



# DO I REALLY WANT TO WORK HERE? TESTING A MODEL OF JOB PURSUIT FOR MBA INTERNS

**GERARD BEENEN AND SHAUN PICHLER**

*Job pursuit refers to the intentions, decisions, or behaviors indicative of a candidate's interest in a particular employer. This study develops and tests a process model of job pursuit for MBA interns with data collected before, during, and after their internships. Our model integrates theory from the person-environment fit and organizational socialization literature. Results show pre-entry person-organization (P-O) fit and social aspects tactics jointly motivate proactive information seeking about the employer (from those inside and outside the assigned department) during the internship, and interactively motivate information seeking outside the assigned department. Yet, only information seeking inside the assigned department is related to learning about the employer. Learning about the employer also predicts job-acceptance intentions, which in turn predicts job-acceptance decisions. The model developed in this study should serve as a guide to help human resource managers understand job pursuit and acceptance in internships and other similar employment relationships. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

*Keywords:* person-situation fit, internship, recruitment, socialization, career

**T**o successfully attract talent, today's organizations need a steady stream of qualified job candidates who are motivated to pursue potential employment. Job pursuit describes the intentions, decisions, or behaviors indicative of a candidate's interest in a particular employer (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005). The importance of understanding antecedents of job pursuit is highlighted by the fact that despite the current economic challenges, experts predict a shortage of qualified employees (Kossek

& Pichler, 2006). Organizations therefore must develop strategies and tactics to attract the most qualified workers.

Though a perceived fit between a job candidate and the employer environment (i.e., person-organization, or P-O, fit) predicts job-pursuit activity (Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson 2005), scholars have not yet developed and tested a model to explain this linkage. This study develops and tests a model of job pursuit during an MBA internship experience where candidates engage in job-pursuit activity focused

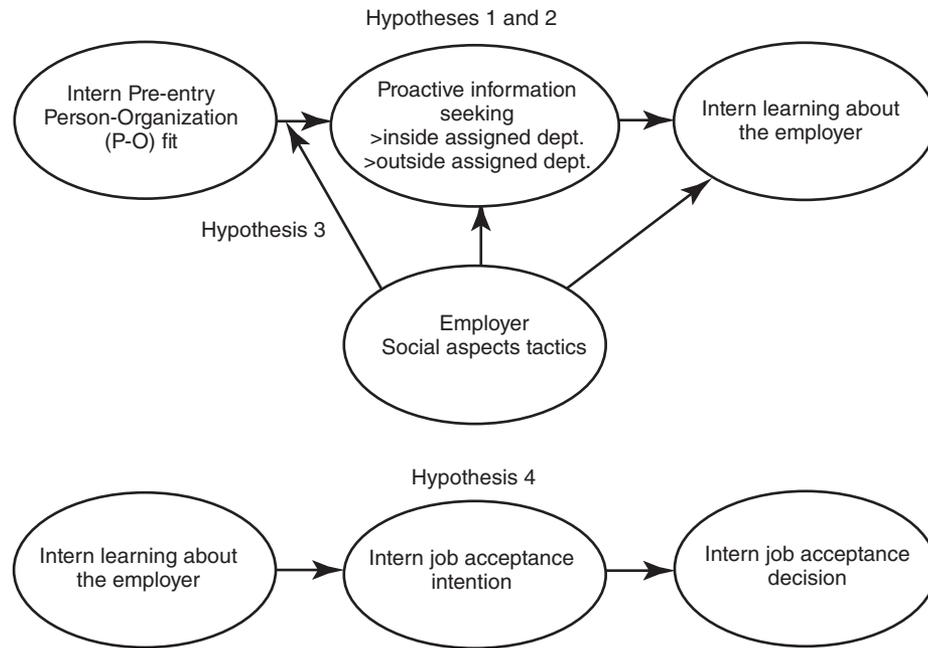
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**FIGURE 1.** Hypothesized Relationships for Internship Job-Pursuit Model

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*Organizational actions are believed to play a moderating role in the relationship between person-environment fit and job pursuit.*

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on gaining a “realistic preview” of a job (Eby, Allen, & Brinley, 2005, p. 568). Our model draws insights from P-O fit and socialization literatures, which focuses on how new employees learn their roles (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). In particular, we examine the job-pursuit process in the context of internships, which are short-term contingent work arrangements employers use to attract and select job candidates (Baron & Kreps, 1999; Beenen & Rousseau, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2006). Specifically, we investigate how pre-entry P-O fit, along with socialization experiences during the internship, influence post-internship learning, and job-acceptance intentions and decisions.

Researchers have used organizational socialization theory to link organizational and newcomer actions to reduced turnover intentions and behaviors (e.g., Bauer et al., 2007). These findings are relevant to internships, in which job candidates simultaneously work for and pursue potential

longer-term employment and career mobility (Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007). Furthermore, organizational actions are believed to play a moderating role in the relationship between person-environment fit and job pursuit (Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Job pursuit in internships refers to the extent to which interns who are job seekers proactively seek out career-relevant information about their internship employer, and their post-internship job-offer-acceptance intentions and decisions. We address two main research questions in this study: (1) How do organizational socialization tactics impact job pursuit in the context of internships? and (2) What mediating and moderating mechanisms explain these relationships? To test our model of intern job pursuit (Figure 1), we collected data at four points of the job-pursuit process: just before starting an internship (pre-entry), shortly after starting an internship (post-entry), shortly after completing an internship (post-internship), and nine months after making a decision about accepting a full-time offer with the internship employer (post-decision).

This study makes important contributions to the job-pursuit literature. First, we examine job pursuit in the context of internships. Despite the growing importance of internships as a way to recruit employees, internships are a context that has largely been overlooked in the literature (e.g., Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998). Second, we contribute to theory related to the job-pursuit process by developing and testing a new model that accounts for relationships between individual perceptions and behaviors, organizational tactics, and job pursuit. In so doing, we integrate two theoretical perspectives relevant to job pursuit—P-O fit and socialization—and clarify the nomological net of job pursuit. Lastly, we develop practical implications for human resource professionals who operate in environments where internships are used to recruit workers.

### Job Pursuit in the Context of Internships

We studied job pursuit in internships for several reasons. First, interns are a growing portion of the job-candidate pool (Jones, 2006; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2006) who work for and pursue employment with the same organization. As interns perform their jobs, they also can seek inside information about career opportunities—a key driver of candidate job pursuit (Cable & Graham, 2000). Employers use internships to attract and select the most talented job candidates (Baron & Kreps, 1999). During economic downturns, internships also provide employers a way to accomplish work without the liabilities of hiring permanent employees. Yet, P-O fit research has largely focused on conventional job candidates and overlooked job-pursuit intentions and behaviors that occur in internships (e.g., Carless, 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 2002).

Since interns complete a trial 8–12-week employment period before a job-acceptance decision is even an option, interns can engage in job-pursuit activities that are unavailable to conventional job candidates, such as proactively seeking information from

organizational members, and learning more about the employer (Cable & Graham, 2000). Employer information seeking here refers to an intern's proactive inquiries about employment practices by consulting with individuals both inside and outside the intern's assigned department. This is a specific form of information seeking that reduces newcomer uncertainty (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996). Employer learning is defined as an intern's increase in knowledge about the potential employer's organizational, promotion, and reward practices. This is distinct from other forms of learning such as skill development.

Research also has overlooked how employer actions and interns' job-pursuit behaviors can work in concert to help them learn about the employer. While we chose MBA internships as an employment relationship worthy of attention, our model may generalize to job pursuit in a variety of similar employment relationships and related situations such as realistic job previews, case team competitions for job candidates, professional internship programs, and contingent work arrangements with the potential for full-time employment.

### Job-Candidate Beliefs and Behaviors: Pre-entry P-O Fit and Proactive Information Seeking

Pre-entry person-organization (P-O) fit is a specific form of person-environment fit that is most relevant given the internship context. For instance, before starting their internship roles, interns may not have much access to information about their specific job (person-job fit) or workgroup (person-group fit). P-O fit describes the extent to which a person is compatible with an organization because (1) one party provides what the other needs (complementary fit); (2) both parties share similar characteristics (supplementary fit); (3) or both (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kristof, 1996). Both types predict job acceptance, employee intentions to stay, satisfaction, and

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organizational commitment and identification (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Our focus is subjective (perceived) complementary and supplementary fit because it is more cognitively available to job seekers than objective assessments of fit (Judge & Cable, 1997), and therefore more likely to guide their intentions and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991, 2002; Cable & DeRue, 2002). During the job-pursuit process, job candidates typically form P-O fit perceptions through a combination of activities initiated by themselves and their potential employers. For example, candidates learn about potential employers through external information sources, brochures, websites, job interviews, and interpersonal contact with employer representatives (Cable & Judge, 1996; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Candidates who form stronger pre-entry P-O fit perceptions through these activities are more attracted to an employer and have stronger job-acceptance intentions and behaviors (Cable & Judge,

1996; Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and are more likely to have stronger P-O fit perceptions after entering the organization as employees (Saks & Ashforth, 2002).

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits that perceptions contribute to the formation of attitudes, which are positive or negative beliefs about a particular object. In the context of the job pursuit process, P-O fit represents positive beliefs that a job candidate forms about a potential employer. Beliefs lead to the formation of intentions, which in turn motivate correspondent behaviors (Ajzen, 1991, 2002; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The TPB has explained candidate job-pursuit motivations and behaviors outside the internship context (Schreurs et al., 2009). Socialization theory posits uncertainty reduction is a motivational

mechanism for newcomers that drives proactive information-seeking behaviors, formation of social relationships with coworkers and superiors, and learning (e.g., Bauer et al., 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b).

Since interns have no prior work experience with the employer, positive P-O fit perceptions should motivate interns to reduce any remaining uncertainty about their longer-term interest in and potential career opportunities with the employer. Information that helps the intern assess opportunities for future employment with the organization is an important element of employer attractiveness and, consequently, an intern's job-pursuit motivation (Cable & Graham, 2000). Thus, we expect interns with strong P-O fit perceptions before starting their internships will be more likely to experience employer learning at the end of the internship.

Managers and coworkers in one's assigned department are key informants who can help interns reduce any uncertainty they may have about the potential employer (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Yet, interns may also solicit employer information from colleagues outside of their assigned department, to the extent they perceive outsiders to have relevant information and pose a lower social cost than insiders (Morrison & Vancouver, 2000). For instance, interns may view outsiders as having access to information about organizational practices with which insiders may be less familiar. Accordingly, we differentiate proactive information seeking about the employer that targets those inside and outside of one's assigned department. These uncertainty reduction efforts will be expressed as proactive behaviors that enable them to learn more about their internship employer. Those with weaker P-O fit when starting their internships are less likely to view their employer as a viable career destination and should be less inclined to engage in such proactive information-seeking behavior. Thus, P-O fit will motivate interns to reduce their uncertainty about future career prospects with their internship employers by proactively engaging in career information seeking. In effect, they will attempt to acquire knowledge to further validate their perceptions of P-O fit by engaging in career

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information-seeking behavior, which then reduces their uncertainty through employer learning. Therefore we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1a: Intern P-O fit will be positively related to employer learning.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Intern P-O fit will be positively related to proactive information seeking inside and outside the intern's assigned department.*

*Hypothesis 1c: Intern proactive information seeking inside and outside the intern's assigned department will mediate the relationship between intern P-O fit and employer learning.*

### **Organizational Actions: Social Aspects Tactics**

Employers use internships to attract and select the most talented job candidates (Baron & Kreps, 1999). Consequently, employers are likely to initiate activities that help interns learn about the organization and its concomitant career opportunities. Socialization tactics are organizational actions that help newcomers reduce uncertainty and thereby adjust to the contextual, technical, and social aspects of their roles (Bauer et al., 2007; G. R. Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Social aspects tactics in particular involve supervisors and mentors providing newcomers the social support and job-related information that facilitates their social acceptance (G. R. Jones, 1986). Since mentoring is a crucial component of successful career planning and exploration processes within organizations (Eby et al., 2005), we propose social aspects tactics are especially important for employer learning and subsequent job-acceptance intentions.

Specifically, we expect the relationship of social aspects tactics to learning will be partly mediated by interns' information seeking. This is because social aspects tactics should have both positive direct and indirect effects on employer learning. A direct effect will occur because supportive mentors and supervisors should provide interns career-related information about their potential employer (Baron & Kreps, 1999; G. R. Jones,

1986), independent of interns' behaviors. An indirect effect should be mediated through the intern's proactive information-seeking efforts. This is because in new work settings, proactive behavior has social costs (Morrison, 2002a, 2002b; Morrison & Vancouver, 2000). Interns will feel more socially accepted as they experience social aspects tactics with their assigned mentors and supervisors. This will reduce the social costs of proactivity and raise the likelihood they will engage in proactive information seeking. The relational nature of the informational exchanges initiated by mentors and supervisors also yield follow-up opportunities in which interns can ask questions and seek further information about the organization (Morrison, 2002b). In support of this view, socialization tactics predicted information seeking (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gordon, 1995), which mediated the relationship between socialization tactics and outcomes (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). Based on the preceding rationale, we predict:

*Hypothesis 2a: Social aspects tactics will be positively related to employer learning.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Social aspects tactics will be positively related to proactive information seeking.*

*Hypothesis 2c: Proactive information seeking will partly mediate the relationship between social aspects tactics and employer learning.*

### **P-O Fit—Social Aspects Tactics Interaction in MBA Intern Job Pursuit**

P-O fit research lacks an explication of situational moderators in the relationship of job candidates' fit perceptions and job-pursuit activity (e.g., job-acceptance intentions) (Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). We contend intern job pursuers' P-O fit and organizational actions (social aspects tactics) will have

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a multiplicative relationship with candidate job pursuit in the form of more intern effort and attention directed at proactively seeking information about the employer. Specifically, mentoring relationships initiated by the organization through social aspects tactics will provide interns who are predisposed to seek career information (as a consequence of their higher P-O fit) with even more opportunities to further develop their relationship network both inside and outside their departments, ask follow-up questions, and seek additional information.

For example, interns who are more proactive and who have access to mentors will be uniquely positioned to engage in more extensive

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*The relationship between P-O fit and learning should be stronger, or the slope more positive, for interns who are exposed to relatively more social aspects tactics.*

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informational exchanges with those mentors, and to ask them for further contacts within the organization, which in turn will yield additional informal mentoring relationships. So when P-O fit and social aspects tactics are both high, proactive information seeking about the employer should be highest. We expect that interns who are exposed to high levels of social aspects tactics will seek more information, especially those who already are predisposed to seek information. In other words, the relationship between P-O fit and learning should be stronger, or the slope more positive,

for interns who are exposed to relatively more social aspects tactics.

While low levels of social aspects tactics conceivably might increase attempts to gain knowledge about one's potential employer, it is more likely that a lack of employer initiative would be interpreted as disinterest in providing additional information about employment within the organization. Consequently if P-O fit and social aspects tactics are simultaneously low, interns should be relatively unmotivated to proactively seek out additional information about career opportunities with the employer. We expect that interns with little or no exposure to social aspects tactics will seek less information, especially if they already are less predisposed

to doing so. In other words, the relationship between P-O fit and information seeking will be weaker, or the slope less positive for interns who are exposed to relatively fewer social aspects tactics. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following interaction:

*Hypothesis 3: Social aspects tactics will moderate the relationship between P-O fit and proactive information seeking such that the relationship will be stronger (weaker) when the use of social aspects tactics is higher (lower).*

### **Employer Learning and Job Acceptance**

In socialization research, proactive newcomer behaviors such as information seeking, lead to learning, thereby reducing uncertainty. This learning and concomitant uncertainty reduction in turn leads to a number of positive newcomer outcomes, including higher intentions to remain with the employer (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Bauer et al., 2007; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). In an internship, the analogue of intention to remain is the job pursuer's intention to accept a job offer. We expect learning about the employer also will yield higher intentions to accept an offer. As intern job pursuers acquire information about a potential employer organization, their concomitant reduction in uncertainty should result in stronger job-acceptance intentions with their internship employers. Prior research has shown this linkage in an internship between general skill development and job-acceptance intentions (Beenen & Rousseau, 2010). We expect a similar linkage between more specific learning about the employer and job-acceptance intentions.

A link between learning about an employer and job acceptance is also consistent with the realistic job preview (RJPs) literature. RJPs reduce unrealistically high expectations among job candidates by ensuring they receive a balance of positive and negative information during recruitment (Breugh & Billings, 1988; Buckley et al., 2002). Though RJPs are shorter in duration than internships, we expect interns will be exposed to a similar

balance of positive and negative information than one might find in RJPs. As with RJPs, internships bestow job candidates with more complete information that enables them to make more informed job-acceptance decisions (Breugh & Starke, 2000), and benefits employers through reduced turnover (Earnest, Allen, & Landis, 2011).

Research has shown when an RJP is combined with an expectation lowering procedure (ELP) (an intervention that reduces applicants' high expectations about a potential employment arrangement), the highest level of retention is achieved (i.e., compared to control, RJP-only, and ELP-only conditions) (Buckley et al., 2002). A recent meta-analytic study showed employers who provide a balance of positive and negative information through RJPs are perceived as more honest than those who do not, resulting in higher retention (Earnest et al., 2011). Meta-analytic evidence also shows RJPs are more likely to increase job acceptance among applicants with no previous exposure to the job itself (Meglino, Ravlin, & DeNisi, 2000), which is generally the case with MBA interns.

Though we expect employer learning will be a function of both organizationally initiated socialization and intern-initiated information seeking (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007), we also expect employer learning will yield a balance of positive and negative information, much like an RJP. Learning about an employer through social interactions with colleagues in- and outside one's work unit should lead to more candid interpersonal exchanges about the organization. This would signal a sense of honesty in the social exchange between the intern and the employer, and should result in higher job-acceptance intentions (Earnest et al., 2011).

Consistent with the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991, 2002; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), it is important to establish an empirical link between interns' intentions and behaviors (Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). Meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated this link between behavioral intention and behavior ( $r = .22$ ) in TPB research (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Consequently, we expect job-acceptance intentions will

predict job-acceptance decisions. Establishing this link buttresses the practical importance and internal validity of our process model. While studies of job pursuit usually do not include actual job-acceptance decisions (e.g., Carless, 2005), the TPB generally has been supported in the job-pursuit process (e.g., Armitage & Conner, 2001; Scheurers et al., 2009). Consequently, we predict:

*Hypothesis 4: Intern job-acceptance intentions will mediate the relationship of employer learning to intern job-acceptance decisions.*

## Methods

### Research Context

MBA internships were selected as a research context because they are characteristically used by employers to select full-time employees, and by job candidates to select potential employers (Beenen & Rousseau, 2010; BusinessWeek, 2004). MBA interns typically complete their internships over 8–12 weeks during the summer and know their likelihood of receiving an offer after the internship is over.

This study's main sample included 106 MBA interns from three full-time MBA programs in the midwestern United States. Participants were 66 percent male and 34 percent female, compared to 73 percent male and 27 percent female for the population of the three schools. They had 5.7 years of work experience compared to 5.5 years for the population. They worked in the following industries: communication (3 percent), consumer products (11 percent), consulting (18 percent), financial services (21 percent), health care/pharmaceuticals (19 percent), high technology (17 percent), and manufacturing (11 percent). It is noteworthy that interns in the study had an average of 2.34 internship job offers, and the graduation placement rates for the three schools at the time of the study was 92 percent. Consequently, it is unlikely interns would have felt compelled to pursue

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*Learning about an employer through social interactions with colleagues in- and outside one's work unit should lead to more candid and interpersonal exchanges about the organization.*

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employment with what they might consider an undesirable internship employer.

### Procedure

Participants were recruited through e-mails sent to about 780 students enrolled in three full-time MBA programs. An email message with an Internet link to a survey was sent two to three weeks before the internship start date (time 1) ( $n = 140$ ), three weeks after the start date (time 2), and within two weeks after the end date (time 3) ( $n = 106$  for times 1, 2, 3). Data from these 106 participants were used to test Hypotheses 1–3. About nine months later (time 4), job-acceptance decision data were collected to test hypothesis 4 ( $n = 48$ ).

### Study Variables

All scale items are in the Appendix. Saks and Ashforth's (2002) four-item P-O fit scale was administered at time 1 ( $\alpha = .74$ ). Five social aspects items from Jones' (1986) socialization tactics scale were adapted to the MBA internship context and administered at time 2 ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Four proactive information-seeking scale items were developed for this study based on items Ashford and Black's (1996) proactive socialization scale. At time 2, two sets of two items respectively measured information seeking "inside my department" ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and "outside my department" ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Employer learning was measured at time 3 with a four-item scale assessing interns' knowledge of informal organizational structure, organizational processes, and career advancement and reward systems ( $\alpha = .73$ ) (e.g., "I learned what it takes to get promoted in this organization"). All the preceding items used six-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). For P-O fit, a "Don't know" category was included to ensure validity by allowing participants to rate their perceived pre-entry P-O fit only if they believed they had enough information to do so. Listwise deletion of items was used for "Don't know" responses when items were averaged. Participants who rated their degree of P-O fit using two or more of the scale items were included. No participants responded "Don't know" to more than two items.

Interns' job-acceptance intentions were measured at times 1 and 3 as follows: "Assume your summer employer has given you a full-time post-MBA offer, in a city where you want to live, with satisfactory pay. How likely are you to accept this offer?" (0 percent = no chance of accepting the offer to 100 percent = completely certain of accepting the offer). At time 4 (nine months after internships were completed), job-acceptance decisions (0 = offer rejected, 1 = offer accepted) were solicited from 80 participants who received job offers from their internship employers and who consented to a follow-up survey. Of these 80, there were 48 completed responses (45 percent).

### Control Variables

Schools in the study sample differ in their relative rankings and strengths. For instance, one school is known for its disciplinary strengths in marketing, another in operations. To account for such qualitative differences two dummy variables represented the three schools. Interns' interest in accepting a full-time job offer with the employer at time 1 also could have influenced their motivation to seek career information independent of their P-O fit perceptions. Consequently, we controlled for time 1 job-acceptance intentions. Interns who were more proactive also may have been more likely to engage in proactive information seeking. To control for this, we included the number of internship job offers as an indirect measure of intern proactive behavior. This assumes interns who were more proactive in their job search would be more likely to acquire more internship offers. The number of offers may also serve as a proxy for ability since general mental ability predicts number of job offers (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2010). Thus, the number of offers also helps control for the relationship of ability to job-pursuit behavior. Finally, we controlled for sex differences with a dummy variable.

### Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) ensured the measures corresponded to the *a priori* structure of the scales. A five-factor model (P-O fit, social aspects tactics, proactive

information seeking inside/outside, employer learning) had good fit given the small sample size ( $n = 106$ , comparative fit index [CFI] = .93, incremental fit index [IFI] = .93, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .086) and superior fit to both a four-factor model (with proactive information seeking as a single factor) (CFI = .81, IFI = .82, RMSEA = .11) and a one-factor model (CFI = .73, IFI = .73, RMSEA = .171).

### Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Hypothesis 3 was tested using moderation analysis and centered variables (Aiken & West, 1991). Hypothesis 4 was tested separately using both OLS regression and logistic regression for the dichotomous outcome (job offer acceptance).

Mediation requires a relationship be demonstrated between the independent variable and the mediator(s), and only the mediator(s) and the dependent variable (when controlling for the independent variable). A significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is not required for mediation with longitudinal data (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). As mediating processes become more distal, the strength of the association between independent and dependent variables typically decreases due to random factors and other competing causes (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). SPSS macros developed by Hayes (2012) and Hayes and Preacher (2012) were used to test mediation. The *MEDIATE* macro accommodates multiple mediating variables (Hypotheses 1c and 2c), while the *PROCESS* macro accommodates both continuous and dichotomous variables (Hypothesis 4) (i.e., job-acceptance decision). Both macros rely on bootstrapping to estimate the confidence interval of the indirect effects of the predictors through the mediators (*ab*). Bootstrapping avoids type I errors that can result from non-normal distributions of an indirect effect—which is a vulnerability of the Sobel (1982) test (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Mediation is

supported when the confidence interval for the indirect effects do not include zero. Given the smaller sample size ( $n = 48$ ) used to test Hypothesis 4, the indirect effect of employer learning through job-acceptance intentions was assessed for both 90 percent and 95 percent confidence intervals.

### Results

Table I displays descriptive statistics for study participants, and correlations and reliability coefficients for the study variables.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted intern pre-entry P-O fit and social aspects tactics would predict learning about the employer (H1a, H2a) and proactive information seeking (H1b, H2b). Hypotheses 1c and 2c predicted proactive information seeking would fully mediate the relationship of P-O fit to employer learning (H1c) and partially mediate the relationship of social aspects tactics to employer learning (H2c). Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2c were supported; 2b was supported (for inside information seeking only); and 1c was not supported. Table II shows the mediation analysis results. P-O fit and social aspects tactics were significantly related to employer learning (Model 1: P-O fit,  $B = .31$ ,  $t = 2.41$ ,  $p = .018$ , social aspects tactics:  $B = .31$ ,  $t = 4.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and to information-seeking behavior inside the assigned department (Model 2a: P-O fit:  $B = .41$ ,  $t = 2.25$ ,  $p = .027$ , social aspects tactics:  $B = .51$ ,  $t = 5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, only P-O fit was significantly related to information seeking outside the assigned department (Model 2b: P-O fit,  $B = .58$ ,  $t = 2.40$ ,  $p = .018$ ; social aspects tactics,  $B = .25$ ,  $t = 1.82$ ,  $p = .067$ ). This supports Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 2a but only supports 2b for inside information seeking, not outside information seeking.

For the conditions of mediation to be met, both P-O fit and social aspects tactics must be related to the mediators, and the relationship of the predictors to employer learning must be diminished (partial mediation) or insignificant (full mediation) with the mediators added to the model (Kenny et al., 1998; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Since social aspects tactics was not significantly related

**T A B L E I Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study Variables**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. P-O fit <sub>t1</sub>	5.02	.59	(.74)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Social aspects tactics <sub>t2</sub>	4.24	1.02	.28**	(.79)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Information seeking (inside) <sub>t2</sub>	4.66	1.15	.35***	.47***	(.87)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Information seeking (outside) <sub>t2</sub>	4.16	1.39	.27**	.28**	.62***	(.91)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Employer learning <sub>t3</sub>	4.46	.79	.26**	.44***	.47***	.31***	(.73)	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Job-acceptance intention <sub>t3</sub>	60%	31%	.22*	.25**	.19*	.08	.35***	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Job-acceptance decision <sub>t4</sub> (1 = yes)	45%	-	.24 <sup>+</sup>	.20	.19	.06	.27*	.54***	-	-	-	-	-
8. Number of offers	2.34	1.24	-.08	.01	.16 <sup>+</sup>	.17 <sup>+</sup>	.11	-.05	.23 <sup>+</sup>	-	-	-	-
9. Sex (1 = male)	66%	-	-.17 <sup>+</sup>	.04	-.02	-.13	.12	-.07	-.05	-.01	-	-	-
10. Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	74%	22%	.31**	.16 <sup>+</sup>	.15	.10	.08	.47***	.30*	.06	.05	-	-
11. School1	.48	.50	.01	.05	.12	-.07	-.02	-.07	-.13	-.23*	-.03	-.10	-
12. School2	.47	.50	.06	-.13 <sup>+</sup>	.05	.00	-.13	.16 <sup>+</sup>	.25 <sup>+</sup>	-.15	-.06	.01	-.31***

N = 112 to 140 for all variables except for job-acceptance decision (N = 50 to 53).

<sup>+</sup>p < .10.

\*p < .05.

\*\*p < .01.

\*\*\*p < .001.

Two-tailed tests: t1,2,3,4 = time1,2,3,4. Time 1 is three weeks before internship start date. Time 2 is three weeks after start date. Time 3 is two weeks after internship end date. Time 4 is nine months after internship end date. The Cronbach's alpha is displayed on the diagonal.

**TABLE II Hierarchical Regression Models for Testing Mediation of Information Seeking on the Relationship of P-O Fit and Social Aspects Tactics to Employer Learning**

(1) Employer learning <sub>t3</sub>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Controls</b>				
Sex	.29	.14	2.03	<b>.045</b>
Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.10	.06	1.79	.076
Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	-.00	.00	-1.12	.267
School 1	-.26	.14	-1.81	.073
School 2	-.12	.33	-.37	.713
<b>Predictors <math>\Delta R^2 = .24^{***}</math> Total <math>R^2 = .31^{***}</math> Adjusted <math>R^2 = .26</math></b>				
Pre-entry P-O fit <sub>t1</sub> (Hypothesis 1a)	.31	.13	2.41	<b>.018</b>
Social integration tactics <sub>t2</sub> (Hypothesis 2a)	.31	.07	4.32	<b>.000</b>
<b>(2a) Information seeking (inside)<sub>t2</sub></b>				
<b>Controls</b>				
Sex	.05	.21	.02	.797
Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.17	.08	.18	<b>.040</b>
Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	.00	.01	-.01	.950
School 1	.16	.20	.07	.437
School 2	.56	.48	.10	.242
<b>Predictors <math>\Delta R^2 = .28^{***}</math> Total <math>R^2 = .33^{***}</math> Adjusted <math>R^2 = .28</math></b>				
Pre-entry P-O fit <sub>t1</sub> (Hypothesis 1b)	.41	.18	2.28	<b>.027</b>
Social integration tactics <sub>t2</sub> (Hypothesis 2b)	.51	.10	5.10	<b>.000</b>
<b>(2b) Information seeking (outside)<sub>t2</sub></b>				
<b>Controls</b>				
Sex	-.37	.27	-1.36	.176
Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.23	.11	2.06	<b>.043</b>
Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	.00	.01	.09	.932
School 1	-.47	.27	-1.77	.080
School 2	.01	.63	.02	.984
<b>Predictors <math>\Delta R^2 = .11^{**}</math> Total <math>R^2 = .19^{***}</math> Adjusted Total <math>R^2 = .13</math></b>				
Pre-entry P-O fit <sub>t1</sub> (Hypothesis 1b)	.58	.24	2.40	<b>.018</b>
Social integration tactics <sub>t2</sub> (Hypothesis 2b)	.25	.14	1.85	.067
<b>(3) Employer learning<sub>t3</sub></b>				
<b>Controls</b>				
Sex	.28	.14	1.93	.057
Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.08	.06	1.29	.200
Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	-.00	.00	-1.12	.265
School 1	-.29	.14	-2.05	<b>.043</b>
School 2	-.23	.33	-.70	.487
Pre-entry P-O fit <sub>t1</sub>	.24	.13	1.86	.066
Social integration tactics <sub>t2</sub>	.22	.08	2.75	<b>.007</b>
<b>Mediators <math>\Delta R^2 = .05^*</math> Total <math>R^2 = .36^{***}</math> Adjusted Total <math>R^2 = .30</math></b>				
Information seeking (inside dept.) <sub>t2</sub> (Hypotheses 1c, 2c)	.19	.08	2.26	<b>.026</b>
Information seeking (outside dept.) <sub>t2</sub> (Hypotheses 1c, 2c)	-.02	.06	-.28	.781

*N* = 106.

\**p* < .05.

\*\**p* < .01.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

Unstandardized regression coefficients reported.

to information seeking outside the assigned department, mediation for Hypothesis 2c only could be tested for information seeking inside the assigned department. When the hypothesized mediators (proactive information seeking inside and outside the assigned department) were entered into the model, information seeking inside the department predicted employer learning (outside information seeking did not) (Model 3:  $B = .19$ ,  $t = 2.26$ ,  $p = .026$ ), and the coefficients were weaker and no longer significant for P-O fit (Model 3:  $B = .24$  (vs.  $.31$ ),  $t = 1.86$ ,  $p = .066$ ), and weaker though still significant for social aspects tactics (Model 3:  $B = .22$  (vs.  $.31$ ),  $t = 2.75$ ,  $p = .007$ ). The 95 percent confidence intervals for indirect effects of P-O fit through inside information seeking included zero ( $-.003$  to  $.188$ ) and the confidence interval for indirect effects of social aspects tactics did not include zero ( $.011$  to  $.193$ ). Overall, this result did not support Hypothesis 1c and supported Hypothesis 2c for information seeking inside the assigned department, but not for information seeking outside the assigned department.

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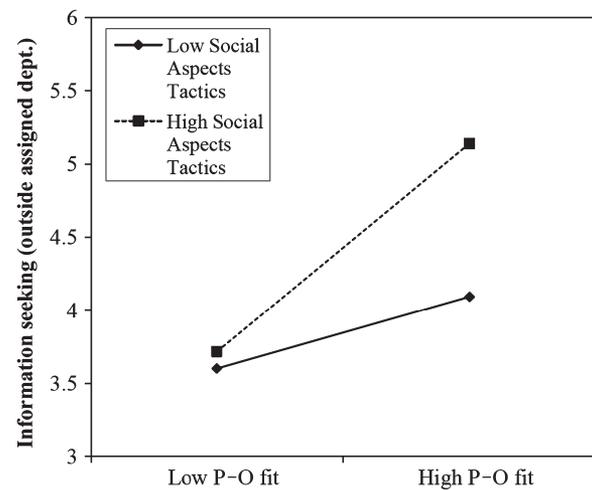
*When both P-O fit and social aspects tactics were higher, interns were more likely to proactively seek information from those outside their assigned department; they were no more likely to do so with those inside their department.*

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Hypothesis 3 predicted an interaction between P-O fit and social aspects tactics as related to proactive information seeking. This was partly supported with a simple moderating effect ( $B = .39$ ,  $t = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ) only for information seeking outside the intern's assigned department as displayed in Figure 2. In other words, when both P-O fit and

social aspects tactics were higher, interns were more likely to proactively seek information from those outside their assigned department; they were no more likely to do so with those inside their department. Since information seeking outside the assigned department did not predict employer learning, it was not necessary to test for mediated moderation.

Hypothesis 4 predicted job-acceptance intentions will mediate the relationship between employer learning and



**FIGURE 2.** Interaction of P-O Fit and Social Aspects Tactics on Intern Information Seeking (Outside the Assigned Department)

job-acceptance decisions. This was tested using data from 48 responses from participants (from schools 1 and 2) who responded to surveys for all four time periods, including the time 4 survey which measured job-acceptance decisions. The PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012) was used to test for the indirect effect of the employer learning through job-acceptance intention. Mediation is supported when the confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero (MacKinnon et al., 2002). Given the relatively small sample size, tests at both the 90 percent and 95 percent confidential interval levels were conducted. Three models were used to test for mediation (Kenny et al., 1998; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Since the mediator was a continuous variable and the dependent variable was a dichotomous variable, both logistic and OLS regression models were used. Table III displays the results and coefficients for each model. First, the direct effect was tested with a logistic regression where job-acceptance decision (1 = job offer accepted, 0 = job offer not accepted) was regressed on the controls and employer learning. For Model 1, employer learning predicted job-acceptance decisions at time 4 (nine months later) though the coefficient was only significant at the  $p < .10$  level ( $B = 1.18$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.26$ ,  $p = .055$ ). This model accurately predicted 77.1 percent

**TABLE III** Test for Mediation of Job-Acceptance Intentions on the Relationship of Employer Learning to Job-Acceptance Decisions

Model		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>(1) Job-acceptance decision<sub>t4</sub></b>					
<b>Controls</b>					
	Sex	.94	.78	2.56	.229
	Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.57	.35	1.77	.099
	Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	.05	.02	1.05	.025
	School	.29	.73	1.34	.690
<b>Predictor <math>\Delta R^2 = .06^*</math> Total <math>R^2 = .29^{***}</math></b>					
	Employer learning <sub>t3</sub>	1.18	.62	3.26	<b>.055</b>
<b>(2) Job-acceptance intention<sub>t3</sub></b>					
<b>Controls</b>					
	Sex	-13.81	7.70	-	.797
	Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.21	3.10	-	.040
	Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	.80	.20	-	.950
	School	12.61	7.39	-	.437
<b>Predictor <math>\Delta R^2 = .05^+</math> Total <math>R^2 = .34^{***}</math> Adjusted <math>R^2 = .26</math></b>					
	Employer learning <sub>t3</sub>	10.80	5.99	-	<b>.078</b>
<b>(3) Job-acceptance decision<sub>t4</sub></b>					
<b>Controls</b>					
	Sex	.66	.86	1.93	.447
	Number of offers <sub>t1</sub>	.76	.42	2.13	.072
	Job-acceptance intention <sub>t1</sub>	.03	.03	1.03	.287
	School	1.19	.92	3.30	.196
	Employer learning <sub>t3</sub>	.75	.69	2.12	.276
<b>Mediator <math>\Delta R^2 = .10^*</math> Total <math>R^2 = .39^{**}</math></b>					
	Job-acceptance intention <sub>t3</sub>	.05	.02	1.05	<b>.022</b>

*N* = 48 except for Model 2(a).

<sup>+</sup>*p* < .10.

\**p* < .05.

\*\**p* < .01.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Models 1 and 3 use logistic regression. Model 2 uses OLS regression. Job-acceptance decision is a dichotomous variable (0 = no, 1 = yes). Job-acceptance intention is a continuous variable (0 to 100% probability of accepting a job offer).

Cox & Snell  $R^2$  displayed for Models 1 and 3.

of job-acceptance decisions, compared to 66.7 percent for the model that included only controls. For Model 2, job-acceptance intention was regressed on the controls and employer learning using OLS regression. Employer learning predicted 5 percent of the variance in job-acceptance intentions, though the coefficient was only significant at the  $p < .10$  level ( $B = 10.81$ ,  $t = 1.8$ ,  $p = .078$ ). For the larger sample of participants who responded to the

time 1–3 surveys ( $n = 106$ ), employer learning predicted job-acceptance decisions at a more stringent significance level ( $B = 15.15$ ,  $t = 4.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, for Model 3, when job-acceptance intention was added to Model 1, employer learning no longer predicted job acceptance ( $B = .75$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .276$ ), though job-acceptance intentions did ( $B = .05$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .022$ ). Model 3 accurately predicted 83.3 percent of job-acceptance

decisions, compared to 77.1 percent for Model 1. The 90 percent confidence interval for the indirect effect of employer learning through job-acceptance intention did not include zero (.07 to .97), though the 95 percent confidence interval did include zero (-.07 to 1.12). Given the small sample size, these results support Hypothesis 4 at the  $p < .10$  significance level, though not at the  $p < .05$  level.

## Discussion

Our results generally support our model of intern job pursuit and suggest the processes that influence job-acceptance decisions are complex. Results indicate job-acceptance intentions are determined by interns learning about their potential career opportunities within a particular employer. Learning about the employer is developed through both information seeking initiated by the intern (and motivated by perceptions of P-O fit), and social aspects tactics initiated by the employer. P-O fit and social aspects tactics also multiplicatively impact information seeking, targeting those outside the intern's assigned department.

Another finding of this study is that job-acceptance intentions for interns predicted job-acceptance decisions.

### *Implications and Directions for Future Research*

P-O fit and organizational socialization perspectives heretofore have not been integrated to understand job acceptance for interns, even though both literatures are based on a person-situation theoretical perspective (e.g., Bauer et al., 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Our model integrated these perspectives, showing job acceptance for MBA interns was influenced by their environment (social aspects tactics), their individual beliefs (pre-entry P-O fit), and on-the-job behavior (information seeking). Our results also showed person-environment interactions (P-O fit  $\times$  social aspects tactics) amplified interns'

motivation to seek employer information outside their assigned department. These findings are consistent with interactional organizational behavior (e.g., Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981), P-O fit (Chatman, 1989; Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), organizational socialization (Bauer et al., 2007), and job mobility traditions (Ng et al., 2007). Future research should continue to model how persons and situations interactively determine job acceptance as we have attempted in this study.

This study showed that for interns P-O fit can be an antecedent, not just a consequence of proactive behavior (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). The motivating effect of pre-entry P-O fit was independent of the effect of social aspects tactics and candidates' pre-entry intentions to accept full-time job offers.

Organizational socialization theory presumes newcomers try to reduce their uncertainty in a new role by learning about the employing organization (e.g., Bauer et al., 2007; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). Socialization tactics are intended to increase learning and reduce uncertainty, resulting in positive socialization outcomes (e.g., intention to remain) (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b). Viewing job-acceptance intentions in the MBA internship context as a positive socialization outcome (analogous to intention to remain in conventional roles), we posited and found employer learning predicted interns' acceptance intentions.

Consistent with socialization theory, we also showed social aspects tactics were positively related to information seeking inside the assigned department, and employer learning. We were not able to distinguish whether interns sought information or learned about both positive and negative aspects of various employer characteristics. To do so was beyond the scope of the current study. It is likely, since learning in this study is a function of social aspects tactics and proactive information seeking, that these information sources provided interns with information of different types and valences. Though we expect, based on the realistic job preview literature, that

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*Our results generally support our model of intern job pursuit and suggest the processes that influence job-acceptance decisions are complex.*

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both positive and “realistic” negative information will be positively related to job-acceptance intentions and behaviors (Buckley et al., 2002; Earnest et al., 2011), a variety of positive and negative information not captured in this study is accessible in an internship. We suspect under some conditions, either positive or negative information could reduce job-acceptance intentions. For instance, positive information conveyed through disingenuous means (e.g., a mentor perceived as “phony”), or negative information obtained without the employer’s intent (e.g., “unsanctioned” information from a disgruntled former employee) could dissuade an intern from job-pursuit activities with that employer. Upon discovering such information, it is feasible that interns who enter the organization with stronger perceptions of P-O fit could end their internships with weaker perceptions of P-O fit, and little or no intention of continued employment. Such factors could weaken the otherwise strong relationship between pre- and post-entry fit ( $r = .54$ ) shown in prior research (Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Given that interns who are self-selected into organizations likely start their jobs with more positive than negative impressions about the employer, on-the-job experiences that reverse this balance may deter them from continuing to pursue employment with the organization. Relationships between the valence of the content of intern learning and job acceptance, and the boundary conditions of these relationships and potential moderating influence on the relationship of pre and post-entry P-O fit, are potential areas for future research.

Information seeking that targeted insiders partially mediated the relationship between both P-O fit and social aspects tactics, and employer learning. These results suggest a key reason why social aspects tactics are related to employer learning is because they increase the extent to which interns seek out employer-related information. Social aspects tactics may have had a direct effect on interns’ learning about other important employer features not measured in this study, such as values, culture, history, and politics (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Moreover, some organizations may have

proactively given interns employer-related information through means other than social aspects tactics.

The distinct patterns of results for interns seeking information *inside* versus *outside* one’s assigned department are particularly interesting in several respects. First, social aspects tactics were only related to interns’ inside information seeking (i.e., within the intern’s assigned work unit), and not to outside information seeking. From a social network perspective, social aspects tactics may have facilitated the process of building closer relationships with this core group of managers and mentors in their own departments, while relationships outside the department were less developed and on the periphery of their network (Borgatti & Everett, 1999). Furthermore, the social costs of seeking inside information may have been higher than those of seeking outside information (Morrison & Vancouver, 2000). Close relationships with insiders brought about by social aspects tactics would have lowered these social costs. Since the social costs of seeking outside information already were relatively lower, social aspects tactics may have had a negligible effect on seeking such information by interns already predisposed to do so.

Second, only *inside* information seeking was related to employer learning, and partly mediated the relationship to employer learning. More trusting relationships with an intern’s core group of managers and mentors in their own departments may have yielded more subjectively valued employer information, while information gathered from their less trustworthy, peripheral group of outsiders may have contributed information viewed as less subjectively valued.

Third, the interaction between P-O-fit and social aspects tactics as related to information seeking was supported only for information seeking *outside* one’s assigned department. It appears motivation to reduce uncertainty activated by P-O fit along with social aspects

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*A key reason why social aspects tactics are related to employer learning is because they increase the extent to which interns seek out employer-related information.*

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tactics provided extraordinary opportunities to extend the range of the information network that interns developed (Morrison, 2002b). The same combination of intern motivation and organizational actions provided only additive, and perhaps redundant, opportunities to develop relationships inside the assigned work unit. Perhaps the smaller size of the core network inside the department limited the potential for further information-seeking opportunities, while the more expansive peripheral network outside the department posed no such constraints. In other words, interns may have viewed the assigned department as a redundant

information source beyond a certain threshold, while the broader organization provided a higher threshold for such redundancy. Though inside information seeking seemed particularly important to employer learning, it is important for interns to be comfortable seeking information from outside of their department for their successful adjustment. Since prior research has not distinguished between inside and outside information seeking for interns, future research should examine both the causes and effects of interns' information seeking inside and outside the assigned work unit.

Finally, we found support for the mediation hypothesis that employer learning predicted job acceptance decisions nine months later as mediated by job-acceptance intentions. It is worth noting the strong correlation between job-acceptance intention and acceptance ( $r = .55, p < .0001$ ; two-

tailed,  $n = 48$ ) is consistent with correlations between these variables in another study with graduate interns (Cable & Judge, 1996:  $r = .48, n = 44$ ), and a larger study with undergraduate interns (Resick, Baltes, & Shantz, 2007;  $r = .38, n = 273$ ). Future researchers may want to investigate job pursuit for interns and other contingent workers using a broader operationalization of employer learning.

## Practical Implications

This study has important implications for individuals engaged in job pursuit through internships or other contingent work arrangements, and for employers interested in attracting and retaining these individuals. For job pursuers, taking initiative and proactively seeking information inside one's assigned department is a primary source of learning about their employer. After all, the internship is a two-way street where the intern assesses a potential employer, and the employer evaluates the intern as a potential employee. Seeking information outside one's assigned department did not lead to employer learning. Seeking information from departmental outsiders may contribute to forms of learning not measured in this study (e.g., learning about organizational culture).

For employers, our results show social aspects tactics were an especially effective way to increase intern learning and access to employer information, and ultimately post-internship job-acceptance intentions. This highlights the role of activities that enhance interns' employer learning for employers interested in attracting potential employees through internships. Human resource practitioners should consider other ways to stimulate intern learning, including face-to-face and virtual provision of career planning and information sessions, formal and informal intern career mentoring, and other cost-effective approaches modeled after career management programs for permanent workers (e.g., Eby, Allen, & Brinley, 2005). Human resource managers may also consider implementing programs to monitor intern learning in conjunction with monitoring job offers, acceptances, and rejections related to the internship program.

Since P-O fit predicted information seeking both inside and outside the assigned department, and employer learning, organizations also could consider implementing programs to assess and increase P-O fit before the start of the internship. A validated measure of P-O fit may serve as a useful screening tool prior to an interview. P-O fit could be enhanced through increased information

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*Since prior research has not distinguished between inside and outside information seeking for interns, future research should examine both the causes and effects of interns' information seeking inside and outside the assigned work unit.*

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about the organization, its norms and values through formal and informal channels (e.g., interviews, information sessions, website recruiting materials). The importance of P-O fit is further highlighted by the fact that it interacted with social aspects tactics to amplify interns' motivation to seek employer information outside the assigned work unit. Though not measured in this study, it is possible that establishing connections with people outside the work unit may help interns who accept positions to have a broader awareness of organizational resources and operations when they start their jobs.

Human resource professionals may want to consider recruiting interns who are most likely to seek career-related information once selected into an internship program or other similar employment relationship. Individuals with more proactive personalities (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999) or who are more conscientious and extroverted (Barrick & Mount, 1991) should be more likely to talk to other individuals about career opportunities and paths potentially available to them. If personality is not formally considered in the recruitment process or is not used in the selection process, it is important for human resource professionals and managers to be cognizant that individuals will likely vary on those dimensions that will be closely related to information seeking and that this information-seeking behavior will likely affect the job-pursuit process for interns.

In situations where new hires with valuable skills are recruited through multiple programs, including internships, HR managers should consider monitoring the performance of new hires recruited through each program. Our findings and the socialization literature suggest that individuals who had the opportunity to learn about their employer through an internship or other employment preview program will be better prepared to perform (e.g., Bauer et al., 2007), once they are engaged in more permanent employment.

### **Study Limitations**

This study relied on self-report measures, introducing potential for common method

biases. Nonetheless, self-reports were appropriate for the constructs in this study. Steps were taken to reduce the potential threat of common method biases in our data (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), including random ordering of scale items in each survey and a longitudinal design. Support for the a priori factor structure of our measurement model and the P-O fit  $\times$  social aspects tactics interaction suggest common method variance is not a validity threat in our study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

This study did not distinguish complementary versus supplementary fit since it was the first to explore pre-entry P-O fit and job pursuit for intern job candidates. Future research may consider more specific operationalizations of fit, as well as the antecedents of fit. For example, interns who view their employers as instrumental to getting a job offer with a different employer (Boswell, Boudreau, & Dunford, 2004) (complementary fit) may be less proactive about searching for career information during internships than those who view their employers as potential career destinations (supplementary fit).

It is possible that perceptions of fit led interns to seek information that confirmed their perceptions (i.e., interns with relatively higher [lower] perceptions of fit may have sought out more positive [negative] information about their potential employer). This sort of confirmation bias shown to be prevalent in decision making (Nickerson, 1998) is possible among interns, and may have affected interns' job-acceptance decisions. Future researchers may consider modeling potential confirmation bias in the job-pursuit process. Regardless, our results show perceptions of fit increase information seeking, learning, and job-acceptance intentions.

Our employer learning measure was limited, as it did not capture HR practices such as

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*It is important for human resource professionals and managers to be cognizant that individuals will likely vary on those dimensions that will be closely related to information seeking and that this information-seeking behavior will likely affect the job-pursuit process for interns.*

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benefits policies, training and development programs, or other organizational attributes such as culture. Nonetheless, it covered a reasonably broad set of employer features, including “how different parts of the organization operate,” “informal organizational structure” and “how managers are compensated.”

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*Organizations interested in recruiting MBA interns should focus on intern P-O fit, formalized socialization mechanisms, and providing interns with adequate information about their career prospects within the organization.*

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Other factors not explicitly controlled for in this study may have contributed to intern job acceptance and employer learning, such as personality (e.g., conscientiousness), prior information-seeking behavior, or employer quality. For instance, MBA internships may vary in quality to the extent that employers rely on them as a key hiring mechanism. Alternatively, higher-ability interns may have been given opportunities to learn outside the reach of those viewed as lower in ability. Nonetheless, our sample was drawn from schools with relatively comparable populations, and we controlled for the number of job offers, which is an imperfect proxy for intern ability (higher-ability interns should have more offers).

Finally, our analysis linking job-acceptance intentions to behaviors relied on a small sample ( $n = 48$ ). Nonetheless, the correlation between job acceptance intentions and decisions in our study was moderately strong ( $r = .51$ ) compared to correlations of these variables in meta-analytic research on job

pursuit ( $\rho = .33$ ) (Chapman et al., 2005), and to the relationship of intentions and behaviors in the broader theory of planned behavior literature ( $\rho = .22$ ) (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

## Conclusion

This study makes important contributions to theory and practice related to job pursuit. The conceptual model supports key tenets of P-O fit and socialization theory—and integrates propositions from these traditionally distinct literatures. Our results show a complex process such that interns’ P-O fit, proactive information seeking and organizational social aspects tactics influence their learning about a particular employer, which in turn influences their job-acceptance intentions and decisions. Organizations interested in recruiting MBA interns should focus on intern P-O fit, formalized socialization mechanisms, and providing interns with adequate information about their career prospects within the organization.

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## APPENDIX

**Pre-entry (time 1)***Person-Organization Fit (Saks & Ashforth, 2002)*

1. My values match or fit the values of employees in this organization.
2. The organization will meet my career development needs
3. My personality fits the personality or image of the organization.
4. The organization is a good match for me.

**Post-entry (time 2)***Social Integration Tactics (G. R. Jones, 1986)*

1. I've been made to feel my skills and abilities are important in this organization.
2. My colleagues have been supportive of me personally.
3. My colleagues have gone out of their way to help me adjust to this organization.

*Information Seeking (Adapted from Ashford & Black, 1996)*

1. I talk to people inside my department to learn how their careers have developed.
2. I start conversations with people inside my department to learn about typical career paths in the organization.
3. I talk to people outside my department to learn how their careers have developed.
4. I start conversations with people outside my department to learn about typical career paths in the organization.

**Post-internship (time 3)***Employer Learning*

1. I learned what it takes to get promoted in this organization.
2. I learned about the informal structure of the organization.
3. I learned how managers are compensated in this organization.
4. I learned about how different parts of the organization operate.

*Intention to Accept a Full-Time Offer (also asked at time 1 as a control)*

Assume your summer employer already has given you a full-time post-MBA offer, in a city where you want to live, with satisfactory pay. Given what you know now, how likely are you to accept this offer?

\_\_\_\_% My estimated likelihood of accepting this offer

(Answer between 0 and 100: 0 = definitely wouldn't accept, 100 = definitely would accept)

**Post-internship (time 4)***Job-Acceptance Decision (nine months after time 3)*

Did you receive a full-time job offer from your internship employer? (yes or no) If yes, did you accept the offer? (yes or no)

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