

# The Effect of Applicant Influence Tactics on Recruiter Perceptions of Fit and Hiring Recommendations: A Field Study

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The present study examined the effect of applicant influence-tactic use on recruiter perceptions of fit. Two tactics, ingratiation and self-promotion, were expected to have positive effects on recruiter perceptions of fit and on recruiter hiring recommendations. In addition, the authors expected recruiter fit perceptions to mediate the relationship between applicant influence tactics and recruiter hiring recommendations. Results suggested that ingratiation had a positive effect on perceived fit and recruiter hiring recommendations (and indirectly, on receipt of a job offer). In addition, perceived fit mediated the relationship between ingratiation and hiring recommendations. The effects of self-promotion on fit and hiring recommendations were generally weak and nonsignificant. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Historically, interview research has focused on the characteristics and behaviors of the interviewer that caused the interview to have purportedly poor validity. As it became apparent that the validity of the interview was substantially higher than previously thought (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994), research took a more construct-oriented approach, and among other things, examined applicant characteristics that are related to interviewer evaluations. These factors range from knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to personality characteristics, values, and applied social skills (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001). Although the direct effect of each of these factors on interview outcomes has been extensively studied, these factors have also become central components in the study of person–environment (P–E) fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000).

The concept of P–E fit is a venerable one in psychology, dating at least as far back as Lewin's (1935) study, in which behavior was conceptualized as a function of the interaction between the person and the environment ( $B = f[P, E]$ ). Historically, the concept also has been emphasized in vocational counseling (Holland, 1973) as well as in interactional psychology (Endler & Magnusson, 1976), which developed as a reaction to Mischel's (1968) critique of the personality literature. In industrial–organizational psychology, much of the research on P–E fit has focused on assessments of person–organization (P–O) and person–job (P–J) fit made by recruiters during the employment interview (e.g., Adkins, Russell,

& Werbel, 1994; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Although this research is extensive, it is far from conclusive. For example, although research has shown that recruiters do attempt to evaluate applicant fit during the employment interview and that perceptions of fit affect subsequent selection decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997), little research has examined the extent to which applicant behaviors affect evaluations of perceived fit.

If applicant behaviors affect recruiter evaluations of fit, and it seems likely that they do, one class of behaviors that may affect these evaluations are applicant influence tactics. Influence tactics are behaviors used by an individual to manage shared meaning (Ferris, Fedor, & King, 1994). In other words, these tactics are used in an effort to manage others' perceptions of a situation in a way that is beneficial to the influencer. In the present study, we examined antecedents to applicant influence-tactic use, the use of influence tactics in employment interviews, and the effect these tactics have on interview outcomes such as recruiter perceptions of fit and hiring recommendations.

When examining employment interviews, fit assessments, and influence tactics in combination, one sees a number of important relationships between these three distinct areas of research. For example, Stevens and Kristof (1995) found that self-promotion and ingratiation are the primary influence tactics used in employment interviews. Also, the use of these tactics often leads to positive interview outcomes such as second interview invitations and job offers. Furthermore, previous research has found that recruiter perceptions of fit lead to positive interview outcomes (Cable & Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000). However, several questions have not been answered. Specifically, what factors contribute to applicants' use of influence tactics in employment interviews? What is the nature of the relationship between applicant influence tactics and recruiter perceptions of fit? And finally, do influence tactics have only a direct effect on interview outcomes, as suggested by previous research, or is the effect mediated by some intervening mechanism, such as perceived fit?

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In the Hypotheses section, we address these questions as we discuss previous research on influence tactics, P–E fit, and the employment interview. We then propose a series of hypotheses that replicate findings from previous research and form the foundation for the present study. Finally, we develop hypotheses that extend previous research in a number of ways.

First, we explore self-monitoring as an antecedent to applicant influence tactics. Although self-monitoring has been widely discussed as a possible antecedent to influence tactics, as we note shortly, little research has linked it to contemporary conceptualizations of this construct. Second, we examine the effect of influence tactics on perceptions of fit. We are aware of no research that has examined the possible relationship between influence tactics and perceived fit. Third, we explore a mediating role for perceived fit in the relationship between applicant influence tactics and recruiter hiring recommendations. Previous research has implied only a direct effect of influence tactics on recruiter recommendations. By examining these relationships, we hope to gain a better understanding of the impact of influence tactics and fit perceptions on the interview process.

## Hypotheses

### *Influence Tactics and Hiring Recommendations*

The initial employment interview is a rather ambiguous situation in which neither party typically has extensive, first-hand knowledge of the other (Judge & Ferris, 1993). As a result, both the applicant and the recruiter attempt to gather as much information as possible about the other to determine whether they are interested in further pursuit of an employment relationship. Because initial job interviews tend to be rather short, accurate assessments of available information and cues are critical to the success of selection decisions. Unfortunately, accurate assessments may be difficult to obtain.

Many authors have argued that the ambiguity surrounding the employment interview creates a situation in which influence tactics are likely to be used to successfully manage perceptions (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Judge & Ferris, 1993). Although it is difficult to manage impressions consistently for extended periods of time, it may be much less difficult to manage impressions over the course of a 30- to 45-min interview. Therefore, past research has focused on determining which influence tactics are used most often in employment interviews and the extent to which the use of these tactics leads to favorable interview outcomes.

Although the broader influence-tactic literature has identified a number of different tactics, two seem particularly relevant to the employment interview: ingratiation and self-promotion. Ingratiation is the use of specific actions such as opinion conformity, other enhancement, and favor doing in an attempt to increase the target person's liking of the individual (Jones, 1964). However, self-promotion is the act of promoting one's positive characteristics in an attempt to elicit attributions of competence (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Previous research has found that both ingratiation and self-promotion are likely to be used by applicants in employment interviews and are likely to have positive effects on interview outcomes (Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

Research by Stevens and Kristof (1995) found that applicant ingratiation tactics are positively related to interview outcomes and

evaluations, such as perceived applicant suitability and likelihood of organizational pursuit. This relationship may be explained by Byrne's (1969) similarity–attraction theory. Similarity–attraction theory suggests that individuals are attracted to those with whom they share something in common. Therefore, when an applicant uses ingratiation tactics such as agreeing with opinions expressed by a recruiter, the recruiter may believe that the parties share many similar beliefs and attitudes, thus causing the recruiter to become more attracted to the applicant. As a result of this attraction, the recruiter can be expected to provide positive evaluations of the applicant. As the recruiter is making his or her evaluations, it seems the most important evaluation he or she makes is an evaluation of whether to recommend hiring the applicant. If the recruiter is attracted to the applicant, a positive recommendation to hire is likely to result.

Just as ingratiation is expected to influence recruiter hiring recommendations, self-promotion is also expected to have a positive impact on hiring recommendations. Again, Stevens and Kristof (1995) provided support for this expected relationship with results of their study, which suggest that self-promotion has a strong, positive correlation with perceived applicant suitability and likelihood of organizational pursuit. Because the traditional focus of the selection process has been on finding competent individuals to fill job openings (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999), it seems that applicants who promote their own skills and abilities to create an impression of competence should be seen as viable candidates by recruiters. In turn, those applicants who recruiters believe have the KSAs necessary to do the job are likely to receive positive hiring recommendations. Thus, we expect self-promotion to be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations.

### *Perceived Fit and Hiring Recommendations*

The present study examined two forms of fit: P–O fit and P–J fit. P–O fit focuses on the compatibility between the individual and the organization in terms of values and/or personality traits (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, 2000). However, P–J fit is concerned with the fit between an individual's abilities and the demands and requirements of a specific job (Edwards, 1991).

Looking specifically at the role of P–O fit in the selection process, several researchers have suggested that P–O fit perceptions likely play an important role in recruiters' decision-making processes (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). In fact, recent empirical work suggests that subjective evaluations of P–O fit are indeed important factors in the selection process (Cable & Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000).

Specifically, Kristof-Brown (2000) examined recruiters' subjective evaluations of P–O fit and the effect of these evaluations on selection decisions. Results suggest that recruiters' subjective P–O fit perceptions are strong predictors of subsequent hiring recommendations. Furthermore, Cable and Judge (1997) found that recruiters' P–O fit perceptions are the single most important factor in predicting hiring recommendations. On the basis of the results of these studies, we hypothesized that recruiters' perceptions of P–O fit would be positively related to subsequent hiring recommendations.

Just as a positive relationship is expected between perceived P–O fit and recruiter hiring recommendations, research suggests that perceived P–J fit will also have a positive relationship with

hiring recommendations. Previous selection research has suggested that a central purpose of many selection processes is to select those candidates whose objective qualifications best match the requirements of the job (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). However, research has also shown that subjective evaluations made by recruiters tend to have stronger effects on subsequent selection decisions than do objective qualifications (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kinicki, Lockwood, Hom, & Griffeth, 1990; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990).

For example, Kinicki et al. (1990) found that whereas objective qualifications had little effect on selection recommendations, subjective evaluations of P-J fit were strongly related to hiring recommendations. Furthermore, Kristof-Brown (2000) examined recruiters' judgments of applicant fit in an effort to determine how recruiters evaluate fit and how they use judgments of fit in making selection decisions. Results of this study also suggest that recruiters' judgments of applicant P-J fit are the strongest predictors of recruiters' hiring recommendations. Therefore, in this study we expected recruiters' perceptions of P-J fit to have a positive effect on hiring recommendations.

### *Hiring Recommendations and Job Offers*

Finally, although recruiters' hiring recommendations are an important part of the selection process, they do not represent the final outcome. Ultimately, the most important question is whether the organization actually extends a job offer to the applicant. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the relationship between recruiters' hiring recommendations and the actual hiring decisions made by organizations. Past research has suggested that recruiters' recommendations are likely to have a positive effect on actual hiring decisions. For example, many of those responsible for making final hiring decisions have reported that recruiters' recommendations are one of the most important factors in making their final decision (Dipboye, 1994). Cable and Judge (1997) provided empirical evidence of this, reporting a correlation of .64 ( $p < .05$ ) between recruiter hiring recommendations and organizational hiring decisions. As this suggests, it is reasonable to expect that recruiter recommendations will have a positive effect on organizational decisions to extend a job offer.

In an effort to replicate previous research and to lay the groundwork for the focal issues of the present study, we hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Ingratiation will be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations.

*Hypothesis 2:* Self-promotion will be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceived P-O fit will be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations.

*Hypothesis 4:* Perceived P-J fit will be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations.

*Hypothesis 5:* Recruiter hiring recommendations will be positively related to actual job offers.

### *Self-Monitoring and Influence Tactics*

One critical question about the use of influence tactics in employment interviews is, Who is most likely to use these tactics?

Although a number of factors may play a role in determining influence-tactics use, a critical individual difference variable is self-monitoring. As suggested by Ferris et al. (1994), individuals who score high on self-monitoring are able to scan their environment for cues that suggest appropriate behaviors. These individuals are then able to modify their behaviors in such a manner that they are able to portray the image most appropriate to a given situation. Having the ability to identify social cues in the environment and to control one's behavior is obviously a skill that is important to the implementation of influence tactics. In fact, empirical evidence suggests that those individuals who score high on self-monitoring are more likely to try to influence others' perceptions (Fandt & Ferris, 1990; von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, 1981).

von Baeyer et al. (1981) examined the behaviors of individuals in an interview context when they were told that the interviewer held stereotypical beliefs about women (i.e., that they should be feminine, attractive, etc.). Results suggested that female participants who scored high on self-monitoring were more likely to behave in a feminine manner during the interview than were those who scored low on self-monitoring. In addition, Fandt and Ferris (1990) found that self-monitoring was a significant predictor of information manipulation when individuals were in a high accountability situation. As this research suggests, individuals who are high self-monitors can be expected to use influence tactics to manage impressions and influence perceptions.

Though these two studies suggest a link between self-monitoring and influence tactics, we are not aware of any published research that has linked self-monitoring to ingratiation and self-promotion in the context of employment interviews. This is important because though the interview context is a natural setting in which influence tactics may be used, in this setting, those who are good actors (high self-monitors) may be more effective because it is difficult for the interviewer to verify the accuracy of the behavior (Judge & Ferris, 1993). Thus, we expected applicant self-monitoring to be positively related to both ingratiation and self-promotion.

### *Ingratiation, Perceived P-O Fit, and Hiring Recommendations*

The basic function of influence tactics is to influence a target person's perception of a situation. In an interview setting, an applicant's ability to manage recruiters' perceptions may have a significant impact on such recruiter evaluations as P-O fit. One strategy applicants may choose in an attempt to influence recruiter perceptions and evaluations is to employ ingratiation.

A primary purpose of ingratiation is to increase the target's perception of similarity between him- or herself and the ingratiation. In fact, one tactic commonly considered a form of ingratiation is opinion conformity. When using opinion conformity, the ingratiation expresses opinions that are in agreement with those of the target (Jones, 1964; Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977), thereby increasing the perceived similarity between the target and the ingratiation. Because P-O fit is based on similarities between the individual and the organization, this perceived similarity should have a significant effect on conclusions recruiters draw regarding the fit between applicant and organization. Just as Byrne's (1969) similarity-attraction theory provides a framework for explaining the positive relationship between ingratiation and hiring recom-

mendations, it may also provide an explanation for the expected positive relationship between ingratiation and recruiter perceptions of P-O fit. Specifically, ingratiation is likely to increase the perceived similarity between a recruiter and an applicant. Because perceptions of P-O fit are influenced by perceived similarities in beliefs and attitudes about important values (Kristof-Brown, 2000), the heightened perceptions of similarity brought about by ingratiation should have a positive effect on recruiter perceptions of P-O fit.

The expected relationship between applicant ingratiation and recruiter perceptions of P-O fit, combined with the expected relationship between P-O fit and hiring recommendations, leads us to expect a mediated relationship between applicant ingratiation and recruiter hiring recommendations. Specifically, ingratiation is expected not only to have a direct effect on recruiter hiring recommendations as previously hypothesized, but also to have an indirect effect through recruiter perceptions of P-O fit.

### *Self-Promotion, Perceived P-J Fit, and Hiring Recommendations*

The research by Stevens and Kristof (1995) suggests that in addition to using ingratiation tactics during the interview, applicants use self-promotion during employment interviews. One result of applicant self-promotion is likely to be more positive recruiter perceptions of P-J fit. As previously suggested, the primary focus of the selection process traditionally has been on identifying competent individuals to fill job openings (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Competency typically is established when an individual possesses the KSAs necessary to complete the tasks required in a given job. As such, initial assessments of P-J fit are often made by examining applicants' resumes and comparing their KSAs with job requirements.

Additional information regarding P-J fit is often gathered through the employment interview. Though objective measures of an applicant's qualifications and abilities (e.g., a resume and/or application blank) provide some evidence of his or her competency, significant amounts of information regarding competence are also gathered during the interview. It is in the interview that applicants may, and often do, use influence tactics to manipulate recruiters' judgments (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Although influence tactics are not likely to completely obscure the effects of objective qualifications on perceived P-J fit, the use of influence tactics may work to enhance recruiters' already positive evaluations of P-J fit or to offset recruiters' previously formed negative assessments of P-J fit. Self-promotion is one influence tactic that may allow applicants to manage recruiters' perceptions of P-J fit.

As noted earlier, the goal of self-promotion is to create an impression of competence. Self-promoters often use verbal accounts of their achievements and abilities to help establish positive impressions of themselves. In addition, those who use self-promotion are likely to downplay or ignore negative aspects of their background while taking credit for past successes (Schlenker, 1980). Self-promotion tactics highlight positive information about an applicant and are expected to have positive effects on recruiters' perceptions of P-J fit.

We previously hypothesized that self-promotion and P-J fit would have direct effects on hiring recommendations. However, as

the preceding discussion suggests, self-promotion is also likely to have an indirect effect on hiring recommendations, with this effect being mediated by perceived P-J fit. As argued earlier, self-promotion may be used by applicants to promote those qualities they possess that match the requirements of the job. To the extent applicants are able to do this successfully, recruiters' perceptions of how well that applicant fits the job in question should be positively affected. Therefore, self-promotion should have a positive impact on perceived P-J fit. In turn, as suggested by previous research (e.g., Kristof-Brown, 2000), P-J fit is expected to be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations. As a result, we expected perceived P-J fit to mediate the relationship between self-promotion and recruiter hiring recommendations.

To advance previous research and to more closely examine the process through which applicant influence tactics affect interview outcomes, we proposed the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 6:* Applicant self-monitoring will be positively related to (a) ingratiation and (b) self-promotion.

*Hypothesis 7:* Applicant ingratiation will be positively related to perceived P-O fit.

*Hypothesis 8:* Perceived P-O fit will mediate the relationship between ingratiation and recruiter hiring recommendations.

*Hypothesis 9:* Applicant self-promotion will be positively related to perceived P-J fit.

*Hypothesis 10:* Perceived P-J fit will mediate the relationship between self-promotion and recruiter hiring recommendations.

## Method

### *Participants*

Data were collected from 116 undergraduate Business and Liberal Arts majors who registered for job search assistance with the campus placement office of a large Midwestern university. The average age of participants was 21 years, 51% were men, and 49% were women. Ninety-one percent of the participants were Caucasian, 5% were Asian, 3% were African American, and 1% were Hispanic. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was assured.

### *Design and Procedure*

On registering with the campus placement office, job applicants were given a brief overview and asked to participate in the present study. At their placement office orientation meeting, participants were asked to complete an initial survey (Time 1). Next, participants were asked to complete a short, postinterview survey following each interview they participated in during the recruiting season (Time 2). Beginning 3 months after the start of the recruiting season, follow-up surveys were sent to all applicants who completed postinterview surveys (Time 3). The delivery of these surveys was timed so that they arrived approximately 3 months after the postinterview survey was completed.

As company recruiters arrived on campus to conduct initial employment interviews, each recruiter was asked to participate in the present study. Those who agreed completed a short survey following each interview to record their perceptions and evaluations of each candidate (Time 2).

### *Measures*

*Résumé data.* Each applicant was required to have a resume on file with the campus placement office, and study participants gave permission

for the authors to have access to these résumés. Because the effect of applicant influence behaviors on recruiter perceptions and evaluations might be affected by applicant quality (e.g., the best applicants might feel less of a need to self-promote), we examined each résumé and coded applicants' grade point average (GPA) and total months of work experience. These variables served as controls in our analyses.

*Initial applicant survey.* The initial applicant survey, completed at Time 1, was used to assess self-monitoring as well as to collect demographic data about the participants. The Revised Self-Monitoring Scale (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984) was used to assess applicant self-monitoring tendencies. Applicants were asked to respond to 13 items designed to measure their sensitivity to social cues and their ability to modify their own behavior (e.g., "Once I know what the situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly"). The internal consistency reliability estimate of the self-monitoring scale was  $\alpha = .73$ .

*Postinterview applicant assessments.* Following each interview (Time 2), applicants were asked to complete a survey that provided information about the influence tactics they used in the interview. Past research has suggested that applicants are able to report their use of influence tactics with reasonable accuracy (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). In their investigation of applicant use of influence tactics during employment interviews, Stevens and Kristof (1995) found that applicant reports of influence-tactic use had strong, positive correlations (ranging from .50 to .68) with independent, third-party observer reports of applicant influence-tactic use. This suggests that applicants are aware of the tactics they use and are willing and able to accurately report them.

To establish the extent to which influence tactics were used during the interview, we adapted measures developed by Stevens and Kristof (1995) and Wayne and Ferris (1990) for use in the present study. To assess ingratiation, we used a nine-item measure adopted from Stevens and Kristof. This measure was developed for use in an interview setting and was well suited for use in the present study. Applicants responded to a series of statements regarding their use of ingratiation tactics using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The coefficient alpha reliability estimate of this scale was .85. The items used in this scale are provided in the Appendix.

Self-promotion was assessed using a combination of items developed by Stevens and Kristof (1995) and Wayne and Ferris (1990). A combination of items from these two scales was used to obtain the most construct valid measure possible of self-promotion. Each of the scales from which the items were drawn has advantages and disadvantages. The Stevens and Kristof scale was designed for use with interview research, but not all items apply to the definition of self-promotion used in the present study. The Wayne and Ferris measure, however, was not specifically developed for interview research but appears to be a more construct valid measure of self-promotion as defined in the present study. Therefore, we used a five-item scale created with items adapted from both Stevens and Kristof's and Wayne and Ferris's studies. This measure used the previously described 7-point scale. The coefficient alpha reliability estimate of this scale was .77. As with the ingratiation scale, the items used in this scale are provided in the Appendix.

*Follow-up survey.* For each completed postinterview survey, a follow-up survey was sent approximately 3 months after the interview. The 3-month lag time was provided to allow organizations to make job offer decisions. This survey asked applicants to report whether they received a job offer as a result of the initial interview.

*Postinterview recruiter assessments.* Following each interview, recruiters were asked to provide several assessments of the applicant. Each of these assessments was based on the recruiter's agreement with a series of statements using the same 7-point scale used by applicants on their postinterview evaluations.

The first postinterview assessment was recruiters' perceptions of applicant P-O fit and P-J fit. Although research and theory suggest that P-O fit and P-J fit are distinct constructs (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-

Brown, 2000), recruiters seem to have difficulty differentiating between the two types of fit. Therefore, the formatting and wording of items measuring P-O fit and P-J fit was specifically designed to draw out the distinctions between these two constructs. Perceived P-O fit was assessed using two statements adapted from measures used by Cable and Judge (1997). The first statement was "This applicant is a good match or fit with my organization and its current employees." The second statement was "This applicant's values reflect the values of my organization." In the present study, these items displayed an internal consistency reliability of  $\alpha = .86$ .

To be consistent with the earlier definition of P-J fit, we assessed perceived P-J fit using two statements designed to determine the congruence between the demands of the job and the abilities of the applicant. The first statement was "This applicant possesses the KSAs necessary to perform the duties of this specific job." The second statement was "I believe this applicant can achieve a high level of performance in this particular job." The coefficient alpha reliability of this scale in the present study was .89.

Recruiters were also asked about their hiring recommendations for each applicant. Specifically, recruiters were asked the likelihood that they would recommend hiring the applicant ("I would recommend extending a job offer to this applicant") and for their overall evaluation of the applicant ("Overall, I would evaluate this candidate positively"). Recruiters responded using the same 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) described previously. These two items were combined to form a hiring recommendation variable similar to that used by Cable and Judge (1997). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability was  $\alpha = .92$ .

## Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 1. Although most of the correlations are consistent with expectations, several correlations warrant comment. To begin, the correlation between recruiters' subjective evaluations of P-O fit and recruiters' subjective evaluations of P-J fit was high (.88). Although correlations of this magnitude between these variables are not uncommon (e.g., Kristof-Brown, 2000), it is nonetheless important to further investigate the distinctiveness of these dimensions. Accordingly, two confirmatory factor analysis models were specified using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The first analysis tested a two-factor model of fit. This model is consistent with theoretical arguments that suggest that P-O fit and P-J fit are distinct constructs (Kristof-Brown, 2000). The second model tested a single-factor model of fit in which the P-O and P-J fit items loaded on a single, unitary construct. The results of these analyses indicate that a single factor model is the best fit to the data in the present study. Therefore, a single fit construct (overall fit) was used in the remainder of the analyses. The reliability of this measure was  $\alpha = .93$ .

Figure 1 presents the parameter estimates and standard errors of the proposed model following the previously discussed modification. Structural equation modeling was conducted using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996) with maximum-likelihood estimation. All analyses were based on covariance matrices, and empirical support for the models was assessed by examining seven fit indices including the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom, standardized root-mean-square residual (RMR), root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), normed-fit index (NFI), and

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. GPA	3.19	0.45	—								
2. Work experience	48.64	28.20	.16	—							
3. Subjective P-O fit	5.06	1.32	-.11	-.01	(.86)						
4. Subjective P-J fit	4.84	1.41	-.10	.00	.88**	(.89)					
5. Self-monitoring	4.89	0.52	-.25**	-.13	.20*	.21*	(.73)				
6. Ingratiation	5.57	0.86	-.12	-.10	.38**	.37**	.16	(.85)			
7. Self-promotion	4.88	0.99	-.21*	-.22*	.24*	.29**	.18*	.53**	(.77)		
8. Hiring recommendation	5.06	1.78	-.12	-.05	.87**	.86**	.20*	.40**	.27**	(.92)	
9. Job offer	0.15	0.36	-.01	-.01	.29**	.32**	.03	.16	.13	.34**	—

Note. Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses.  $N = 116$ . GPA = grade point average; P-O fit = person-organization fit; P-J fit = person-job fit.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

nonnormed-fit index (NNFI). In our initial analyses we tested a series of hypotheses in an effort to replicate previous research on applicant influence tactics, perceived fit, and employment interviews. Results of the present study provide support for most, but not all, of these relationships.

First, we hypothesized that applicant ingratiation and self-promotion would have positive effects on recruiter hiring recommendations. On the one hand, parameter estimates in Figure 1 suggest only weak, nonsignificant effects of applicant ingratiation and self-promotion on recruiter hiring recommendations. On the other hand, these estimates represent only the direct effects of applicant influence tactics on recruiter hiring recommendations. A more complete understanding of these relationships can be obtained by examining the direct, indirect, and total effects of influence tactics on hiring recommendations. These effects are shown in Table 2 and suggest that whereas self-promotion did not significantly affect hiring recommendations, the total effect of ingratiation on hiring recommendations was relatively strong and significant. However, most of this effect was indirect. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported, but Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Next, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 suggested that P-O fit and P-J fit would be positively related to recruiter hiring recommendations. Because we collapsed our two measures of fit into a single overall fit variable, we were unable to directly test these hypotheses. However, the parameter estimate relating overall fit to hiring recommendations was positive and significant. Thus, our results support the general hypothesis that recruiter perceptions of fit have a positive impact on subsequent hiring recommendations. Finally, we proposed that recruiter hiring recommendations would be positively related to second-interview invitations. As expected, results suggest a strong, positive relationship ( $\beta = .79$ ,  $p < .01$ ), thus providing support for Hypothesis 5.

The second step in this study was to propose a series of new hypotheses that examined antecedents to applicant influence-tactic use and the mediating effect of fit on the relationship between applicant-influence tactics and recruiter hiring recommendations. To begin, we hypothesized that applicant self-monitoring would predict applicant use of ingratiation and self-promotion. Parameter estimates of self-monitoring predicting ingratiation and self-

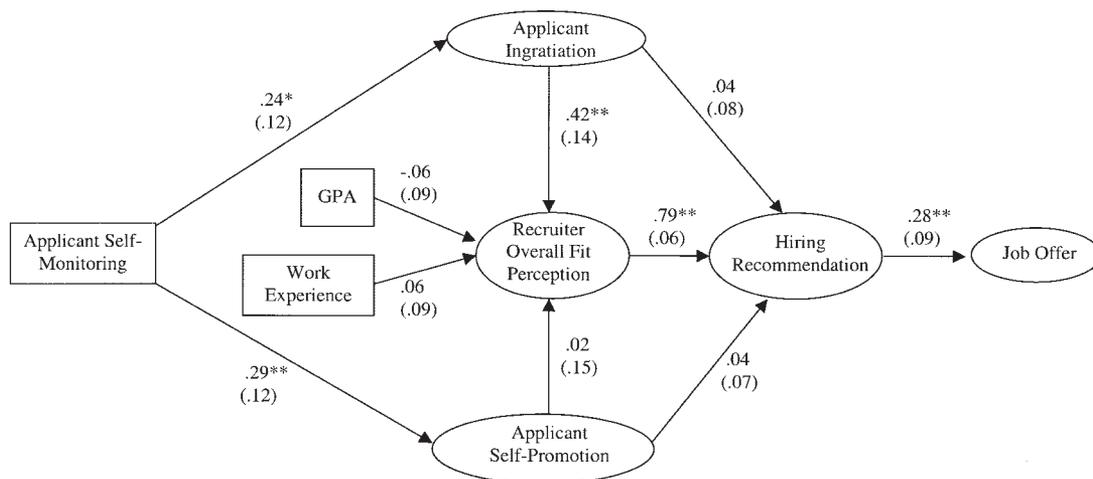


Figure 1. Structural estimates of proposed model. Statistics are standardized path coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. GPA = grade point average. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
*Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Influence Tactics and Overall Fit on Hiring Recommendations*

Tactic and overall fit	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
Ingratiation	.04	.33**	.37**
Self-promotion	.04	.02	.06
Overall fit	.79**	–	.79**

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

promotion were positive and significant, providing support for Hypothesis 6.

Next, applicant influence tactics were hypothesized to affect recruiters' perceptions of fit.<sup>1</sup> First, applicant ingratiation was expected to have a positive effect on perceived fit. Perceived fit was then expected to mediate the effect of applicant ingratiation on hiring recommendations. Results of our analyses provided support for these hypotheses. The parameter estimate of the relationship between ingratiation and perceived fit was significant and positive, providing support for Hypothesis 7.

Because ingratiation had a positive effect on perceived fit and perceived fit had a positive effect on hiring recommendations, it seemed likely that fit evaluations mediated the relationship between ingratiation and recruiter hiring recommendations. In fact, results shown in Table 2 provide support for the mediating role of fit. These results suggest that whereas the total effect of ingratiation on hiring recommendations was significant, the direct effect was weak and nonsignificant. Only the indirect effect through perceived fit was significant, accounting for 89% of the effect of ingratiation on hiring recommendations. Therefore, Hypothesis 8 was supported.

Finally, the relationships in the covariance structure model among self-promotion, perceived fit, and hiring recommendations were not as strong as expected. First, as previously noted, the effect of self-promotion on hiring recommendations was nonsignificant and failed to support the hypothesized relationship. Likewise, the parameter estimate for the relationship between self-promotion and fit was weak and nonsignificant. As a result, Hypothesis 9 was not supported. In addition, perceived fit was hypothesized to mediate the effect of self-promotion on hiring recommendations. As the previous results have shown, self-promotion had only weak, direct effects on perceived fit and recruiter hiring recommendations. Furthermore, as Table 2 suggests, self-promotion had only weak, nonsignificant indirect and total effects on hiring recommendations. Thus, Hypothesis 10 was not supported.

Although we expected influence tactics to affect recruiters' perceptions of fit, it is also possible that other applicant characteristics played a role in the development of fit perceptions. Therefore, applicant GPA and work experience were controlled in our analyses. As the results in Figures 1 and 2 suggest, GPA ( $\beta = -.06, p > .05$ ) and work experience ( $\beta = .06, p > .05$ ) had only weak, nonsignificant effects on recruiter perceptions of fit. Thus, these objective applicant characteristics were not important factors in the formation of recruiter fit perceptions. Rather, it was more subjective characteristics such as the use of influence tactics, and ingratiation in particular, that had the strongest effect on percep-

tions of fit. This result was not completely surprising. In fact, Gilmore and Ferris (1989) similarly found that applicant behaviors had a more significant impact on recruiter judgments than did applicant qualifications. In combination, these results seem to suggest that recruiters' judgments and perceptions may be influenced more by an applicant's interview behaviors than by his or her objective qualifications.

### *Model Fit and Alternative Model Testing*

One reason for using covariance structure modeling is to determine how well a given model fits the data used to test that model. A number of different indices of model fit were computed for the proposed model and are included in Table 3. As suggested by the fit indices, the proposed model generally met the standards indicative of a good-fitting model. Despite indications that the proposed model was a good fit to the data, Hayduk (1987) and Medsker, Williams, and Holahan (1994) recommended testing alternative models when using covariance structure analysis to determine whether the proposed model fits the data better than other plausible models. Given that fit appears to mediate most, if not all, of the effect of ingratiation and self-promotion on recruiter hiring recommendations, we tested an alternative model that eliminated the links between ingratiation and hiring recommendation and between self-promotion and hiring recommendation: in effect, a fully mediated model. The test of this alternative model did not result in significant changes to the fit indices (see Table 3) or to model parameters. However, it is a more parsimonious model than the proposed model. Thus, the fully mediated model was identified as the final model and is depicted in Figure 2.

### *Distinctiveness of Overall Fit Perception and Hiring Recommendation*

Because the measures of recruiter overall fit perception and hiring recommendation are strongly related ( $\beta = .81$ ; see Figure 2), it is possible that the two measures are indistinct. To investigate the distinctiveness of these measures, we tested two measurement models. One measurement model stipulated that fit and hiring recommendation are separate measures, as is assumed in the hypothesized model. The other measurement model tested this assumption by combining fit and hiring recommendation (assuming that they are perfectly correlated). The fit statistics for the hypothesized measurement model, assuming that fit and hiring recom-

<sup>1</sup> Baron (1986) suggested that there may be "too much of a good thing" when individuals use influence behaviors to achieve an outcome. Specifically, whereas a certain level of ingratiation or self-promotion may be effective, excessive use of these tactics would make the intentions of the individual obvious to the target and thereby backfire. Under this explanation, one would expect a curvilinear relationship such that the main effect of influence tactics would be positive but the quadratic effect would be negative. To investigate this possibility, we used curvilinear regression whereby a linear and quadratic term for ingratiation and self-promotion were entered into equations predicting overall fit perceptions. In these regressions, whereas the linear terms were positive and for ingratiation, significant, for neither ingratiation nor self-promotion was the quadratic term significant, thus failing to support the "too much of a good thing" effect for these tactics in this context.

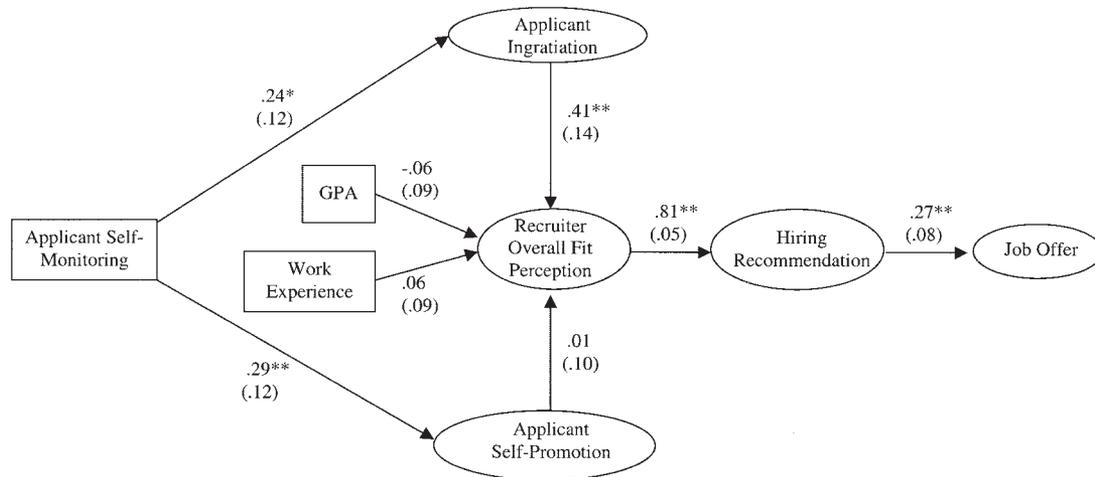


Figure 2. Structural estimates of final model. Statistics are standardized path coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. GPA = grade point average. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

mendation are distinct measures, were as follows:  $\chi^2_6(5, N = 116) = 3.16$  (*ns*), standardized RMR = .01, RMSEA = .01, GFI = .99, AGFI = .97, NFI = .99, and NNFI = 1.00. The fit statistics for the alternative measurement model, which stipulates that fit and hiring recommendation are indistinct (i.e., perfectly correlated) measures, were as follows:  $\chi^2_5(6, N = 116) = 30.59$  ( $p < .01$ ), standardized RMR = .43, RMSEA = .19, GFI = .90, AGFI = .75, NFI = .95, and NNFI = .93. The 90% confidence intervals for the two RMSEA statistics did not overlap; thus the fit was significantly worse for the alternative model. These results indicate that considerable damage was done to the fit of the measurement model that constrains the relationship between fit and hiring recommendation to unity. Thus, it appears that despite the substantial relationship between the measures, it is important to distinguish measures of fit and hiring recommendation in the model.

## Discussion

Previous research has examined a number of behavioral and perceptual factors that influence employment interview decisions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Although this research has provided a better understanding of the interview process, we do not yet fully understand the intricacies of the

human interactions embedded within the employment interview. Furthermore, we have yet to precisely model the process through which behaviors lead to perceptions and perceptions lead to outcomes in the interview context. The present study is an attempt to integrate previous research and develop a model that explains how an applicant's words and actions ultimately lead to interview outcomes and decisions.

One contribution of the present study is that it extends previous work on the role of self-monitoring in the employment interview. Previous research by Cable and Judge (1996) has shown that self-monitoring has a direct, positive effect on recruiter perceptions of fit. The present study suggests that although self-monitoring does affect fit perceptions, the effect is mediated by applicants' use of influence tactics. In fact, the effect of self-monitoring on recruiter perceptions of fit is 37% weaker when applicant influence tactics are added to the model. Therefore, a primary role of self-monitoring may be to affect the extent to which applicants use influence tactics during the employment interview.

Next, influence tactics positively affected recruiter perceptions of fit. Previous research has failed to include influence tactics when examining predictors of recruiters' fit perceptions. The omission of influence tactics in previous research becomes more important when one considers the strength of the effect of ingratiation on perceived fit in the present study. Failing to include a variable with such strong effects may have artificially inflated the observed effects of other variables reported to be strong predictors of perceived fit. Therefore, future research that examines predictors of perceived fit should control for the use of influence tactics by applicants.

The present study also contributes to our understanding of the relationship between applicant influence tactics and interview outcomes. Whereas previous research has examined the direct effects of influence tactics on interview outcomes (Baron, 1986; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), the present study suggests that the effect of applicant influence tactics on interview outcomes is mediated by re-

Table 3  
Evaluation of Model Fit

Fit statistics	Proposed model	Final model
$\chi^2/df$	50.02/30	51.80/32
Standardized root-mean-square residual	.06	.06
Root-mean-square error of approximation	.08	.07
Goodness-of-fit index	.93	.92
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index	.87	.87
Normed-fit index	.92	.92
Nonnormed-fit index	.95	.95

Note.  $N = 116$ .

cruiter perceptions of fit. For example, Stevens and Kristof (1995) found significant, positive relationships between applicant self-promotion and recruiters' perceptions of applicant suitability and recruiters' reports of the likelihood of organizational pursuit of the applicant. However, the present study found only a weak, nonsignificant effect of self-promotion on hiring recommendations when controlling for recruiter perceptions of fit.

Similarly, whereas Stevens & Kristof (1995) found significant, direct effects of ingratiation on interview outcomes, results of the present study suggest that these effects are weak and nonsignificant when recruiter perceptions of fit are included in the model. Thus, it appears that influence tactics may not directly affect interview outcomes as previously reported. Rather, influence tactics appear to exert influence on outcomes primarily through their effect on the perceptions of fit recruiters develop throughout the course of the interview.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the differential effects of ingratiation and self-promotion on perceived fit in the present study. Whereas ingratiation had a strong, positive effect on fit, self-promotion had only a weak, nonsignificant effect. There are several possible explanations for this pattern of results. First, recruiters in the present study were employees of the organizations for whom they were conducting interviews rather than external recruiters hired by the organizations for the specific purpose of conducting screening interviews. As such, because the recruiters are potential colleagues, applicants may have felt a stronger need to project a friendly persona to enhance their image as a pleasant, likeable coworker. When external recruiters are hired to conduct interviews, applicants may feel that the most important impression to make is that of a competent employee who has all the necessary KSAs to do the job effectively. Because the applicant would not be working with the external recruiter in the future, the motivation to establish one's competence may override the motivation to appear similar to and likable to the recruiter.

A second possible explanation lies in the stage of the selection process at which the interview is conducted. Whereas screening interviews, such as those included in the present study, are typically conducted in the early stages of the selection process by recruiters who may be hiring for a number of different positions, interviews at later stages of the selection process are often conducted by direct supervisors or managers. Because recruiters conducting screening interviews are often looking for candidates to fill several different positions, they may not be entirely familiar with the specific task and skill requirements of each job for which they are interviewing. Thus, an applicant's attempts to self-promote may not have as much of an impact on the recruiter's judgments as do the applicant's ingratiation tactics. However, at later stages of the selection process, when a direct supervisor, who is intimately familiar with the requirements of the position, is conducting the interviews, applicants' self-promotion tactics may be more effective because they may elicit greater recognition of the applicants' relevant skills and abilities in the mind of the supervisor. At the same time, the supervisor may assume that all applicants who have reached the later stages of the selection process have been screened for compatibility with the current workforce and may pay less attention to any ingratiation tactics used by the applicant.

As the previous discussions suggest, our results do contradict some findings reported in previous studies. Several possible explanations exist for these discrepancies. First, the fact that the

present model includes perceived fit as a predictor of hiring recommendations helps explain the nonsignificant, direct effects of ingratiation and self-promotion on hiring recommendations. Although Stevens and Kristof (1995) found significant positive effects for self-promotion and the fit with organization tactic and significant negative effects for nonverbal behavior on recruiter perceptions, the absence of perceived fit in their model leaves open the possibility that the relationships observed in their study were due to the omission of fit.

Next, Stevens and Kristof (1995) reported that applicants used more self-promotion tactics than ingratiation tactics in employment interviews. However, participants in the present study reported using more ingratiation tactics than self-promotion tactics. This may be due to differences in the type of jobs being filled in the two studies. Whereas 30% of Stevens and Kristof's sample were engineering majors, presumably interviewing for engineering jobs, the present sample consisted entirely of business and liberal arts majors interviewing primarily for positions in sales, service, and management. The positions being filled in the present study seem to require that applicants interact well with people and be a person whom others are attracted to and are willing to interact with. As such, it seems that the successful applicant is one who is able to use ingratiation to improve social interactions with others.

Although some findings of the present study contradict previous research, other findings provide support for findings reported in past studies. For example, the present study found that recruiter perceptions of applicant fit are strong predictors of interview outcomes. Specifically, fit perceptions have a strong, positive effect on recruiter hiring recommendations. This is consistent with previous research by Cable and Judge (1996) that found a similarly strong relationship between P-O fit perceptions and recruiter hiring recommendations. However, these effects should be interpreted with some caution as common method bias concerns may have artificially inflated effect size estimates in both studies.

Finally, it is clear that some results of the present study may be more interesting and practically important than are others. On the one hand, some might see the relationship between a recruiter's perception of applicant fit and his or her hiring recommendations to be tautological. After all, would a recruiter recommend hiring someone who they did not think was a good fit to the job or organization? On the other hand, even if the link between fit and hiring recommendation does lack some psychological depth, the link between fit and the actual receipt of a job offer is a more important linkage—in both research and practice. From the standpoint of the research literature, the need to track the effect of fit through the stages of the hiring process, ending with the job offer, has been emphasized (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Werbel and Gilliland (1999) also noted that considerably more research is needed to link fit to actual outcomes. One contribution of our study is that it responds to these calls. Practically, the linkage between fit and the actual receipt job offers shows that fit matters. Indeed, the correlation between P-O fit and P-J fit with the actual receipt of a job offer was significant and nontrivial ( $r = .29$  and  $.32$ , respectively;  $p < .01$ ). Thus, the fit impressions applicants make during the initial interview are likely some of the most important impressions they make during the entire hiring process. It is significant that our study further shows that these fit impressions are impressions that can be managed by applicants (through ingratiation).

### Limitations and Strengths

Although results of the present study are promising and provide valuable insight into the interview process, the study is not without limitations. For example, data from the present study suggest a strong relationship between recruiters' subjective evaluations of P-O fit and P-J fit. Although theory suggests that these are two distinct constructs and previous research has treated them as such (e.g., Kristof-Brown, 2000), the bivariate correlation between the two constructs in the present study was very high ( $r = .88$ ). One possible explanation for the high correlation between subjective P-O fit and subjective P-J fit in the present study is common method bias. Each construct was assessed with a two-item measure on the recruiters' postinterview survey. Thus, each recruiter reported their evaluations of subjective P-O fit at the same time they reported their evaluations of subjective P-J fit. Because these evaluations were reported simultaneously and on a single survey, common method bias may have artificially inflated the correlation between subjective P-O fit and subjective P-J fit.

Despite this limitation, the present study has several strengths. First, multiple sources were used to collect data at several different points in time during the course of a 10-month recruiting cycle. Another strength of the present study is the use of actual job applicants and actual recruiters in an authentic interview setting. The use of a field study methodology has been rather limited in prior studies of influence-tactic use in the employment interview. With the exception of Stevens and Kristof's (1995) study, nearly all previous research on this topic has relied on experimental data. The use of a field study may provide a more realistic test of the hypothesized relationships than one can typically obtain in a laboratory study, because the outcomes of the interviews used in the present study have real-world implications for the applicants as well as for the recruiting organizations. Therefore, the motivation of participants is at a level that may be difficult to replicate in an experimental setting.

### Implications and Future Research

The results of the present study have implications for applicants, placement counselors, and researchers. From the applicants' perspective, the use of ingratiation is likely to lead to more positive evaluations of fit by organizational recruiters. In turn, these positive fit evaluations often lead to positive hiring recommendations and ultimately to job offers. Applicants who are aware of the positive effects that may result from the use of ingratiation and self-promotion may be more successful in their job searches than those applicants who are not aware of the positive effects of these tactics.

For placement counselors and others who assist job seekers with their interviewing skills and techniques, the results of the present study suggest that applicants may benefit from training that teaches them how to effectively use ingratiation and self-promotion during the employment interview. However, this also raises the question of whether individuals can learn to use influence tactics. In addition, if these tactics can be learned, how rigorous is the process an individual must go through to learn to use these tactics effectively? It is possible that the subtleties required to use influence tactics effectively cannot be mastered quickly but rather take much time and practice to perfect. This is

an issue that has received little attention in the research literature. Future research should examine the extent to which influence-tactic use is, or can, be learned.

Although the present study provides important information about the effects of applicant influence tactics on recruiter perceptions of fit, it does not address the role of recruiter influence tactics. In other words, what effect does recruiter ingratiation or self-promotion have on applicant perceptions of fit? Little research has examined the influence tactics used by recruiters during the employment interview. It is possible that recruiters who use ingratiation to appear likable will be able to affect the perceptions of applicants, such that applicants who feel strong liking for the recruiter may perceive a better fit between themselves and the organization than do those applicants who do not like the recruiter. Therefore, future research should examine the effect that recruiter influence tactics have on applicants' perceptions and behaviors in the employment interview.

### Conclusion

The present study extends previous research on the use of influence tactics in employment interviews and the role of perceived fit in the employment process. Whereas previous research has suggested that ingratiation and self-promotion have direct effects on interview outcomes, results of the present study suggest that these effects are mediated by recruiter perceptions of fit. Furthermore, results suggest that the impact of perceived fit goes beyond recruiter recommendations to include a strong influence on final job offer decisions. These findings suggest that influence tactics have implications throughout the employment process. However, to fully understand the effects of influence tactics in this process, future research must rely more heavily on the perception and social influence literatures to help elucidate the intricacies of interpersonal interactions that take place in the employment interview. The present study provides a solid foundation on which to base this future research and provides strong evidence that influence tactics are indeed an important part of the employment process.

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## Appendix

### Items in Ingratiation and Self-Promotion Scales

#### Ingratiation ( $\alpha = .85$ )

1. I praised the organization.
2. I complimented the interviewer or organization.
3. I discussed non-job-related topics about which the recruiter and I share similar opinions.
4. I discussed interests I shared in common with the recruiter.
5. I found out what kind of person the organization was seeking and explained how I fit in.
6. I indicated my interest in the position and the company.
7. I indicated my enthusiasm for working for this organization.
8. I smiled a lot or used other friendly non-verbal behaviors.
9. I maintained eye contact with the interviewer.

#### Self-Promotion ( $\alpha = .77$ )

1. I played up the value of positive events that I took credit for.
2. I described my skills and abilities in an attractive way.
3. I took charge during the interview to get my main points across.
4. I took credit for positive events even if I was not solely responsible.
5. I made positive events I was responsible for appear better than they actually were.

*Note.* Ingratiation items were adapted from Stevens and Kristof's (1995) study. Self-promotion items were adapted from Stevens and Kristof's (1995) and Wayne and Ferris's (1990) studies.

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