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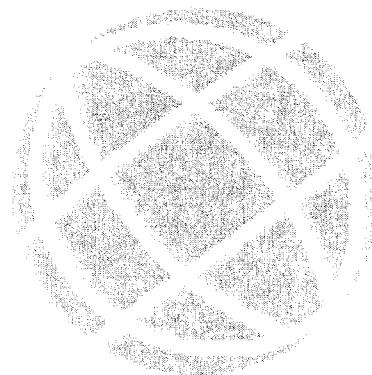
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## WORKING PAPER SERIES

# The Relationship Between Person-Organization Fit and Career Success

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**The Relationship Between Person-Organization Fit and Career Success**

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**RUNNING HEAD: FIT AND CAREER SUCCESS**

**Abstract**

Recently, person-organization fit has been shown to relate to a number of positive work-related outcomes. However, the relationship between fit and career success has not yet been directly examined. The present study provides the first investigation of this relationship. Graduates from industrial relations programs in two large universities were surveyed to assess their preferences for particular organizational environments, the level of career success they had attained, and the nature of the organizational environments in which they worked. Results indicated that person-organization fit was a significant predictor of both extrinsic measures of success (salary, job level attained, and number of promotions received), and intrinsic measures of success (job and life satisfaction). Implications of the results for individuals and organizations are discussed.

### The Relationship Between Person-Organization Fit and Career Success

Do people who fit the particular organizational environment to which they belong achieve higher levels of career success than those who do not? Although this relationship has not been explicitly tested, the tenets of interactional psychology (e.g., Murray, 1938), the speculations of respected scholars (e.g., Holland, 1976, 1985; Olian & Rynes, 1984; Schneider, 1983, 1987), and empirical research demonstrating that fit results in positive work-related outcomes (e.g., Blau, 1987; Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Cladwell, 1991), strongly suggest an affirmative response. Both the theoretical foundations and the related empirical research suggest that individuals will seek out, find comfort, and flourish in environments that support their specific preferences. Therefore, individuals who do indeed fit in the organization should, over time, achieve higher levels of extrinsic success and generally be more satisfied with their jobs and lives than those who do not.

The rationale for these beliefs, indeed for person-organization fit in general, are grounded in interactional psychology. Fit implies a state of congruence between individual and environmental characteristics. Early interactionist perspectives on motivational psychology viewed person-environment fit in terms of need-press associations (Murray, 1938). In this context, needs represent the determinants of behavior in individuals and can be inferred from how the individual feels, behaves, or reacts. Press represents the environmental determinants of behavior and implies what the environment can do for an individual, to facilitate or hinder the fulfillment of needs or the accomplishment of goals (Hall & Lindzey, 1970; Murray, 1938). Therefore, work motivation is assumed to be maximized when individual characteristics fit organizational environments. Since motivation interacts with abilities to affect performance (Steers & Porter, 1983), and performance is closely linked to both pay and promotions in most organizations (Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991), person-organization fit should affect career success.

Other theories also posit a relationship between fit and career success. Specifically, reinforcement theory predicts that individuals tend to seek out, prefer, and remain in environments in which positive reinforcements are maximized (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969; Vroom, 1964). Organizations use reinforcements to shape individual behavior to be consistent with existing norms. Holland (1976) has argued that, over time, reinforcements constrain individual behavior to be consistent with organizational desires. That is, the individuals who display the proper behaviors and attitudes (i.e., those who fit) have the indicators of career success bestowed upon them.

Expectancy theory also is useful in explaining how fit may relate to career success. The theory posits that individuals will tend to engage in activities perceived most likely to yield valued or valent outcomes. As applied to work motivation and performance, congruence between individual preferences and organizational conditions presumably affect outcome valences. Additionally, since environmental conditions can either facilitate or hinder the use of particular knowledge, skills, and abilities, and the expression of particular needs, values, and personality characteristics, the match between individual and organizational attributes should affect the perceived probability that effort will lead to performance. Finally, individuals form instrumentality perceptions from the historical record of what the organization rewards. Therefore, expectancy theory predicts that individuals who have the characteristics to perform well in an organization, will subsequently get rewarded for possessing these characteristics. In other words, those who fit will succeed.

Shifting from the individual perspective, Schneider (1983, 1987) has proposed an organizational-level perspective of fit which describes the process in terms of an attraction-selection-attrition cycle. Schneider argues that not only do organizational environments shape individual behaviors through the reward systems in place, but individual needs and preferences also shape what the organization chooses to reward. The key premise is that

individuals are not "assigned" to organizational settings, rather they self-select in and out on the basis of fit. Those who fit stay, contribute, and are subsequently rewarded by the organization, while those who do not fit leave.

Psychological and political influence processes also may be powerful, fit-based determinants of career success (Janis, 1972; Schneider, 1983, 1987). Specifically, those who fit are socially and politically supported by the organization's members and systems, while those who do not are ostracized and undermined (Schreiber, 1983). Therefore, those who fit are more likely to receive the support necessary to perform well, thereby increasing the likelihood that their performance will lead to extrinsic indicators of success, such as pay increases and promotions. They also are likely to encounter more comfortable and supportive working environments than those who do not fit, and are therefore likely to possess higher levels of job and life satisfaction.

In addition to the informal social and political influences that differentially affect "right types" versus "non-right types" (Schneider, 1983, 1987), the organization may formally nurture some individuals to a greater extent than others. Through formalized human resource systems, those who fit are often afforded greater opportunity to succeed than are those who do not. For example, organizational mobility systems can be characterized by contest or sponsorship norms (Rosenbaum, 1984; Turner, 1960). Under contest norms, individuals compete for promotions on the basis of ability and recent performance, and the decisions are presumably unaffected by other individual differences. Alternatively, under sponsorship norms, promotions are often based on the degree to which individuals have been identified as having high potential by virtue of possessing particular attributes (often the same attributes possessed by the gate-keepers). Sponsored mobility is evident in access to organizational mechanisms such as "fast-track" promotion ladders and mentoring relationships. Since these mechanisms have been associated with career success (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1984; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991), to the

extent that this access is granted on the basis of fit, the implications for career success are obvious.

In addition, considerable research has linked person-organization fit to many positive work-related outcomes that should, in turn, be related to career success. For example, fit has been shown to have implications for job involvement (Blau, 1987), organizational commitment (Blau, 1987; Meglino et al., 1989), individual health and adaptation (French, Caplan & Harrison, 1982; Moos, 1987), job performance (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990), and work attitudes (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990; Meglino et al., 1989). Fit has also been shown to affect both applicant preferences and behaviors (Bretz, Ash & Dreher, 1989; Judge & Bretz, in press; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991) and recruiter perceptions of applicant suitability (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). These outcomes suggest that those who fit are more likely to be attracted to the organization, be favorably evaluated by established organizational members, display greater work motivation, and perform better than those who do not.

### **Hypotheses**

Many variables have been shown to influence career success. For example, individual differences in cognitive ability (Dreher & Bretz, 1991), motivation (Whitely et al., 1991), human capital acquisitions (Hall & Hall, 1979; Mills, 1985; Pfeffer, 1977; Whitely et al., 1991), familial obligations (Cook, 1987; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and demographic influences such as socio-economic status, marital status, and gender (Dipboye, 1986; Dreher, Dougherty, & Whitely, 1985; Pfeffer, 1977; Powell, 1988) all have been shown to effect career success. Similarly, organizational-level variables such as career or promotion systems (London & Stumpf, 1982; Stumpf & London, 1981), early career challenge (Kaufman, 1974), mentoring (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1983; Whitely et al. 1991), and socialization (Feldman, 1981; Louis, 1980; Reichers, 1987; Wanous, Reichers, & Malik, 1984) also have been shown to effect individual career success.

However, in spite of the previously discussed theoretical support for the effect of person-organization fit on career success, and empirical research indicating that fit has positive work-related outcomes, no research has directly examined this relationship. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that person-organization fit is positively related to career success. Career success can be construed as consisting of intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Bell & Staw, 1989; London & Stumpf, 1982). Extrinsic success consists of attainment of certain exoterically visible outcomes, such as salary level, job level, and number of promotions achieved. Given the theoretical predictions and past research reviewed earlier:

H1: Greater congruence between individual values and preferences and the presence of these in the organizational environment (person-organization fit) will be related to higher levels of extrinsic career success.

Although previous research has focused on extrinsic indicators of success, intrinsic dimensions such as job and life satisfaction may be equally important in assessing career success (Bartolome & Evans, 1980; Bray & Howard, 1980; Vaillant, 1977). Specifically, extrinsic outcomes (high salary, many promotions) acquired at the expense of one's self esteem, values, or family life may not be defined as success. Although research has demonstrated that intrinsic and extrinsic success are positively related (Bray & Howard, 1980; Vaillant, 1977), they are clearly distinct and it is possible that a person may achieve one and not the other, or occasionally one at the expense of the other. Also, fitting or not fitting purportedly creates powerful internalized reactions that might affect job satisfaction and life satisfaction. For example, empirical data from the vocational behavior literature strongly suggests that person-occupation fit predicts job satisfaction (Assouline & Meir, 1987; Mount & Muchinsky, 1978; Rounds, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1987; Smart, Elton, & McLaughlin, 1986; Spokane, 1985). It is reasonable to expect that a similar situation holds true with respect to person-organization fit. Therefore:

H2: Greater congruence between individual values and preferences and the presence of these in the organizational environment (person-organization fit) will be related to higher levels of intrinsic career success.

### Method

#### Subjects and Procedure

Graduates from two large industrial relations programs were surveyed. The questionnaire assessed respondents' career success, factors which have been previously been shown to affect career success, the existing organizational environment, and preferences for different organizational environments. The sample included all 651 past graduates from the industrial relations program at a large Midwestern university, and all 1980 through 1986 graduates ( $n = 1,561$ ) from the industrial relations school of a large Northeastern university. The study was conducted with the support of the schools' placement and alumni relations directors, who provided mailing labels and included a cover letter asking for full participation. Confidentiality of individual responses was assured, and respondents were promised a summary of the results. From the Midwestern sample, 301 surveys were returned (46%), and from the Northeastern sample, 572 surveys were returned (37%). Overall, 873 of the 2,189 deliverable surveys were returned (40%). The response rates achieved compare favorably with past survey research (Dillman, 1978, 1983).

Sixty-three percent of respondents were male, 66% were married, and their average age was 34.8 years. Twenty-three percent of respondents reported having experienced a significant interruption in their careers. Seventy-four percent reported being from middle class or upper middle class backgrounds. Respondents worked an average of 49.8 hours per week, spent 5 hours per week caring for dependents, and spent 8.7 hours per week performing household chores. Average tenure in respondents' current line of work was approximately 4 years, and the typical respondent was working in a job 4.2 levels above entry level. Respondents had averaged 3.35 promotions, with an average of 1.65 of those

with their current employer. Average salary of respondents was \$66,422 per year. Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported being at least moderately satisfied with their job; 82% reported being at least slightly satisfied with their life in general.

### **Measures**

**Career success.** Extrinsic career success was measured by three variables. Salary, job level (defined as number of positions above entry level), and number of promotions with current employer were used as measures of extrinsic career success. These variables were standardized and summed to form a scale representing overall extrinsic success.

Intrinsic career success was manifested by life satisfaction and job satisfaction. Life satisfaction was measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale, a 5-item measure of job satisfaction that compares favorably with other measures of life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale statements include (1) in most ways my life is close to ideal, (2) the conditions of my life are excellent, (3) I am satisfied with my life, (4) so far I have gotten the important things I want in life, and (5) if I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. Respondents indicate on a 1 (strongly disagree) to a 5 (strongly agree) scale their agreement with these five statements that are intended to elicit overall life satisfaction.

Job satisfaction was measured by the G.M. Faces Scale, a single-item measure of overall job satisfaction that has been shown to compare favorably with faceted measures of this construct (Kunin, 1955; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983; Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969). In completing the Faces scale, the respondent checks one of six faces, arranged from sad to happy, which best expresses satisfaction with the job in general. Although the reliability of single-item measures is often questioned, single-item responses are appropriate when individuals are asked to make summary judgments about their own level of satisfaction or affect (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). The job- and life-satisfaction scales were standardized and summed to form an overall measure of intrinsic career success.

Person-organization fit. Fit was assessed using two 15-item scales. One scale asked respondents to indicate (using a 5-point Likert-type scale; 1 = not at all true, 5 = definitely true) how descriptive each statement was regarding their current organizational environment. In a separate part of the survey, the other scale asked respondents to indicate (again using a 5-point Likert-type scale) how well each statement described them personally. All items on the scale addressed organizational conditions or practices that previous research has identified as potentially important determinants of fit and career success.

Evidence suggests that employers tend to distinguish themselves on the basis of reward (pay and promotions) contingencies (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1989). Moreover, it has been hypothesized and demonstrated that these contingencies are differentially appealing to applicants and employees (Bretz et al., 1989; Moos, 1987; Schneider, 1983, 1987; Staw, 1986). Therefore, several items on this scale addressed reward system characteristics (whether based on individual merit, longevity, or unit performance), and mobility system characteristics (whether based on contest or sponsored mobility norms). Since the nature of the work and the organization also might affect fit and success (Caldwell, & O'Reilly, 1990; Rynes et al., 1991), scale items also addressed the way jobs are designed (individualistic versus cooperative), and general organizational atmosphere (competitive versus cooperative). Finally, because work values have been shown to exert powerful influences over perceptions of fit and work-related behavior (Chatman, 1989; Judge & Bretz, in press; Meglino et al., 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1991), items on the scale also addressed several work values (achievement, honesty, concern for others, and fairness).

Fit was operationalized as the sum of the differences between responses to corresponding items on the two scales. For example, regarding reward system design, the item "this organization pays on the basis of individual performance" on the organizational scale coincided with the item "I believe people should be paid on the basis of their individual performance" on the individual scale. Similarly, regarding values, the item

"fairness is an important consideration in organizational activities" on the organizational scale coincided with the item "fairness is an important consideration to me" on the individual scale. In order to make high values indicate fit, the summed differences between individual preferences and organizational characteristics were divided into 1. The scale items are included the Appendix.

Other Variables. Other variables, identified by past research as affecting career success, were measured by specific questions on the survey. These include access to a mentor, job tenure, hours worked per week, familial obligations (number of hours per week spent in fulfilling household duties and caring for dependents), hours per week spent in family leisure, intention to remain in the organization (as a proxy for commitment), highest educational degree achieved, socioeconomic status (1 = working class to 5 = upper class), whether the respondent worked in a line or staff position, whether the respondent had experienced a significant career interruption (and the length of the interruption), marital status, gender, grade-point average, industry in which the respondent was employed, and the university from which the respondent graduated.

Although not subject to formal hypotheses, we did have expectations regarding the direction of influence of these variables. Specifically, we expected that masters degree (as compared to individuals with undergraduate degrees), mentoring received, job tenure, line position, grade point average, being married, and being male, to positively predict career success. On the other hand, we expected that socio-economic status, career interruptions, and those with a doctorate degree (since generally those with a Ph.D. work in academic jobs and can only be promoted two levels above entry level) to negatively predict career success. Familial responsibilities and family leisure time might be expected to positively predict intrinsic career success but negatively predict extrinsic success. On the other hand, hours worked per week should positively predict extrinsic career success but might negatively affect intrinsic outcomes. Despite these expectations, no formal hypotheses were made for

these influences, and thus two-tailed tests were used for these control variables. One-tailed tests were used to test the hypothesized effect of person-organization fit on career outcomes.

### Results

Reliability analysis indicated that the coefficient alpha estimate for the three-item extrinsic success scale was .59. Coefficient alpha for the two-item intrinsic success scale was .68. Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989; Long, 1983), was used to assess the reliability of the extrinsic and intrinsic career success scales. This is the approach recommended by Bollen (1989) and Bollen and Lennox (1991) to overcome the limiting assumptions underlying coefficient alpha. The structural equation analysis revealed that the overall model constraining measures of intrinsic and extrinsic success to load on their respective constructs provided a good fit to the data (chi-square = 8.74 with 4 degrees of freedom, *ns*; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .98; root-mean-square residual = .02; see La Du & Tanaka, 1989, for a review of these fit statistics). Further, 94% of the variance in the factors was explained by the measures. All loadings of the measures on both constructs were relatively strong (average loading was .61) and statistically significant (*p* < .01). This indicates that, despite the moderately low coefficient alphas, the measures adequately represent the hypothesized constructs.

The correlations between variables are provided in Table 1. Correlational analysis revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic career success were significantly positively related (*r*=.20). This moderate relationship suggests that those who have achieved objective measures of success also tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and lives in general. Intrinsic success was also positively related to intention to stay (*r*=.17), having a mentor (*r*=.11), being married (*r*=.23), and number of children (*r*=.12). Extrinsic success was positively related to job tenure (*r*=.14), hours worked (*r*=.27), intention to stay (*r*=.23), having a masters degree (*r*=.12), being male (*r*=.14), being married (*r*=.21), and number

of children ( $r=.17$ ). Extrinsic success was significantly negatively related to having obtained a Ph.D ( $r=-.12$ ).

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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Table 2 presents the regression results for both extrinsic and intrinsic career success. Person-organization fit significantly positively predicted both intrinsic and extrinsic career success. This provides support for hypotheses 1 and 2. For extrinsic success, job tenure, hours worked, and intention to stay also were significant, indicating perhaps that success comes to those who "pay their dues." Being married also had a positive significant effect on career success, and number of children was marginally significant. However, familial obligations apparently interfere with obtaining extrinsic success. Socio-economic status negatively predicted extrinsic success. This may be due to better starting positions (and therefore fewer promotions available) afforded to those from sponsored backgrounds (Dreher et al., 1985). Finally, having a Ph.D. was negatively related to extrinsic success. This was possibly observed because those possessing a Ph.D. typically work in academic jobs where only two promotions are possible and state budgets for merit pools frequently very limited.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Being married and engaging in family leisure activities positively predicted intrinsic success. Intention to stay also positively predicted intrinsic success. Finally, having a masters degree negatively predicted intrinsic success, perhaps reflecting dissatisfaction with the rewards that the additional education returned relative to the costs incurred acquiring it.

Since scaled measures of extrinsic and intrinsic career success were used, it is illustrative to decompose the scales and examine the effects of fit on the component

variables. Therefore, the regression analyses were rerun using each scale component as the dependent variable. The extrinsic scale consisted of number of promotions, job level, and salary. Person-organization fit significantly predicted number of promotions (beta = .10, p < .05), job level (beta = .14, p < .01), and salary (beta = .23, p < .01). Similarly, person-organization fit significantly predicted job satisfaction (beta = .36, p < .01) and life satisfaction (beta = .14, p < .01).

In order to depict the practical effects of fitting versus not fitting the organization, mean differences between those who fit and those who did not were examined using t-tests. To do so, it was necessary to categorize individuals on the basis of fit. Therefore, a median split was performed on the person-organization fit variable. Comparison between means indicated that those who fit were significantly different from those who did not fit on both of the composite dependent variables as well as on salary, number of promotions, job level attained, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction. These differences are summarized in Table 3. Clearly, there are tangible positive effects to one's career as a result of fitting the organization in which one works. Specifically, respondents who fit better, on average, earned 22% higher salaries, achieved 29% more promotions, worked at a job level 11.6% higher, and reported a 15% higher level of job satisfaction and a 6.2% higher level of life satisfaction, than those who fit less well.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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Because the data are cross-sectional in nature, it is possible that in addition to person-organization fit affecting career outcomes, these outcomes also influence person-organization fit. As pointed out by James, Mulaik, and Brett (1982), sound causal inferences necessitate examining the possibility of reciprocal relationships between the variables of interest. Because LISREL allows testing nested models (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989), it is possible to

examine alternative models to the hypothesized causal ordering. Specifically, if adding a causal link to the model significantly improves its fit, the original hypothesized causal ordering is rejected. In other words, it is possible to test whether the relationship between person-organization fit and career success is nonrecursive in nature. If it is, then the interpretation of the regression results presented in Table 2 may not be valid because the mutual effects should be jointly considered. On the other hand, if adding a link from extrinsic or intrinsic success to person-organization fit does not result in a significant improvement in fit, the interpretation of the regression results as indicating the effect of fit on career success would be supported. In fact, adding a link from extrinsic or intrinsic career success to person-organization fit did not result in a significant improvement in fit (decrease in chi-square = 3.94, decrease in degrees of freedom = 2, ns, and decrease in chi-square = 5.62, decrease in degrees of freedom = 2, ns, respectively). Thus, the inferences based on the regression results presented in Table 2 appear to be valid.

### **Discussion**

Does fit between the individual and the organizational environment affect the individual's ability to succeed in that organization? Although previous research has identified several positive implications of fit in organizational settings, the relationship between fit and career success has not received direct empirical study. The current study provided a preliminary examination of this relationship by computing an index of person-organization fit and relating this to measures of intrinsic and extrinsic success. The fit index was based on prior research suggesting that reward contingencies, organizational systems differences, job design differences, and values differences represented important dimensions of the fit construct. To avoid omitted variable problems, the relationship between fit and success was examined in the context of other variables that have been previously shown to affect career success. The results of this study suggest that both extrinsic and intrinsic career success are significantly influenced by the degree to which the individual fits into the

organization. The present findings have implications for both individuals and organizations. Each are discussed in turn.

For many years, researchers have theorized that fit between individuals and their organizations should contribute to both individual and organizational success. For example, Olian and Rynes (1984) discussed a framework for basing staffing decisions on the degree of fit between individual and organizational characteristics, and in doing so speculated that "the relative effectiveness of employees with particular attitudes, values, or personality traits is likely to vary with differences in organizational strategy" (p. 175). The presumption was that those who fit would succeed and contribute to the success of the organization while those "who are not well matched to organizational conditions (e.g., people with low tolerance for ambiguity in prospector organizations) are less likely to be effective performers in those organizations" (Olian & Rynes, 1984, p. 178). The present results support this proposition.

In fact, the results indicate that individuals should be very concerned about the degree to which they fit in their organization. Since fit appears to lead to higher levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic success, the consequences of not fitting are quite severe. The current results are consistent with prior research and may help explain some of the behaviors that have been associated with fit and misfit. For example, fit has been shown to relate to a number of positive work-related outcomes including higher job involvement (Blau, 1987), greater organizational commitment (Meglino et al., 1989), lower turnover (O'Reilly et al., 1991), and improved health and adaptation (French et al., 1982; Moos, 1987). These outcomes are quite understandable in the context of the current study. It makes sense that those who experience extrinsic success would be more involved in their jobs, display greater commitment, and be less likely to leave than those who do not. It also makes sense that higher levels of job and life satisfaction would be associated with lower turnover and more functional adaptive behavior. It would appear then, that individuals should consider fit-

based career management strategies. Those who find themselves in organizations where they do not fit should seriously consider the potentially limiting effects this might have on their career prospects.

Since fit has potentially long-term benefits, it would appear that fit-based job search strategies are preferred. Previous research (Judge & Bretz, *in press*; Rynes et al., 1991) has indicated that job applicants make entry decisions on the basis of perceived fit. It seems that fit would be most beneficial early in one's organizational tenure. To the extent that fit contributes to sponsorship decisions, it would lead to more challenging early career assignments, mentoring relationships, and fast-track promotion ladders. Since early career success has been shown to affect later career success (Dreher & Bretz, 1990), the logic of basing job choice decisions on immediate fit seems compelling.

Organizations might want to consider the potential benefits from selecting on the basis of fit. Since fit appears to lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, selecting individuals who fit would presumably result in a more satisfied work force. Given the relationship between satisfaction and other work attitudes and behaviors (Locke, 1976), organizations might benefit in some very tangible ways from attracting and selecting those who fit.

This probably is, to some extent, already happening. It has been hypothesized that organizations attempt to attract and select particular types of individuals (Olian & Rynes, 1984; Schneider, 1983, 1987; Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988). Recently, Rynes and Gerhart (1990) reported that recruiters attend to fit in their hiring recommendations, and Guthrie and Olian (1991) provided convincing empirical evidence that organizations systematically limit characteristics sought in general managers on the basis of contextual features. In other words, at least some organizations attempt to hire people who fit. Schneider's (1983, 1987) attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis argues that high levels of fit will result in organizational homogeneity that will have negative consequences for organizational

effectiveness. Empirical evidence of the relationship between fit and career success is critical in this regard. If, for example, no relationship existed between fit and success, the hypothesis might be dismissed or discounted since the worrisome homogeneity which Schneider predicts would be unlikely to develop. However, if, as the current results suggest, those who fit are more likely to succeed than those who do not, Schneider's concerns are well-founded.

Schneider's (1983, 1987) concerns seem particularly relevant in the context of the evidence that is accumulating. Specifically, research has now demonstrated that applicants are attracted to and make entry decisions on the basis of fit (Bretz et al., 1989; Judge & Bretz, *in press*; Rynes et al, 1991), organizations recruit and hire on the basis of fit (Guthrie & Olian, 1991; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990), and those who fit achieve higher levels of success than those who do not. Therefore, it appears that the homogenization process which Schneider hypothesized is being documented a little at a time. The issue is exacerbated when one considers the transitive nature of errors committed under conditions of sponsored mobility (Haire, 1968). That is, once a promotion decision has been made on the basis of fit, it becomes increasing unlikely that false-positive selection errors will be undone by subsequent decisions because the selected individual competes in a smaller and more homogeneous cohort at each successive organizational level. At the same time, someone passed over at lower levels because of perceived misfit is unlikely to be given the opportunity to compete at higher levels. In this way, false-negative selection errors are particularly damaging since those who might have been highly successful at higher levels are less likely to be considered. Although we do not have the data to test the extent to which homogeneity results in declining organizational performance, in light of the current results, this is a potentially important topic for future research.

This study has some limitations that should be discussed. First, the data is self-reported so it is possible that self-report variance biased the observed relationships.

However, self-report variance is considered to be most problematic when attitudinal data is related to other attitudinal data (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Therefore, the relationship between fit and intrinsic success should be interpreted more cautiously than the relationship between fit and extrinsic success. Furthermore, the use of difference scores to operationalize fit should control for unmeasured dispositional or mood-oriented constructs that ostensibly would influence the individual's assessments of both the organization and themselves. Finally, we should also note that no viable alternative to self-reports exist for collecting much of the information used in this study.

The absence of longitudinal data also represents a potential limitation of this study. The causal relationship between fit and success might be best understood by first measuring fit and subsequently assessing success at a later point in time. However, since career success is a phenomenon that evolves over several years, this data collection strategy would be very difficult and would suffer from its own shortcomings (e.g., attrition). In the current study, an attempt was made to address the causality issue by employing nonrecursive causal techniques. While covariance structure models do not provide proof of causality, the LISREL results do suggest that the direction of causality was from fit to career success.

It is also worth noting that the construct of fit is not fully understood. For example, there are literally hundreds of individual difference attributes that might be examined in pursuit of person-organization fit (a taxonomy of individual differences is proposed by Owens & Schoenfeldt, 1979). Recent research reveals at least four different general orientations: (1) fit between individual knowledge, skills, and abilities 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., 1991); and (4) fit between individual personality and perceived organizational image or personality (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Tom,

1971). However, even the assumption of congruence may not be necessary in describing fit. Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) have proposed a distinction between complementary and supplementary fit. The former describes fit in the traditional congruency framework, while the latter describes a condition in which the person who "fits" is different on key attributes and therefore fills an existing void. Unfortunately, there is little empirical basis for choosing among these orientations. While the current study incorporated many of these conceptualizations in the operationalization of fit, a common understanding of the construct would improve the quality of this line of inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

Past research in the careers literature has suggested a number of influences on career success. Similarly, an emerging literature suggests a number of positive outcomes resulting from person-organization fit. Yet in spite of the seemingly obvious linkage between these two constructs, the present study provided the first direct test of the effect of person-organization fit on career success. Consistent with hypotheses, the present study suggests that person-organization fit is an important influence on career success. These findings contribute to our understanding of the antecedents of career success as well as the consequences of person-organization fit, and hopefully will provide a stimulus for future research in this area.

**Author Notes**

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## **Appendix**

### **Items Used to Construct Person-Organization Fit Scale**

#### **Organization Characteristics Items**

1. This organization pays on the basis of individual performance.
2. This organization has a profit or gain sharing plan.
3. This organization makes promotions based mostly on individual performance.
4. This organization encourages competition between employees.
5. This organization encourages and rewards loyalty.
6. Teamwork and cooperation are valued and rewarded here.
7. When the organization has a good year it pays bonuses to the employees.
8. People generally have to work in groups to get their work done.
9. This organization offers long-term employment security.
10. This organization has a "fast-track" program.
11. This organization has/follows a promote-from-within policy.
12. The typical employee here works very hard to fulfill work expectations.
13. There is an emphasis on helping others.
14. Fairness is an important consideration in organizational activities.
15. When mistakes are made it is best be honest and "take your lumps".

#### **Individual Preference Items**

1. I believe people should be paid on the basis of their individual performance.
2. When organizations make profits, I think they should share some if it with employees.
3. I believe promotions should be made on the basis of individual performance.
4. I believe competition between employees creates a healthy working environment.
5. I believe organizational loyalty should be encouraged and rewarded.

6. I believe teamwork and cooperation are valuable and should be rewarded.
7. When the organization has a good year I think it should pay bonuses to the employees.
8. I think it is better to work in groups to get work done.
9. I believe organizations should offer long-term employment security for their employees.
10. I think organizations should have "fast-track" programs for their "best" employees.
11. I think organizations should try to promote-from-within whenever it is possible.
12. I try very hard to fulfill work expectations.
13. I place a high emphasis on helping others.
14. Fairness is an important consideration to me.
15. When I make mistakes, I am honest about it and "take my lumps."

Table 1

## Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Between Variables Used in Analyses

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Person-Org. Fit	10.98	8.67	--	32	26	20	08	12	-09	18	06	-12	06	12	03	05	03	-06	-09	-07	-04	02
2. Intrinsic Success	0.01	1.67		--	20	11	08	03	06	17	-01	00	03	05	02	23	12	07	-04	-03	-04	02
3. Extrinsic Success	-0.06	2.14			--	06	-09	27	14	23	12	-12	14	06	04	21	17	-02	-07	-03	-07	05
4. Mentor	0.46	0.50				--	05	07	-09	02	-01	-01	-02	-10	05	-03	03	-05	01	-00	03	-03
5. SES	2.94	1.00					--	07	-14	-08	-11	08	-14	12	05	-09	-06	-06	-03	-00	18	-07
6. Hours/Week	49.75	8.76						--	-02	15	-10	13	15	03	14	03	02	-15	-08	03	05	07
7. Job Tenure	3.98	4.90							--	15	04	11	18	01	12	15	02	02	-04	00	-32	05
8. Intention to Stay	3.84	1.43								--	06	-03	09	03	-00	13	19	09	-12	-03	-15	12
9. Masters Degree	0.50	0.50									--	-59	06	-00	-00	-01	03	-01	-04	-04	-34	39
10. PhD	0.25	0.44										--	10	00	14	07	-03	-05	-02	00	06	03
11. Male	0.63	0.48											--	-00	09	18	18	-12	-14	-11	-24	04
12. White	0.94	0.23												--	03	06	03	04	04	00	04	06
13. Line Position	0.32	0.47													--	06	04	-02	-05	-04	01	05
14. Married	0.66	0.47														--	39	23	04	03	-09	05
15. Number of Child.	0.60	0.94															--	40	07	02	-11	07
16. Obligations	13.70	15.84																--	15	13	-01	03
17. Interruption	0.23	0.42																	--	50	04	02
18. Months of Inter.	5.60	16.99																		--	02	05
19. Northeast Univ.	0.65	0.48																			--	-35
20. GPA	3.42	0.38																				--

Note. Decimals omitted. Correlations greater than .10 are significant at the .01 level; correlations greater than .07 are significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). Due to space limitations, industry correlations are not reported but are available upon request. Listwise deletion resulted in N = 513.

Table 2

## Regression Equations Predicting Extrinsic and Intrinsic Career Success

Variable	Intrinsic Success		Extrinsic Success	
	Beta	T	Beta	T
Person-Organization Fit	.30	6.80 **	.21	5.17 **
Mentoring Received	.05	1.14	.02	0.39
Intention To Stay in Organization	.12	2.71 **	.11	2.87 **
Socioeconomic Status	.06	1.33	-.08	-1.93 +
Job Tenure	-.02	-0.38	.16	3.77 **
Hours Worked Per Week	-.02	-0.48	.28	6.84 **
Line Position	-.01	-0.18	-.02	-0.40
Career Interruption	-.03	-0.64	-.03	-0.72
Length of Interruption	-.00	-0.02	.01	0.14
Married	.17	3.69 **	.17	3.96 **
Male	-.07	-1.48	.01	0.25
White	.03	0.63	.02	0.49
Number of Children	.02	0.38	.09	1.90 +
Hours of Family Leisure Per Week	.08	1.83 +	.05	1.38
Dependent & Household Obligations	.04	0.92	-.08	-1.86 +
Grade-point Average	.07	1.47	.02	0.35
Midwest University	-.02	-0.46	.00	0.09
Masters Degree	-.10	-1.68 +	-.00	-0.01
Doctorate Degree	.00	0.08	-.11	-2.12 *
Mining, Construction, & Ag. Industry	.04	0.86	-.01	-0.37
Manufacturing Industry	-.03	-0.70	-.14	-3.22 **
Trans., Commun., & Utility Industry	-.07	-1.56	.03	0.73
Wholesale/Retail Trade Industry	.02	0.47	.00	0.00
Finance & Insurance Industry	.04	1.02	.04	1.12
Service Industry	.06	1.21	-.13	-2.94 **
Public Administration Industry	-.03	-0.63	.03	0.78
R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )		.21 (.17)		.31 (.27)

Note: + p < .10; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01. Individuals in nonclassified establishments (SIC = 99) or those where industry was missing served as the excluded group for the industry dummy variables.

**Table 3****Group Differences on Indicators of Career Success**

	Overall Mean	High Fit Mean	Low Fit Mean	T	p
<b>Extrinsic Success</b>	-0.06	0.25	-0.45	4.72	.000
Salary	66422	72065	59084	4.76	.000
Number of Promotions	1.65	1.82	1.41	3.05	.002
Job Level	4.20	4.41	3.95	3.70	.000
<b>Intrinsic Success</b>	0.01	0.36	-0.46	7.07	.000
Job Satisfaction	4.48	4.74	4.12	8.24	.000
Life Satisfaction	25.24	25.88	24.37	3.55	.000