RECRUITER

PERCEPTIONS OF

APPLICANT FIT:

COMMONALITIES

AND DIFFERENCES

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Recruiter Perceptions of Applicant Fit:

Commonalities and Differences

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Abstract

To date, normative selection models have focused primarily on matching individual knowledges, skills, and abilities to job requirements. However, it has increasingly been argued that people should also be selected for fit to broader organizational characteristics such as strategy, culture and values. Despite the apparent reasonableness of these claims, there has been little research on how employers actually go about the task of screening or selecting for broader organizational fit. Accordingly, the present study examined how organizational recruiters assess applicant fit. Fifty-four campus recruiters in four colleges provided examples of "best-fitting" and "worst-fitting" applicants from just-completed interview schedules, along with specific descriptions of what it was that made each applicant "fit" or "not fit". Examination of interview transcripts suggested that despite the recent emphasis on unique organizational values, strategies, or cultures in discussions of fit, by far the most frequently-mentioned determinants of fit were either (1) job-related coursework or experience, or (2) generally (rather than uniquely) desirable personal characteristics such as articulateness, positive personal appearance, and good general communication skills. However, some systematic differences were detected in the extent to which particular characteristics were sought by recruiters in different colleges or by those recruiting for different types of vacancies. Findings are related to previous research, and implications for applicants, employers, and future researchers are offered.

Recruiter Perceptions of Applicant Fit:

Commonalities and Differences

Historically, personnel selection has been dominated by paradigms based on the centrality of job analysis and the matching of individual knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to job requirements (e.g., Dunnette, 1966; Gatewood & Feild, 1990; Heneman, Schwab, Fossum & Dyer, 1989; Schneider & Schmitt, 1986). More recently, however, meta-analytic results and findings of generalizable validities across broad job families have raised questions about whether such fine-grained job analyses are really necessary for effective selection (e.g., Pearlman, 1980; Schmidt, Hunter & Pearlman, 1981).

Although the job-matching and validity generalization paradigms differ in several important respects, they are alike in de-emphasizing the potential role of broader organizational characteristics on selection utility. In the first case, organizational characteristics are overshadowed by attention to specific job requirements; in the latter, by attention to personal traits such as cognitive ability or conscientiousness that are presumed to be predictive across a wide range of jobs and organizations. Nevertheless, the notion that organizational characteristics influence the appropriateness of alternative human resource practices has gained considerable momentum in recent years. A wide range of experts have argued that for maximal effectiveness, organizations should tailor human resource systems to broad organizational characteristics such as culture, values, strategy and structure (e.g., Miles & Snow, 1978; Olian & Rynes, 1984; Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Staw, 1986).

In the specific area of staffing, discussions of fit have been almost exclusively normative or anecdotal (rather than empirical). For example, Olian and Rynes (1984), have presented a logically-derived model of how selection procedures and criteria might be made consistent with "prospector" and "defender" business strategies (see also Miles & Snow, 1978). Schuler and Jackson (1987) have combined logical and case study approaches to develop similar prescriptions for innovation, quality-enhancement, or cost-reduction strategies. More recently, Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan (1991) recommended that organizational (as well

as job) analyses should drive selection procedures, and that applicants' personalities and values should be assessed in addition to their KSAs.

Although empirical research on person-organization fit exists, very little of it addresses how organizations assess applicant fit prior to hiring. The vast majority of fit research has been conducted on currently employed or already-selected individuals (e.g., Blau, 1987; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990; French, Caplan & Harrison, 1982; Kulik, Oldham & Hackman, 1987; Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1989; Moos, 1987; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Rounds, Dawis & Lofquist, 1987). Additionally, most of this research has been concerned primarily with assessing the consequences of good vs. poor fit, rather than with determining how fit is actually assessed in natural employment settings.

Nevertheless, these studies have given additional impetus to fit research because, as a set, they suggest that a variety of positive consequences flow from better fit. These include such outcomes as higher job involvement (e.g., Blau, 1987), greater organizational commitment (e.g., Meglino et al., 1989), improved personal health and adaptation (e.g., French et al., 1982; Moos, 1987), and lower turnover (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 1991).

At the pre-hire stage, the limited extant research has more often focused on the applicant's assessment of fit than the employer's. For example, Bretz, Ash & Dreher (1989) found that differences in individual need for achievement were associated with preferences for individualistic versus group-oriented organizational reward systems. Burke & Deszca (1982) reported that graduating students exhibiting high levels of Type A characteristics (ambition, competitiveness, hostility, need for achievement) preferred working environments characterized by high standards, spontaneity, ambiguity, and toughness. Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart (1991) found that applicants assess fit on the basis of job and organizational characteristics, recruiter characteristics, and recruiting process characteristics (particularly delays). Finally, Judge and Bretz (in press) reported that individuals preferred jobs in organizations that expressed value orientations similar to their own.

Most of the limited literature on how employers assess applicant fit has been anecdotal, prescriptive, or case-study based (e.g., Gerstein & Reisman, 1983; Herbert & Deresky, 1987; Leontiades, 1982; Ricklefs, 1979). These articles have tended to suggest that, absent direct strategic analysis and planning, assessments of applicant fit tend to be based on generalized concepts of "good" managers or employees, combined with personal proclivities of the people doing the hiring. Ricklefs (1979), for example, provided examples from executive search firms of top-level managers who were hired because they (and the hiring manager) liked Victorian homes, didn't own television sets, or were borrowed to the hilt, and others who were not hired because they wore short-sleeved shirts, smoked pipes, coached little league baseball, or didn't know how to eat artichokes.

On the other hand, Rynes and Gerhart (1990) found at least some empirical evidence that recruiters incorporate organizational factors into assessments of applicant fit. In their study, recruiters from the same organization (but interviewing at different times) were found to agree more closely on assessments of applicant fit than did randomly selected pairs of recruiters who interviewed the same applicants. In addition, assessments of organizational fit were more variable across recruiters than were assessments of general employability, suggesting that additional factors are taken into account when recruiters make judgements concerning their own organizations. Finally, after controlling for the effects of perceived general employability, firm-specific applicant fit was best predicted by interpersonal factors (listening, warmth, verbal skills and appearance), followed by factors reflecting goal orientation, past accomplishments and leadership.

Despite this research, the assessment of applicant fit by organizational representatives remains largely a mystery. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that recruiters look for such characteristics as motivation or leadership in addition to KSAs, we do not know precisely what behaviors or characteristics are used to assess these traits in a pre-hire context. Similarly, although prescriptive literature suggests that personality traits and values are important to broader organizational fit, we do not know how these variables (especially

values) are assessed in employment interviews. Nor do we know the extent to which these criteria are differentially sought or evaluated by recruiters from different organizations or industries.

There are literally hundreds of individual difference attributes that might be examined in pursuit of person-organization fit (e.g., Owens & Schoenfeldt, 1979). Recent research reveals at least four different general orientations: (1) fit between individual KSAs and job requirements (e.g., Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990); (2) fit between individual needs, organizational structures, and reinforcement systems (e.g., Moos, 1987; Staw, 1986); (3) fit between individual value orientations and organizational culture or values (e.g., Chatman, 1989; Meglino et al., 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1987), and (4) fit between individual personality and perceived organizational image or personality (Bowen et al., 1991; Tom, 1971). Unfortunately, there is little empirical basis for choosing among these orientations, particularly in pre-hire contexts where the assessibility of some dimensions is uncertain.

As a result, we decided to examine applicant fit assessment in as non-directive a way as possible. Rather than specifying hypotheses and generating questionnaire items that might or might not represent fit (or might or might not be assessable in an interview setting), we asked interviewers to articulate their own conceptualizations of applicant fit. This is an important advantage because there may be serious demand characteristics associated with researcher-generated rating scales, particularly in areas where little construct validity work has been done. For example, research has consistently shown that subjects rate long lists of researcher-generated attributes as far more "equal" in importance than they actually are in decision making processes (e.g., Slovic & Lichtenstein, 1971). Similarly, attributes rated as "important" are sometimes totally ignored in decision simulations or policy capturing situations (Rynes, Schwab & Heneman, 1983).

Although recruiters were given a completely free reign in describing fit assessment, they nevertheless were asked to do so in a concrete decision situation. Specifically, they were asked to describe specific characteristics of good- and poor-fitting applicants from just-

completed interview schedules. A concrete context was provided for two reasons. First, previous research has demonstrated that meaningful answers to questions about decision factors cannot be generated in abstract settings (e.g., Opshal & Dunnette, 1966; Rynes et al., 1983). Second, an earlier attempt to examine fit more globally generated unusable results. Specifically, when asked to provide general descriptions of how they assessed fit, an earlier recruiter sample produced only vague listings of "mom and apple pie" attributes (e.g., leadership, motivation, teamwork, intelligence). As such, a decision was made to use a more concrete decision setting and a critical incidents methodology (Flanagan, 1954).

In choosing this methodology, we carefully considered and accepted the trade-offs that come from doing qualitative analyses. In any research venture, it is important to match the methodology to the task at hand. Given the virtual absence of applicant fit research at the pre-hire stage, qualitative methods seemed highly appropriate in that they yield useful information for construct definition and validation (Miller, 1991) and allow extended responses that are not dependent on respondents' writing skills (Patton, 1990). In Patton's words, "Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of inquiry" (1990, p. 14). In addition, face-to-face interactions may "open up" respondents and make them less calculating than they might be with written formats (Rynes et al., 1991).

The specific research approach is described more thoroughly in the sections that follow. In general, the research purpose was threefold: (1) to delineate the domain of person-organization fit at the pre-hire stage; (2) to identify specific behaviors, characteristics or interactions linked to recruiter's inferences of fit, and (3) to conduct a preliminary examination of differences in conceptualizations of fit by vacancy type and college.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 54 recruiters who were conducting on-campus interviews at four colleges (Arts & Science = 9, Business = 14, Engineering = 14, and Industrial Relations =

17) of a major northeastern university. Forty recruiters were male and 14 were female.

Nearly all recruiters were managers representing their own functional areas. They were

interviewing for a variety of positions, including vacancies in sales/marketing (n=7), human

resources (n=17), consulting (n=3), finance/banking (n=7), general management (n=6), and

engineering/programming/R&D (n=14). Fifty of the 54 openings were for permanent

positions. All of the one-digit SIC industry classifications were represented. Recruiter

characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

Procedure

Placement directors of the four colleges provided recruiting schedules and company

contacts for organizations that had arranged to recruit during the Spring semester of 1990.

Because diversity among organizations should make results more generalizable, we attempted

to include both service and manufacturing organizations, public and private organizations,

small and large organizations, and both well established and relatively young organizations.

Recruiters were contacted in advance, informed of the purpose of the study, and asked

to participate by allowing us to conduct a structured interview regarding their perceptions of

applicant fit. Recruiters were interviewed in the late afternoon to insure that the recruiter had

had sufficient opportunity to interview several students prior to the research interview. This

was done so that specific behavioral examples of people who fit or did not fit their

organization would be available, and the recruiter would be less likely to rely on

generalizations or "mom and apple pie" responses.

The interviews followed a structured format that asked each interviewer the same

questions in the same order. The questions were worded to elicit examples of fit and lack of

fit in the form of critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954). A variety of questions were asked (best

fit, worst fit, changes in fit assessment, general versus specific fit) because of the abstractness

of the fit construct. It was felt that asking these questions in different ways would be more likely to trigger specific examples of "fitting" and "non-fitting" behaviors. Interview questions are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 Here

Analyses

All 54 interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read by the three principal investigators who, based on knowledge of the fit literature and the content of the interviews, independently designed coding schemes for interpreting the recruiters' comments. Differences between the coding schemes were reconciled through a series of meetings in which a large number of interview phrases were collectively labeled by the research team. Each meeting resulted in a revised coding scheme. Following each meeting, the principal investigators independently analyzed several "practice" interviews to see how well the revised scheme fit the data. Because we wanted to put very minimal interpretations on recruiters' words, when in doubt regarding the equivalence of phrases, we left two categories rather than merging into one. For example, the phrase "the best fit I saw today was a woman who had the very specific coursework we look for, good GPA and solid summer experiences in our industry" received one code each for job-related coursework, GPA, and job-related work experience. This resulted in a very "pure" form of content coding (Weber, 1990), but also resulted in a consensus scheme containing 45 codes. After four iterations and the imposition of three "coding rules", a consensus scheme was reached. The first "rule" was that all six questions would be coded together. This was done for two reasons. First, the different questions had all been designed to elicit responses about the same underlying construct. Second, given the large number of possible codes (45), and the modest sample size, separately coding the six different questions would both slice the data too

thinly, and result in six-times as much summary information. Thus, a higher level of aggregation (by recruiter, rather than question-per-recruiter) was chosen.

The second rule was to count a trait or characteristic only once per question, unless it was clear that the recruiter was referring to two different individuals. This rule was necessary to control for some recruiters' tendencies to ramble on about particular issues.

The third rule was not to attempt to differentiate positive from negative statements about indicators of fit. This decision was made after initial attempts at developing a coding scheme revealed that, in most cases, the recruiters used positive orientations to describe those who fit (e.g. the applicant had relevant job experience) and negative orientations to describe those who didn't (e.g. the applicant did not have relevant job experience). Also, in some cases it was not clear whether two traits were opposite ends of the same continuum (one negative and one positive), or two different constructs entirely.

Finally, using the consensus scheme, the first author and a graduate research assistant independently coded each of the transcribed interviews. The two coders initially agreed on 90% of the coded statements, with the remainder being reconciled through group discussion with another graduate research assistant.

Given the nature of the study and the relatively modest sample size, analyses were primarily descriptive. We paid specific attention to the frequency with which particular indicators of fit were mentioned, and to the specific behaviors or other cues that led to those assessments. In addition, however, we conducted preliminary analyses to suggest how recruiter, organization, or vacancy characteristics might be influencing the specific indicators used.

RESULTS

The preliminary rounds of content analysis identified 45 different characteristics which were cited as indicators of applicant-organization fit. The frequencies with which these variables were mentioned are provided in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 Here

Since many of the attributes were infrequently mentioned, we decided to examine in greater depth only those that were mentioned by at least two-thirds of the sample (i.e. mean greater than or equal to .67). This decision rule yielded thirteen attributes that formed the basis for our further analyses. (These attributes are listed in bold at the top of Table 3). In Table 4, these indicators of fit are defined, along with illustrative examples of the incidents, observations, or behaviors that led to applicants being characterized in these terms.

Insert Table 4 Here

The correlations among these thirteen attributes (as well as recruiter sex, functional area, industry, and type of vacancy) are presented in Table 5. Though most of the attributes were not significantly related, a few relationships among variables in recruiters' descriptions of fit warrant mention. For example, mentions of leadership were significantly correlated with those of teamwork and work ethic. This is reasonable in that "leading" implies developing positive working relationships and infusing high standards among others.

Insert Table 5 Here

In addition, work experience, articulateness, and general communication skills also tended to be mentioned together. Since work experience also implies previous interviewing experience, perhaps ability to communicate effectively in the interview setting was enhanced through prior practice. It is also possible that since applicants with prior work experience have more relevant content to discuss with recruiters, they may be more comfortable with the

process and more confident in what they are saying, particularly when behavioral description interview formats are used (Rynes & Connerley, 1991).

Mentions of focus were significantly correlated with those of work experience and GPA, while GPA was also related to work ethic and coursework. The relationship between previous work experience and focus suggests that experience, and the maturation process associated with it, heightens applicants' awareness of what they really want out of their working life. The relationships between GPA, work ethic and coursework suggest that recruiters recognize the differences between "easy" and "hard" classes and appreciate that achieving higher a GPA requires a work ethic.

Finally, mentions of confidence and appearance were significantly related, most likely through the tendency of recruiters to include body language in their interpretation of both attributes. For example, while referring to a candidate's appearance, one recruiter mentioned that "he had his fist on the table, without a hard beating, but showing me that he was determined and confident."

There are at least three plausible explanations for these relationships. First, recruiters may share certain "implicit theories" of personality, wherein particular traits or experiences are believed to correlate within the typical individual (Cronbach, 1955). Second, independent of recruiters' assumptions, applicants may in fact possess certain attributes in combination with others (e.g., more work experience and clearer focus), which then causes those attributes to be mentioned in conjunction with one another. Third, some of our constructs may have overlapping domains (e.g., articulateness and general communication), but remain separated in this study because of the decision to preserve a relatively pure coding scheme.

Turning from general results to differences among recruiters, we conducted several analyses of variance to determine the extent to which organization, recruiter, and vacancy characteristics were associated with differences in frequencies of mention. However, because of the modest sample size and the possibility of idiosyncratic response patterns, these results should be considered exploratory and interpreted cautiously. We suggest particular caution in

interpreting the differences based on type of position, since the extremely small sample size for consulting positions may reflect sampling error (see Table 6). In fact, because responses regarding consulting positions may confound interpretation, we limit our discussion to the other significant differences.

Insert Table 6 Here

Differences by College

The frequency with which GPA was mentioned as an indicator of fit differed across colleges ($F = 2.90$, $p = .04$), with Tukey's multiple comparison procedure (.05) indicating that the difference was particularly significant between Engineering (mean frequency of mention: $m = 1.29$) and Business ($m = .21$). Additionally, work ethic appeared to be significantly more important to recruiters in the College of Arts & Sciences ($F = 2.96$, $p = .04$), who mentioned it two to three times more frequently than did the other recruiters. Tukey's procedure (.05) indicated that the significance was due primarily to the difference between Arts and Engineering. Scheffe's test (.10) indicated that Arts was also marginally different from ILR. Finally, differences in the importance of teamwork/cooperative attitude as an indicator of fit were also significant ($F = 2.83$, $p = .05$). Teamwork was considered more important in Business ($m = 1.50$) than in Engineering ($m = .99$), ILR ($m = .65$), or Arts ($m = .44$).

These patterns largely make sense. Engineering programs tend to be highly analytical and more structured than the other academic disciplines represented in this study, making GPA more comparable and therefore a more important indicator of fit. In Business, the interpersonal nature of managerial jobs, and the growth of total quality movements in the organizations which these students tend seek, makes teamwork an important indicator of fit. In Arts, where students have much more latitude to choose courses, it is harder to directly compare GPA. Moreover, these students tend to have less prior job experience than students

in the professional schools. Therefore, in the absence of more concrete dimensions, recruiters seemed to key on work ethic as a signal for other desirable characteristics.

Differences by Vacancy

With respect to the type of vacancy to be filled, work experience appeared to be a more important determinant of fit for finance/banking (m = 2.86) than for human resources (m = 1.41) and engineering (m = 1.79), although the differences were only marginally significant (F = 2.32, p = .06).

Recruiters also indicated that appearance was more important for finance/banking (m = 2.00) and sales/marketing (m = 1.71) than for the other types of vacancies (F = 2.37, p = .05), but multiple comparison tests failed to identify any two groups that were statistically different.

Significant variation between finance/banking (m = 1.86) and sales/marketing (m = 0.14) was also found for leadership (F = 2.59, p = .04).

Finally, work ethic was found to vary significantly (F = 3.88, p = .005) by type of vacancy. Tukey's procedure verified significant differences (.05) between managerial positions (m = 2.00) and sales/marketing (m = .29), engineering/programming (m = .50), and human resources (m = .59).

Differences by Recruiter Sex

Male recruiters mentioned work experience as an indicator of applicant fit nearly twice as often as did female recruiters (male: m = 2.13, female: m = 1.3; t = 2.21, p = .03). Applicant focus was also mentioned more frequently (t = 2.03, p = .05) by male recruiters (m = .97) than by female recruiters (m = .46). However, work ethic was mentioned more frequently (t = 1.96, p = .05) by female recruiters (m = 1.23) than by male recruiters (m = .64). Therefore, women appear to be focusing more on aptitude than on credentials, and the pattern of responses is consistent with females' tendency to be more open and flexible about careers than men tend to be (Gallos, 1989).

Additional Analyses

Because of the infrequency with which many of the original 45 items were mentioned, it was impossible to analyze them independently. Therefore, an attempt was made to bring some of the less frequently mentioned items back into the analyses by creating scales based on content similarity between the attributes (means and standard deviations are reported in Table 3). The Motivation scale was created by summing responses that were coded as work ethic, energy, ambition, work history, and extracurricular activities. These items represented not only a desire and willingness to work, but also a history of having done so. The Leadership scale was created by summing items coded as leadership activities, initiative, independent thought and action, and directing others. The Intelligence scale was created by summing responses coded as perceived cognitive ability, GPA, and ability to synthesize. Communication was created by summing responses coded as general communication skills, articulateness, and appearance. The Interpersonal scale was created by summing responses coded as interpersonal skills, extraverted, teamwork/cooperative attitude and open-mindedness. Finally, the Interest scale was formed by summing responses coded as applicant interest, interest in job, interest in organization, and interest in industry. Differences on these scales were then examined across colleges and type of vacancy.

Motivation varied somewhat by college ($F = 2.44$, $p = .08$) but the difference was particularly significant ($p < .05$) between Arts ($m = 3.56$) and Engineering ($m = 1.57$). Again, this makes sense in that Arts recruiters have fewer standardized, concrete cues to go on, whereas engineering recruiters are more or less assured that engineering graduates have a work ethic just by virtue of the calibre of the school and the difficulty of the coursework.

The role of interpersonal skills also varied significantly by college ($F = 3.60$, $p = .02$) with the primary difference being between Business ($m = 3.5$) and Engineering ($m = 1.36$). The importance of interpersonal skills was also found to vary by type of vacancy ($F = 2.32$, $p = .06$). These skills were considered to be particularly important indicators of fit

for finance/banking positions (m = 4.29) and least important for engineering/ programming positions (m = 1.36).

Differences across colleges also emerged regarding applicant interests (F = 3.07, p = .04). Interests were considered more important by recruiters in Arts (m = 3.33) than they were by recruiters in ILR (m = 1.18). This may be due to the relatively narrow focus of ILR positions vis-a-vis the general sales and management positions recruited for in the Arts College. Differences by type of vacancy tended to confirm this (a marginally significant difference (F = 1.99, p = .10) was noted by type of vacancy). Though multiple comparison procedures failed to identify any two groups that were statistically different, Interests were more important for general management (m = 3.17) positions than for the other types of vacancies that tended to be more narrowly defined.

Finally, leadership was determined (F = 2.58, p = .03) to be more important for management (M = 3.17) and finance/banking positions (m = 3.29) than for engineering positions (m = 0.86). Significant differences on the scales are summarized in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 Here

Individual Differences in Recruiters' Conceptions of Fit

While the differences described in the data thus far are informative, they provide only limited insight into the patterns that emerge in individual recruiters' perceptions of fit. Accordingly, individual recruiter response profiles for the thirteen most frequently mentioned indicators of fit were examined for insight into commonalities and differences across recruiters. To do so, we went back to the transcribed interviews which had been content coded, and counted the number of times each of the thirteen primary indicators of fit were mentioned. This time, to get a more complete "picture" of the interview content, we abandoned the rule to only count an attribute once per question. The resulting profiles (see Table 8) suggest that recruiters' conceptions of applicant fit range from the "superman" ideal

(a little bit of everything; see Schneider, 1976), to a sharp focus on just a few key attributes. Although it would not be practical to discuss every recruiter's profile, a few cases might prove illustrative. For example, Business Recruiter 12 provides an example of the "Superman" perception of fit.

> "The best way to describe what I look for is someone who is well-rounded. By that I mean has a combination of technical and analytical skills and can do a lot of number crunching, work with a control system, or financial system. But at the same time, have the people-skills. Personally, I like to see a broader perspective. The people that can put up with the pressure of the job we have to offer and will be challenged and enjoy the challenge of the job. Lastly, which is the key point, they have a broader perspective; they have a life outside of work. They have other interests that they can bring to work on a day-to-day basis that will help them get the information and cooperation that they need, and will help them to stay with us long-term".

According to this recruiter, it is important that applicants have relevant educational training and job-related work experience, be exceptionally smart, be able to communicate effectively, have exhibited leadership abilities, and be a cooperative team-player with self-confidence who knows what he/she wants but has taken the time and expended the energy to be come a well-rounded individual who appreciates diversity. Wow! Contrast this with Business Recruiter 10 and Engineering Recruiter 10 who are focusing more on KSAs through educational preparation and previous job experience, with Arts Recruiter 5 and ILR Recruiter 5 who are focusing on communication skills, or with Business Recruiter 1 and ILR Recruiter 6 who are focusing on work habits as indicators of fit.

Insert Table 8 Here

Table 8 also makes apparent the differences in variation across attributes. For example the Coefficient of Variation (CV; standard deviation divided by the mean) for work

experience was 0.63. This suggests relative agreement between the 54 recruiters regarding the importance of work experience as an indicator of fit and may be indicative of a highly generalizable criterion of fit at the initial screening stage. Alternatively, mentions of GPA (CV = 1.63) and leadership (CV = 1.50) were considerably more variable, suggesting that these indicators of fit may be more affected by vacancy characteristics or individual recruiter preferences.

It would have been enlightening if the recruiters' response profiles clustered into groups that were identifiable on the basis of particular fit orientations. Unfortunately, several clustering approaches failed to yield readily interpretable cluster solutions.

Discussion

Present findings have implications for at least three parties: employers, applicants, and future researchers. Each is discussed in turn.

From the employer's perspective, it is useful to consider the extent to which recruiters appear to be assessing person-organization fit as opposed to other kinds of fit. In this regard, most recruiters appear to have placed more attention on (1) job-specific fit and (2) general fit (i.e., universally desired characteristics) than on fit to unique organizational characteristics or culture. For example, 89% of recruiters attended to job-related work experience, 76% mentioned job-related coursework, and 96% mentioned one or the other of these job-specific characteristics (Table 8). In the area of generally desired characteristics, 94% mentioned articulateness, 68% mentioned appearance, and 61% mentioned general communication skills. In contrast, no dimensions with a clear organizational fit component fell within the top 13-mentioned categories.

Still, organization-based fit dimensions did figure into some recruiters' judgments. For example, about half the recruiters mentioned at least one applicant who did or didn't fit well because of a dominant interest in a particular industry. In addition, a sizeable minority mentioned applicants who either did or didn't fit their organizational structure or culture, or who did or didn't demonstrate a particular interest in the firm.

In addition, it appears that the teamwork/cooperative attitude dimension had an organization-specific component to at least some of the 28 recruiters who mentioned it (see Table 4). In other words, although some of those who mentioned cooperative attitude saw it as universally desired characteristic, others specifically indicated that it was important because of a team-based structure or global/diversity strategy. Additionally, there were a number of personality traits that, while not very frequently mentioned, were positively evaluated by some recruiters but negatively by others (e.g., competitiveness, humility, calmness, ambition, impulsiveness, or risk-taking).

Despite these occasional attempts to assess organizational fit, however, it seems clear that fit to the broader organization was considerably underemphasized relative to immediate job fit. One explanation may be that despite recent academic and popular press attention to organizational contingencies and fit, the majority of recruiters and their "internal customers" (hiring line managers) still have fairly parochial objectives in making hiring decisions ("Send me someone who can do these specific things right now."). Another possibility is that recruiters consider organizational fit to be important, but do not believe it necessary or feasible to assess it so early in the hiring process. A related possibility might be that organizational fit is regarded as important, but recruiters are uncertain of how to assess it.

Whatever the reason, employers might wish to re-consider whether the relatively low priority on organizational fit is warranted and, if not, what might be done to enhance it (see also Bowen et al., 1991). For example, although it may be true that applicants need specific job-related skills or coursework, it should be noted that the applicants interviewed in this study would generally be regarded as "high potentials". Given that all were Ivy League students in colleges ranked in the top 10 or 20 in their respective fields, most of these applicants would be expected to move relatively rapidly across a variety of increasingly responsible positions. If anything, this situation would be expected to increase the importance of broader organizational fit in recruiter judgments. As such, the present study may represent an overestimate of the attention paid to organizational fit in most staffing situations.

In addition, although recruiters might not believe that it is necessary to assess organizational fit during initial screening, it should be recognized that assessment becomes far more expensive at the site visit stage. Thus, if organizational fit is truly important, some attempt should be made to ensure that recruiters are instructed in how to assess it at the initial screening stage. Although we do not have explicit information on the extent to which recruiters in our sample were told explicitly what to screen for, the overall impression created from reading the transcripts is that most recruiters were acting pretty much on the basis of personal belief systems or schema (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Gioia & Poole, 1984; Jolly, Reynolds & Slocum, 1988). Moreover, this suspicion (if true) would be largely consistent with earlier survey evidence concerning the primarily administrative/legal content and limited duration of most recruiter training programs (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986).

Another potentially noteworthy finding for employers concerns the fact that except for business school recruiters, less than half the recruiters mentioned teamwork, even once, as an important ingredient of fit. Although it is impossible to say how many recruiters "should" be looking for cooperative attitudes and teamwork skills, the dramatic increase in self-managed workgroups, cross-functional teams, cross-organizational alliances, and cooperative relationships with both customers and suppliers would appear to make teamwork a desirable applicant attribute in almost any forward-looking organization (e.g., Garvin, 1986; Kanter, 1989; Lawler, 1988; Schonberger, 1986). Despite the stereotype of engineers as individuals who tinker alone with their computers, requirements for cross-functional communication and coordination are growing rapidly for engineers (e.g., Schonberger, 1986). Similarly, demands for coordination, conciliation and facilitation skills are rising among human resource professionals, who must increasingly act like organizational development consultants in order to be perceived as effective (Schuler, 1990). Thus, the fact that only a minority of recruiters in these areas appear to be actively seeking teamwork skills in a matter of potential concern.

From the applicant's perspective, the most striking finding is the extent to which recruiters look for specific illustrations of demonstrated achievement, particularly work