

RECRUITING FOR FIT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT IN THE
RECRUITMENT PROCESS

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Abstract:

Person-organization (P-O) fit is a concept that has emerged as a prominent recruitment practice for many firms today, where the intention is to hire candidates that either contribute with something the company needs, has similar values, or both. This, in turn, will lead to increased satisfaction, commitment and retention for employees. This study investigated how companies work with P-O fit strategically, and how a candidate that provides something the company needs is viewed in relation to the importance of shared values. Furthermore, it has investigated which factors have an impact on the definitions of fit to understand how companies can benefit from positive aspects and avoid potential dangers. To investigate this, the different types of fit have been categorized and analysed using a model derived from a definition of P-O fit, and the concept of ambiguity was incorporated to increase the understanding of factors that can influence different types of fit. Seven interviews were conducted with HR Directors, HR Managers, and recruiters in large companies. The thesis concludes that in these companies, the externally communicated core values act as determinants to define P-O fit. Furthermore, the ambiguous definition has an impact on which types of fit are attractive to the company since they can adopt both wide and narrow definitions of fit. In these large organizations, the determinants for fit create a wide definition that allows for many types of persons. Subsequently, because of the wide definition, candidates are only viewed attractive by the firms if they share the core values, and a candidate that possesses something they need is not deemed attractive if it comes at the expense of shared values.

Keywords:

Person-Organization Fit, Recruitment, Fit, Recruitment Strategy, Complementary Fit, Supplementary Fit

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Definitions

Concept	Definition
Person-Organization (P-O) fit	The compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: at least one entity provides what the other needs, or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both (Kristof, 1996)
Core values	The externally communicated core values the organization communicate to all stakeholders to represent the company
Complementary fit	The person or organisation provides what the other needs (Kristof, 1996)
Supplementary fit	The person and the organization share similar fundamental characteristics (Kristof, 1996)

Table 1: Definitions

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Who and how organizations are supposed to recruit to get the right people in their organization has been a continuous challenge in human resource management. Fit has been a major part of the research done in the attempt to solve this, tracing its contemporary roots back to Parsons (1909) study on how people may fit with a vocation (Edwards, 2008). Since then, theoretical models such as the ASA framework (Schneider, 1987), the model of person-organization fit (Chatman, 1987), and the facet model of fit (Werbelt & Gilliland, 1999), have suggested that candidates should be recruited dependent on the congruence between the attributes of the person and organization. These models further theorize that this should contribute with positive consequences in the organization, such as higher retention of employees, organizational commitment, and organizational satisfaction, which has been corroborated by later studies (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003).

A common factor of all three models is that the person should have congruence with the organization, known as person-organization fit (henceforth, P-O fit), to gain these positive consequences. P-O fit is most prominently defined by Kristof (1996) as:

*“[...] the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when:
(a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar
fundamental characteristics, or (c) both.”*

Given this, an organization should recruit persons with (a) solely complementary attributes, (b) solely supplementary attributes or (c) both. Several studies have investigated the supplementary fit conceptualization; however, the complementary fit conceptualization has only been explored by a limited number of studies (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006) and studies of perceived fit often do not distinguish these different concepts (Sekiguchi, 2004). Conceptually, complementary fit has been linked to psychological need fulfilment (Cable & Edwards, 2004) and the theory of uniqueness (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007), however these studies take the perspective of employees in organizations to explore if they perceive that they have complementary fit. Thus, it is currently unknown how companies and recruiters' approach complementary fit among candidates.

This study intends to take the perspective of the organization and explore how they strategically approach recruiting people with P-O fit and specifically if and how complementary fit is included in this strategy. To do this, the study will first explore how organizations recruit candidates with P-O fit, as this concept is often ambiguous in how it is defined (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019). Then the study will frame Kristof's (1996) definition from an organizational perspective such that a complementary fit (a) is achieved once the candidate provides what the company needs, this could be in terms of a specific trait, perspective, knowledge, or skill. Whereby a supplementary fit (b) is achieved when the company sees that their fundamental characteristics are shared by the candidate. Furthermore, the study will explore the potential dangers associated with recruiting for P-O fit, such as subjective interpretations of fit leading to cognitive biases (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994) and too high levels of supplementary fit creating a homogenous group and making the organization closed off from the outer environment (Mehtap & Alniaçık, 2014).

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore what strategic approach and perceptions organizations and their recruiters have on candidates' P-O fit and what role complementary fit has in this strategic approach. Furthermore, to investigate which factors can have an impact on what types of fit are attractive to companies and why. For this purpose, this study has the following research question:

How do companies strategically approach complementary fit when recruiting for person-organization fit?

For companies to have an effective P-O fit focused recruitment strategy, it is important to be aware of how they can maximize the benefits such as employee commitment and satisfaction, whilst minimizing the dangers associated with creating a homogenous group with close connectedness. The ambiguous definition of P-O fit creates an environment where it becomes harder to classify when a company has a strategy that does this optimally, which is a result of the differences in how organizations define P-O fit. In this way, an increased understanding of the factors that can have an impact on different types of fit will contribute to a better understanding of how a P-O fit recruitment strategy could be implemented efficiently.

1.3 Delimitation

P-O fit is a part of the larger concept of person-environment fit which is split such that different environments can be studied separately, these are person-organization (P-O), person-group, person-job, person-supervisor, and person-vocation fit (Van Vianen, 2018). This study is targeting the strategic organization wide focus in terms of fit and will thus focus on P-O fit.

This study aims to investigate person-organization fit and is therefore limited to organization-wide attributes (Van Vianen, 2018; Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019). Thus, we will limit this study to factors that have a direct impact on P-O fit instead of other fit environments. This means that factors tied to a specific role (more related to person-job fit) for example availability, age, knowledge, and experience connected to a specific role will be disregarded. The study is conducted from an organizational perspective through the recruitment functions, meaning that the interviews are conducted with people in supervisory recruitment roles to get their holistic view of how they strategically work with P-O fit in their recruitment. This means that the perspective of both HR Directors and Managers as well as recruiters were used in the data collection. Thus, the study does not consider candidates' perceptions or current employees' views on their experiences in the recruitment process. Furthermore, the study is limited to recruitment stages involving interviews and the hiring decision of candidates. Therefore, no consideration will be given to stages prior to or post this stage, for example, attraction stages in recruitment or post-hire employee reviews.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Person-Organization Fit

2.1.1 Defining Person-Organization Fit

P-O fit has often been defined broadly as the compatibility between individuals' and organizations' values, norms, and other attributes, however this definition has been subjectively interpreted differently between researchers, which has created inconsistencies within P-O fit research (Barrick & Parks-Leduc; 2019, Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The basic idea of broad definitions becomes important for companies to adjust them for their specific organizations. However, these inconsistencies have made the continuous work towards a multidimensional model of fit more difficult for researchers (Edwards, 2008; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Van Vianen, 2018). Thus, to concretize how this study will view P-O fit, Kristof's (1996) definition: "[...] the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both." is used.

2.1.2 Conceptualizations of Person-Organization Fit

The definition of the P-O fit concept coined by Kristof (1996) includes the sub-categorization of supplementary and complementary fit to clarify the scope of the concept. This categorization creates an overview of whether the person complements or supplements the organization's attributes (Kristof, 1996). Kristof defines a supplementary fit as the degree to which an individual has pre-existent congruence with the characteristics of the organization. The author defines a complementary fit as the degree to which an individual can contribute attributes that the organization currently does not exhibit. What the individual contributes within a complementary fit is often an important factor to the companies that need it to operate more effectively. It is stated that "The weakness or need of the environment is offset by the strength of the individual, and vice versa" (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987).

2.1.3 Consequences of Person-Organization Fit

Academic research into P-O fit has shown that employees' level of P-O fit have several consequences on work-related factors. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found that P-O fit in employees has a positive impact on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational satisfaction, lower intent-to-quit, lower strain, and higher applicant job acceptance.

In accordance with these findings, P-O fit should be an important part of the recruitment process of organizations in order to take advantage of the positive aspects, which can create a long-term competitive advantage (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to study how organizations strategically approach recruiting candidates with P-O fit, such that areas of improvement and models of fit can be further developed. The recognition of the long-term competitive advantages that can arise from P-O fit within companies is also a main contributor to its increasing relevance.

There are not only positive aspects of a high person-organization fit. Mehtap & Alınayık (2014) state that if not managed correctly, too high levels of connectedness between members can create a danger of hindering a company's ability to realize changes in the outer environment. They continue by asserting that there is a danger for the company of becoming closed off and thus falling behind in areas such as innovation and improvements in the market. Building on this subject,

Kristof (1996) states that “P-O fit during organizational entry is one of the primary influences in creating organizational homogeneity”. Too high levels of supplementary fit can therefore create a danger of organizational homogeneity which hinders rather than improves the organization’s performance. Consequently, it becomes important to understand how important the different types of fit are for individual companies, and how companies can overcome negative consequences and dangers that might be a result of their recruitment strategy.

2.2 Recruitment and Person-Organization Fit

Chapman et al. (2005) found that P-O fit positively predicts the job pursuit intentions and job-organization attraction of potential applicants, which further supports the necessity of studying how organizations recruit candidates who are most attracted to it. Chapman et al.’s (2005) findings are further complemented with Cable & Judge (1997) who found that recruiters’ hiring recommendations and decisions are positively predicted by perceived P-O fit.

However, recruiting individuals based on their personal perceptions of P-O fit, has the potential to be influenced by personal biases of the recruiters (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This means that, although there are positive effects of recruiting for P-O fit, the strategy of how this is done matters, such that it is unbiased and reflects the person’s actual fit to the organization. Adkins et al. (1994) found that personal biases such as similar-to-me or similar-to-an-ideal bias can exist when recruiting candidates based on their fit to the organization. This means that the perception of fit is influenced by the candidates’ similarity to the recruiter, or a recruiter’s ideal. Thus, it becomes interesting to explore how organizations strategically approach recruiting for P-O fit when such a problem could be present in their recruitment practices.

2.3 Research Gap

With the subjects discussed in this chapter, the research gap which emerged is that organizations’ strategic approach to recruiting candidates with P-O fit is underdeveloped. Specifically, how organizations strategically approach defining and recruiting candidates with P-O fit to gain positive effects and reduce potential dangers. Examining this research gap will be important to further develop how P-O fit can be strategically approached in recruitment by organizations and how complementary fit is included to find P-O fit in candidates.

Current research on how the ambiguous definition of P-O fit can impact supplementary and complementary fit from an organizational strategy perspective is limited. Furthermore, with the potential danger of organizational homogeneity and close connectedness, the ambiguity in the definition of fit contributes to a challenge in determining when these dangers may occur, since they are dependent on the width of the definition of fit in a specific organization.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theory Usage

For the purpose of this study, this theoretical framework will present the ambiguous nature of P-O fit as a concept, followed by defining the role of complementary fit in P-O fit in a recruitment context. In order to define the role of complementary fit, a model derived from Kristof's (1996) definition of fit will be used to categorize complementary and supplementary fit. These concepts will then be applied to the empirical material to explore perceived P-O fit and complementary fit in the recruitment process.

3.2 Ambiguity in the Definition of Fit

3.2.1 Environment

When conducting research into P-O fit, the environment which the person should fit to is ambiguous between different organizations because of its broad definition. The organization can be defined as a distinct entity or the people who make up the organization, or both, which make the resulting conclusions of studies difficult to generalize (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). Furthermore, this may make the conceptualization of fit different within the organizations as well, this could, for instance, be dependent on the size of the organization. This is a result of when the organization becomes larger, it becomes harder to have a holistic perspective on the entire organization, its departments, and all its members (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). With an ambiguous definition of P-O fit within the organization, the evaluations of candidates become more reliant on subjective interpretations as the organizations become difficult to define for recruiters.

3.2.2 Attributes

Besides the environment, the factors which determine what fit is, are also ambiguous. Specifically, the attributes which determine whether fit can be found between the person and the environment are defined differently among studies (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019). In P-O fit, Kristof (1996) defines fit as congruence between similar characteristics or supplying what is needed. However, what these characteristics or needs are, is determined by the researcher. Exemplified, the characteristics and needs in P-O fit have been defined as personality, values, norms, goals, politics, religion, ethics, and more (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). With an ambiguous definition of the attributes in fit, it becomes important to investigate how companies define fit in their specific organization. The ambiguity of the definition will in turn have an impact on which types of fit that are attractive for the company, as it will directly dictate which candidates that have a supplementary fit and thus what attributes the organization needs to complement with. Subsequently, this will influence what type of candidates are approved and how the recruiter distinguishes between wanted and unwanted attributes.

3.2.3 Conceptualization of Fit

P-O fit is conceptualized on whether the fit is supplementary or complementary (Kristof, 1996), these conceptualizations can vary widely due to the ambiguously defined concept they are derived from. The ambiguous definition of P-O fit can thus result in both wide and narrow definitions of what a P-O fit is in a specific organization and will impact the conceptualizations of supplementary and complementary fit. The width of the definition of, for instance, supplementary fit, and how

widely defined the shared values are, will in this way result in different categorizations of candidates in terms of supplementary and complementary fit for different definitions. Exemplified, a narrowly defined supplementary fit with specific attributes entails that the importance of complementary fit is increased, whilst a broader definition, which allows many different types of persons, would be in a lower need for complementary fit.

3.2.4 Subjectivity

The ambiguous nature of the P-O fit concept is furthered by the measurements used to determine fit. Measurements of fit are done through actual or perceived fit, where actual fit is an indirect comparison of attributes between the person and the environment, and perceived fit is a direct measurement of the perception of whether fit is present between the person and the environment (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Kristof, 1996). However, due to the highly subjective nature of measurements of perceived fit, what personal and environmental attributes which the person combines to gain perceived fit is unknown (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Van Vianen, 2018). Furthermore, conceptualizations of what type of fit is perceived are often not measured, furthering the ambiguity in how people perceive fit (Sekiguchi, 2004). With highly subjective interpretations of P-O fit caused by the ambiguity of how to measure it, subjectivity becomes a larger determining factor of what P-O fit is when recruiting. As such, this creates an increased potential for personal cognitive biases to influence whether a recruitment is based on if the candidate is similar to the recruiter or to the recruiter's personal conception of an ideal (Adkins et al., 1994).

3.3 Supplementary and Complementary Fit

The benefits of complementary fit, for a company to gain a candidate that possesses something that they need, is most often appreciated and necessary for the success of a company. In this way, something they need can be classified as a specific competence or a new perspective. For instance, a new competence could range from knowledge in Excel to a specific leadership approach. Therefore, it becomes important to investigate how complementary fit is implemented strategically in recruitment and which factors can impact its attractiveness.

To categorize supplementary and complementary fit, a model was constructed (See Figure 1). The model is based on Kristof's (1996) definition: "[...] the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both.". Kristof's definition was chosen since it is one of the most prominent works in P-O fit. Furthermore, the definition demonstrates the individual effects of supplementary and complementary fit and their ability to co-exist. According to the definition, a complementary fit without the occurrence of supplementary fit (a), a supplementary fit without complementary fit (b), and a parallel existence of supplementary and complementary fit (c), would all contribute to a P-O fit.

To gain insight into how organizations work with and view supplementary and complementary fit, it becomes necessary to analyse how their recruiters perceive fit. The definition that each recruiter has, for a fit in their organization, can vary widely because of the broad definition of fit. The ambiguity in how fit is perceived can thus contribute to differing thresholds for supplementary and complementary fit in different organizations. These thresholds vary according to how wide or narrow the fit is deemed. To exemplify, the threshold would be higher in an organization where they search for specific attributes or qualities in their candidate compared to, for example, an

organization that only needs basic traits to fit into their definition. These views will therefore need to be analysed to understand the perceptions of fit. This approach will increase knowledge of which factors can impact the decision regarding which types of fit are relevant for organizations and why.

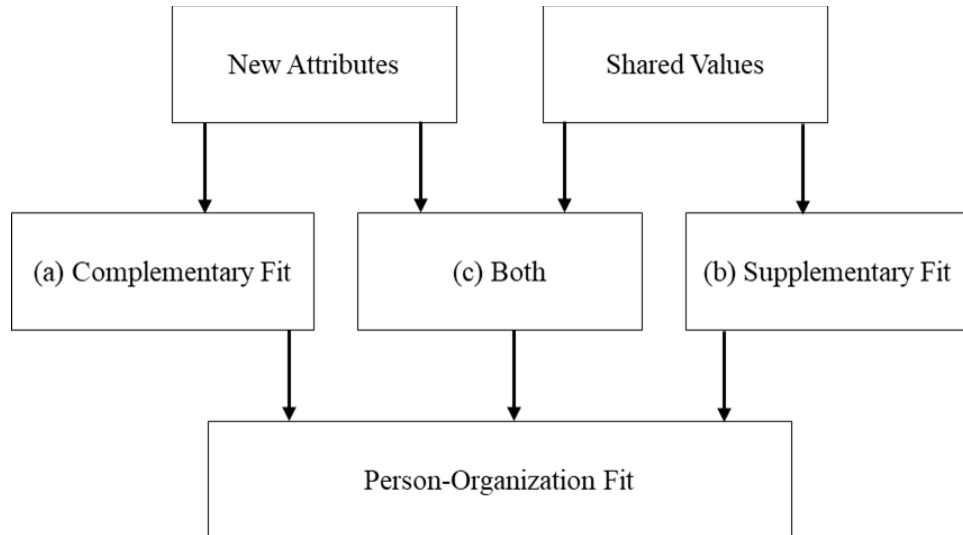


Figure 1. Conceptualizations of Person-Organization Fit created from Kristof (1996)

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

4.1.1 Research Paradigm

To understand how organizations recruit candidates with P-O fit, this study adopted a social constructionist ontological perspective. Social constructionism is an assumption that reality is continuously constructed through social interactions between people (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This position was used under the assumption that a person's fit to an organization is not an objective reality and is, instead, socially constructed through continuous interactions between the members of the organization.

From an ideological standpoint, this study takes a regulation perspective. This means that the study has the assumption that systems and humans can and should be regulated to change how they behave (Saunders et al. 2019). This perspective is taken under the assumption that current recruitment practices do not need radical change regarding person-organization fit and can instead improve through the integration of new perspectives and knowledge, such that new decisions and actions are taken based on them.

Together, the social constructionist position and the regulation perspective make up an interpretivist sociological paradigm. The main objectives and assumptions of this paradigm are that through human interaction, meaning and realities occur and that these can be observed and interpreted by the researchers to create new knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). Through an interpretivist paradigm, this study intends to observe and interpret the participants' contributions to discover and understand the meanings and realities that construct the recruitment practices, specifically surrounding person-organization fit.

4.1.2 Research Method and Approach

This study has a qualitative method and an abductive approach. The data required to answer how organizations strategically approach recruiting candidates, dependent on their interpretation of the candidate's fit to the organization, is difficult to quantify and generalize. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews is chosen since this methodology is used to derive meanings from the language used by participants (Saunders et al., 2019). The selected interview structure is used to open up the data collection process to emergent themes and further explore answers in the interview while still having a foundation in the list of predetermined questions that the researchers can return to.

Furthermore, the theory development and data collection of the study were done through an abductive approach. This means that theoretical themes have emerged from the empirics such that the theoretical framework has been edited to include these themes in the analysis of the empirical material (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Sample

This study has used a non-probability homogenous sampling method. This means that potential participants have been sampled based on their similar characteristics to explore differences among

the participants (Saunders et al., 2019). The criteria for the sample were that the organization had to have an internal recruitment and human resources function such that the organization had designated employees supervising the recruitment practices and working as recruiters. Subsequently, all organizations sampled were of a large size with more than 1000 employees. Furthermore, only organizations where person-organization fit was deemed an important concept to work with were chosen. These organizations were therefore chosen under the assumption that empirical material gathered from the HR Directors, HR Manager, and recruiters within them would give empirical material regarding how the organization strategically approaches P-O fit in recruitment.

Regarding the selected individuals interviewed, the study looked for employees with a direct supervisory role over the recruitment practices or working specifically as recruiters as these individuals have information regarding the recruitment practices within the organization from which empirics could be gathered. With this sampling methodology seven participants were selected and interviewed.

4.2.2 Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix 1) was created as a foundation for the interviews conducted with the participants. It was used to guide the interview through predetermined themes which could be expanded upon by the authors or the participant. The predetermined themes were chosen based on the literature review and elements that were believed to give adequate empirical material to answer the research question. Furthermore, the interview guide was used to get an in-depth description of the recruitment practices of the organization.

4.2.3 Interview Setting

Due to restrictions in time and location, all interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams. All participants within an accessible distance were provided with the opportunity to conduct the interview in-person, however all participants opted to conduct it over the internet. Both authors were present in all interviews whereby one author held the interview and the second was responsible for taking notes, recording and complementary additional questions.

4.3 Data Analysis

4.3.1 Recording and Transcription

Prior to beginning the interviews, all participants were asked for permission to record the interviews. These interviews were then recorded, transcribed, and later edited whilst listening to the recording to change errors to make the transcriptions accurate. The interviews ranged from 30 to 51 minutes with an average interview time of 44 minutes, the full list of interviews is available in Appendix 2.

4.3.2 Coding and Analysis

The empirical material gathered was reviewed, coded, and analysed to bring forth first-order themes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. This process entailed observing and distinguishing differences, similarities, repetitions, and patterns to extract from the data (Saunders et al., 2019). This thematic analysis is summarized in Table 2 below and is the basis for the structure of the empirics.

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes
Strategic Approach to Person-Organization Fit	Determining Factors of P-O Fit Intra-Organizational Ambiguity P-O Fit in the Recruitment Process
Dominance of Supplementary Fit	Perception of Complementary Fit Avoidance of Complementary Fit

Table 2: Summary of thematic analysis

4.4 Ethical Considerations

To avoid harm and malpractice, the researchers have worked diligently to ensure that the study's practices are ethical. All participants signed consent forms and were informed that any identifying information would be kept, anonymized, and later deleted in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Furthermore, all participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out of being included in the study at any time, without a reason. This study specifically faced the challenge of wanting to present the attributes from which candidates were selected in the empirics; some of these attributes could be linked to the organizations. These attributes were shuffled, replaced with synonyms, and accepted by the participants such that no information could be traced back to the participants or their organizations. Moreover, all participants were informed of the purpose of the research prior to the interview to avoid deception.

4.5 Methodology Discussion

The quality of this study's methodological approach will be discussed through Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill's (2019) criteria of *dependability*, *credibility*, *transferability*, *confirmability*, and *authenticity*.

Firstly, due to the qualitative research method, semi-structured interview format and cross-sectional time horizon, the empirical material gathered and analysed are not possible to recreate under the same conditions at a different time. This is due to the complex discussions occurring outside the structured interview questions and the dynamic and subjective empirics gathered which will change over time. To ensure *dependability*, this study has therefore explicitly stated and been clear in the approach used to gather and analyse the empirical material and it has further clarified the underlying assumptions the researchers had when conducting the research. The explicit and clear descriptions of how the research was conducted and the results it has brought forth further provides *transferability*. The reader and future researchers can use this study's context, findings, and interpretations to judge whether the study is transferable to another setting or context.

Secondly, since the empirical data gathered is transcribed and analysed through the interpretations of the researchers, the *credibility* of how the data is represented can be questioned. This can be further exacerbated as all interviews were conducted in Swedish and later translated to English. To counteract wrongful interpretations and representations, quotes and empirics used in the study

were sent to their respective participants such that any material that was used would correctly represent the participant's views. Furthermore, the representation of the researcher-interpreted data may be questioned through its *confirmability* as any untold values and theories of the researchers may bias the chosen and displayed empirical material and analysis. To remedy this, the researchers have been clear and explicit in the assumptions underlying the study and have clearly stated the coding and analysis process used to represent and analyse the empirical material.

Lastly, the representation of the empirical material could have a problem of *authenticity*, as the represented material can be presented to only display a biased viewpoint. To avoid such a problem, the researchers have extensively reviewed the empirical material and provided competing viewpoints from different participants to accurately represent a holistic picture of all participants. The underlying assumptions of how the empirical material is viewed by the researchers is further made explicit such that future readers are aware of how it was collected and analysed.

5. Empirics

5.1 Strategic Approach to Person-Organization Fit

5.1.1 Determining Factors of Person-Organization Fit

All respondents had a common factor when it came to a vital part of their definition of fit, this common factor was their externally communicated core values, henceforth denoted as core values. The authors did not give any options for how a fit could be defined in the interviews with the participants, and it was thus answered as an open question. For Company 1, the definition of fit was not something outspoken and determined in the organization, and recruiters were given free rein on interpreting how to achieve a high degree of fit. From the interviews, it became clear that recruiters from different offices had a large focus on their core values, which were dedication, entrepreneurship, and impact. These core values were complemented with qualities that reflected the key aspects of their corporate culture, which were focused on employees being unprestigious and authentic. These qualities were deemed important in the candidate's individual behaviour to fit into the organization, as it was a vital part of their culture.

Company 2 emphasized their core values as their determinant of a P-O fit, in their case the core values were bravery, integrity, engagement, and cooperation. For them, it was the sole outspoken determinant. Their HR Director stated:

“The core values are so important that everything we do, big or small, has to be defended with the help of them” - HR Director Company 2

“We live by our core values every day and in every context, by the coffee machine or how we handle our sales meetings” - HR Director Company 2

As a result, the core values were denoted as a hygiene factor. Therefore, the fit between a candidate and the organization had a heavy focus during the first interview, and many applicants are turned down instantly if the recruiters perceive that the core values are not shared. Furthermore, the HR director clarified that their definition of fit does not hinder different people and perspectives:

“The core values have to be shared, but that does not limit [new candidates from contributing with] new perspectives” - HR Director Company 2

“We recruit from core values, it is because we know that skills that are required can be taught, [...] but the values have to be there” - HR Director Company 2

Company 3 focused on five specific competencies or behaviours derived directly from their core values as the main determinant of their fit. The core values that were listed by the company were dedication, creativity, and communication. But it was also particularly important for them to focus on competency-based decision-making in their recruitment practices and remaining objective in their assessment. A key point was stated as:

“[...] adding the type of behaviour needed to make the team as multilateral as possible” - HR Manager Company 3

Company 4 also focused heavily on their fit using core values, which were stated to be authentic, attentive, daring, and professional. Thus, the aim was to find candidates that could identify with them. Similar to Company 3, they are working towards a spread in personalities and have no specific template for what type of person they were searching for. The idea behind their core values was furthermore to create a basis which allowed many different personalities, and they are therefore more focused on more generic core values that can be a fit with diverse types of individuals. The HR manager stated:

“All processes and routines are permeated by this [the core values]” - HR Manager Company 4

“We have the ability to train our employees in many occupations, therefore it becomes important [for the candidate] to be able to identify with the core values” - HR Manager Company 4

“We are searching for different personality types and have no generic template” - HR Manager Company 4

5.1.2 Intra-Organizational Ambiguity

Company 1 had a difference between two parts of their organization regarding how important P-O fit was among their employees. This distinction was in terms of employees working with internal functions such as recruiting and sales, where the degree of P-O fit was deemed more important as compared to their consultants working externally. This was due to their recent years of fast expansion and growth in the market, which have put them in a situation where their rapid growth has limited the degree of focus that they can afford to have on finding candidates that have a high degree of P-O fit among their consultants. Thus, they have made the trade-off that the P-O fit is less necessary and that it is more important to expand their business with the required competencies. On the other hand, for the internal functions, it was stated that:

“There [in the internal functions] you have to be able to have a fit” - HR Director Company 1

The interview also resulted in an example where one employee was determined to lack the P-O fit, and that became one of the factors in ending their employment, in conjunction with lower results than expected. A key driver for this generic reasoning was that:

“The ambassadorship has more weight in a recruiter compared to a consultant” - Recruiter 1 Company 1

Company 2 stated that there were no larger differences between the weight placed on P-O fit throughout various departments or parts of the organization. According to the HR Director, it was important to maintain an overall high degree of P-O fit since various occupations and individuals that do not share the values could do immense damage to the organization. For instance, ranging from external damage for a salesperson which could take its form in a damaged brand reputation, to internal damage in the organization for a manager, where not practicing the core values would mean that the manager is a negative role model. Furthermore, Company 2 was in a comparable

situation to Company 1 with a rapid expansion during the most recent years. However, it was stated that they still maintained their focus on shared core values and fit in their recruitment process.

Company 3 also reasoned that there were no larger differences in P-O fit between various parts of the organization. One distinction was that the core values were said to carry different weights in different teams and roles. Although all were still present in every role, for instance someone calculating taxes had more weight on some core values compared to someone working in sales. Furthermore, Company 4 had the same reasoning where it was stated that the core values in different teams and roles:

*“They [the core values] are expressed in various ways in different roles” - HR
Manager Company 4*

However, unlike Company 3, Company 4 stated that they still had the same weight on each core value, and it was simply the expression or result that had its effect in different ways.

5.1.3 P-O Fit in the Recruitment Process

Company 1 had no specific and generic outspoken strategy for working with P-O fit in recruiting throughout the organization, which is a result of them having many local recruitment organizations in several cities. Something common between the offices in their recruiting strategy was that there were high efforts focused on presenting a picture of how the organization works, to find candidates that match the values.

Company 2 had a similar focus where a presentation of the core values and overall organization was important, and it was further stated that the first interview focused on ensuring a match between the core values and the candidate. To exemplify, the HR Director said that:

*“We have declined many profiles directly after the first interview if we for
example realize that the values [core values] are not a match” - HR Director
Company 2*

It was further emphasized that they had a clear rule that involved at least two employees during each recruiting process to reduce prejudice and biases by having more perspectives on the candidate.

Company 3 did not have a specific strategy aside from continuously making sure that the candidate throughout the process identified with the core values. This organization's recruiting process relied heavily on the responsibility of the managers of each team responsible for the recruitment and HR as a support function. Because of this, it was comparably more important to Company 3 to continuously focus on the core values with employees, in other words after recruiting them, and thus had more outspoken routines and activities tied to the core values each year. Similar to Company 2, it was important to remain objective in the recruitment process and therefore, they had a heavy focus on competence and behaviours.

For Company 4 the focus was on determining the shared core values during the recruitment process, but the company also relies on a profile of demands that varies between the different professions. It was further emphasized that many required qualities and types of knowledge could be learned for many positions if they found a candidate that had high compatibility with the values.

5.2 Dominance of Supplementary Fit

5.2.1 Perception of Complementary Fit

All the companies were of the same opinion that different personalities and abilities were beneficial for the company and their culture in general. At the same time, all the companies agreed that it would be challenging to hire personnel that did not share the core values of the organization.

Both Company 1 and 2 had a vision of moving their organizations towards more heterogeneous ones, to have more diverse personalities and perspectives. Company 1 stressed that they had limitations because of, for instance, demands for fluency in Swedish for their employees, which made it difficult for them to achieve the level of heterogeneity that they wanted. Furthermore, the HR Director did not see potential problems in their way of working with P-O fit and was more focused on problems that might arise if they are forced to limit their focus on P-O fit as the firm grows. Company 2 had a similar argument where some specific parts of the organization that had the highest degree of homogeneity were limited because of the occupations. One example was the sales department which is limited by the fact that sales is a male-dominated profession.

Company 3 was fairly satisfied with their current situation in terms of heterogeneity and Company 4 worked actively with hiring people that have different personalities. As an example, Company 4 has a saying that they communicate externally that focuses on incorporating cultural aspects from their employees into their organization's culture. Company 1 and 2 stressed their large expansion during recent years as a factor that definitively has impacted the culture and will continue to do so. In this regard, Company 1 spoke about a worry that the fast expansion and many new employees could cause them to lose some of its characteristics in the culture. Similarly, Company 2 spoke about their expansion and cultural change:

“It can be a challenge to keep everything together, we have to be more open towards differences, take on new perspectives and keep up with the changes, everything cannot be as it was” - Recruitment Manager Company 2

5.2.2 Avoidance of Complementary Fit

To investigate how companies view complementary fit on its own, the questions focused on how the organizations handled complementary fit without the presence of supplementary fit. Thus, a focus on complementary fit (a) and not both (c). The result was that all companies agreed that the supplementary fit (b) was the most important and that they were very sceptical toward simply focusing on candidates that contributed to what the company needs if the candidates did not have share the core values. To further see the implications of how companies worked with complementary fit, a question was asked about how they evaluated a candidate that did not fully share the core values of the organization but contributed with something they needed. Company 2 stated that:

“Then we would rather decline a candidate that has the competence we need, since it does not match with our core values” - HR Director Company 2

Furthermore, Company 2 deemed it so important to share the values that they would rather wait years, if it is what it took for the right candidate. The reasoning was focused on that this is the optimal long-term strategy. Similarly, Company 3 also stated that it was not possible to hire a

candidate with the competence wanted if the values were missing. The thoughts behind it were closely correlated to future workplace environment issues that could potentially arise if people did not share the same fundamental values, and thus the ability to cooperate with that person. The HR manager at Company 4 had the same opinion, and they based it on the idea that it would be worse for the candidates since it is important for them to be able to identify and have a sense of belongingness with the organization that they are working for eight hours a day.

“If the culture or values are not a match with the candidate, then the candidate will terminate their own employment” - HR Manager Company 4

The HR manager at Company 1 could see positive effects in concrete examples of recruiting for a complementary fit, one example was that it could be beneficial to complement a sales team with someone with a higher drive to positively affect the other employees. At the same time, the recruiters did not work a lot with complementing qualities within teams or departments as much as the HR Director might want them to. This was further strengthened by the recruiter who said that:

“One can never consciously abstain from cultural fit” - Recruiter 1 Company 1

6. Analysis

6.1 Ambiguity in the Definition of Person-Organization Fit

Due to the sample criteria, all companies' respective participants agreed that it is important for candidates to fit with the organization. However, when asked how people are recruited to fit with their organization, all answers pointed to the organizations' core values or characteristics derived from the core values. Academic literature has shown that an employee's fit with the organization can be determined by several characteristics (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006; Barrick, Parks-Leduc, 2019). This shows that although P-O fit is an important aspect for all organizations' recruitment, these companies have chosen to define it broadly, using their externally communicated core values. Using their core values as the fit determinants could be seen as an unambiguous method for judging candidates' fit because of the explicitly stated words, however the stated words are very wide and could be applied in different ways and contexts to a candidate. This means that the stated core values are ambiguous and that they can allow for many diverse types of people among candidates.

In this way, the core values are the main determinant of how the recruiters should perceive a supplementary fit. As such, what the fit entails and how the ambiguously defined core values are applied, is subjectively interpreted by the respective recruiters in each organization. To exemplify, values such as bravery, creativity and authenticity could be applied to a wide range of candidates differently by recruiters. Subsequently, recruiters in organizations are required to create subjective interpretations of what the core values entail in relation to the candidates, how they can be applied, and how a candidate achieves enough to fit with the organization. As a result, one recruiter's perception of how the core values is to be applied to candidates can differ from another and create a clash of perceptions of people who fit the organization. Comparing this with Company 2's statement that people do not fit the organization may damage it, shows the importance of how the core values are interpreted and applied, since this may not only reduce positive consequences but also create negative consequences for the organization.

Given the subjective interpretations of the ambiguous core values and how fit is perceived, biases from the personal judgements of the recruiters may be present. Adkins et al. (1994) found that subjective interpretations of fit can be biased towards a sense of similarity to the recruiter or to an ideal, rather than the values of the organization. This problem is thus increased when the core values of the organization are ambiguous, such that the recruiters' interpretation of the core values may be influenced by a similar-to-me or similar-to-ideal bias. To counteract the potential biases and minimize subjectivity in the recruitment process, all four companies utilize a recruitment strategy involving several steps and employees. Since the biases are based on personal perceptions, using several different employees and stages in the recruitment process means that multiple personal interpretations clash and need to find a collective agreement that the person fits the organization. This entails that the organization is more likely to find candidates with actual P-O fit that will bring positive effects (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al, 2005).

Although the recruitment practices of the organizations include subjective interpretations of how the candidates fit the core values of the organization, the importance of fit on candidates does not generally differ intra-organizationally. The empirical material gathered shows that recruiters should perceive P-O fit the same for all candidates irrespective of the job position or department

they are applying to. There were only minor deviations, such as the consultants in Company 1 and Company 3 that claims to place different weight on their different core values depending on the specific role, although keeping all present. As such, despite the ambiguous definition of how candidates fit to the core values, it is vehemently argued that all new employees need to fit the core values of the organization.

6.2 Complementary Fit

6.2.1 Relevant Types of Fit

In accordance with the model of Kristof's (1996) definition of P-O fit, it becomes important to categorize which types of fit are relevant for an employer (see Figure 1). The categorization of fit is based on the companies' own definitions of what fit is in their organization.

From the empirical data collected from Company 1, it is demonstrated that there are clear distinctions between the internal functions and the consultants in regard to which types of fit are recruited. However, the ambition from the company's perspective is clear in the aspect that they are foremost searching for candidates that have a supplementary fit (b) and both (c). This, in other words, does not hinder candidates that have a complementary fit if they also have a supplementary fit (c). In their internal functions, the focus on the supplementary fit is more prominent compared to their consultants that work externally, here their ambition is illustrated and the result is supplementary fit (b) or both (c), which is clearly stated by the recruiter that says that they can never consciously abstain from cultural fit in a candidate. On the other hand, the fast growth and pressure of the market has pushed the company into supplementary fit (a), complementary fit (b), and both (c) for their external consultants. An important distinction and reason for this is that the P-O fit was not deemed as important in the consultants as the internal functions.

The attractive types of fit for Company 2 are stated to be supplementary fit (b) and both (c) because of their reasoning that they would decline a candidate that does not share the values in conjunction with their willingness to wait years for the right candidate. Thus, a complementary fit (a) would not be considered as a candidate. However, the recruiter stated that they would have to be more open towards differences and changes, illustrating that the thought of how complementary fit (a) and both (c) could be beneficial is there, although not implemented. In this manner, Company 2 has taken a different approach compared to Company 1 in their large expansion in recent years. Where they have continued to emphasize the requirement of supplementary fit consistently.

Company 3 had a similar reasoning as Company 2, for instance their reasoning that they wanted to add the type of behaviour to make the team as multilateral as possible. It was however deemed particularly important to maintain the shared core values. The result is thus also a strict focus on supplementary fit (b) and both (c). In this case, the importance of shared core values outweighed the importance of making the team as multilateral as possible and complementary fit (a) was therefore not deemed attractive on its own.

Company 4 believed that an employee that does not share the values will eventually choose to terminate their employment themselves. Because of that Company 4 did not value a complementary fit (a). Instead, they focused foremost on both supplementary and complementary fit (c) or on supplementary fit (b).

The empirics support that all four companies had the vision of working with supplementary fit (b) and both supplementary and complementary fit (c). Although Company 1 shared this vision, they are the only firm that has been forced by external market demand to incorporate complementary fit (a) in parts of their organization.

6.2.2 Dependence on the Definition of Supplementary Fit

A crucial factor to take into consideration is that the different types of fit that a company seeks are based on their way of defining their fit. It became clear during the interviews that the factors involved in determining fit for the interviewed organizations were wide and easily applicable to candidates with varying personalities in general. Because of this, there was no high threshold or narrowly defined determinants for candidates to have a supplementary fit. Therefore, this becomes one of the more crucial factors in understanding why complementary fit is not as commonly sought after if there is an absence of supplementary fit. A company that had, for example, more specific personality traits as their defined fit would need a higher degree of complementary fit in their organization to avoid the dangers. To exemplify, the HR manager at Company 2 stated that the core values must be shared, but that did not limit candidates from contributing with new perspectives. This indicates that the focus on maintaining supplementary fit, and simply allowing complementary fit parallel to supplementary fit as in (c) instead of by itself, should in this case not result in any negative aspects of working with P-O fit.

As previously stated, the negative downsides of working with P-O fit in organizations are related to creating organizational homogeneity (Kristof 1996) and a close connectedness that hinders the ability to realize changes in the outer environment (Mehtap & Almiaçık, 2014). On the other hand, the positive aspects are connected to creating high job satisfaction, commitment, and retaining employees (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Because of the comparably low threshold for a supplementary fit in these organizations, it should be simple to prevent widespread homogeneity and falling victim of too close connectedness. Furthermore, since they work with P-O fit and value the shared core values, they should achieve the benefits of higher job satisfaction and retention rates among their employees.

This would mean that a crucial factor for organizations that work with P-O fit is to review the possible outcomes, and actively work against the danger of organizational homogeneity and close connectedness. As demonstrated by the companies interviewed, one solution to this would be to allow a wide definition of fit.

6.2.3 Recruiting for Complementary Fit

Regarding the willingness to recruit candidates that have a complementary fit without supplementary fit (a) there is only one example of an organization where this applies. Company 1 and their consultants, where it occurs that recruiters lower their expectations on supplementary fit in terms of requirements of shared core values, to establish a complementary fit in terms of something they need, which takes its form in competence. This begs the question of why this is occurring in one of the organizations, and part of the answer is given by the explanation that the consultants work externally and will therefore have a smaller impact on the internal working environment. Furthermore, Company 1 incorporated additional measures beyond the core values for their fit, such as being unprestigious and authentic. As a result, their definition of fit becomes marginally narrower than the other companies, and it is demonstrated that they are comparably

more open toward complementary fit (a). Company 1 was furthermore the only organization that during the interview could give examples of how complementary fit could be beneficial, although it would still be preferable with both (c).

For the other companies, it is strictly stated that they will not choose a candidate that does not have a supplementary fit (b) or both (c). At the same time, there are no clear problems of organizational homogeneity or worries within the companies themselves for potential problems with this. This could either be the result of a high degree of both (c) among their employees or potentially that the key factor is their low threshold and easily applicable supplementary fit. If the supplementary fit and its threshold was higher, then they should have more pressing concerns and requirements of candidates that can contribute with a complementary fit.

The challenge that the ambiguity in the definition of fit provides is that various companies can choose how widely or narrowly they define their fit. This will further contribute to different categorizations of supplementary or complementary fit in their organization compared to other organizations. In theory, a company can define its fit widely and thus allow for many types of personalities and perspectives to fit this picture without having to actively recruit complementary fit. On the other hand, companies that have more specific expectations of their future employees, and a higher threshold for supplementary fit would need a higher degree of complementary fit. This results in difficulty comparing organizations with different thresholds for their supplementary fit. This means that although most of the interviewed organizations do not work with complementary fit (a) if it is not also supported by supplementary fit as (c), it could still be possible for organizations with a higher threshold and more niched supplementary fit to have the demand for a complementary fit (a). Company 1 demonstrates that in some cases, it becomes evident for complementary fit (a) for instance when there is pressure to recruit new employees.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Answer to the Research Question

This work has focused on providing an analysis of how companies strategically view and work with P-O fit and investigate whether this view includes complementary fit. It became clear that the ambiguous definition of fit has resulted in companies defining their fit broadly, with their externally communicated core values as a basis or sole determinant. Using the model derived from Kristof's (1996) definition, has led to a widespread perception that the companies are not interested in a complementary fit if it does not exist in parallel to supplementary fit as in (c). This indicates that these companies do not follow the constructed model and do not deem complementary fit without supplementary fit (a) as a part of P-O fit. Furthermore, the thesis's purpose has been to understand factors that can impact how companies view different types of fit. One of these factors can be stated to be how widely or narrowly defined a P-O fit is within the organization, which is a direct result of the ambiguous definition of P-O fit and the ability to determine the width of the definition for each company.

In these organizations, to define the fit between a person and an organization on the core values can be seen as both positive and a potential danger. On the positive side, it demonstrates that the core values are something that permeates the entire organization and something that they sincerely work with rather than externally communicated words to strengthen the brand image. The externally communicated core values used as a determinant for fit are often quite generic, which is positive in terms of allowing many diverse types of people to fit into this picture of their fit. Thus, making it easier for companies to work with areas such as diversity to prevent organizational homogeneity without their work on P-O fit hindering them. Regarding potential dangers, the broad and ambiguous definition increases the possibility of subjectivity for individual recruiters. As argued in the work, subjectivity increases with more generic determinants, and values such as entrepreneurship, professionalism, and bravery can take their form in many ways. However, in this study, the deviations between recruiters within the same organizations are small regarding which candidates they are searching for. This is a result of the organizations' work to decrease subjectivity and bias from their recruiters. The concrete solutions that have been implemented in these firms is to involve several employees and thus perspectives on potential candidates.

7.2 Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of the text is that complementary fit (a) is less important for organizations that have a wide definition of their fit, and a definition that already allows for different types of candidates. For complementary fit to be attractive in these organizations, it must exist parallel to supplementary fit as in (c). Because these four organizations focused their definition on their externally communicated core values, the result of the study was that complementary fit (a) is neither attractive nor wanted in the organizations and that a definition of fit based on core values is commonly used in large firms. In terms of what role ambiguity has, the study's contribution is an understanding of how various firms' categorization of their potential candidates can change depending on their definition of fit. Meaning that firms with widely defined fit, and a low threshold for supplementary fit has a lower tendency to seek complementary fit.

Among the interviewed organizations only Company 1 deviated slightly compared to the others by adding cultural dimensions outside of the core values. This is, furthermore, the only organization that accepts complementary fit in a part of their organization. This displays that a company with more specific fit criteria and thus a higher threshold, could have a higher tendency to seek complementary fit.

7.3 Implications

Most often, companies speak about the definition of supplementary fit when asked about their P-O fit, and the insight into which fit different organizations recruit can help them in becoming more efficient in terms of what they need and the potential dangers of that strategic direction. For instance, a company that has a wide definition of their supplementary fit might not be in as strong need to recruit complementary fit, whilst a firm with a high threshold for supplementary fit might be in a stronger need to avoid organizational homogeneity and becoming closed off. In this way, this study demonstrates that a focus on a specific type of fit may not automatically mean that a firm faces, for instance, any of the potential dangers. To understand how the type of fit can affect the company, it is important to investigate what the definitions of each type of fit allow for in candidates, and how wide or narrow the definition is.

7.4 Limitations

The result, in terms of the attractiveness of complementary fit in our study, was conducted with four organizations that all focus on their externally communicated core values in their definition of fit. It is therefore possible for other organizations to have different definitions and focus from which they recruit individuals with P-O fit. This would entail that a similar study with such organizations may result in different conclusions. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a way that took the perceived fit of HR Directors, HR Managers, and recruiters into consideration, thus the study has not focused on candidates or indirect measures of fit. This could entail different results for studies including different perspectives and measurement methods.

This study has focused on large Swedish organizations, as such, smaller to medium size organizations, or internationally based organizations, may have different definitions of fit. Among the sample of four separate firms, there was only one firm that deviated more than the others from the pure focus on core values, thus a larger sample may bring forth more deviating results.

Lastly, the P-O fit concept has been consistently evolving over the last several decades and is currently ambiguously defined in academia. This, in combination with the low academic focus on complementary fit in P-O fit research, and the interconnectedness between emerging themes created difficulties in implementing a specific model. Thus, as the concept continues to develop in academia, further research may create a more concrete model from which to analyse P-O fit in recruitment.

7.5 Future Research

For future research, we encourage investigating complementary fit with a larger sample. Preferably with organizations that have both wide and narrow definitions of their fit and differing organizational sizes, to investigate potential differences in the requirements for candidates. Furthermore, we would suggest future researchers investigate whether there is a general

dependence for complementary fit given the defined supplementary fit. One possibility is that there exists a correlation between how closely defined supplementary fit is for recruiters, and how much organizations stress complementary attributes in candidates.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Participant:

- What is your role in the company?
- How long have you worked for the company?
- How long have you worked in that role?

Recruitment Process:

- How many employees recruit in the company?
- How does the recruitment process in the interview-stage look?
 - Are there several people involved in this stage?
 - Are the interviews structured or more adaptable?
 - Do the same recruiters recruit for all departments or do different people handle specific departments?

The Organization:

- What values, vision, mission and similar does your company have?
 - How strongly anchored are these with your employees?
 - How would you describe the organizational culture?
 - Does it differ between departments?
- Is there anything in the organizational culture you lack today or would like to work with in the future?
 - Is there anything in the culture or recruitment strategy that limits this?
- How would you describe the coherence of employees in the company?
 - Does this coherence vary in, for example, the same team?

Fit

- How important would you say the fit between a person and the organization is in your organization and in your recruitment?
- What carries the most weight when recruiting?
 - How would you describe an ideal recruit to the company?
- Does the weight of shared values differ between roles?
 - Does this weight differ, for instance, between departments?
- Does your focus on shared values mean that you experience difficulty in recruiting people who do not completely fit into your organization?
 - What could make it such that a person like that would be recruited?

Appendix 2: List of Interviews

Organization	Position	Length	Date
1	HR Director	47 min	2022-09-29
2	Recruitment Manager	51 min	2022-10-04
2	HR Director	41 min	2022-10-07
3	HR Manager	51 min	2022-10-10
1	Recruiter 2	30 min	2022-10-13
4	HR Manager	48 min	2022-10-13
1	Recruiter 1	42 min	2022-10-14
Average	44 min		
Min	30 min		
Max	51 min		