The effect of person–organization fit feedback via recruitment web sites on applicant attraction

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Abstract

We adopted a person–organization (P–O) fit framework to examine applicant attraction to an organization in the context of Web-based recruitment. A total of 121 undergraduate business students participated in a two-stage study first by completing a paper-and-pencil survey and second, by visiting a fictitious recruitment Web site in which the researchers manipulated the fit feedback information participants received. Levels of participants' subjective P–O fit and P–O fit feedback information were found to be positively related to attraction. That is, participants with high subjective P–O fit perceptions and participants who received high P–O fit feedback information reported higher applicant attraction. Furthermore, the interaction between P–O fit feedback information and whether the P–O fit feedback information was consistent with participants' subjective P–O fit was significantly related to applicant attraction. Implications of Web-based recruitment with real-time feedback are offered.
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1. Introduction

The advent of Web technology has revolutionized human resource management, particularly in the area of recruitment (Chapman & Webster, 2003; Foster, 2003; Lievens, van

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Dam, & Anderson, 2002). Every day, about 4 million people turn to the Internet for job searching (Rowh, 2005). In addition, more than 70% of organizations practice Web-based recruitment (Berry, 2005). One reason for this rapid adoption of Web-based recruitment is the reduction in recruitment costs of up to 95% of the traditional recruitment sources (Buckley, Minette, Joy, & Michaels, 2004; Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000). Another reason is that Web-based recruitment significantly increases the number of resumes received as well as the volume of qualified applicants from which to choose (Chapman & Webster, 2003). It is obvious that Web-based recruitment has become a major medium for recruitment (Berry, 2005; Chapman & Webster, 2003; Foster, 2003; Zusman & Landis, 2002).

Despite the rapid growth in the use of Web-based recruitment, only a few empirical studies have systematically examined applicant reactions to various aspects of Web-based recruitment (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Rozelle & Landis, 2002). Those few either are descriptive in nature (Chapman & Webster, 2003; Kuhn & Skuterud, 2000) or focus mainly on applicant evaluations of various Web site features (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003; Williamson, Lepak, & King, 2003). As the main goal of Web-based recruitment is to enlarge the potential qualified candidate pool, a large body of research focuses on how the design elements of the recruitment-oriented (Rynes, 1989) Web sites influence applicant attraction to the organization (Anderson, 2003). The design elements examined include what contents can best promote or sell the organization to the applicants, usability, aesthetics, speed, and attractiveness of the Web site interfaces. The general conclusion from these studies is that both the content and the style of a company's recruitment Web pages can influence the company's attractiveness to applicants (Cober et al., 2003; Williamson et al., 2003). While these studies provide evidence on the value of Web-based recruitment, much remains to be investigated. For example, research on how the provision of interactive diagnostic questionnaires influences applicant attraction is lacking. Given that the combination of online testing and feedback represents a powerful recruitment tool, it is of recruiters' great interest to determine how this interactive technology predisposes applicants to the organization. Additionally, previous research has failed to consider relevant psychological processes such as how applicants interpret the information provided by the company Web site. Given the rising popularity of Web-based recruitment, researchers and relevant stakeholders have identified the need for theory-driven research that incorporates such factors when exploring the effect that Web-based recruitment has on recruitment outcomes (Anderson, 2003; Breaugh & Starke, 2000).

Recruitment outcomes include applicant attraction to the organization, intention to remain in the selection process, post-hire outcomes such as job performance, and organizational performance (Anderson, 2003; Barber, 1998). Of these, scholars suggest that applicant attraction should be a high priority because it can influence both the applicants' intentions to remain in the selection process and the post-hire outcomes (Barber, 1998; Carless, 2005; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Clearly, applicant attraction is an important antecedent to other recruitment outcomes. Because it is of the utmost importance that talented applicants with high potential remain in the selection, identifying the factors that increase organizational attractiveness to desirable candidates is a recruitment priority. On the basis of the theoretical and practical value of applicant attraction, the present study focuses on applicant attraction, rather than other recruitment outcomes, in the context of Web-based recruitment.

Providing real-time feedback to applicants is an important and valuable feature of Web-based recruitment that may be related to applicant attraction. Unlike other recruitment media such as email and newspaper advertising that only allow one-way communication, real-time feedback on Web sites facilitates interaction between the applicant and the organization prior to any direct contact between them. This tool makes recruitment Web sites' screening-oriented recruitment (Rynes, 1989) possible through the process of online testing or diagnosis. Screening-oriented recruitment Web sites benefit both organizations and job applicants in many ways. For organizations, online testing represents a highly efficient and cost-effective means of screening applicants. For applicants, test results provide applicants with (often free) personal assessment information (Martinez, 2000), leading to increased self-awareness of their knowledge, skills, personality traits, preferences, and interests. This empowers applicants to self-select employment only with those organizations to which the applicants are best suited, which in turn saves applicants and organizations valuable time and money (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Research on attention suggests that personally relevant messages can generate more attention and interest than general information (Chaiken & Stangor, 1987). Therefore, screening-oriented recruitment Web sites that feature personalized information should attract more applicant attention than recruitment-oriented recruitment Web sites that feature general information about the organizations. Furthermore, with the capability of providing real-time feedback to applicants such as the extent to which applicants fit the organizational culture and job requirements, Web-based recruitment can not only attract more attention from job applicants, but also promote greater information processing of the applicants.

Of the feedback potentially available to job applicants on the recruitment Web sites, information on the extent to which an applicant "fits" the organization, the person–organization (P–O) fit, can be quite valuable to both organizations and applicants. P–O fit can be perceived as the value congruence between the individual and the organization (Kristof, 1996) and P–O fit is an important predictor for the employees' organizational commitment and job performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). With regards to the relationship between P–O fit and recruitment outcomes, previous research suggests that applicants' subjective P–O fit perception can influence their job choices (Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002). This perception is based in part on an applicant's reading of the descriptions of the organizational cultures, values, and visions that are available on the company Web sites. As personal values and organizational cultures are relatively stable, P–O fit assessment provides a good criterion for screening out potential job applicants who, owing to conflicting value systems, may leave the organization not long after they enter it. Furthermore, P–O fit information constitutes a real-time feedback that can be used in the recruitment and the selection processes of all job openings.

Regarding the effects of feedback information on applicant reactions, the extent to which the feedback is consistent with the applicants' expectations also becomes important. That is, if P–O fit feedback is inconsistent with an individual's subjective perception of P–O fit, the individual's interpretation of this inconsistency may influence how the individual interprets the inconsistency. It is conceivable that incongruence between P–O fit feedback provided by the Web site and the subjective P–O fit perception of the applicant may decrease organizational attractiveness. In addition, understanding which information becomes the primary information that applicants use to determine attraction can help practitioners to understand the role of real-time feedback in job application decisions. Given that no prior recruitment research has examined the aforementioned issues, we

examine the effect to which feedback is consistent with the applicants' expectations and how it affects their reactions.

In sum, the current study is aimed to investigate the interactive nature of Web-based recruitment. Specifically, we examined how real-time feedback on applicants' P–O fit by a recruitment Web site and applicants' subjective P–O fit perceptions jointly affected applicant attraction. In addition, we extended past research on Web-based recruitment by studying how job applicants utilized the P–O fit feedback information and their subjective P–O fit perceptions when the two types of information were inconsistent with each other.

1.1. Subjective P–O fit and attraction

Subjective P–O fit, or perceived P–O fit, refers to individuals' direct judgments concerning the extent to which they fit the organization. In the context of recruitment, subjective P–O fit represents the overall evaluation of how well the individuals' values fit the organizational attributes (Kristof, 1996). Findings of P–O fit generally suggest that individuals prefer to work for an organization whose attributes align with their personal characteristics, whether it is concerned with personality or value (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Schneider, 1987). Although many studies have examined the effect that subjective P–O fit has on job performance after organizational entry (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), only a few studies have examined the role of subjective P–O fit in the context of recruitment (Dineen et al., 2002). Consistent with the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), prior P–O fit studies in the context of recruitment found a positive relationship between subjective P–O fit and applicant attraction (Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997) and a positive relationship between subjective P–O fit and job performance after the individual was hired (Cable & Judge, 1996). As subjective P–O fit can affect both pre-entry and post-entry attitudes and behaviors of job applicants, the role that subjective P–O fit plays during the recruitment and selection process appears to be a topic in need of more research attention.

Given the prevalence of P–O fit concepts in the studies of organizational behaviors, there are an increasing number of studies that apply P–O fit to recruitment. However, we found only one study that examined the effect of subjective P–O fit in the context of Web-based recruitment (Dineen et al., 2002). Because the study measured subjective P–O fit *after* the participant had received fit feedback from the Web site, the measure of subjective P–O fit in the study was not independent of the fit feedback information provided. That is, the participant may adjust their subjective P–O fit on the basis of P–O fit feedback information provided. As a result, it was not possible to compare the relative importance of subjective P–O fit and fit feedback in predicting applicant attraction. Furthermore, the above procedure used by Dineen et al. (2002) is inconsistent with the information processing that job applicants normally go through. In the process of job seeking, individuals look for organizations that have desirable attributes. Job seekers learn about an organization's values through company literature such as advertisements, brochures, and mission statements, typically presented on the company Web sites (Barber, 1998; Barber & Roehling, 1993). Further, job seekers examine whether those attributes of the organizations are similar to those of individuals. Although job seekers may not be aware of their actual, objective P–O fit with the organization during job seeking, they tend to form subjective perceptions of how the organization fits with them in order to decide whether or

not to continue the job application process with the evaluated organization. We believe that an investigation of the role that subjective P–O fit plays in applicant attraction *before* applicants receive any personalized information regarding their fit with the organization is necessary in order to understand the role that subjective P–O fit plays in the recruitment process. According to the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), the individuals who perceive a similarity between their own values and the organization's values will be more likely to find the organization attractive and to remain in the application process. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Subjective P–O fit with an organization is positively related to applicant attraction. That is, the greater the subjective perceived fit between applicant and organization, the more attractive the applicant will find the organization.

1.2. P–O fit feedback and attraction

Before the World Wide Web came into existence, applicant attraction to organizations was based solely on non-personalized information such as word of mouth and company literature. Web technology now makes possible real-time, interactive, and personalized feedback, and it is very likely that this technology affects applicant attraction. As stated previously, personalized information has been shown to increase the attention and the attraction of recipients (Chaiken & Stangor, 1987; Dineen et al., 2002). Given that environmental cues, such as general company information that does not directly target any specific individuals, can have an effect on applicant attraction, it is very likely that personalized information will affect applicant attraction.

Therefore, in the context of Web-based recruitment where the individual is provided with P–O fit feedback based on an online survey, it is quite possible that this information will influence individuals' judgments on organization attractiveness. We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. P–O fit feedback information will affect applicant attraction such that individuals receiving feedback indicating high P–O fit will be more attracted to the organization than individuals receiving feedback indicating low P–O fit.

1.3. Moderating effect of fit consistency between the subjective P–O fit and P–O fit feedback

Individuals tend to form their own perceptions of subjective P–O fit on the basis of environmental cues such as company literature *before* the individuals receive any personalized information from the recruitment Web site. It is possible for there to be a discrepancy between the individual's subjective P–O fit and the P–O fit feedback provided by the recruitment Web site. The consistency between the provided P–O fit feedback and the individual's subjective P–O fit may moderate (1) the relationship between subjective P–O fit and attraction, and (2) the relationship between P–O fit feedback and attraction. Although both the individual's subjective P–O fit perceptions and the P–O fit feedback provided by the recruitment Web site can affect applicant attraction, the aforementioned relationships may depend on whether or not the P–O fit feedback is consistent with subjective P–O fit. When subjective P–O fit is in line with P–O fit feedback, there may be a stronger relationship between subjective P–O fit and attraction because the effects

of subjective P–O fit and P–O fit feedback on applicant attraction are additive. Further, in the high P–O fit feedback condition, individuals with high subjective P–O fit may have the greatest level of attraction to the organization, compared to the other three types of combination of P–O fit feedback and subjective P–O fit (high P–O fit feedback with low subjective P–O fit, low P–O fit feedback with high subjective P–O fit, and low P–O fit feedback with low subjective P–O fit). Similarly, in the low P–O fit feedback condition, individuals with low subjective P–O fit may report the lowest level of organization attractiveness comparing to the other three types of combination of P–O fit feedback and subjective P–O fit. However, when subjective P–O fit is not consistent with P–O fit feedback, the two types of information may cancel each other out. Thus, the relationships between (1) subjective P–O fit and applicant attraction and (2) P–O fit and applicant attraction in the inconsistent conditions may differ from the relationships in the consistent conditions. Given that no prior studies have examined this issue, we take an exploratory perspective while investigating the moderating effects of the consistency between subjective P–O fit and P–O fit feedback. We propose the following non-directional moderating hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a. Fit consistency will moderate the relationship between the subjective P–O fit and applicant attraction.

Hypothesis 3b. Fit consistency will moderate the relationship between the P–O fit feedback and applicant attraction.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 203 undergraduate business majors from a National-funded university in Taiwan participated in the first stage of the study for extra course credits. To enter a one-tenth chance of winning a drawing of a 100 NT dollar (equivalent of 3 US dollars) gift certificate, 145 students completed the second stage of the study, and this resulted in an overall participation rate of 60%. A total of 24 students either failed to provide complete information or did not pass the manipulation check and were dropped from the analyses. This loss resulted in a valid sample of 121 participants. The average age of the valid sample was 19.9 years old (SD = 1.45), the gender composition of the sample was 24% ($N = 28$) male and 76% ($N = 93$) female, and 88% of the participants had experience in part-time or full-time work.

2.2. Research Web site

We created two versions of the recruitment Web pages for a fictitious organization called Ace Household Products Inc. The two versions represented the two conditions of the P–O fit feedback: high and low P–O fit feedback. To finalize the research questionnaire and to ensure the functionality of the research Web site, we conducted a pilot study with 47 undergraduate students. The result of our pilot study prompted us to make minor modifications to both the paper-and-pencil questionnaire and the research Web site.

The study Web sites were modeled after several official Web sites of Taiwan's top 10 household-product companies. The Web pages were presented in the following thematic order: Company History, Values and Missions, Organizational Chart and Functions, and Career Opportunities. The pages making up the site were linked serially and could not be revisited. Those factors ensured that participants visited all parts of the Web site and in the same order.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Applicant attraction

We used nine items to measure the applicant attraction to the organization. These items were adapted from previous studies on recruitment (Cable & Judge, 1994, 1997; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). All items were translated into Traditional Chinese and were measured on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). An example is, "I would accept a job offer from the organization, if it were offered." We back-translated all items to ensure the semantic equivalence of the scale. The internal consistency coefficient was .87 in the current study.

2.3.2. Subjective P–O fit

To measure subjective P–O fit, we adapted six items from studies by Cable and Judge (1996) and Judge and Cable (1997). All items were translated into Traditional Chinese and were measured on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). An example is, "The values and personality of this organization reflect my own values and personality." To ensure the semantic equivalence of the scale, every item was back-translated. The internal consistency coefficient was .88.

2.3.3. Fit feedback

We randomly assigned the participants into either the high P–O fit feedback or the low P–O fit feedback conditions. Participants in the high P–O fit feedback condition received the feedback information, "Your responses indicate that your likely fit with the organization would be 80%. This indicates a HIGH fit between your values and personality and the organization's overall culture," whereas participants in the low P–O fit feedback condition received the feedback information, "Your responses indicate that your likely fit with the organization would be 30%. This indicates a LOW fit between your values and personality and the organization's overall culture." Unlike Dineen et al. (2002), who used 80% as the high fit and 40% as the low fit, we used 80% as the high fit and 30% as the low fit. Our choices of the numeric values that represent high fit feedback and low fit feedback were based on results of a pilot study conducted with 30 graduate students. Using a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much), these students were asked to rate the numeric levels of fit percentages ranged from 10% to 90% with 5% intervals. The pilot results found that 74% of the pilot respondents indicated that 80% of fit as high fit and 80% of the pilot respondents indicated that 30% of fit as low fit. We dummy coded the variable of fit feedback (1 = low, 2 = high) for the hypothesis testing.

2.3.4. Fit consistency

In order to create the fit consistency variable, we used the median-split method (median = 4.10) to divide the participants into a high subjective P–O fit group and a low

subjective P–O fit group. The fit consistent conditions contained the following two combinations: the high subjective P–O fit with a high P–O fit feedback condition and the low subjective P–O fit with a low P–O fit feedback condition. The fit inconsistent conditions consisted of the following two conditions: the high subjective P–O fit with a low P–O fit feedback condition and the low subjective P–O fit with a high P–O fit feedback condition. We dummy coded the variable (1 = inconsistent, 2 = consistent) for the hypothesis testing.

2.3.5. Control variables

We chose several control variables that have been shown to be related to applicant attraction on the basis of prior recruitment research incorporating P–O fit framework (Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997). These variables consisted of the participants' age, gender (1 = male, 2 = female), work experience (1 = never, 2 = less than 1 year, 3 = 1–2 years, 4 = more than 2 years), grade point average (GPA, 1 = lower than 60 points, 2 = 61–70 points, 3 = 71–80 points, 4 = 81–90 points, 5 = higher than 90 points), average hours spent on the Internet a day, agreement with P–O fit feedback, and self-esteem. We used one item to measure the participants' agreement with the fit feedback: "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the provided fit evaluation between you and Ace Household Inc." The item was measured on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). We used the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) to measure the participants' self-esteem. All items were translated into Traditional Chinese and were measured on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). To ensure the semantic equivalence of the scale, every item was back-translated. The internal consistency coefficient was .88.

2.3.6. Manipulation check

We used one item to check whether the participant correctly received the fit feedback information: "According to the feedback on the previous page, my fit with the organization was low." The item was measured on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The participants whose answers were not consistent with the fit feedback condition were dropped from the study. For example, a participant who received high P–O fit feedback but who answered 5 (agree) on this item was dropped from the study.

2.4. Procedure

We collected the research data in two stages. First, we asked the participants to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire on control variables. One week later, we invited the participants via email to visit the research Web site for the second stage of the study. After the participants logged on to the research Web site, we instructed them to complete an online Web-based questionnaire on self-esteem. They then reviewed Web pages on company history, products, mission, current employees, and career opportunities. We informed the participants that while they browsed the company Web sites, the computer calculated their fit level with the organization on the basis of the participants' responses to the paper-and-pencil and Web-based questionnaires. When the participants finished browsing the company's information, they answered questions on subjective P–O fit. After the participants submitted their answers on subjective P–O fit, we randomly assigned them

to either the high P–O fit feedback (80%) or the low P–O fit feedback (30%) condition. After the participants received the fit feedback information, the participants completed a Web-based questionnaire concerning manipulation check, agreement on the P–O fit feedback information provided by the Web site, and attraction to the organization.

2.5. Analysis

We used hierarchical regression analyses to examine all hypotheses. All control variables were centered before analyses. For Hypotheses 1 and 2, we entered the control variables before entering subjective P–O fit and fit feedback variables. The moderating effects proposed by Hypotheses 3a and 3b were tested using procedures suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). To reduce the problem of colinearity, we also centered subjective P–O fit, fit feedback variables, and fit consistency while testing Hypotheses 3a and 3b (Aiken & West, 1991).

3. Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, applicant attraction was positively related to participant agreement on the fit feedback information ($r = .35$, $p < .01$), self-esteem ($r = .22$, $p < .01$), subjective P–O fit ($r = .54$, $p < .01$), and P–O fit feedback ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). Participants who reported higher levels of attraction were also more likely to agree on the fit feedback information, to have higher self-esteem, to report higher level of subjective P–O fit, and to receive high P–O fit feedback. Furthermore, participant agreement on the fit feedback information was positively related to subjective P–O fit ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) and fit feedback information ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). On the basis of the correlation coefficients, we found that the participants who reported higher levels of agreement on P–O fit feedback information were those who reported higher levels of subjective P–O fit or received high P–O fit feedback information.

3.1. Main effects

Table 2 presents the results of hierarchical regression analyses. Hypotheses 1 was supported such that the participants' subjective P–O fit was positively related to attraction ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 also received support in that participants who received high P–O fit feedback reported higher levels of attraction than those in the low P–O fit feedback condition ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$).

3.2. Moderating effects

Hypothesis 3a was not supported ($\beta = .16$, $p = .18$) as the moderating effect of fit consistency on the relationship between subjective P–O fit and applicant attraction was not significant. Hypothesis 3b proposed a moderating effect of fit consistency on the relationship between fit feedback and applicant attraction, and was supported ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$). As shown in Fig. 1, the relationship between fit feedback and attraction in the consistent condition is opposite of the pattern of the relationship between fit feedback and attraction in the inconsistent condition. Specifically, in the inconsistent condition, individuals who

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	1.77	.42	–									
2. Age	19.88	1.45	.09	–								
3. (Part-time) work experience	2.34	.84	−.01	.21**	–							
4. Grade point average	4.52	1.21	.26**	.00	.12	–						
5. Average time on Internet	4.10	2.08	.08	.17	.18*	−.17	–					
6. Agreement on fit feedback	3.96	.82	−.14	.00	−.09	−.05	.06	–				
7. Self-esteem	3.63	.71	.04	.02	.02	.25**	−.22**	−.13	(.88)			
8. Subjective P–O fit	4.22	.50	−.06	−.08	−.01	.04	.03	.28**	.09	(.88)		
9. P–O fit feedback	1.50	.50	−.04	−.05	−.07	.22**	−.04	.50**	.05	.05	–	
10. Applicant attraction	4.49	.50	−.06	−.08	−.03	.07	−.02	.35**	.22**	.54**	.29**	(.87)

Note. Internal consistency coefficients are shown in the parentheses on the diagonal of the correlation matrix.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Results of hierarchical regression analyses on applicant attraction

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control variables			
Gender	−.04	−.02	−.03
Age	−.10	−.04	−.04
(Part-time) work experience	.01	.01	−.01
GPA	.04	−.03	−.05
Average time on Internet	.05	.02	.00
Agreement on fit feedback	.41**	.18	.07
Self-esteem	.28**	.22**	.16
Main effects			
Subjective P–O fit (SPOF)		.45**	.14
P–O fit feedback (FitFB)		.19**	.14
Fit consistency (FC)		−.03	−.04
Two-way interactions			
SPOF by FitFB			.06
SPOF by FC			.16
FitFB by FC			.45**
ΔR^2	.22**	.19**	.09**
R^2	.22**	.42**	.50**
F	4.55**	7.65**	8.17**

Note. Standardized regression coefficients of regression analyses are reported here.
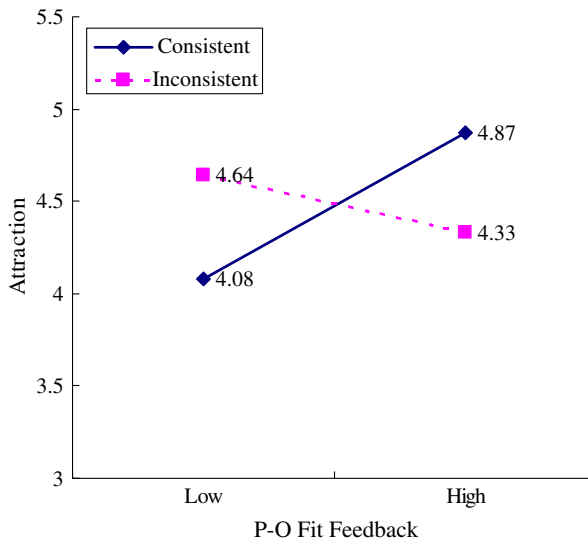* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Fig. 1. Moderating effect of feedback consistency on P–O fit feedback and applicant attraction.

received high P–O fit feedback reported lower levels of attraction than those in the low P–O fit feedback condition. On the contrary, in the consistent conditions, individuals who received high P–O fit feedback reported higher levels of attraction than those who

received low P–O fit feedback. In short, the findings underscore the importance of fit consistency in specifying the boundary conditions for P–O fit feedback information predicting applicant attraction in the context of Web-based recruitment.

4. Discussion

As online recruitment activities dramatically increase the size of the applicant pool, attracting desirable candidates becomes a more complicated and critical concern for human resource professionals (Boehle, 2000). The current study expands our understanding of Web-based recruitment by examining how the provision of real-time feedback on person–organizational fit feedback and job applicants' subjective P–O fit perceptions affect their attraction to the organization.

Consistent with previous studies on attraction, our results suggest that individuals who regard themselves as having a better fit with an organization are more likely to find that organization attractive. Furthermore, our findings suggest that the recruitment Web sites' real-time feedback on the individual's fit with an organization influences the applicant's attraction to the organization. In general, individuals who receive high P–O fit feedback will report higher attraction than those who receive low P–O fit feedback. However, when the P–O fit feedback is inconsistent with the individuals' subjective P–O fit perceptions, the individuals rely mainly on their own perceptions of P–O fit in determining how attractive the organization is. The implication for the findings is that while individuals do not blindly accept fit feedback, they do take into account the information provided by the Web site while making judgments on organizational attractiveness.

4.1. Implications and future research

Several implications and future research suggestions emerged from this study. The ability to provide tailored real-time P–O fit feedback to a job applicant enables recruitment practitioners to influence organization attractiveness before there is any direct contact between the job applicant and the organization. Our findings reveal that the provision of personally tailored feedback regarding the job applicants can affect their reactions in the job application process. Therefore, future research should continue to examine issues related to the provision of personally tailored feedback on recruitment Web sites. For example, research is needed to determine whether different types of personally tailored information such as person–job fit have similar effects on applicant attraction and the relative importance that different types of feedback information have on individuals' judgments concerning attraction. In addition, future research can also examine whether the provision of detailed personally tailored feedback information such as numeric level of P–O fit, along with detailed interpretation of the fit evaluations can result in different effects on applicant attraction.

Because the cost of screening-oriented recruitment Web sites can be significantly higher than recruitment-oriented ones, work should also extend to the examination of the utility that the screening-oriented recruitment Web sites have for the recruitment and selection processes. For example, it would be helpful to know whether the inclusion of screening-oriented components in recruitment Web sites significantly increases the number of qualified job candidates and enhances the financial return of the recruitment and selection practices by promoting the job applicant's self-selection process. Furthermore, because organizations can

manipulate the cutoff point for high and low fit on the basis of their human resources demands, future research can examine whether the ratio of job applicants who received high fit feedback compared to applicants who received low fit feedback can a have substantial influence on recruitment and selection outcomes. By doing so, the organizations will be able to fine-tune the appropriate fit level that enhances the effectiveness of the screening process.

In addition, to recruit applicants via a company's Web site, many Internet recruitment companies provide organizations with online recruitment services such as job postings and initial resume screening. The current research findings suggest that Internet recruitment companies may be able improve their services by providing both job seekers and companies with P–O fit information between the two. However, Internet recruitment companies may collect applicants' information under a different context, such as self-understanding, and applicants may not necessarily have the opportunities to closely examine the company information of the organization that they are interested in while using the matching service provided by the Internet recruitment company. The above differences in the procedure in the provision of P–O fit by Internet recruitment companies may result in applicants responding differently to an organization's Web sites compared to Web sites of Internet recruitment companies. Future research should examine whether the above differences in the procedure in the provision of P–O fit may result in different relationships between fit feedback and attraction.

4.2. Study limitations

Several limitations of this study should be addressed. First, our use of a student sample as opposed to an employee sample may limit the generalizability of the study. The results of this study, although generalizable to new university graduates, may not necessarily be extended to employees. Because most students tend not to have long-term full-time employment experience with an organization, their reactions to the recruitment Web site and their interpretations of the P–O fit information may differ from those of employees who are actually looking for new jobs. Future research should examine whether a similar relationship can be found in the job incumbent sample.

Second, the use of a fictitious Web site in the study may restrict the generalizability of the study. Some important features that may affect job applicant attraction, such as salary levels, benefits, and corporate images, were not fully incorporated into the study Web site. This fact may limit the external validity of the current study. Future research may examine whether combinations of different types of organization information will result in different effects on applicant attraction. Another limitation related to the use of a fictitious Web site is that we linked the Web pages serially to ensure that all participants visit the Web pages in the same order and did not revisit previous pages. Although the purpose of such a restriction was to increase the internal validity the study by standardizing the experiment, the procedure also reduced the external validity of the study because it is against the hyper-linked user-driven nature of most Web sites. This may be especially unrealistic in the part in which the participants are asked to review the company information. However, given that most secured Web sites restrict users from using the "back" option to revisit browsed Web pages, we believe that our procedure may be appropriate in the on-line test taking part of the experiment. Future research may consider recording the browsing pattern and time of each participant to statistically control the potential confounding effects due to the different browsing behaviors.

Because we only examined the effect that screening-oriented recruitment Web pages on an organization's official Web site has on applicant attraction, our findings may not be applicable to those small and medium sized companies that may not have enough resources to develop their own screening-oriented recruitment Web pages. However, as many small and medium sized companies subscribe to recruitment services from Internet recruitment companies, future research that examines the Internet recruitment companies' provision of personalized information to job applicants can provide practical implications for small and medium sized companies for their use of Web-based recruitment.

4.3. Conclusion

This study contributes to our knowledge of recruitment literature. We examined the role that Web sites' real-time interactive feedback plays in the recruitment process, and we introduced new avenues of investigation in the area of Web-based recruitment. Moreover, we applied the person–organization fit literature by studying the effect of P–O fit on applicant attraction. This study also illustrates the need for theoretically grounded approaches to issues of Web-based recruitment so that the mechanisms that enhance the utility of Web-based recruitment can be identified and useful practice suggestions can be made available to human resource professionals.

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