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REFERENCES AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ASSESSMENT STAGE OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

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Abstract
This study was aimed at reviewing the use of references and social media as assessment methods during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. Studies have shown both to be fairly poor predictors for future performance, although both are quite frequently used. Interviews were conducted with ten human resource managers to review what using the methods provided them with as well as how references and social media were being used as assessment tools during the recruitment process.

The human resource managers that were interviewed tended to used references in a structured and methodical way as well as understanding the information they provide is often somewhat unreliable. Meanwhile the use of social media as an assessment method was not at all structured. Although the managers may have understood that the information gathered through social media is not necessarily reliable it was still used in an unstructured way to assess applicants.

These results show that while the use of both references and social media as assessment methods can be improved, there is a substantial difference in their current quality of used when compared to academic findings. While using references to assess applicants is in line with academia, social media use for assessing applicants is a long way behind.

Keywords: References, social media, assessment methods, recruitment process
Declaration of Research Work Integrity

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature of any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

By signing the present document I confirm and agree that I have read RU’s ethics code of conduct and fully understand the consequences of violating these rules in regards of my thesis.

Date and place  Kennitala  Signature
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1. Introduction

Recruitment can be a simple concept, if an organization has a need for an additional employee. The organization then locates a person that is considered able to do the job in question, and that is that. Recruiting a new employee is not a difficult process, but recruiting the right employee can be tougher. It has been shown that hiring the wrong person for a job can be both expensive and disruptive for an organization (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). When gathering information on applicants it may be easy to assume that the more information you have, the easier it is to assess the applicant. The problem is that there are many factors that come into play when using information to assess applicants, such as where it comes from and if the same information is available for all applicants. This paper will examine two different assessment methods - references and social media - and review how they are being used during the assessment stage of the recruitment process.

Two employees with comparable education, field of work and work experience are not necessarily equal job performers (Armstrong, 2009). There are other factors to consider such as the applicant’s personality. For example, a gregarious person will likely perform better as a public speaker than a reserved person would, although both may be equally qualified to communicate the material (Ployhart, 2006). Another factor is the person-organization fit, which is the fit between the applicant and the present organizational culture. A worker who does not fit the organizational culture may not have the same commitment and satisfaction to his job as others at the organization may have. This can result in that worker performing worse at their job than his abilities on paper may dictate (O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Dalal, 2007; Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Because of these additional factors which are difficult to assess from a CV alone, it may not be the best option to hire the applicant with looks the most appealing at first glance. Therefore, to increase the chance of choosing the best employee available a, professional and comprehensive recruitment process with valid methods is key (Armstrong 2009; Bjarnadóttir, 2012).

A professional and comprehensive recruitment process involves the use of assessment methods, among other stages. There are various assessment methods, such as interviews and different tests. The individual focus of methods often differs, where different methods are used to assess different aspects of an applicant (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Armstrong, 2009; Bjarnadóttir, 2012). The main focus of this paper will be on the use of two particular assessment methods: references and social media. These methods may not function in the same way and could even be seen as vastly different. On the one hand, references tend to be
received either orally or written from previous employers. Social media on the other hand is accessed electronically, and is in most instances presented by the applicant. They do, however, often share a common purpose. Both methods are used to gather information without involving the applicant (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). Usually their main focus is to gather information on personality and personality traits, but they are also often used to confirm information presented by the applicant himself, such as through his application (Taylor, Pajo, Cheung & Stringfield, 2004; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth & Junco, 2013). Another aspect they have in common is that neither references nor social media have been shown to be reliable when assessing future performance. Studies have shown both methods to have below average correlation between job performance and the information they provide (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013). Nevertheless, both methods are regularly used during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. During the process Cranet surveys have shown references to be used around 90% of the time, while social media is used around 33% of the time. This is quite substantial use when compared to their below average performance prediction ability (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). The regular use of these methods, in spite of studies regarding them as relatively poor predictors for future performance, is somewhat contradictory. Because of that the main goal of this paper is to examine the use of references and social media during the recruitment process and try to gather information on the reasons for their common use.

The first chapter of the theoretical framework of this paper will be going into the reasons why and how professional and comprehensive recruitment processes can benefit organizations. In the second chapter, the focus will be on the different factors that have to be taken into consideration when assessing applicants, such as their practical and cognitive abilities. The third chapter will handle biases and discuss how biases can affect neutral decisions when assessing applicants. The fourth chapter is on various assessment methods, in particular the use of references and social media during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. Finally, the fifth chapter of the theoretical framework presents the objectives and research questions of the paper. The research on the common use of references and social media during the recruitment process is done by conducting ten interviews. During the interviews, various human resource managers discuss their use of the two assessment methods, references and social media.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The reason for using a comprehensive recruitment process

A recruitment process includes the steps an organization takes when hiring a new employee. Although the recruitment process for an organization can be short, a comprehensive recruitment process has certain stages that have to be fulfilled. The process tends to begin with the decision of whether there is a need for a new employee and ending with the hiring of an applicant. A comprehensive recruitment process can be divided into six stages, as can be seen in figure 1. These six stages are not a finite result, as the process has been presented in various forms over the years. Regardless, the fundamental content of these stages has usually been the same (Armstrong, 2009).

![Figure 1: The recruitment process (Armstrong, 2009; Bjarnadóttir, 2012)](image)

During the first step the need for a new employee is assessed. It may not be necessary to hire a new employee every time a job needs to be done. There are other methods available, such as dividing the tasks between current employees or even outsourcing them. After examining all available options, the result may be that hiring is necessary. In the second step the need for a new employee has been confirmed. Then it is time to conduct a job analysis where the tasks and responsibilities of the job, as well as the attributes an employee needs to possess for optimal performance at the job in question, are listed. After a job analysis has been conducted a job description can be created based on the outcome of the analysis. At the end of the recruitment process, the applicant which is hired may not necessarily possess all that the job analysis requires. Under those circumstances the organization will have to provide the employee with training for those requirements that are not fulfilled. The third step of the process focuses on sourcing a pool of applicants. A greater number of applicants increases the hiring options available and therefore increases the likelihood of finding a good fit for the job and the organization. The fourth step focuses on choosing assessment methods such as interviews and tests that will provide the organization with the information needed to make an informed decision and find the applicant best suited for the job at hand. The amount and types of assessment methods may vary, depending on the nature of the job. During the fifth step, the applicants are assessed by using the assessment methods chosen in the fourth step. The assessment usually starts by screening all the applicants and selecting those that look like the best fit for the job. After that will those selected be subject to further assessment by different
assessment methods. The sixth and final step is the hiring and the trial period of the applicant that was considered to be the best overall fit for the job and the organization (Armstrong, 2009; Fernández-Aráoz, Groysberg & Nohria, 2009).

There is a consensus by most academics that it is useful to follow the stages of the recruitment process when planning on recruiting a new employee (Armstrong, 2009). Nevertheless, there a divide between assessment methods academics propose to be used and those that organizations commonly choose to use during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. Studies have shown many managers to disregard more complex methods and new findings and rather keep to their trusted methods when assessing applicants. This has resulted in organizations today still using generic interviews, relying on gut feeling and even just settling on the first choice that comes along (Fernández-Aráoz, Groysberg & Nohria, 2009). Many have attributed this divide to the increased technical aspect of staffing and the often complex presentation of new findings (Rynes, McNatt & Bretz, 1999; Rynes, Brown & Colbert, 2002; Terpstra & Rozell, 1997). This is often the reason, but there are other factors that contribute to the use of these older methods. Certain methods that have been shown to be effective can often be both expensive and time consuming (Furnham, 2008). Certain organizations, especially those in the public sector, may often be handicapped and unable to use optimal methods because of limited time and funds. Additionally, public organizations tend to be required to follow legislation, which may require certain steps to be followed during recruitment and emphasis on information disclosure, such as reliance on educational qualifications which are easy to justify as assessment tools (Ballam, 2002; Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

Even though managers keep using the assessment methods they have experience of, it does not necessarily mean they do not trust other methods shown to be good predictors of performance. In a study conducted by Adrian Furnham (2008) on HR professional’s beliefs and knowledge of assessment techniques and psychometric tests, the majority of more technical methods such as cognitive ability tests were seen as very valid methods. The belief participants had of their validity received respectable ratings with some topping more widely used methods such as references (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Meanwhile, their practicality and cost ratings produced the opposite outcome where they tended to lag behind methods more traditionally used (Furnham, 2008). Methods that are considered to be less valid and less accepted, but are considered cheaper, seem to be used more frequently. These are methods such as references and biodata like applications (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015).
Considering these findings above, it may be assumed that it is not the distrust of the validity of other methods that is standing in way of the use of more complex assessment methods, but their perceived cost, practicality and complexity. It may even be theorized that because of these factors, HR managers are not familiarizing themselves with new research. That in turn would result in the aforementioned gap between academic findings and practical use. Studies have shown that companies that follow up on new findings in the recruitment field tend to have a competitive advantage on those that avoid new findings and exclusively use their old methods. Therefore, it is worthwhile for managers to follow a good recruitment process for staffing; regardless of cost, practicality and complexity (Rynes, Brown & Colbert, 2002; Ployhart, 2006).

There may be other reasons for managers to frequently use assessment methods such as references instead of cognitive ability tests in their recruitment processes. Even though cognitive ability tests have been shown to be better predictors for future performance than many other assessment methods, they are not perfect predictors (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Managers may find the sometimes inaccurate recruitment process to not be worth time and money that has to be spent on it. The reality is that when organizations are hiring they are unable most of the time to safely predict the future performance of employees. Humans are very complex and their performance can be affected by a multitude of factors, such as their relationships at home and at work, their personalities as well as their competencies. The perception recruiters may have of individuals can be heavily influenced by their current state of mind. A study by Lyubomirsky, King & Diener (2005) shows there to be a correlation between positive effects and increased favorable characteristics such as skills, behaviors and sociability. Another study by Zelenski, Murphy and Jenkins (2008) focused on the relationship between happiness and productivity. The outcome of that study supported their hypothesis and specifically showed the correlation between positive effects and productivity. All of these ever changing factors are often affected by outside influences that organizations are usually unable to control. This shows that no matter how sophisticated the assessment methods are, there can never be a perfect prediction (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015).

An inability to perfectly predict is simply the reality of staffing as long as humans are a part of the process (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005; Zelenski, Murphy & Jenkins, 2008). Regardless, it is not a valid reason to disregard new research results relating to the effectiveness and predictability of assessment methods in the recruitment process. Research has still proven the validity of the statement that a good recruitment process equipped with
valid assessment methods is able to limit the uncertainty of the future performance of a new employee (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Bjarnadóttir, 2012). Merely the opportunity of limiting the chance of a wrong hire can be valuable. Peer-reviewed scholarly findings that improve the accuracy of the information gathered during the recruitment process should therefore be welcomed. They do increase the prediction power of the organization’s assessment of applicants to help them find the best one available.

It can be expensive to go through all the stages of the recruitment process when hiring a new employee. The cost of the recruitment process is based on a multitude of factors, such as the time it takes to gather and assess all applicants, the training costs for the one hired and the reduced productivity that tends to result from a new employee (Rollag, Parise & Cross, 2012; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). A 2006 study by Phani Tej Adidam showed the cost of employee turnover to be between 25% and 250% of the employee’s yearly salary. It is also expensive to replace the employee. A 2003 learning curve study conducted by the Mellon Corp further showed the decreased productivity attributed to the learning curve of a new job can cost a company between 1% and 2.5% of its total revenues. The learning period depends naturally on the job type, the ability of the employee to learn new things as well as the reception he receives at the organization. However, the average period for an employee to reach full productivity at a new job can range from 8 weeks and up to 26 weeks, which is quite some time in the fast paced modern world (Williams, 2003). The damage can be limited with a good knowledge retention strategy, but some loss of knowledge is an inevitable consequence of departing employees (Parise, Cross & Davenport, 2006). It might sound harsh to think that an organization will both be losing knowledge and having to pay for replacing some of it back by having lower productivity than before. Regardless, the reality of human resources is that both the humans themselves and the knowledge they possess is perishable. That means that following the employment of people there will always be a certain fixed cost and effort of having to recruit new employees. This is especially true when reviewing the modern labor market where the tradition of employees having secure career jobs has all but vanished, and with them some of the traditions of internal development of employees (Cappelli, 1999). Although recruitment may be costly and time consuming, it is a recurring process at most organizations. A process which merits an emphasis on quality practices as it can then help the organization in the long run.

It is possible for organizations needing employees to exclusively source applicants, skip any assessment and hire the first applicant that they believe can do the job. That would make recruitment both more cost effective and quicker than having to go through the time
consuming process of assessing applicants. The quick approach might be tempting, but the time and money saved may not be a viable option in the long run. In a short amount of time the additional cost, financial and non-financial alike, may prove to outweigh any short-term gains. Firstly, it would mean the organization would likely miss out on the competitive advantage the right employee can create, which in turn helps the organization in outperforming its competition (Barney & Wright, 1997; Wright, McMahon & McWilliams, 1994). Just as with other good resources, good human resources can create a competitive advantage for its organization. Secondly, the wrong hire will likely result in either a voluntary or involuntary dismissal of that employee and a new individual will have to be hired in their place. Under those circumstances organizations have to endure the additional cost of dismissing an employee, such as wage compensation or even a lawsuit, if unacceptable methods have been used, both of which can be quite expensive (Paetzold & Willborn, 1992; Ballam, 2002).

While the monetary cost is rather obvious, a poor recruitment process can also open up the possibility for additional non-monetary costs. These costs are often difficult to detect and are therefore sometimes overlooked by organizations, although they can result in a reaction from the applicants that can end in monetary loss. Applicants deem selection procedures to be unfair, not responding to applications and making applicants wait for an unnecessary amount of time can infuriate applicants to a degree where they get a negative opinion of the organization (Ryan & Plooyhart, 2000; Schinkel, van Dierendonck & Anderson, 2004; Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004). Marketing research has shown that 13% of unhappy customers tell more than 20 people about their unhappiness. Although job applicants may not be regarded as customers, it is fair to assume that their poor experience may result in a similar, negative word of mouth, which will influence others’ views of the organization (Buttle, 1998). This can seriously affect the future recruitment process of an organization by resulting in fewer competent applicants applying for open positions, because of the poor reputation of the organization.

There may have been a tendency by organizations to view the recruitment process as a whole and by that the assessment stage as a short term process. By that they are ignoring the long term impact a subpar recruitment process can have on an organization. There are, however, many long term expenses and uncomfortable situations organizations can avoid by conducting a comprehensive recruitment process and valid assessment methods.
2.2. Different aspects that have to be considered when assessing applicants

When organizations are planning on assessing applicants during their recruitment process there are many different aspects that have to be taken into consideration. These aspects can be roughly divided into the cognitive abilities and the characteristics and personality traits of the applicant (Schmitt, Cortina, Ingerick & Wiechmann, 2003; Kierstead, 1998; Barrick & Mount 1991). It may be logical to associate cognitive abilities such as knowledge, skills and abilities directly to the job at hand. These are all important aspects to assess when finding the right employee during recruitment for a job. Even though that may be the case, it is not always the applicant with the best education or the most experience in the field that tends to be the best fit for the job. In the modern labor market there are other factors that also have to be taken into consideration. These are factors such as how the applicant will fit into the organizational culture, the applicant’s personality and all additional abilities and knowledge that the applicant may bring to the organization (Ployhart, 2006; Ferris, 1993).

Since organizations have to assess a multitude of factors, they need a benchmark to be able to assess the employee in an unbiased way. This is where the job analysis comes into play. Job analysis is a part of the second stage of the recruitment process and is an invaluable part of it. Job analysis is an examination of a job with the aim of gathering a comprehensive list of the different attributes an employee has to possess for him to be able to provide optimal performance (Wilson, 2007). Job analysis can vary from being superficial and only listing essential knowledge, to being very detailed. A good analysis includes lists of the tasks that are common encounters for employees in this job, rating these tasks as to how important they are, how much time is usually spent on these tasks and if it is essential for the applicant to possess the attributes to conduct them prior to being hired (Wilson, 2007; Bjarnadóttir, 2012).
When creating a good job analysis it is important to list all of the different tasks the job entails. The acronym KSAO stands for knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics. They are the four, distinct and important main categories that work together to create a comprehensive overview of what the job requires (Peterson et. al., 1999; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). This is further evident in figure 2, where each category is further explained.

The first three categories, knowledge, skills and abilities, include factors which tend to have a direct relation with the job. They tend to be focused on the cognitive capabilities of the employee that focuses on reviewing if a person has the capabilities to do the job (Schmitt et al., 2003). For further explanation, it is useful to look at examples from a job listed in the Occupational Information Network. That is a US government supported database with hundreds of occupational definitions (O*NET Resource Centre, n.d.; Mumford et. al., 1999). A retail salesperson has to have: the knowledge of the principles of providing service, the skills to convey information effectively and the ability to speak clearly (O*NET OnLine, 2016). All of these traits are something that is relatively easy to connect to the job of a retail salesperson. These three categories, and therefore the cognitive abilities of workers, were the
main focus of employers until the late 1980’s. Since then there has been an increased focus on
the other characteristics category. This occurred after personality studies showed them to be no
worse predictors for job performance than cognitive capabilities (Kierstead, 1998; Barrick &

There is some difference between acquiring cognitive information and personality
information. Cognitive capabilities tend to be easier to confirm, while accurate personality
information is often harder to confirm (Kierstead, 1998). Personality related factors, contrary
to cognitive capabilities, assess the will to do the job rather than the capability to do it. That
is, if the employee has the personality and integrity to do the job, regardless of the knowledge,
skills and abilities to do it. These two individual determinants of performance therefore
require a balance between them. That means an employee has to have both the capability and
the will to do a particular job if the individual is to be successful (Schmitt et al., 2003).
Additionally, personality has served well as a predictor for the likelihood of positive actions,
particularly increased contextual performance (Kierstead, 1998). Contextual performance is a
concept that has arisen from the increased competition in the modern labor market. It is the
demand of organizations that employees provide more than just the completion of tasks
directly associated with their jobs. An example would be an employee that would volunteer to
complete a task that is completely unrelated to his job, just to help his co-workers and the
organization (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). The increased
interest of personality influenced increased research and development of psychometric tests.
These are tests that are focused on evaluating people’s personalities in a structured and

Although research on the link between personality and job performance has ignited an
interest in the other characteristics category, it does not mean the other three are less
important. As mentioned above in this chapter, all four categories create a comprehensive
overview of what a job requires. A study by Arvey and Murphy (1998) suggested that while
personality variables are good predictors of contextual performance, cognitive abilities, which
the knowledge, skills and abilities categories provide, give more information and may be
better suited to predict task performance. This means that a good mix of all categories is
necessary. Contextual performance may be a good thing to receive from an employee, but it is
not worth it if the employee does not offer suitable task performance as well.

It is beneficial to find an applicant that is a good fit with the culture of the organization.
This is known as person-organization fit and a good fit increases commitment and satisfaction
at work (O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Commitment and satisfaction are factors that
can increase task performance and contextual performance, which means better job performance (Dalal, 2007; Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Person-organization fit also increases the likelihood of the employee being satisfied and working for a longer period of time at the organization. Increased time working at the company increases the organizational fit and improves the factors needed for the job. Both influence the productivity and performance of employees. Considering this, organizations do well to focus on finding the best overall fit. It may not be the best solution to focus exclusively on finding the best fit for the job in question, but rather to consider how the applicant will fit into the company culture (Kristof, 1996; Rollag, Parise & Cross, 2012).

It is difficult to analyze personality and there are multitudes of different characteristics that can be focused on. Because of the amount of characteristics, personality assessment models are used when assessing workers. One of, if not the most popular, models is the Big Five personality traits. The emergence of the Big Five is considered to be a giant step in reviewing the link between personality and job performance. That is because of the focus on five important factors which allows for a better focus when assessing personality (Kierstead, 1998). The Big Five is by no means the only model, but it is one of, if not the most, used and has been used as a base for personality tests for years (International Personality Item Pool, 2016). Other widespread models such HEXACO, which derives from the Big Five and Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA) are examples of new approaches of personality assessment methods available (Lee & Ashton, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The Big Five, also known as the Five Factor model, focuses on five main factors that multitude of studies have shown to be relatively reliable when assessing applicants. Each factor is considered to be able to predict in some degree both the advantages and disadvantages an employee or applicant possesses (Digman, 1990). The Big Five model has also not been without its critics, as not all researchers have agreed on having five factors or the theoretical justification for the use of the five factor model (Goldberg, 1993; Block, 1995). There have also been questions on how suitable it is for different cultures which are not considered a part of the western world. A study on the use of the Big Five in a small indigenous culture showed it not being completely applicable (Gurven et al., 2013). As stated above, these five factors were chosen on the basis that they were the fundamentals for organizations for assessing personalities. As many researchers have used the model and developed it over the years, these factors have been known under multiple names. Although the names might vary, the affiliated traits are the same. Common names for the five factors
are as follows: extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness and openness; as can be seen in table 1 (Goldberg, 1993).

Table 1: The Big Five Taxonomy of Personality (Kierstead, 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Five Factors</th>
<th>Alternate names</th>
<th>Linked positive traits</th>
<th>Linked negative traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Conformity, Dependability</td>
<td>Careful, Thorough, Responsible, Planful, Persevering, Achievement oriented, Efficient, Self-disciplined, Diligent</td>
<td>Inconsistent, Impulsive, Undisciplined, Unreliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Calm, Relaxed, Self-confident, Steady, Easy-going</td>
<td>Anxious, Depressed, Angry, Worried, Insecure, Tense, Vulnerable, High-strung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Surgency, Assertiveness</td>
<td>Sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, active, ambitious, expressive, energetic, enthusiastic, outgoing</td>
<td>Quiet, reserved, shy, retiring, taciturn, inhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Likeability, Friendliness</td>
<td>Courteous, Flexible, Cooperative, Tolerant, Caring, Trusting, Supportive, Altruistic, Sympathetic, Kind, Modest</td>
<td>Spiteful, Self-centered, Self-aggrandizing, Hostile, Indifferent, Cold, Coarse, Mean-spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Culture, Intelligence, Inquiring, Intellect</td>
<td>Imaginative, Creative, Curious, Cultured, Sharp-witted, Broad-minded, Inventive, Insightful, Complex</td>
<td>Simple, Concrete, Narrow, Imitative, Unimaginative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows examples of both positive and negative traits that tend to be associated with each factor. As previously stated, each of the factors is considered to have certain advantageous and disadvantageous traits, depending on a high or low score during assessment.

In later years there has been an emphasis on reviewing the validity of the factors within the Big Five. The outcome has shown conscientiousness, emotional stability and extraversion in that order, have a substantial correlation with overall job performance in most jobs. That does not mean the other two are not useful during assessment or the other three are applicable all the time. In certain jobs creativity may be deemed more important, such as in art and music. Conscientiousness enforces traits such as care and efficiency which could stifle other
traits such as creativity. Its use could therefore have a negative effect on performance in extroversion jobs (Kierstead, 1998). Table 2 lists the advantages and disadvantages connected to each of the five factors of the Big Five. This can be useful after assessing the personality of a worker to roughly predict his strengths and weaknesses (Digman, 1990). Because of these differences between jobs and personality it is good to assess what traits, and therefore what factors, are relevant to each job. Holland Occupational Themes (RIASEC) and Personality-Related Position Requirements Form (PPRF) are examples of methods used when evaluating what personality traits are the most important when it comes to various jobs. The information gathered by using RIASEC or PPRF can then be used to emphasize what information related to the factors are considered to be the most important for a particular job (Kierstead, 1998; Nauta, 2010; Raymark, et al., 1997).

Table 2: Implications of Big Five Personality Traits at Work (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Digman, 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Five Factors</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Better overall job performance</td>
<td>Lower adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher levels of job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More likely to emerge as leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer &quot;deviant&quot; work behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher retention (lower turnover)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>Better overall job performance</td>
<td>Less able to identify threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher levels of job satisfaction</td>
<td>More likely to engage in high-risk behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More efficient leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher retention (lower turnover)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Perform better in sales</td>
<td>Higher absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More likely to emerge as leaders</td>
<td>More accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher level of job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>More valued as team members</td>
<td>Lower career success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More &quot;helping&quot; behaviors</td>
<td>Less able to cope with conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer &quot;deviant&quot; work behaviors</td>
<td>Give more lenient ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Higher creativity</td>
<td>Less committed to employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More efficient leaders</td>
<td>More &quot;deviant&quot; work behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More adaptable</td>
<td>More accidents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The main focus of the use of references and social media during the assessment stage of the recruitment process is considered to be to gather information on personality and personality traits (Taylor, Pajo, Cheung & Stringfield, 2004; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth & Junco, 2013). Assessing the personality of applicants and finding a person-organization fit is beneficial for an organization in many ways and it is equally important to assess the cognitive capabilities of applicants when trying to find an employee with good organizational fit that will work for the organization in the long run. When viewing the most commonly used assessment methods used to assess general hires, psychological testing is not widely used. According to the Icelandic Cranet survey, they are used in 19% of instances when hiring specialists and 5% of instances when hiring non-educated workers. Meanwhile, the use of references is around 90% and the use of social media is around 33% when assessing applicants (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). The numbers for the use of psychometric testing for professionals and non-educated workers are similar in the majority of other European countries. Even though there are a few exceptions of countries that use psychometric testing more, none does it in more than in 50% of instances when hiring specialists or non-educated workers (Cranfield International Network, 2011). While psychometric testing is designed to assess people’s personality in a valid and impartial way, references and social media do not. This may mean those two assessment methods carry some influence when assessing personalities, without necessarily being able to provide unbiased information to the recruiter.

2.3 Bias during employee assessment
Humans are complex and just as job performance can be influenced by a multitude of factors, so can perception and the decision making of recruiters be influenced as well. That means existing biases and traditions of the individual when assessing applicants on the behalf of an organization can influence his judgment. That can, in turn, negatively affect the final hiring of an applicant by introducing unnecessary and possibly inappropriate requirements for the job. This is evidenced in a plethora of studies on the subject, particularly on racial bias and gender bias (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015).

Studies on gender bias have shown how stereotypical gender traits and the gender stereotype of a job can heavily influence hires. This is particularly seen in male-dominated jobs where women are often highly discriminated against because of their assumed lack of traits needed for the job. These jobs are often those that garner the highest income and status (Koch, Mello & Sackett, 2015).
This inability for women and minorities to advance to the top has been known as the “glass ceiling”, as there are invisible but strong barriers that stand in the way of these groups receiving a promotion. Studies have shown the ceiling to be very influential in the western world, where white males have dominated senior-level positions regardless of their proportional participation in the workforce (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). As mentioned in the previous chapter, a good person-organization fit increases commitment and satisfaction at work, which is something organizations want in an employee (O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). However, the fit tends to be based on the perception of certain individuals within the organization and it can vary between people. That is why the person-organization fit should be evaluated on the basis of the job itself and those that the employee will be working with. Having a structured evaluation of what an organizational fit is for the job will therefore limit the influence of bias (Kristof, 1996).

Everyone is biased in one way or another, which affects the way people perceive and interact with each other. Research has identified that, regardless of people considering themselves open minded and judgment free, some implicit bias tends to be in place regardless (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998; Banjani & Greenwald, 2013). This is the result of a process known as attribution. It was first introduced by Fritz Heider in the 1920’s, but other researchers have further expanded on his original research over the years. The main intake of the attribution process is that all people evaluate their environment and attribute behavior and events to external or interpersonal causes. The main reason for that is the need for humans to construct explanations for occurrences in their environment in order to make it easier to analyze and react to various situations. This includes attributing characteristics and behaviors onto other people (Malle, 2004). Although this may simplify communication, it can result in ill grounded and often wrong estimations, where negative and unsubstantiated behavior and characteristics can be projected onto others. In the same way it can cause people to attribute unsubstantiated positive behavior and characteristics onto others (Malle, 2004). This can have a direct influence on the assessment process, where bias can affect decisions. Examples of this are found in studies which have shown that when people assessing applicants experience similarity between themselves and an applicant, they tend to consider him a better person-organization fit than he is in reality. This has been known as the similarity effect (Garcia, 2005; Vivian Chen, Lee & Yvonne Yeh, 2008). This behavior derives from this aforementioned need for people to be able to understand and explain their environment. During the assessment stage of the recruitment process it is quite common for the assessment people to come into contact with information on the applicant for the first time. A first
impression can be either a direct or indirect observation of a person. That person then uses the process of attribution to attribute certain characteristics and behaviors to other people without possessing any prior knowledge on the person. This process is almost instantaneous as research has shown it to only take one-tenth of a second, regardless of the first impression being a direct or indirect observation (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007). As early as 1946, research conducted by the psychologist Solomon Asch concluded that the slightest difference in a description of a person can influence the view of others, without them even meeting the person themselves (Asch, 1946). Even though some of his statements have been criticized by other psychologists, the influence of positive and negative behavioral descriptions has been accepted. (Kunda, Sinclair, & Griffin, 1997).

Although attribution can often provide deceptive information that can have a negative effect, it does not mean all perception should be completely disregarded. Research on visual and vocal cues which often causes attribution has shown an ability to predict future communication between interviewers and interviewees. Increased likelihood of positive future interpersonal communication is very positive. It can, however, be negative if an assessment relies too heavily on the perception of a single individual. That may result in the organization missing out on the employee which is the best organizational fit; although the applicant that is hired will likely be exemplary at communicating with those that assessed him (DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999). This means that there might be a reason to keep visual and vocal experiences in mind, without allowing them to have an overwhelming effect on the final decision. The aforementioned influence of bias and the need for person-organization fit is the reason why job analysis and evaluation of person-organization fit should be conducted at the beginning of the recruitment process. Having these parameters defined limits the influence of invalid and subjective criteria affecting the final hiring decision. This enhances the chance of minorities and those applicants that are not traditionally associated with similar jobs (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005; Kristof, 1996). That in turn improves the quality of the selection process which increases the likelihood of hiring the person which is the best fit for the job and the organization itself.

When organizations use references and social media as assessment methods they have to be mindful of the chances of bias affecting their use. References and social media provide information that is often influenced in one way or another by external factors and biases of recruiters (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007). This can result in subjective information where the external factors can affect the interpretation, and therefore the validity, of the information.
2.4. Assessing applicants for jobs

The perfect assessment method and therefore the perfect recruitment process does not exist. Studies have, though, proven that good assessment methods are able to limit the uncertainty of the abilities of a new employee. Therefore it is better to use them, than to be without them (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Bjarnadóttir, 2012). The assessment stage of the recruitment process is arguably one of the most important stages of the recruitment process. When assessing applicants there is not necessarily a right and wrong assessment methods. Employers can technically use whatever method they desire, but research has shown some to be more valid and therefore more predictive of future performance than others (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

Increased validity has also been shown to correlate with job related information and the structure of the assessment stage. The more focus there is on gathering information that is relevant to the job performance and making sure all applicants receive a similar assessment process as possible, the better prediction the method provides (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). While reading star signs and palms could be used for assessment, these methods would probably both be poor predictors of future performance. Not only is it highly unlikely that they would provide job related information, they would probably infuriate applicants as they would likely deem them unfair and unprofessional (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). The perceived fairness of assessment methods is something organizations should be mindful of when deciding upon what assessment methods they will use when assessing applicants (Schinkel, van Dierendonck & Anderson, 2004). Although many of the most valid assessment methods are widely accepted by applicants, there is no absolute positive connection between valid and fair, or invalid and unfair, methods.
Table 3: Predictive Validity for Overall Job Performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment methods</th>
<th>Validity (r)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work sample tests</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMA tests</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment interviews (structured)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer ratings</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job knowledge tests</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;E behavioral consistency method</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tryout procedure</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity tests</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment interviews (unstructured)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment centres</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical data measures</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness tests</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job experience (years)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;E point method</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphology</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graphology is an example of a method with low validity and is therefore an assessment method with low predictability. Studies have shown graphology to have a reliability coefficient of 0.02, which was the second lowest recorded validity in a study by Schmidt and Hunter (1998), where they surveyed the validity of various selection methods, as seen in table 3. Generally the assessment methods that score the lowest are not widely accepted by organizations and applicants alike, but that is not always the case. Regardless of its poor performance prediction, graphology is used as an assessment method and is moderately accepted in France, which has a history of using graphology, as well as countries influenced by French culture and French law, such as Morocco (Scroggins, Benson & Cross, 2008). Meanwhile, it has been viewed as unfair by the majority of other western countries (Steiner & Gilliland, 1996; Scroggins, Benson & Cross, 2008; Anderson & Witvliet, 2008). The same goes for methods with high predictive values, where studies have shown interviews to be viewed slightly more favorably than work samples, although work samples have been shown to be better predictors (Scroggins, Benson & Cross, 2008; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Therefore, the use of interviews may increase the subjective validity of applicants, although
using job samples may increase the true validity of the assessment process. In the same way, the regular use of graphology in France over the years seems to have boosted the cultural acceptance of graphology, regardless of its lack of validity. Therefore, it is not only the prediction validity that influences what assessment methods are being used, but also its acceptance by the local culture. This also means that a method which may be a very valid predictor for future performance may not necessarily be accepted by applicants. That might result in their negative view of the recruitment process and therefore a negative experience of the organization itself.

The focus will now be on those assessment methods that have been shown to be commonly used in the assessment part of the recruitment process. As stated above, there are a multitude of different methods available. To decide on those methods that tend to be more widely used in the working environment than the others, the survey of the international Cranet collaboration was used (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). The Cranet survey is an international collaboration that focuses on surveying HR practices around the world. Therefore, it provides a good cross section of methods used all over the world, not exclusively in a certain culture or a certain continent. An educational institute from each participating country gathers data on the status of its labor market (Brewster, 1995). A joint questionnaire is then created by participants and it is ensured that the language used is clear as it is translated into the different languages for all of the countries the survey is conducted in (Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2011; Lazarova, Morley & Tyson, 2008).

Table 4: Cranet Assessment Methods (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment methods</th>
<th>Validity (r)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>0.38 - 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV / Application forms</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychometric tests</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment centres</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from Social Media (limited research)</td>
<td>- 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tryouts / Ability tests</td>
<td>0.44 - 0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical tests</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers- / Mathematical ability</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 includes assessment methods that were on the questionnaire at the 2015 Cranet survey and are some of the most commonly used assessment methods used during the recruitment process (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). The methods can be conducted in a variety of ways, so these validity numbers represent the average rating for each method. Interviews are one of the most commonly used assessment methods in the world (Degroot & Gooty, 2009). The reason for the two validity numbers is the vast prediction difference based on how they are conducted (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). There has also been different validity numbers recorded for job tryouts and ability tests respectively. Finally, while there have been studies on the validity of social media, they have been limited in both their number as well as the numbers of their participants (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013).

When reviewing different assessment methods it is important to recall the two fundamental determinants of performance which were discussed before: cognitive capabilities and personality. As some assessment methods focus more, or exclusively, on the other determinant and vice versa, there has to be balance between methods in order to evaluate who is the best fit for the job (Schmitt et al., 2003). The balance between the determinants might not always be the same and this is where a good job analysis helps. It makes it possible to decide what requirements are needed for the job and to pick and choose a relevant and appropriately informative combination of assessment methods.

Conducting an interview is one of the most accepted and popular assessment methods around the world (Anderson & Witvliet, 2008; Posthuma, Morgeson & Champion, 2002). Interviews are very versatile and can be used to evaluate both cognitive capabilities of an applicant by probing into his knowledge as well as evaluating his personality traits by querying the experiences, methods and views of the individual. (Degroot & Gooty, 2009; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). Interviews are made up of various formats and types. Interview formats can be categorized as one-on-one, group, board or panel and combination. Then there are three classified types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Edward, Johnson & Molicor, 1990). The most effective interviews are those that are structured, where all applicants receive the same questions put forth in the same manner. This can be seen in Schmidt and Hunter’s predictive validity study (1998), where structured interviews have the validity coefficient of 0.53, while unstructured interviews have the validity coefficient of 0.38 (see tables 3 and 4). The popular use of interviews has attracted a lot of research on their functionality. This increased validity coefficient of structured interviews is mainly because structured interviews can be used to measure differences between applicants as all respondents should have the interview questions.
presented in the same way. Having a preconceived scale for comparing applicants limits biases that tend to heavily influence unstructured interviews. Unfortunately, it is impossible to completely remove any bias, as studies have shown that regardless of how structured an interview is, nonverbal cues always influence how the person conducting the interview perceives the respondent (Degroot & Gooty, 2009). This is not limited to negative perception. Interviewers tend to assume the interviewee fits the company if he experiences any similarities between them, as mentioned in chapter 4.1. (Garcia, 2005; Vivian Chen, Lee & Yvonne Yeh, 2008).

Resumes or application forms are traditionally used as the initial screening tools of applicants, used to determine who are deemed qualified enough to proceed into further assessment (Weinstein, 2012). They mainly list knowledge, abilities and skills, though they often include some limited indication of personality traits, although the information gathered is mainly of the cognitive nature (Udehukwu & Manyak, 2009). The information provided by resumes and application forms is cost effective and accessible, which is useful when dismissing applicants that do not possess the cognitive capabilities required by job analysis. The main problem with resumes and application forms are exaggerations by applicants, who understandably want to present themselves in as positive of a light as possible (Cole, Feild & Giles, 2003). This is due to the fact that people tend to be egotistical when it comes to others’ perception of them (Smith & Kidder, 2010).

The use of psychometric tests began in the late 80’s in tandem with the increased research and belief in the importance of personality as well as cognitive capabilities when predicting job performance (Kierstead, 1998; Barrick & Mount 1991). There are a multitude of different personality tests which share the main focus of assessing personality traits, although they are often bundled with cognitive tests. The validity of a few types of these tests can be seen in table 3, such as conscientiousness tests. A comparison of different psychometric tests conducted by Risavy and Hausdorf (2011) shows the importance of the presentation and make of the tests as some of those reviewed discriminated against certain groups and minorities. To limit this, the optimal method should be chosen with regard to the goals of the organization. The threat of participants distorting the outcome by faking has also been a reoccurring debate for some years, where studies have shown contradictory outcomes regarding the influence of faking on the outcome of the psychometric tests (Morgeson et al., 2007). The amount of poorly conducted psychometric tests has also influenced the general view of the validity of personality testing by some experts. In a study conducted by Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy and Schmitt (2007) they state that even
though personality may influence performance, the tests are often invalid and discriminatory, and faking can distort their outcome. They also add that research has shown personality tests to have a low validity for predicting future performance and some of the highest reported validities are potentially inflated due to improper methods or extensive corrections.

Assessment centers are not an assessment method by itself, but rather a selection method comprised of different assessment methods. It uses a wide range of various assessment techniques based on a job analysis, which are conducted over a certain period of time. This has the aim of providing a comprehensive collection of information on all individuals before deciding on whom to hire (Armstrong, 2009). Because it includes a multitude of assessment methods, it is expensive and is traditionally used for higher-level jobs. Assessment centers are very expensive although the cost has been limited in later years by the use of computerized assessment center simulations. Regardless of the high cost, assessment centers only possess a validity coefficient of 0.37, which is not as predictive as many other methods available. This has been attributed to two big issues. First there is the threat of a halo effect, where the assessor overvalues a participant and that influences his ratings. Secondly, the assessment centers are never able to accurately replicate a working environment. Working in an environment where applicants know they are being tested can lead to the recruiters only seeing the applicant’s best performance, rather than traditional work performance (Taylor et al., 2004; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015).

Ability tests are a common way to evaluate an applicant’s function. They are widely used and have been shown to be exceptional predictors of performance with a validity coefficient of .54, which makes it one of the few methods in Schmidt and Hunter’s (1998) research with more than 50% likeliness of correctly predicting future performance. There are two major types of ability tests. There are aptitude tests, which focus on innate ability, and achievement tests which focus on learned ability. It is often difficult to separate these two functions, which results in ability tests often being a hybrid of both types (Sagie & Magnezy, 1997). The focuses of ability tests vary depending on the need to assess cognitive abilities or personality traits. Traditional ability tests are conducted in a shorter period of time, where the applicant finishes an assignment or a test. Conducting an ability test has often been perceived as complex and expensive, although simple tests have proven to be quite effective as well. The cost has decreased substantially in later years when more organizations have chosen the option of conducting ability tests electronically (Armstrong, 2009). Job tryout procedure is a longer type of an ability test, where an applicant comes into the organization over a period of time. This is considered a good method to analyze performance in the natural setting the
future employee will be working in. The problem with job tryout procedures is the 8 to 26 weeks it takes an employee to reach full productivity in a new job (Williams, 2003). As seen in table 3, job tryout has a validity coefficient of .44, which has to be considered a good prediction when compared to other methods (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The prediction would probably be even better if there was an option of keeping the applicants on a long trial basis where they would have reached their full performance potential. That is, unfortunately, an unrealistic option because of the length of time and high costs.

4.2.2. References and social media as assessment methods

The use of references and social media as assessment methods during the recruitment process is quite common. The Icelandic 2015 Cranet survey has shown references to be used in approximately 90% of all hires, while social media platforms are used in 33% of all hires (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Using references and social media as assessment methods have some aspects that are different from the other previously mentioned assessment methods. These assessment methods also share some properties organizations may appreciate. Both methods are generally executed in a time consuming and relatively effortless manner. Generally, it does not take a long time to collect references through a telephone or read a reference letter. The same goes for social media, where it is even easier to gather information. When using social media, the information is already present on the internet and it should not take a long time to access what available information there is online on the applicant. Those factors result in both methods traditionally being cost effective compared to many other assessment methods (Paetzold & Willborn, 1992; Taylor et al., 2004; Iddekinge et al. 2013). The methods also share the fact that the information is generally gathered without having to include the participation of the applicant (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). Both methods are often used to gather the same kind of information. Usually, they are used to gather information personality and personality traits, but also are they used to confirm information provided by the applicant (Taylor et al., 2004; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Van Iddekinge et al., 2013). Finally, they share a negative similarity where the information they provide is in many ways subjective and often biased, which can result in the appearance of unwarranted positive or negative experiences of the applicant. That is why it has been suggested they should be used instead to gather information post-screening during the end of the assessment stage (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015).
As previously stated, acquiring a reference is an assessment method that is mainly used to gather information on the non-cognitive aspects of an applicant and his performance and behavior in his previous job (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). It can therefore be used to gather information regarding the contextual performance of an applicant, which research has shown to provide certain benefits to organizations along with job performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). What makes references unique compared to other assessment methods is the information they are able to provide, as it usually comes from a third party with experience of the applicant’s work and his personality. That individual has observed the typical performance of the applicant, rather than the maximum performance applicants tend to show when being observed during an assessment period (Taylor et al., 2004). This may allow for additional information on possible cultural fit and confirmation of the information the applicant provides on his application. That is assuming the reference is being received from a reliable source (Ballam, 2002). Although references may provide unique information, studies have shown them to be unreliable and invalid in most cases (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). The fact studies have shown references to be unreliable has been considered by some as the main reason for the limited amount of research that has been conducted on references when compared to other common assessment methods (Taylor et al., 2004). There are two main types of references: letters of recommendation and reference checks (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Even though both types are used to gather similar information, there is a notable difference between the two. Letters of recommendation are rigid and provide exhaustive information which content is usually exclusively decided upon by the letter writer. Reference checks are dynamic and led by an organizational representative, that allows for both follow-up questions and probing when further information is required (Taylor et al., 2004).

Letters of recommendation have been widely used for assessment in certain settings, such as at academic institutions, but their use has been steadily decreasing (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). One of the main reasons for that is the tendency of many letters of recommendation to exclusively provide a positive account of the applicant, regardless of his real performance (Bjarnadóttir, 2012). One of the reasons for that is that the letters regularly go through the applicants themselves before reaching those that will assess their content. Most of the applicants will understandably filter out letters containing negative information, as their goal is undoubtedly to present themselves in a positive light. Research has then shown reference providers to increase their use of positive wording in letters of recommendation compared to references through other channels (Judge & Higgins, 1998).
The positivity of reference letters can be linked with the unwillingness of letter writers to document negative statements in letters of recommendation (Bjarnadóttir, 2012). There is always the threat of documented opinions surfacing out of context and presenting the writer and the organization in a negative light. This could then be deemed as unfair treatment by the applicant (Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004). The resulting negative perception could then result in a negative word of mouth as an unhappy former employee is likely to spread around his negative experiences of the organization. The spreading of negative experiences associated with the organization may hurt its reputation in the long run (Buttle, 1998). Even though all these previously mentioned situations were avoided there is still the matter of their structure and their ability to provide information which is possible to assess systematically. Letters of recommendation present rigid and unstructured information which tends to emphasize various aspects of different individuals. Many of these aspects can even be completely irrelevant to the requirements of the job itself, but still influence how the applicant is perceived (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). This increases the likelihood of bias during the assessment stage, as it is likely to appear when information on applicants is not comparable. This can occur even though the assessor is fully aware of the irrelevance of some of the information presented in a letter of recommendation (Kristof, 1996). Further research on letters of recommendation has shown them to be unreliable. One study showed stronger correlation between two letters written by the same letter writer on the behalf of two different applicants, than letters written about a single applicant by two different letter writers. This shows how letters of recommendation tend to be more descriptive of the writer of a recommendation letter than the subject of the letter, the applicant which is being recommended (Baxter et al., 1981; Judge & Higgins, 1998).

These aforementioned factors have confirmed letters of recommendation to be an unreliable predictor for future performance (Aamodt, Bryan & Whitcomb, 1993). The letters regularly provide insignificant content which does not offer any information in helping an organization identify good applicants. The combination of aforementioned factors has shown letters of recommendation to be an overall poor predictor for future performance. Studies have shown their average validity to be 0.14, but depending on those providing the references and its structure it may sometimes be higher (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Reilly & Chao, 1982). This has led to the view that letters of recommendation should not be used during the assessment stage unless they are structured and it is possible to confirm that the writer of the letter is both a credible and accountable source (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Using a percentile ranking scale with letters of recommendation increases the validity.
of the method up to approximately 0.42, which is a substantial increase (McCarthy & Goffin, 2001). That compares favorably to the prediction of other selection methods, as can be seen in table 3, but their use requires a fair amount of structure and coordination on the part of the letter writers, which is generally unavailable.

There is a pronounced difference between the use of reference checks and letters of recommendation. While the use of letters has been decreasing, the use of reference checks is still very common. Studies have shown reference checks to be used, at least occasionally, by approximately nine out of every ten organizations; with the use depending on the type of job being staffed at a given time (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Their common use may be attributed to the two main advantages reference checks have over letters of recommendation. Firstly, the reference check process is led by an organizational representative. This allows for structured gathering of information as the representative can focus on gathering information and use follow-up and probing questions when necessary (Taylor et al., 2004). The focus of these structured questions should be on job-relevant dimensions which is possible to compare to answers from other referees. Common questions such as “would you rehire the person” and “what are the candidate’s strengths/weaknesses” are considered to have questionable job relevance. Academics have also emphasized that the questions should be focused on asking referees to rate the applicant to similar employees at their respective organization. That creates some reference when evaluating the information (Taylor et al., 2004). Using structured reference checks reduces bias when all referees are presented with the same questions (Kristof, 1996). Secondly studies have shown average validity of reference checks to be .26, which is considerably more than the 0.14 validity of letters of reference (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Reily & Chao, 1982). There are, however, substantial exceptions to their validity and in certain areas of the world organizations providing references can be targets for defamation charges if the information they provide is negative (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The cost of litigation is such that even though organizations are likely to win the case, going to court to fight the charges is not economically viable. This threat of having to go to court has resulted in many organizations opting for “name rank and serial number” mentality regarding references. That means organizations looking for references will only be presented with confirmation of the applicant’s name and job title, but no information on cognitive ability or the personality of the applicant (Ballam, 2002). Under those circumstances, where organizations are not providing any insightful information, it is fair to assume the validity of the method to decrease. Similar to letters of recommendation, reference checks can provide an
unrealistically positive picture of the applicant. This is especially common when the referee is provided by the applicant himself, as people want to be presented in a positive way (Bjarnadóttir, 2012). Therefore, applicants may name their friends as their referees to ensure they receive a good recommendation. While overly positive references are difficult to react to when receiving letters of recommendation, the dynamism of the reference checks process allows for certain counter measures (Taylor et al., 2004). If the organizational representative conducting the reference checks receives inadequate information, it is both quick and simple to contact the applicant’s other superiors or coworkers to receive additional references. Under these circumstances it is important to consider the position of the applicant and ensure it does not affect him in a negative way (Bjarnadóttir, 2012). When the need for additional references arises, it may be prudent to contact the applicant and receive his permission. The applicant may feel they are being treated unfairly and from that develop a negative image of the organization (Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004). This can then result in others developing a negative image of the organization which can hurt its reputation in the long run (Buttle, 1998).

The use of the web in the recruitment process has only become common in recent years. This is due to the emergence of web 2.0 and the common use of social networks (Bradley & McDonald, 2011; Smith & Kidder, 2010). Their use has further increased with the participation of generation Y in the labor market. This is due to generation Y having grown up around computers and their widespread online presence (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014). The popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook can be attributed to the need of people to present their identity and feel like they belong (Liu, 2007). After the increased use of the internet in the recruitment process, electronic recruitment through social media has been extremely useful. It has allowed for shorter hiring times, increased the flow of information relevant to the job at hand and the acceleration of the recruitment process itself. This reduces the time jobs are vacant and saves money (Smith & Rupp, 2004). Electronic recruitment focused on social media has also encouraged people not actively looking for jobs to apply, rather than more traditional recruitment tools, such as newspaper advertisements have done. This is due to the accessibility and reach online job advertisements have. They often reach workers who are not necessarily looking for them (Broughton, Foley, Ledermeier & Cox, 2013).

While using social media in electronic recruitment has proven helpful, the same cannot be said of the use of social media as an assessment method in the recruitment process. It has been considered somewhat controversial as studies have not shown social media platforms to necessarily provide accurate prediction of applicants’ future work performance.
(Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013; Back, Stopfer, Vazire, Gaddis, Schmukle, Egloff & Gosling, 2010; Verschuren & Ranganath, 2012; Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2013). When using social media to assess applicants, the focus is usually on gathering non-cognitive information about the applicant, mainly assessing personality traits and characteristics, similar to the way references have been used (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). There are many different types of social media platforms, but the main focus of recruitment research has been on two, Facebook and LinkedIn. The difference between these two platforms is their emphasis. While Facebook is more focused on social life and interests, LinkedIn is designed to present colleagues and organizations with job related information (Verschuren & Ranganath, 2012; Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2013).

A CareerBuilder survey of 2303 US managers and human resources specialists stated that approximately 1/3 of them used social media to research their applicants (Grasz, 2012). This approximation has been further confirmed by other similar studies (Levinson, 2010; Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). As previously mentioned the main reason for the common use of social media is its ability to provide extensive amount of information in a quick and cost-effective way (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013). These positives of social media use seem to be overshadowed by their drawbacks. It is quite difficult to confirm the accuracy of information through social media. The information that is possible to gather from social media platforms is diverse which makes it next to impossible to fairly compare multiple applicants. That reduces the possibility of having a process that will ensure structured and therefore fairer applicant assessment through social media (Broughton et al., 2013). Finally, the empirical evidence for the use of social media is still scarce. The focus of social media research has been on the possibilities and potential risk of social media, rather than providing a valid way to implement their use into the assessment stage (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014). The widespread use of information from social media and the lack of empirical data on its validity resulted in employers relying on their gut feeling when evaluating the information they received. Therefore employers have been using casual information from social media to provide predictions for future performance, without having the proof to back up their statements (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013).

A study by Van Iddekinge et al. (2013) asked recruiters to review and evaluate Facebook profiles. The outcome showed no correlation between the assessments the recruiters made and future job performance, turnover intentions or turnover of the people. It did not even provide incremental prediction beyond what other more established predictors already provide. On top of that, some subgroup differences were detected, where minorities tended to
score lower than others. It may be fair to attribute that to the similarity effect, where recruiters tend to value those similar to themselves higher than others (Garcia, 2005; Vivian Chen, Lee & Yvonne Yeh, 2008). This is further supported in a CareerBuilder survey where 58% of managers were more likely to hire an applicant if they got a “good feel” for the individual. The same survey showed the most common reason for rejecting candidates was their perceived lifestyle, rather than the employment related information available (Grasz, 2012). It may be difficult to judge how a certain lifestyle influences work performance. When considering the information provided by Facebook, it is possible to rely on the information provided. A study by Back et. al. on evaluating self-idealization on Facebook accounts showed that there were little to no signs of people exaggerating the information presented on their Facebook profiles (2010). In the study the people put forth the information themselves. There is, however, always the chance that some other person presents falsified or exaggerated information on behalf of the applicant. This can often be something the applicant is not even aware of and therefore does not remove (Smith & Kidder, 2010). This highlights a certain issue with the use of social media, such as Facebook, as an assessment method. The information gathered through social media profiles is very much reflective on the perception of the recruiter that gathers the information, which may often be without the proper context.

Although the aforementioned Van Iddekinge et. al. (2013) study focused exclusively on evaluating Facebook profiles, those conducting that study encourage organizations to treat all online information on applicants in the same way and stay away from it until studies have confirmed methods for their valid use. That included both information through LinkedIn and material found through Google searches. Even though the study above showed no correlation between recruiters’ assessments and job performance, other studies have shown it to provide limited information. There are studies that have shown social media to provide some practical information on personalities. These researches also confirm to a certain degree, that the difference between information gathered from Facebook and LinkedIn is minute. These personality studies have been working with the Big Five personality traits model where the focus is on five fundamental factors that are believed to influence job performance (Kierstead, 1998; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Executed to the best of the authors’ knowledge, no extensive studies have been executed on the link between social media and personality traits. Regardless of the information Facebook and LinkedIn provide, the platforms seem mainly useful for predicting the applicants’ extraversion. Neither of the social media platforms provided any prediction to other factors of the Big Five, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability (Back et al., 2010; Verschuren & Ranganath, 2012).
Since LinkedIn was unable to predict other Big Five factors than Facebook, it may be fair to assume both platforms to be similarly valid when used as assessment methods in the recruitment process. Finally, there is the question of privacy, which makes the use of social media as an assessment method in the recruitment process so unique. When gathering information by using social media, organizations can be accessing information that the applicant considers and wants to keep private (Smith & Kidder, 2010). Studies have shown that applicants are generally not pleased with the use of their social media profiles when assessing their abilities as employees (Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2013). This may be the case, but because of the availability of social media information and the lack of the need for the applicants’ participation in gathering it, expecting organizations to ignore social media may be unrealistic.

Taking all the issues that accompany the use of social media as an assessment method into consideration, it may be reasonable for organizations to consider their use of social media during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. There seems to be a consensus between academics that the right method to assess social media information has yet to emerge (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013; Back et. al., 2010; Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). Studies have then shown majority of people not to relate their social media accounts to their professional lives. Employees and applicants in general seem to be very opposed to organizations reviewing their social media which can cause a backlash for the company if found out or even just suspected (Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2015). This further supports statements that information from social media, as well as Google searches, should preferably be excluded from the assessment stage altogether until valid methods to assess social media have come forth (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013). Then, if social media is to be used during the process, it should not be used for screening. It should be focused on exclusively evaluating job related KSAO-focused information that can be compared to similar information on other applicants (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015).

When reviewing what academics say on references and social media the view is rather clear. References and social media are both cheap and easy methods to use when gathering information on an applicant. They are, however, not very valid, especially the common current use of social media as an assessment method which studies have found not to add any meaningful information to a recruitment process (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013). When taking the validity of the methods into consideration and the often unreliable information both methods provide, the main reason for their common use seems to be the ease of use and their cost effectiveness.
2.5. Objectives and research questions

As previously stated, the main objective of the research will be to examine the role references and social media play in assessment of applicants during the recruitment process. Both of these methods play big part in the assessment stage of the recruitment process. According to the Icelandic 2015 Cranet survey, references are used during assessment in approximately 90% of all hires, while a social media platform is used during assessment in approximately 33% of all hires (Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015). This is regardless of studies having shown these methods to be relatively bad predictors of future performance compared to other assessment methods (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Anderson & Shackleton, 1993; Davison, Maraist & Bing, 2011; Van Iddekinge et al., 2013).

To the best of the authors’ knowledge, there has not been any research conducted on what information these methods provide organizations, why the methods are so commonly used in spite of their poor performance prediction and tendencies for providing biased information and how much they influence the final hiring decision. When looking at Iceland in particular, assessment methods that have been considered more reliable predictors are being used less than in the other Nordic countries. At the same time the use of references and social media are comparatively the same in those countries (Cranfield International Network, 2011; Einarsdóttir, Ólafsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). It is not necessarily that the use of references and social media is unacceptable, as both do provide information in a relatively efficient manner. The question is how they fit into the assessment puzzle and if the information they provide is being used to assess future performance or if there is another reason for this popular use (Paetzold & Willborn, 1992; Verschuren & Ranganath, 2012).

Therefore, there are three research questions:

- **What information on applicants does the use of references and social media as assessment methods provide organizations in the recruitment process?**
- **How are references and social media used during the assessment stage of the recruitment process?**
- **How influential is the information organizations gather through the use of references and social media during the recruitment process when making a final decision on an applicant?**
3. Methodology

Because of the limited amount of information on the why and how references and social media are used during the assessment stage of the recruitment process, the research is based on qualitative research methods. They are designed to probe into the thoughts and intentions of the interviewee and should therefore provide detailed information regarding the subject. The type of qualitative research method that will be used is the individual in-depth interview. Using that method has many benefits, such as providing personal answers where respondents are not influenced by others as well, as providing a great amount of information from carefully selected respondents in a short amount of time (Palmerino, 1999). The in-depth interviews are then semi-structured, because of the limited topic of discussion. This means that the interviewer brings a list of questions that are used to keep the interview on topic, as opposed to it being free flowing and imprecise.

3.1. Research method

Research methods can be roughly divided into two: quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods. When using quantitative methods, the goal is to get numeric and measurable outcome that supports objective support for hypothesis and theories. Meanwhile the goal of qualitative methods is not a numeric or measureable outcome, but rather to gather detailed and in depth information on a subject. This is especially useful when there is no data to go around and can often provide information that allows for a structured hypothesis (Bernburg, 2005).

After deciding on the use of individual in-depth interviews, the focus was on creating a questionnaire with short open ended questions which were to provide relevant information on the subject. The interviews were recorded by a recording device and then reviewed, written down and transcribed. This ensured the validity of the interviews, as well as allowing for organization and coding of the information gathered. The focus was on asking non-threatening and relatively open ended questions in a relaxed manner. This made for a better flow of conversation as well as studies have shown that when respondents feel comfortable during the discussion, they are more willing to answer frankly (Aaker, Kumar, Leone & Day, 2013). To ensure fairness and truthful answers, no mention was made beforehand of any lack of validity these methods have been shown to have. Since the focus is on two different assessment methods, the author did his best to keep the discussion on each method divided. First, the focus was on questions related to references and following this were questions directed towards social media. This ensured that answers were directed towards either method.
in order to limit uncertainty regarding what method is being discussed at a given time. The author did his best to keep discussion on the two methods separate, but due to the focus on free flowing discussion, that could be difficult.

3.2. Participants

The sample was made up of ten human resource managers. As the focus was on a certain subset of people the sample was purposive. The emphasis was on ensuring the equal amount of men and women participants as well as having participants from both private and public organizations. Finally, the focus was on making sure that the selection of participants was diverse relating to the type of organizations and sectors they were working in. All of the participants that were selected were full time employees of their respective organizations and not contractors, as is sometimes the case in the Icelandic labor market. A list of the participants can be seen in table 5.

Table 5: List of Participants in the Study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee number</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest Education Level</th>
<th>Working experience in HR</th>
<th>Type of organization working for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masters in HR</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Private organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Masters in HR</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>Public organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Masters in HR</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Private organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma in HR</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Privately owned organization, but heavily affiliated with government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma in marketing and economics</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Private organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masters in economics</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Private organization fully owned by the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Masters in HR</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Public organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Doctorate in HR</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Public organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>MBA with focus on HR</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Public organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma in operations management</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Private organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This gives an opportunity to compare private and public sectors, and see if there are any noticeable differences between the two. All participants work at organizations with a minimum of seventy employees to ensure they are experienced in going through recruitment processes on a regular basis. All names of both interviewees and their organization are
withheld. That ensures their privacy as well as allowing for a more open and honest communication.

3.3 Execution of interview

The interviews were conducted at each interviewee’s place of work. All of the participants were working in and in a driving distance from the capital area, so they were all easily accessible. As the interviewer and the interviewees were all native Icelandic speakers, the interviews were conducted in Icelandic.

The focus was on beginning by introducing the research and then moving into simple, easy to answer questions. This was done to create a conversational flow and to warm the interviewee up. These were questions such as “What are your main tasks within the organization?” Thereafter the questions became focused on the recruitment process, asking about their general structure within the organization and what methods were used during the assessment stage. Then the focus moved onto the use of references and social media during the assessment stage, if the interviewee had not already discussed those methods fully. At the end there were some general questions regarding age, education and work experience. Personal questions like these can cause the interviewee to close up and reduce the flow of the interview (Aaker, Kumar, Leone & Day, 2013). This is why a decision was made to introduce them at the end, as can be seen in Appendix 1.
4. Results

This results chapter will be divided into two main parts. The first part will focus on the use and the information references provide human resource managers. The second part will focus on the use of social media as an assessment method. How it is being used and the information it provides human resource managers. In all chapters the focus will be on the considerations and themes that came up during the interviews.

References have long been used to get an outsiders review of an applicant. For the longest time they were the only method providing external information to evaluate applicants. In recent years the widespread use of social media in the recruitment process has become apparent. Although the methods are different the interviews proved them to share a certain similarity in the eyes of human resource managers. Both methods provide information in both quick and cost effective fashion. There was little to no noticeable difference between the information provided by male and female interviewees. The use of these methods, particularly social media, was very much in line with the views of the human resource manager of each respective organization. There was a slight noticeable difference is between the fully public organizations and the others. That is the result of Icelandic legislation which requires public organizations to disclose any personal information gathered during the recruitment process. Provided it is requested by an associated individual.

4.1. References

All of the interviewees acknowledged their use of references during the assessment process at their respective organizations. After conducting and coding the interviews, there were 4 main themes that appeared. First, it was the type of information organizations receive from references. Second was how references were used during the assessment stage. Third was the communication and reliability of referees. Fourth was the impact references have on the final decision of the recruitment process.

4.1.1. Information received from references

When the interviewees were asked about what information they felt references provided, all of them answered in a similar fashion. The manager’s general view was that references are very useful to confirm if the information that applicants present through their applications are indeed correct. The majority of the managers mentioned this use and one of them had this to say about its benefits:
“If someone tells me in a job interview that he has great initiative... it does not tell me if that statement is true or not. It tells me nothing about it. However, if the applicant can provide me with an example of an instance where he showed great initiative and I can then confirm it via self-evaluation test. Or if I get a reference that says; “he showed initiative by doing this, and we liked it.” Then I have a much better interview package and more validity.”

Another important use seemed to be to get information about the personality traits of the applicants. That being said, the managers were not always looking for the same personality traits for every applicant, as those most important can differ between jobs. They were, however, focusing on some kind of personality related information. One interviewee had this to say about the assessment of personality traits:

“If we are hiring general employees, then we mainly question about attendance, communication skills, responsibility and independence. Is it necessary to have to constantly tell the individual what to do? When hiring a specialist the questions are more focused on details such as the state of the projects he/she was turning in and how he is to work with. Then we are more focused on getting confirmation of the behavior of the individual.”

When comparing the importance of assessing personalities of applicants to the importance of assessing their cognitive abilities, some of the managers’ views were that it would be evident from the start if the applicant did not possess the cognitive capabilities stated on their applications. The difference with personality traits is that it often takes a longer time to fully realize those and they are important for future performance, or as one manager put it: “Through the years I have seen that if people possess certain basic fundamentals such as ambition and interest they can pretty much learn to do anything.” This was a view many of the managers shared. The right attitude and personality traits that ensure good person-organization fit are at least equally important to cognitive capabilities; not necessarily the job performance itself, but certainly contextual performance. As well as agreeing that the main advantage of references was to get information on personality traits, there seemed to be a unanimous agreement that letters of reference did not provide any useful information. This seemed to be because the letters were not dynamic and therefore did not necessarily provide answers the managers were looking for. None of the interviewees confirmed their active use
of letters of recommendation and there were some compelling arguments to why, as one of the managers stated:

“I choose to receive references through the phone rather than by a letter. When you have conducted an interview and you have concerns, you can question the provider of the reference directly on that particular issue. The predictive validity of references increases when you have that option.”

One manager had very strong opinions on the use of letters of recommendation due to the fact that anyone could write them. Because of that, the manager was adamant that the letters should not be used and were not to be trusted:

“… I want it to be clear that I have never relied on any letters of recommendation and used them to evaluate… anyone could have written these letters and they do not provide me with anything.”

Another interviewee followed suit by referring to the nature of letters of recommendation and how they were usually provided by the applicants themselves, by stating “… it is impossible to read a negative letter of recommendation because they do not exist.” This is due to the aforementioned fact that applicants are very self-conscious and focused on presenting themselves in a positive manner.

4.1.2. Using references during the assessment stage

During the interview, the managers were asked about the time they use references during the assessment stage of the recruiting process. Eight out of the ten interviewees stated that they choose to use references exclusively during the latter stages of the assessment process when the prime candidates had already been identified and interviewed. The other two said they would usually hold back on references until the latter part of the process. They would, however, occasionally hurry the process and go straight into references if received from a trusted and reliable source, as one stated:

“I was looking at a couple of applications this week from a particular organization. I proceeded to question an in-house project manager that used to work at that same organization. I went to her and asked her if she knew either person. She answered that she knew one of them and that person was great. This helps us.”
The managers gave various reasons for their decision to generally use recommendations at the end of the assessment stage of the recruitment process. Only one of the interviewees said that this was a conscious choice made to ensure fairness to the applicants. By that meaning that references would not create an externally influenced view the manager would have of the applicants. It is not possible to generalize that the others did not have that in mind as well, although they did not state it during an interview. The majority of the other managers justified their decision on the grounds that references were more of a follow-up method and did not provide optimal basic information. Some took their reasoning further by pointing out that references were also not considered to be a very reliable assessment method, or as one interviewee said “... references are not incredibly reliable. That is just something you have to be mindful of. But I never refuse any information.” By that, they were referring to the fact that although references have not shown high validity when it comes to predicting future performance, they still provide additional information that can give additional insight into the applicant. That information may be more relevant at a later date after other assessment methods have been used and not to gather primary information.

Six out of the ten interviewees had specifically structured questions when acquiring references. That entails certain key questions that are always present, designed to gather information that provide answers to common questions that are relevant to the recruitment process. One of the managers described their reasoning for including key questions when acquiring references:

“There is structure to our questioning. There tend to be specific key questions that we always want present, then there can be other questions as well. So there are certain that have to be present. One of the key questions asks about their relationship to the applicant. It is very important for us to know what the relationship between those people is, as we know people describes those they know differently and sometimes there is a friendship between superiors and employees. Another key question is to know why the applicant quit or is quitting. That has to be clear.”

When examining this, it is clear to see that structure does not have to represent complete rigidity. Apart from using the key questions, other applicant-specific questions are also used. It can be understood from the aforementioned statement that the focus is not on having job relevant key questions to be able to compare applicants. The key questions are rather oriented towards getting some general information the manager believes has helped
him in the past. This view was commonly shared by both those with complete structure of their questioning and those that had certain favorite questions without having an official structure.

Having well-structured questions when acquiring references can be considered an even more important task for public organizations than private. That is because of Icelandic legislation which requires public organizations to be able to disclose personal information related to the recruitment process of all applicants. Additionally, public organizations have to be able to justify the reason for hiring an applicant, as laws state that education and gender have to be considered during their recruitment process. This makes the use of subjective assessment methods such as references quite difficult. These requirements on public organizations limit the quality and quantity of information references usually provide, as one of the managers employed at a public organization stated:

“The problem with public recruitment and therefore references is that the acquired information is public records. When I ask for a reference I state “you are unable to expect me to treat this as confidentiality.” Then you are unable to receive everything you want. When you declare this before receiving a reference, you are almost guaranteed to have zero chance [of receiving the information you want]. This is due to administrative procedures which cause great problems for professional recruitment processes at public organizations. The same can be said about information on those applying. You can say that as soon as you tell applicants that their names will appear publicly, 15-20% of them decide to withdraw their application.”

This describes the situation public organizations have to deal with. Laws inhibit them in providing applicants with the same anonymity on information gathered through the recruitment process as private organizations can offer. The inability to provide anonymity to referees has caused public organizations to receive often very basic information; with referees only providing confirmation that the applicant worked at his organization, but nothing on their performance or personality. This can result in public organizations choosing not to use the assessment method because of the possible complications that follow it. While it is difficult for public organizations to use references, another manager in the public sector had a different story:
“We do not have any formal questionnaires and division managers handle outgoing calls to referees and then they say “yes, he received good recommendation”. Nothing is being documented, the process is very informal.”

The public organization this manager is working for does not seem to document references. By treating references as informal information and not documenting them, no proof of the use of references exists. It seems they are not treated as a relevant assessment method by all public organizations.

4.1.3. The providers of references

When the interviewees were asked about referees and the information they provide, there was unanimous agreement. All of the managers felt that referees the applicants put on their CV generally provided positive accounts of them. Some also pointed out how unreliable they can be. Anyone could be on the list provided to them by the applicant, such as his friends and relatives. When one of the managers was questioned on his experience with referees provided by applicants, he had this to say:

“I have only once contacted a referee of a list that did not provide positive recommendation. If you are unable to line up few referees to give you a positive recommendation, then you have a big problem. You will always get positive references from the referees listed, unless something is seriously wrong.”

Because of the overly positive references from the referees the applicants provide themselves, the managers are unable to take what they say at face value. This has resulted in them having to ask focused questions and read between the lines. One of the interviewees had this to say about acquiring references:

“... I see the reference interviews to be similar to job interviews. You are not necessarily listening to the answers the referee provides. You have to read between the lines and realize what it is he did not say. Some will not be willing to tell the truth when you ask them questions, but when you notice hesitation before a response, that answers a lot. Usually, when I review previous hires I have conducted, you know that when people hesitate there is a reason for it.”

When having to read between the lines, the managers tend to use questions that focused on a certain thing. Three of them said that the question “would you rehire this individual?” would often provide hesitation followed by a truthful answer. When asked why
this was the case, one of the managers pointed out that people were not necessarily willing to lie, even though they were not willing to tell the whole truth either. When asking direct questions, people were often forced to answer. Others in a similar position were of the opinion that all references provided some information. They chose to contact many different referees and try to create a comprehensive picture by comparing their answers, stating that talking to their provided referees could often give them access to others that could provide more information on the applicant.

Contacting others than those referees provided to them is a method all ten interviewees agree provides the best information. They tend to be referees that are contacted through other channels than the applicant himself, often without his knowledge. Because of that it seems they do not feel the same obligation to commend his performances and provide truthful answers. In other cases they contacted an acquaintance within the applicants’ previous or current organization or talked to a coworker they knew had some experience with the organization. While the majority of the managers thought nothing of this, some, especially those working at public organizations were not as forthright. This may be the result of the regulations which demand public organizations to have all the material they use during a recruitment process. One of the managers that was not fond of going behind the applicants’ back and had this to say on the matter:

“...you do not go behind the applicants’ back. They have been honest and laid everything they have on the table and... yes. But often you are in various networks of contacts and then you dig up different things.”

As all of the managers tend to do this, there seems to be a relative ease of contacting someone that has inside information on an applicant. When asked about this ease of managers to provide external and unrelated contacts, one attributed this to the small population of Iceland by stating:

“You receive the best information from the referees that are not provided by the applicant. This is just an island, everybody knows each other.”

4.1.4. Influence of references on assessment

When inquiring as to how influential information provided through references is to the final decision of an applicant, there were certain instances where they seemed to be quite influential. The main use of references has been to provide additional information and
confirm statements made by applicants. The general view of the interviewees is that references are a good tool to provide information and confirmation, but it is a method that should primarily be used in conjunction with others. This view was, however, not shared by all the managers. Under certain circumstances it may not be worth taking a risk when receiving a negative reference. One manager gave an example of times when references were and will be very influential on his final decision:

“... then we have received comments: “No, this man is dishonest. I would never hire him.” That was in the production line. Then the applicant had worked in a store owned by an elderly woman. Her statement resulted in this individual not receiving a job here.”

This was followed by another example from the same person: “If a former superior says that the applicant in question is the most dishonest man he has ever worked with, that is something that influences our decision.” This shows that references can have a strong influence on the final decision making in the recruitment process - as long as the referees are considered to be credible sources and provide references that the manager considers so negative that it is not worth following up on the applicant.

4.2. Social media
The use of social media varied substantially between the interviewees. After conducting and coding the interviews, there were three main themes that appeared. First, it was the type of information organizations receive through social media. Second was how social media was being used during the assessment stage. Third was the impact social media has on the final decision of the recruitment process.

4.2.1. Information received through social media
When interviewing the managers regarding their view of information gathering through social media, there were two social media platforms that came up for discussion. First there is Facebook, which the majority of the managers use somewhat when assessing applicants. Second is LinkedIn, which few of the managers use routinely and then mainly when hiring from abroad on regular basis. When questioned on the differences of use between Facebook and LinkedIn, the difference was clear. Facebook is used by the majority of interviewees to assess personality, while LinkedIn provided more of a job related information. When asked about the information Facebook provides one manager stated:
“You go onto Facebook and look those up that are contacting you. You do not want to see a tattooed swastika. That’s the thing with Facebook, you do not want an applicant to have values or views that are not politically correct”.

This was a view shared by the majority of the other interviewees. Facebook provides information that can be used to assess personalities of applicants. This is regularly used by the managers as a quick way to see if an applicant is involved in something they are not willing to associate with their organization. While some of the managers were only looking for certain red flags, others were more liberal in their assessments of applicants through Facebook. When questioned on the type of information Facebook provides the organization, one manager had this to say:

“It is more the younger generation. We may call someone in for an interview and he arrives in prominent clothing, then you start to think. Okay, is this applicant that kind of type? Then you look at the applicants’ Facebook profile and you see some “out there” pictures and then... or is perhaps expressing himself in a negative way and declaring something you know. Some types like that.”

LinkedIn was actively used by two of the ten interviewees. These two had it in common that their organizations tended to source applicants from abroad. This resulted in them using LinkedIn not only for sourcing, but also for assessment. Those using LinkedIn used it more to review cognitive capabilities and experience, rather than to assess personality, although the users stated that communication within the LinkedIn website itself can provide some information on personality. When asked how LinkedIn could be used for assessment, an interviewee responded:

“People often have a link to their LinkedIn page in their CV. I find that positive. That allows for detailed information to be kept on the web, while the CV can be short and to the point.”

According to the statement, this manager found shorter CV’s positive. They allow for quicker screening of applicants while the link to LinkedIn still retains detailed information for reviewing when necessary. The other managers, particularly those that sourced locally, had a very different experience with LinkedIn. When questioned on LinkedIn, one described it simply as chaotic. Another said he had used it few years back and tried to source through it without any positive outcome.
After interviewing the managers, it became clear that many associated Google searches with social media. Although Google searches may not be a social media platform, the personal information gathered through its use is more than not retrieved through one, whether that is personal blogs, or any other of the plethora of social media platforms available. Because of that perception and similar use, it may be reasonable to associate the use of Google searches with the use of social media.

4.2.2. Using social media during the assessment stage
Out of the ten managers, nine used social media platforms or Google searches when assessing applicants. The one manager that did not use social media during assessment had procedural fairness in mind when excluding his use of social media:

“No, we do not use any of these [social media platforms]. I am not looking up people on Facebook. Isn’t it different between individuals whether or not they have their Facebook profiles open? I don’t know... my focus is on gathering... looking at this in a coordinated way. If we were to assess with the help of Facebook it would be similar to our use of references. They would only be used at the very end. If I were to use Facebook, I would like to assess all applicants in the same way.”

The other nine interviewees tended to use some social media during the assessment stage. Its use differed from Google searches at the end of the process to reviewing Facebook when receiving applications. What these managers shared however was that none of their organizations had any structured procedures when it came to using social media. While some managers have certain rules of thumb when it comes to the use of social media during assessment, nothing is set in stone and methods seem to correlate with the personal views of each manager. The same can be said about how far organizations go in their assessment of applicants through social media. Each manager seemed to have his own view of the use of social media. While some attributed excessive amount of party pictures to bad employees, others stated that people have to be able to have fun without having to worry about their social media use.

4.2.3. Influence of social media on assessment
It is quite difficult to evaluate what influence assessment through social media has on a final decision of an applicant. Because of the lack of structure when it comes to the social media use, it seems the influence is different from one organization to another. It can even be
different from one subgroup of people to another, as can be seen in a statement from one of the managers:

“We tend to use this [social media] for those applying for general positions. These are often young people that do not have a lot of work experience and therefore have few references. Then you can take a look at social media and at the company the person keeps. If the pictures on his profile are exclusively party pictures and so forth.”

It can be interpreted from this statement that young people that post party pictures are not considered to be prime employees for that organization. Therefore unsuitable posted material may be even more influential on the decisions to hire younger applicants than older, because of the lack of other information on the young applicants.
5. Discussion

The focus of the following chapter is to review the information from the results chapter and compare it with the theory presented in the theoretical framework chapter. The objective of conducting interviews was to examine what role references and social media really played during the assessment of applicants during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. After reviewing the answers provided by the ten interviewees there was no new information that came forth on the use of references and social media. However, many of the approaches the interviewees chose when using references and social media as assessment methods were somewhat contradictory to the findings of the academic studies.

5.1. References

There are two main types of references. Those are letters of recommendation and reference checks. After interviewing the ten managers it was clear that none of them valued the use of letters of recommendation as an acceptable method to assess applicants, although they all valued the use of reference checks. The main reasons mentioned for their view of recommendation letters is: the tendency of those letters to provide exclusively positive information, the inability to confirm who it is that actually wrote the letter and the inability to receive further information on the applicant’s recommendations provided by the letter. The interviewee’s stance is in accordance with studies on recommendation letters which have shown letters of recommendation to be poor predictors for future performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984). These letters provide almost exclusively positive accounts of applicants and because of their rigid nature it is usually not possible to follow up on their information with follow up questions (Aamodt, Bryan & Whitcomb, 1993; Taylor et. al. 2004). As none of the managers tended to use recommendation letters, no further information on their use came forth.

When asked about their use of reference checks, the general view of the managers was that there had to be some reservation of the validity of the information they provide. This is in accordance with what studies have shown (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). They did, however, all confirm the use of them during most of their assessments of applicants. The main use of reference checks seemed to be twofold. One is to confirm the reality of the information, such as cognitive capabilities, that the applicant has provided through his application. The other was mainly to gather or confirm information on the applicant’s personality, traits and behavior. This use of references is in agreement with studies which have shown these same two main uses of reference checks to be the most common when assessing applicants (Taylor
et. al., 2004; Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013). Receiving information about the personality of applicants was thought to be important by many of the managers. That was because of the view that person-organization affects certain performance aspects of employees, with some stating it could even be more important in certain situations than cognitive abilities. This is in line with what studies on the matter have shown. (Kierstead, 1998; Barrick & Mount 1991). This concludes that while the managers are aware of the unreliable nature of the use of reference checks as assessment methods, they nonetheless appreciate the information on applicants they are able to provide. This view was enforced by the statement of one of the managers, who felt references were unreliable but additional information was always helpful.

When questioned on how they used reference checks during the assessment stage of the recruitment process, there was some variance between managers. While some managers had decided upon their methods independently, others were restricted from having a complete freedom in their approach, such as those working in the public sector. The managers all seemed to agree that during a general recruitment process the use of references to assess applicants should be used towards the end of the assessment stage. While for some this was considered an unbreakable rule, others were ready to make exceptions. This was done especially if the managers knew someone who they considered to have reliable information about an applicant. Out of the ten managers, one justified the primary decision of using references to assess applicants at the end of the recruitment process as ensuring fairness and reducing the possibility of bias influencing decisions. The other managers justified their decision by stating that references were not a reliable assessment method and were to be used as a follow-up method, not to gather primary information. The decision of the managers to use reference checks at the end of the assessment stage is in line with studies. Because of the often subjective information recruiters receive through reference checks, it has been suggested that they should rather be used after screening the applicants (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007). If reference checks are used at the beginning of an assessment stage they will cause bias which distorts fair assessment of the candidates. The first impression of the candidate will come from an external source which can have unsubstantiated positive or negative influence on the recruiter’s view of that applicant (Kunda, Sinclair & Griffin, 1997; Malle, 2004). Some of the interviewees made exceptions when they considered themselves to be able to receive a reference from a reliable source. Although it may sound great to receive a reference for an applicant right from the beginning it will likely cause an instant exclusion of a candidate that may well fit the job or it will influence the hire of an applicant that may not be the best available fit.
Six out of the ten managers stated they used structured questions when acquiring references. This structure was by most a semi-structured process, with certain key questions that the managers believed to be relevant to the recruitment process. When structured questions are used when gathering reference checks, it is possible to compare answers and use them to compare applicants by using similar information (Taylor et. al., 2004). Studies have then shown the use of structured questions to reduce the bias of recruiters because the use of similar questions provides similar answers (Kristof, 1996). While the use of structured questions may be positive in reducing bias, it seemed common for the interviewees to use questions that were not job relevant. The most commonly referenced question used by those interviewees that had structured questions was if the referee would re-hire the applicant. This goes against accepted academia on the topic, which states that when using structured questions to gather references they should be job relevant and focused on asking referees to rate the applicant compared to similar employees in their organizations (Taylor et. al., 2004). This will allow for better referencing when comparing applicants and therefore a fairer assessment of them. Many of the interviewed managers seemed to rather want to focus on subjective non job related questions that often did not necessarily provide comparable information, but instead provided situations they could interpret, such as hesitation.

When discussing the referees all of the managers were in agreement that those provided by the applicants themselves would almost exclusively provide a positive reference. That is due to the fact that the applicants are able to handpick their referees and ensure that they get good recommendation. That also allows for the applicants to get their friends to give references on their behalf (Taylor et. al., 2004). All the managers agreed that the best references came from contacts not provided by the applicant, but through other channels. When this is done there is a possibility the applicant experiences unfair treatment which can negatively affect the reputation of the organization. It may be good to ask for permission before contacting non-listed referees (Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004; Buttle, 1998). This was not something the interviewed managers seemed to do, as even those that wanted to keep all information above board said that they sometimes happened to be in a network of contacts that provided them with information.

The managers did generally not view information from reference checks to be a decision maker on their final decision, excluding circumstances where credible sources gave horrible references. The managers rather considered it as a tool that provides and confirms information that can then be used with other assessment methods. This is in part due to their view of reference checks as unreliable. This is in compliance with what studies have said on
using reference checks as assessment methods during the recruitment process. Studies have shown references to be poor predictors as well as vulnerable to the influence of bias (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007). This shows it to be the right decision by the managers to be reserved towards the information gathered through reference checks. The decision on allowing it to have impact when a trusted source gives very negative reference may result in the organization missing out on a good fit. The negative reference may be the result of unsubstantiated bias. It is however an understandable justification by one of the managers that it may not be worth the time spent following up on an applicant that receives such negative recommendation.

5.2. Social media
When the interviewees were asked about the information social media provided them with when assessing applicants, there were two social platforms that came into discussion. First there was Facebook which is used by nine of the ten interviewees and is mainly used to assess applicant’s personality traits and behavior. Then there was LinkedIn, which was used by two of the nine social media using managers on regular basis. As an assessment tool LinkedIn is mainly used to review CV’s and to view work experience as well as being a good tool for quick screening. Although a quick screening process may be convenient, it is unlikely to add any additional information regarding the applicant as the information on LinkedIn will likely already have been presented during the job application. This use of the two platforms by the managers fits studies which have shown each to be generally used to provide that kind of information when being used to assess applicants (Verschuren & Ranganath, 2012; Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2013). The common use of social media by the interviewees goes against various studies which have shown the negative effects of using social media as an assessment method in the recruitment process. Social media has been shown to be a poor predictor of future performance and studies have shown very little or even no correlation between future performance and the assessment of recruiters of social media profiles (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013). Applicant assessments through social media have been shown to be highly susceptible to bias as their content is highly subjective; this is because the view of the information on there is reliant on the views of the recruiter (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2007). The information which is available on each person through social media varies, that makes it difficult to compare applicants on a neutral basis (Broughton et. al., 2013). Social media often contains unreliable information which is difficult to authenticate. There can be information presented under the name of the applicant that is not his (Smith & Kidder, 2010).
The use of information from social media platforms which are considered private and are not work related is frowned upon by applicants and that can result in negative opinions of the organization (Stoughton, Thompson & Meade, 2015). Some academics have even gone so far as to recommend complete avoidance of their use as assessment tools, as not enough research has been conducted on their possible uses and contributions. They have further stated that at the moment social media does not tend to provide any additional information which proves useful when assessing applicants (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013).

The interviewees that used social media to assess applicants had in common the fact that the use of social media was not considered as an official part of the recruitment process at any of their organizations. Additionally, and possibly because of social media not being an official assessment method, none of the organizations had any clear structure or guidelines on how the use of social media should be conducted when using it to assess applicants. For some of the managers it was a random decision if they chose to view social media information in the beginning or at the end of the assessment stage. This goes against the recommendations of academics. They have recommended that if organizations want to use social media, in spite of studies having shown their use to be a poor assessment method, its use should be very structured and exclusively focus on evaluating job related information that can be compared to similar information from other applicants (Heneman III, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015). The interviewees’ unstructured use of social media is in line with its general use, where it is quite common for recruiters to assess applicants on the basis of their social media content by relying on their gut feeling without anything to support their sentiment (Van Iddekinge et. al., 2013).

Although there are many negatives of using social media as an assessment method, some of the managers that used Facebook to assess applicants were exclusively using it to look for red flags after all other assessment methods were finished. These red flags may be the applicant’s involvement in something the organization is not willing to be associated with. The problem is that all information on social media is not correct and may be derived from other people, although it is associated with the applicant (Smith & Kidder, 2010). Therefore, if there is a sighting of red flag associated with an applicant through social media, it may be prudent to follow up on that finding instead of rejecting the applicant outright.

It seems the outcome of assessing applicants through social media can be influential on the final decision by many of the managers. Nevertheless there is a substantial difference of what matters to each of them. While some of the managers look for obviously offensive factors that may influence their decisions, others seem to decide what kind of a person an
applicant is by assessing party pictures and the list of friends the applicant has on his social media page.
6. Conclusion

When reviewing the use of references and social media there is quite some difference on the attitude towards each. The lack of validity and limitations of using references when assessing applicants seems to be understood by managers. Meanwhile they do not seem to be aware of, or at least not to consider, the limitations and lack of validity studies have shown social media to have.

The interviewees’ general use of references is quite close to that which is stated as optimal in the theory. The use of recommendation letters is not valued as an assessment method and the main emphasis is on using reference checks when using references to gather information to assess applicants. The use of references tends to be conducted at the end of the assessment stage of the recruitment process. This reduces the likelihood of bias influencing the view of applicants in either a positive or negative manner.

There are some suggestions on how the use of references might be improved to make them more valid and reliable. When gathering information through references, the recruiter should have a clear structure of questions which ensures similar information for all applicants. That will allow for less of a bias when comparing the information of different applicants. The questions should be job related and focused on creating some measurable comparison, such as asking for comparison to other similar employees. The questions should not be subjective where the recruiter has to read into some hidden meaning of the answers, such as interpreting hesitation. References are best kept at the end of the assessment stage. There should not be exceptions because a recommendation from a reliable source is available. Even though receiving an instant confirmation of the capabilities of an applicant may be convenient, it is not the best decision. Having either a good or poor view of an applicant before the assessment stage begins creates bias during the recruitment process, which may prohibit the organization from hiring the best available fit for the job. There should be an awareness of the likelihood of bias when assessing applicants through references. The reason for the late use of references during the assessment stage should not only be because of the poor validity references have and therefore the unreliable information. Their late use should also be present to combat bias influencing the recruitment process. It might be good to ask applicants for permission before contacting referees they have not recommended. If this is done above board it is far less likely that the applicant experiences unfair treatment.

The interviewees’ general use of social media is far from the emphasis that has been put forth in the theory. Social media is widely used to assess applicants, regardless of the fact
that studies have shown them, at least at the moment, to be very poor at predicting anything regarding future job performance. There seems to be very limited structure or guidelines on the use of social media during the assessment stage of the recruitment process. The way the majority of the managers are conducting applicant assessment through social media, it is highly likely that they are inhibiting their organizations in finding the best people, instead of social media being a tool to find the best performers.

There are some suggestions on how the use of social media could be improved, although according to theory, it is considered best to exclude the use of social media from the recruitment process, at least while there is a lack of research on its effects. Clear structure and guidelines should be present on the use of social media. That would ensure all applicants receive the same treatment, which would optimally be reviewing social media platforms at the end of the assessment stage, if they are to be used at all. This would also prevent the use of gut feelings when assessing applicants. The process of using social media when assessing applicants should be structured. The structure should ensure the same information is gathered on all applicants to allow for less biased comparison of applicants. The factors that should be considered when using social media to assess applicants should be job related. Applicants should not be assessed on the grounds of their appearance or the friends they keep as studies have shown little to no correlation between those factors and future job performance of applicants.

References and social media should not necessarily be viewed as standalone assessment methods, but rather as providers of supplementary information available to support other assessment methods. Both are poor on their own, but can provide unique information that can then be confirmed by other, more valid assessment methods. They are both quick to use and cost effective and that, along with the willingness of managers to gather all available information, seem to be the reason for their widespread use and popularity. The problem is that collecting copious amount of information on an applicant may not be the best if it is not job relevant, the origin and truthfulness of some the information is in doubt and their intake can only be interpreted by using gut feeling. At present, the use of references can provide somewhat helpful and job relevant information. This is particularly evident when references are gathered in a structured and comparable way. Studies have shown that the same cannot be said about social media at present. That is not to say that social media will not prove to be useful later, but that will be after more research on its potential use to assess applicants has been conducted.
When considering the outcome of the interviews, potential limitations should be considered. All participants were Caucasian Icelanders working in Iceland. The size of the Icelandic labor market is small compared to many other global markets. The small size of the market may result in close knit networks that make it easier to gather information on applicants, than in bigger labor markets. All except one of the participants are 40 years or older; the use of references and particularly social media as assessment methods may be different when used by younger individuals.

Future research on the subject could focus on the validity of social media or valid methods to use social media to assess applicants. Another interesting topic of research would be to do a comparative study in a bigger labor market to see if the use of references and social media differs.
7. References


Grasz, J. (2012). Thirty-seven percent of companies use social networks to research potential job candidates, according to new CareerBuilder Survey. *Careerbuilder.com.*


Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview questionnaire (Icelandic)

- Örstutt yfirborðskynning á verkefninu:
  - Ég er að skoða notkun meðmæla og samfélagsmiðla við mat á umsækjendum
- Byrja á léttum upphitunarspurningum:
  - Hversu lengi hefur þú verið í bransanum?
  - Ertu búin/n að vinna lengi hérna?
- Byrja helstu spurningar:
  - Nú ert þú mannaúðsstjóri fyrirtækisins, hver eru helstu störf þín?
    - Hefur þú beina aðkomu að ráðningum hjá fyrirtækinu?
      - JÁ = Hvernig kemur þú að þeim? (ef það er ekki farið nánar út í það)
      - NEI = Hver er það sem sér mest um það hjá fyrirtækinu?
  - Hvaða aðferðir notið þið helst við mat á hæfní umsækjenda?
    - Áttir þú þátt í hönnun ferlisins?
- Ef mannaúðsstjóri minnist á notkun meðmæla og samfélagsmiðla
  - Hvernig er það notað og hver er skoðun þín á þessum matsaðferðum?
    - Hvaða upplýsingar veita þessar aðferðir ykkur?
- Ef mannaúðsstjóri minnist EKKI á að nota meðmæli eða samfélagsmiðla
  - Afhverju er það ekki notað, hver er skoðun þín á þessum matsaðferðum?
- Lokaspurningar og stutt “yfirheyrsla”
  - Er eiththvað fleira sem þú vilt nefna varðandi ofangreindar spurningar?
  - Hver er aldur þinn?
  - Hvaða menntun hefur þú?
  - Hver er starfsreynsla þún á þessu sviði?
  - Má ég fá að senda þér tölvupóst ef það er eiththvað sem mér misfórst að spyrja þig um?