational attraction* was assessed by three items adapted from Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, and Stoffey (1993). These items assessed perceptions of the attractiveness of working for the company ($\alpha = .77, .77$, Time 1 & 2, respectively). A sample item is, ‘X is one of the best places to work’. The response format was a 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 7 representing *strongly agree*.

*Job acceptance intentions* were measured by two items developed by Harris and Fink (1987). These were, ‘If you were offered the job, would you accept it?’ and, ‘If you were offered the job would you accept it immediately?’. The response format was a 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing *not at all likely* and 7 representing *extremely likely* ($\alpha = .79, .83$, Time 2 & 3, respectively).

*$PJ$ fit perceptions* were assessed by four items developed by Saks and Ashforth (1997). A sample item is, ‘To what extent do your knowledge, skills, and abilities “match” or fit the requirements of the job?’. The response format for both fit scales was a 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing *not at all* and 7 representing *completely* ($\alpha = .83$, Time 1 & 2).
PO fit perceptions were assessed by four items developed by Judge and Cable (1997). The items were slightly adapted to reflect the current organization. A sample item is, 'To what extent do your values, goals and personality “match” or fit the current employees of X?'.

Questions have been raised about the distinctiveness of perceived PJ and PO fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; Werbal & Gilliland, 1999) so exploratory factor analysis was used to assess the underlying dimensionality of measures of PJ and PO fit. Analyses showed that the eight items assessed two factors at Time 1 and 2. However, the rotated solution showed that one item from the PO fit scale also loaded highly on the PJ fit scale. This item was removed. The final analyses showed that 66% of the variance at Time 1 was explained by a two-factor solution and 67% at Time 2. Reliability analysis of the three-item PO fit scale showed that although the scale reliability was adequate ($\alpha = .69$ Time 1, .68 Time 2), it could be improved with the removal of an additional item. The reliability of the two-item PO fit measure was .79 at Time 1 and .84 at Time 2. The items were: ‘Do you think the values and “personality” of X employees reflect your own values and personality?’, ‘To what extent do your values, goals and personality “match” or fit the current employees of X?’.  

Alternative job offers. This was assessed by two items used by Harris and Fink (1987). These assessed the number of job offers expected to be received and the number received so far. The response format was a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 8 or more ($\alpha = .68$, .74, Time 1 & 2, respectively).

Job acceptance decision. Applicants were asked if they had been offered a position with the organization and whether they accepted the offer (1 = yes, 2 = no).

Missing data. Eight individuals had missing data for one item in the variable job acceptance intentions at Time 3. In order to maximize the number of cases and ensure equivalent comparisons were made at each stage of the mediation analyses, the expectation-maximization algorithm or EM procedure for replacing missing data was used. This procedure involves estimating the mean, the covariance matrix and the correlation of variables with missing data using an iterative process (SPSSX Version 11).

Table 1. A summary of the data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-selection (Time 1)</th>
<th>Mid-selection (Time 2)</th>
<th>End-of-selection (Time 3)</th>
<th>After job acceptance decision (Time 4)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of alternative job offers</td>
<td>Number of alternative job offers</td>
<td>Intentions to accept a job offer</td>
<td>Job acceptance decision (yes/no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJ &amp; PO fit perceptions</td>
<td>PJ &amp; PO fit perceptions</td>
<td>Organizational attraction</td>
<td>Intentions to accept a job offer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational attraction</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
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</table>

Note. The time interval between Time 1 and 2 was approximately 4 months, between Time 2 and 3 it was approximately 1 month and between Time 3 and 4 it was approximately 3–4 weeks.

1 Items removed were: ‘To what extent do your values, goals and personality “match” or fit X?’. ‘To what extent do your values and personality prevent you from “fitting in” at X because they are different from most other employees’ values and personality?’. 
Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all the study variables are reported in Table 2.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986) several steps are required to test for mediation. First, the independent variable (PJ and PO fit) must be related to the mediating variable (attraction to the organization). Hierarchical regressions were used to examine the relationship between perceptions of PJ and PO fit and the dependent variable of organizational attraction at Time 1, pre-selection; and Time 2, mid-selection. The variable alternative job offers was entered at Step 1 as a control variable in the analyses. At Step 2, PJ and PO fit perceptions were entered.

It can be seen in Table 3, that pre-selection PJ and PO fit perceptions explained unique variance in attraction to the organization (Time 1; $R^2 = .28, p < .001$). The standardized beta weights show that both PJ and PO predict attraction ($\beta = 0.41, t = 5.82, p < .001; \beta = 0.18, t = 2.57, p < .01$, respectively). At mid-selection (Time 2) the findings were similar. PJ and PO fit perceptions explained unique variance in attraction to the organization ($R^2 = .37, p < .001$). Again, both PJ and PO fit perceptions predicted attraction ($\beta = 0.45, t = 5.86, p < .001; \beta = 0.26, t = 3.42, p < .001$, respectively). Thus, the first hypothesis that PJ and PO fit predicted attraction was supported.

The second requirement for mediation is to show that the independent variable (PJ and PO fit) affects the dependent variable (intentions to accept an offer). The results of the hierarchical regression analyses are presented in Table 4. It can be seen that after the number of alternative job offers is controlled, PJ and PO fit perceptions explain unique variance in intentions to accept a job offer mid-way through selection (Time 2; $R^2 = .18, p < .001$). However, the standardized beta weights show that only PJ fit perceptions are a significant predictor of intentions ($\beta = 0.41, t = 4.68, p < .001$). Again, a similar pattern of findings was found at the end-of-selection (Time 3). PJ and PO fit perceptions explained unique variance in intentions to accept a job offer end-of-selection ($R^2 = .13, p < .01$), however, only PJ fit perceptions are a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.33, t = 2.72, p < .01$). Thus, there was partial support for the second hypothesis; PJ and not PO fit predicted intentions to accept a job offer.

The third step of testing a mediation hypothesis is regressing the dependent variable (intentions to accept) on the mediating variable (attraction), with the independent variable included in the equation (PJ fit). Mediation exists if the effect of the independent variable is less than it was without the mediating variable. In order to mitigate concerns about multicollinearity, predictor variables measured prior to the dependent variables were analysed in the same equation (e.g. IV = PJ fit T1, mediator = attraction T1, DV = intentions to accept T2). As PO fit perceptions were not related to intentions to accept mid- and end-of-selection (Time 2 and 3), this was not included in the final equation.

The results are presented in Table 5. At mid-selection (Time 2) it can be seen that when the joint effects of attraction and PJ fit are examined, pre-selection PJ fit perceptions are significant ($\beta = 0.21, t = 2.67, p < .01$) and the effect is less than when attraction is not controlled (see Table 4). The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) was conducted to determine whether attraction was a significant partial mediator of the relationship. The Sobel Test revealed that the link between PJ fit perceptions and intentions to accept was partially mediated by attraction ($z = 5.50, p < .05$).
### Table 2. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Min–max score</th>
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<td><strong>Time 1 (N = 193)</strong></td>
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<td>1. PJF</td>
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<td>2. POF</td>
<td>10.32 (2.05)</td>
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<td>3. Attractiveness</td>
<td>18.87 (2.37)</td>
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<td>4. Alt offers</td>
<td>4.13 (2.56)</td>
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<td><strong>Time 2 (N = 140)</strong></td>
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<td>5. PJF</td>
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<td>6. POF</td>
<td>10.69 (1.80)</td>
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<td>7. Attractiveness</td>
<td>18.38 (2.68)</td>
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<td>8. Job intent</td>
<td>11.13 (2.93)</td>
<td>2–14</td>
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<td>9. Alt offers</td>
<td>3.94 (2.60)</td>
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<td>10. Job intent</td>
<td>10.10 (3.34)</td>
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<td><strong>Time 4 (N = 34)</strong></td>
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<td>11. Decision to accept</td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, max = maximum score possible, job intent = job intentions, alt offer = total number of alternative offers; decision to accept (1 = yes, 2 = no).
At the end-of-selection (Time 3) a slightly different pattern of results was found. PJ fit perceptions are a significant predictor of intentions ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 2.16$, $p < .01$), however, attraction is not a significant predictor. Hence, mid-selection, the relationship between PJ fit and intentions to accept is mediated by attraction to the organization. On the other hand, at the end of selection processes, no support was found for a mediating effect. Rather, PJ fit has a direct effect on intentions to accept. Although PO fit was related to attraction, the findings suggest that PO fit was not related to intentions to accept at either mid- or end-of-selection.

At the end-of-selection (Time 3) a slightly different pattern of results was found. PJ fit perceptions are a significant predictor of intentions ($B = 0.27$, $t = 2.16$, $p < .01$), however, attraction is not a significant predictor. Hence, mid-selection, the relationship between PJ fit and intentions to accept is mediated by attraction to the organization. On the other hand, at the end of selection processes, no support was found for a mediating effect. Rather, PJ fit has a direct effect on intentions to accept. Although PO fit was related to attraction, the findings suggest that PO fit was not related to intentions to accept at either mid- or end-of-selection.

In summary, mid-selection, attraction to the organization mediates the relationship between PJ fit perceptions and intentions to accept a job offer. At the end of selection, PJ fit perceptions have a direct effect on intention to accept a job offer; there was no evidence of attraction mediating the relationship. Contrary to expectations, PO fit was unrelated to intentions to accept a job offer. Thus, mixed support for the mediation hypothesis was found.
Thirty-four applicants indicated they had received a job offer. Of these, 20 accepted and 14 declined. The correlations showed that Time 1 perceptions of PJ (r = 2.01, p < .05) and PO fit (r = 1.12, p < .05) were unrelated to actual job acceptance, as were Time 2 perceptions of PJ (r = 2.01, p < .05) and PO fit (r = 2.17, p < .05).

### Discussion

Applicant perceptions of PJ and PO fit and job choice attitudes and intentions were examined at multiple stages throughout the selection process: prior to selection, during selection, at the completion of selection and after job offer decision. The first hypothesis that PJ and PO fit perceptions would predict organizational attraction was supported. Prior to and during selection, applicant perceptions of the match between their skills, knowledge, and abilities and those of the job, and the match between their values, needs, and goals and those of the organization positively predicted their perceptions of the organization as a desirable place to work. The second hypothesis that PJ and PO fit perceptions would predict job acceptance intentions was partially supported; PJ, and not PO fit perceptions were related to acceptance intentions. Thus, it seems that while both types of fit influence attraction to the organization, PJ fit perceptions are the key determinant of intentions to accept a job offer.

The third hypothesis that organizational attraction would mediate the relationship between PJ and PO fit perceptions and intentions to accept a job offer was partially supported. Mid-selection, attraction mediated the relationship between PJ fit and acceptance intentions. At the end of selection, PJ fit directly influenced intentions to accept. Thus, attraction did not mediate the relationship. These findings reflect the stronger relationship between attraction and intentions early in the selection process compared with later in the selection process (r = .55 - attraction Time 1 and intentions Time 2; r = .36 - attraction Time 2 and intentions Time 3). This suggests that as individuals move through the selection process and gain greater knowledge about the job and organization, variables other than affective attitudes towards the organization influence intentions to accept a job offer, for example, job and organizational characteristics (Cable & Judge, 1996; Lawler, Kuleck, Rhode, & Sorensen, 1975;
Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). According to the elaboration likelihood model of persuasive communication (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) as applicants become more informed about the job and closer to job acceptance decision, they are more likely to utilize central processing compared with peripheral processing and thus rely on actual job and organizational characteristics (for a more detailed explanation of the application of ELM see Larsen & Phillips, 2002). It has also been argued that during the job search process attitudes change from being unrealistically positive to more realistic and objective (Osborn, 1990).

Contrary to expectations, PO fit was not related to acceptance intentions either mid- or end of selection. Inspection of the correlation matrix (see Table 2) shows that perceptions of PJ fit tended to have a stronger relationship with attraction and intentions to accept compared with PO fit. For example, the correlation between PJ fit perceptions and intentions to accept mid-selection was .62 ($p < .01$) and PO fit perceptions and intentions to accept was .41 ($p < .01$); later in the process the respective correlations were .39 ($p < .01$) and .21 ($p > .05$). Note that the first set of correlations is cross-sectional and the second set is not.

The finding that PJ fit, and not PO fit perceptions, predict job acceptance intentions suggests those who invest in their human capital (i.e. graduates) are more interested in ensuring that the job they choose to accept utilizes their KSA rather than working in an environment that is congruent with their values and goals. Similar findings with employed individuals have been reported by Cable and DeRue (2002). They found that perceived needs-supply fit (i.e. PJ fit) was related to career satisfaction and occupational commitment, whereas perceived PO fit was not related. Studies of recruiter perceptions of fit have also shown that perceived PJ fit compared with PO fit is more closely related to hiring recommendations (Kristof-Brown, 2000) and general perceptions of applicant fit (Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993). Together, these findings suggest that career related decisions are strongly influenced by perceived match between individual capabilities and the job requirements (i.e. PJ fit) rather than their match with an organization’s cultural values (i.e. PO fit).

In contrast to the current findings, Cable and Judge (1996) reported that job acceptance intentions after initial interview were related to perceptions of PO fit, but not PJ fit perceptions. There are several possible explanations for the differing findings. First, sample differences may be partly responsible. Over half of Cable and Judge’s sample were seeking internships and less than half were looking for full-time work. Analyses showed that the magnitude of the relationship between perceived PO fit and job choice intentions was different for the two groups; a stronger relationship was found for the full-time job seekers. The current study sample consisted of genuine applicants seeking a range of full-time positions.

Second, measurement issues may account for the differences. The current study used four items to assess applicants’ perceptions of PJ fit, whereas, Cable and Judge (1996) used a single item. In addition, the current study used two items to assess job acceptance intentions, whereas Cable and Judge used a single item. Single items restrict the range of variance and therefore the relationship between fit perceptions and job choice intentions may have been underestimated in Cable and Judge’s work; a point acknowledged by the authors. The extent to which single items capture the full meaning of a construct is also unclear.

Third, recruitment and selection stage differences may explain the differences. Cable and Judge (1996) surveyed potential applicants early in the job seeking process; questionnaires were completed immediately after initial campus interview. On the other
hand, the current study assessed applicant attitudes at later stages of the selection process, during, and at the completion of selection. Related to this point, it is also possible that the selection procedures influenced applicant perceptions of PJ and PO fit, for example, structured interviews (Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000). In the current study, the selection procedures of psychological testing and line managers’ interviews were conducted between Time 2 and 3 data collection.

Fourth, stage differences may also be related to other differences. From correspondence with my American colleagues, I understand that the applicant pool varies widely across campus interviews. In some instances everyone who applies is interviewed, in other situations, a screening process is used to determine who is interviewed. It is unknown whether the Cable and Judge sample had already been screened. Finally, the current sample applied for specific positions (e.g. human resources). Application for a specific position together with an interview by your potential manager would enable an applicant to better assess their PJ fit compared with application for a graduate position. Details about the application process for the Cable and Judge sample were not given.

Actual job choice was not influenced by initial or mid-selection perceptions of PJ or PO fit. This finding is consistent with Cable and Judge (1996). It is important to note that these findings should be regarded as tentative, pending further investigation, due to the small sample size. It is possible that theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991, 2001; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) is a more useful theoretical framework for understanding job acceptance decision (Lawler et al., 1975; Powell & Goulet, 1996; Stevens, 1997) compared with ASA theory.

Limitations and strengths
There are several limitations and strengths of the study that need to be acknowledged. The sample consisted of genuine applicants for a range of positions. There has been a lack of field studies on applicant fit perceptions (Barber, 1998; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). However, the applicants were all applying to join the one organization. Thus, although perceptions of PJ fit assessed how well applicants matched with a variety of positions, perceptions of PO fit measured how well employees matched with a single organization in a single industry. Thus, the generalizability of these results to other organizations and industries is unknown.

At each stage of data collection the sample was slightly reduced. This was an inevitable outcome of the longitudinal research design. As noted earlier, I was able to show that sample attrition did not lead to sample bias. The first data collection point was prior to interview, but only those who were selected for an initial interview were invited to participate in the study. Unknown is the extent that this group differed from rejected applicants, and if the study sample was biased. It is feasible that recruiter perceptions of PJ and PO fit influenced the decision to invite to interview (Cable & Judge, 1997). Thus, it is possible that the variance in early perceptions of PJ and PO fit was restricted. The most common effect of range restriction is attenuation of correlation coefficients. Hence, it is possible that the relationship between early perceptions of PJ and PO fit and outcomes was underestimated.

At the later stage of data collection, it is possible that applicants who had already been rejected responded to the questionnaire. Although it is more probable that rejected applicants did not complete the questionnaire, a few may have completed the
questionnaire at Time 2 or 3. Future researchers should ensure that they have mechanisms in place that enable them to check respondents’ outcomes in the selection process.

A strength of this study was the longitudinal design. Taking this approach meant that I was able reduce the problem of common method bias. However, the flip side of this is sample attrition. Sample attrition may have occurred for multiple reasons, including self-selection and recruiter perceptions of lack of fit or unsuitability. Thus, it is possible that the variance in perceived fit was reduced because of the constrained sample. It is unlikely, however, that range restriction would change the direction of the coefficients obtained. It is more probable that the magnitude of the relationship between fit perceptions and job choice attitudes and intentions was underestimated.

Implications and future research
This study contributes to the small body of evidence that perceptions of PJ and PO fit explain unique variance in the selection context (Bretz et al., 1993; Kristof-Brown, 2000). Most past research has assessed only one type of fit (e.g. Bretz et al., 1989; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997). Assessing the two types of fit simultaneously provides a stronger test of the congruence hypothesis and a more realistic representation of the job search process. Given the limited research in this area and the conflicting findings between this study and that of Cable and Judge (1996), there is a need for research that replicates and extends these findings. For example, researchers have yet to examine the impact of different recruitment and selection procedures on applicant ability to assess perceived fit. This raises the following research questions. Does advertising for a specific position compared with generic advertising (e.g. graduates) influence ability to assess perceived fit? Do different selection procedures differentially affect applicant perceived fit?

Selection studies have consistently shown that subjective fit is a better predictor of a range of outcomes compared with objective fit. It is possible that applicant subjective fit may be more influential at organizational entry due to lack of experience and opportunity to observe the actual organization (Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2001). The findings of Cable and Judge (1996) suggest that subjective PO fit perceptions are based on perceived value congruence (i.e. congruence based on applicants’ perceptions of organizations’ values and their own values). Future research should investigate the links between applicant objective congruence (i.e. fit assessed by including someone else’s perception), perceived congruence and subjective fit perceptions.

Research in the vocational choice domain suggests that identification of the core job aspects of an occupation compared with general aspects may improve the prediction of attraction and intentions to accept an offer (Gati, Garty, & Fassa, 1996). For example, the core aspects for political scientist were using verbal ability, analytical ability, and intellectual curiosity. The median within-occupation correlation between PE fit and occupational satisfaction was .27 when all aspects were considered and .85 when only the core aspects were considered. This is consistent with the speculation of Breaugh and Billings (1988) that RJP information has stronger effects if the information-targeted aspects of the job are seen as important by applicants. Gati et al.’s (1996) methodology is an innovative approach to the problem of specifying applicant fit content and may be worth further exploring.

Practically, organizations seeking to recruit individuals would be well advised to provide detailed and specific information that would enable applicants to evaluate their PJ fit, for example, the nature of the work, training opportunities, level of responsibility,
the KSA required (Barber & Roehling, 1993) and how the job might change over time (Schein, 1978). As well, it is recommended that organizations provide information about their values, policies, and culture so that individuals can assess their PO fit. This is based on the finding that initial attraction is influenced by perceived PO fit. It has also been recommended that organizations use a standardized common metric to assess applicant fit for selection purposes (Cable & DeRue, 2002). An alternative perspective that follows from the research of Ganzach, Pazy, Ohayun, and Brainin (2002) is to facilitate applicants’ ability to assess the degree of PJ and PO fit. For example, an instrument could be developed that enabled applicants to assess the magnitude of fit prior to applying for a job, or the same instrument could be used as a basis for discussion about the magnitude of their fit with the job and organization during the selection process. The findings of Ganzach et al. suggest that inducing a perception of a caring organization has considerable positive impact on individuals. Behaviour that demonstrates a genuine interest in helping the applicant choose a job that fitted their KSA and values, needs and abilities is probable to result in perceptions of a caring organization.

In summary, slightly mixed results were found regarding the mediating role of attraction. Mid-selection, the relationship between PJ fit and acceptance intentions was mediated by attraction; in contrast, at the end of selection, PJ fit directly influenced acceptance intentions. A clearer picture emerged regarding applicant PO fit perceptions; this was unrelated to acceptance intentions (mid-selection and end-of-selection). Further research is needed that jointly examines perceptions of PJ and PO fit in the context of recruitment and selection.

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References


Recruitment and fit perceptions


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