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# SEARCHING FOR A MATCH

The Formation of Person-Organization Fit Perceptions

SEARCHING FOR A MATCH

Marije E. E. de Goede

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SEARCHING FOR A MATCH:  
THE FORMATION OF PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT PERCEPTIONS



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THE FORMATION OF PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT PERCEPTIONS

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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# CHAPTER 1

Person-Organization fit perceptions:  
An introduction



**M**ost people spend a large amount of time with working in an organization. They are generally happy to do so as long as their work and organizational environment fit with their needs and preferences. An organization's culture is particularly important for people's commitment to the organization and for their intentions to stay or quit the job. A person is committed to the organization and will stay if he or she experiences that the organization's culture matches with his or her own cultural preferences. For example, a young accountant, called Anna, likes her job because her organization stresses team work. Anna highly appreciates the input of other team members and she feels energized by working in a team. Her colleague Johan, however, is less happy. He feels most at ease when he can work on his own and when he is not forced to collaborate with others. Johan realizes that he made a mistake when accepting this job. He now knows that he has a suboptimal fit with the organization's culture and he, therefore, ponders about options to leave and to find a better fitting job. He spends quite some time searching vacancies on the web and inspecting organizational websites to get a solid impression of their cultures.

Little is known about how job-seekers in general and career starters in particular form their perceptions about organizations. Specifically, we do not know yet how an organization's culture is represented in the minds of people and how they assess their fit with an organization's culture. This is unfortunate, because fit perceptions are crucial for individuals' career choices. To date, most theory and research on Person-Environment (PE) fit in general and Person-Organization (PO) fit in particular has focused on the outcomes of fit perceptions, e.g., by showing that the more job-seekers perceive a fit with the organization, the more attracted they are to the organization (Judge & Cable, 1997), and the more likely they choose to apply (Dineen & Noe, 2009). Furthermore, perceptions of PO fit are positively related to job-seekers' future socialization and desirable individual outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Finally, PO fit research shows that people's PO fit perceptions are better indicators of their choices and work outcomes than PO fit measures that are obtained more objectively (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003).

It is important for individuals and organizations to gain more insight into the factors that influence people's fit perceptions during job search. Job-seekers aim to find a fitting job and organization and more knowledge about their job search and evaluation strategies could

help them to improve these strategies. Organizations aim to attract applicants, but the question is whether they are able to attract those applicants that will fit their organization. For example, job-seekers may self-select into organizations because of PO fit perceptions that are based on insufficient or biased information. This may lead to suboptimal career decisions that in turn may result in stress, turnover, and disruptions for both the new employee and the organization. In a similar vein, suitable and fitting applicants may self-select out of an organization's hiring process because of perceived insufficient PO fit.

The aim of this dissertation is to provide a better understanding of the content of job-seekers' fit perceptions and how these perceptions are shaped. This dissertation is a first attempt to answer the question: 'What do job-seekers' have in mind when they assess their prospective PO fit? The PO fit literature generally assumes that PO fit perceptions reflect an overall comparison between a person and an organization (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). In this dissertation, I will test this assumption.

This introduction starts with an explanation of the PO fit construct. Next, I will discuss the different assessments of PO fit that are used in the literature and how these assessments relate to each other and to specific individual and organizational outcomes. The introduction will continue with describing factors that may influence people's PO fit perceptions. I will focus both on factors that may affect the inferences that people make about organizations and factors that may affect people's attention to and perception of particular organizational cues. This introduction ends with an overview of the studies in this dissertation.

## **Conceptualizing PO fit**

One of the main questions in PO fit research concerns the precise nature of the PO fit concept. What are the contents of the P and O components, and how do they combine into an impression of PO fit? In her review of the fit literature Kristof-Brown states that: "... there appears to be only one universally agreed upon condition for fit. Namely, that Person-Environment fit requires that a constellation of P and E attributes influence outcomes" (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). At the onset of fit theory is Lewin's (1939) assertion that  $B = F(P, E)$ , i.e., that behavior is a function of the person and the environment, or in other words,

that both personal and situational characteristics jointly affect behavior (Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2008). However, Lewin did not specify how the joint effects of person and environment come about and whether the combination of personal and situational characteristics is additive, interactive, or relative (Edwards, 2008; Schneider, 2001).

Kristof (1996, p.4) defined PO fit as: “the compatibility that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other wants or needs, (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, (c) or both” (p.4). This definition comprises (the combination of) two forms of fit, namely *complementary* fit (part a of Kristof’s definition) and *supplementary* fit (part b of Kristof’s definition). Schneider’s Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework (1987) went a step further with proposing that ‘*people need to fit their environment*’. The ASA framework posits that people are not randomly assigned to particular environments (i.e., organizations), but that they select themselves into and out of these environments. First, people find organizations differentially attractive as a function of their judgment of the congruence between their own characteristics and those of the organization. Job-seekers self-select themselves into organizations: those who expect to find a match with the organization will apply, whereas those who do not expect such a match likely decide not to apply. Second, the prospective employee pool is further reduced through the organization’s selection procedure that aims to hire those job-seekers who have the attributes the organization desires. Finally, once people have become citizens of the organization they will assess the fit between their own characteristics and those of the work environment. If they deem this fit as too small, they will tend to leave the organization as soon as possible. Finally, this process of attraction, selection, and attrition will result in homogeneity of people in organizations, which in turn generate and consolidate an organization’s values and culture.

Person-organization fit has mainly been conceptualized in terms of the fit between personal and organizational values. Values are a fundamental and enduring aspect of both people and organizations, and they guide individual and organizational decisions and actions (Chatman, 1989). As such, values constitute an organization’s culture; they specify how organizational members should behave and how organizational resources should be allocated. Therefore, PO fit researchers have treated PO fit and value congruence as equivalent. They measured, for example, the actual congruence between people’s values and the values of the recruiting organization in order to predict people’s PO fit perceptions and subsequent job choice intentions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997). Moreover,

they measured people's PO fit perceptions with items that refer to the perceived congruence between one's values and those of the organization (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

In line with current fit research (e.g., Van Vianen, 2005), I will conceptualize PO fit as supplementary fit, thus as the congruence between a person's values and those of the organization.

## Measuring PO fit

Although there is general agreement on the theoretical basis and definition of PO fit, there is a wide variety of operationalizations of the congruence between persons and organizations. The aim of this dissertation is to examine whether existing PO fit measures reflect the construct as described in seminal PO fit theories. Below, I will provide a short overview of the PO fit measures that have been used in the PO fit literature.

PO fit measures can be categorized into direct as opposed to indirect measures. Researchers who use a *direct* measure of PO fit interpret fit more as a general feeling towards the organization and operationalize it by asking individuals to indicate the extent to which they perceive fit with the (prospective) organization. Typical questions include: "How well do you think you fit in the organization?" (Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004) or "My personal values match my organization's values and culture" (Cable & DeRue, 2002). This direct PO fit assessment is also called *perceived fit* or *PO fit perceptions*.

Meta-analyses (Arthur, et al., 2006; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Verquer, et al., 2003) have shown that PO fit perceptions are strong correlates of individual and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction (.56-.62), organizational commitment (.59-.77) and intent to quit (-.52 - -.58; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). At the same time, PO fit perceptions are not very informative, because the process underlying these perceptions remains largely unknown. For example, while people are thought to perceive fit when their characteristics are similar to those of the organization (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006), direct PO fit perceptions do not reveal how individuals have assessed these characteristics. To what extent do individuals have a mental representation of personal and organizational characteristics and, second, how do they examine the congruence between both? Measuring fit as a general perception permits a person to use all or only some sources of information

and to apply their own weighting scheme to the various informational aspects involved. Therefore, PO fit perceptions are likely based on individual differences in awareness and salience of individual and organizational characteristics (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Piasentin & Chapman, 2007).

The second category of PO fit measures relies on an explicit comparison between individual and organizational characteristics. These *indirect* measures comprise the measurement of P and O characteristics separately, which researchers then combine into a PO fit index (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). These indirect PO fit measures have also been referred to as *actual PO fit* which can take two forms: subjective or objective (actual) PO fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The *subjective PO fit* index is based on only one source of information, namely individuals' self-reports of their own characteristics and those of the organization. Hence, subjective PO fit is based on a person's own subjective interpretation of the organizational environment. An *objective PO fit* index seems less vulnerable to subjectivity because this index is based on two independent sources of information. The P ratings are derived from individuals themselves, whereas the O ratings are derived from (the shared perceptions of) other organizational members (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997) or objective organizational features (e.g., Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001).

Although indirect measures are more informative about the specific characteristics on which persons and organizations are compared, they are often weaker predictors of people's affective reactions and choices than direct PO fit measures (Cable & Judge, 1997), especially when both persons and organizations are assessed by different sources. For example, low to moderate relations were found between objective fit and job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to quit (.22-.29, .23-.27, -.14 - .19 respectively; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010)

To summarize, different fit measures have different relations with relevant outcomes (as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to quit). In other words, the measurement strategy has a significant impact on the strength of PO fit relationships. Edwards and colleagues (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Schurer Lambert, & Shipp, 2006) compared people's direct fit perceptions with discrepancy perceptions and indirect measures of PO fit. They found that the relationships between these three fit operationalizations were rather weak. Apparently, people's PO fit perceptions do not follow

the basic logic of fit theory and are not based on an overall calculation of discrepancies or a holistic comparison across multiple value dimensions.

This dissertation examines why direct and indirect PO fit measures do not converge and what the sources of people's PO fit perceptions are. I use three measures of PO fit: PO fit perceptions, subjective fit and objective fit. Specifically, the P and O components are assessed and subjective and/or objective fits are estimated and related to job-seekers' PO fit perceptions. Through this, I aim to unravel the routes that lead to people's overall (direct) PO fit perceptions. I investigate how job-seekers perceive organizations, how they process organizational information, and how they compare this information with their own values.

### **The sources of job-seekers' PO fit perceptions**

A first research question concerns job-seekers' perceptions of organizations. What signals do job-seekers use to make inferences about an organization? Job-seekers often have only sparse and ambiguous information to rely on when assessing their prospective fit. As compared to organizational citizens, job-seekers have relatively little information about an organization's culture. Thus to assess their PO fit, job-seekers develop an impression of organizations and their alleged cultures based on the incomplete information available to them. To evaluate this sparse information they may use schematic or stereotypical ideas and expectations about different types of organizations (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000).

A schema could be an organizational image which represents a general, overall impression of an organization and its characteristics that is based on the facts, beliefs, and feelings associated with this organization. Several studies have shown that an organization's reputation or image shapes job-seekers' evaluations with this organization (Turban & Cable, 2003). Also, the type of industry in which a firm operates, the opportunities that a firm provides for employee development, and organizational culture affect job-seekers' perception of an organization (Cable & Graham, 2000). These perceptions take the form of trait-like inferences (e.g., innovative, dominant) about an organization's culture (Lievens, Van Hove, & Anseel, 2007). That is, job-seekers may associate specific types of companies or

branches of industry with specific types of organizational cultures as based, for example, on messages (e.g., commercials, images) in the media.

Little is known about the content of these organizational culture impressions that people have in mind. This is surprising, because a job-seeker's initial attraction to the organization will depend on the extent to which these inferences correspond with their own traits and preferences. If possible – job-seekers choose organizations on the basis of perceived congruence between their own characteristics and those of the organization (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1994; Rentsch & McEwen, 2002). Extant studies that examined the relationship between PO fit perceptions and organizational attractiveness have provided job-seekers with ready items that reflect personal and organizational characteristics. This raises the question whether the mental models that people would spontaneously have in mind when searching for a fitting job resemble the content of P and O components as operationalized by researchers.

To identify the sources of job-seekers' PO fit perceptions, a second question to address is job-seekers' attention to and weighing of organizational cues. Job-seekers often have sparse and ambiguous information to rely on when assessing their prospective fit. Would it be better if they would have comprehensive and solid information about organizational cultures? Would their PO fit assessments be more realistic then? The answer to this question highly depends on how people process and weight different pieces of information. Research has convincingly shown that people are not able to process large amounts of information and that their subsequent decisions are seldom based on rationality (Kahneman, 2003). Rather, people are sensitive to and tend to focus on specific types of information as influenced by the circumstances in which they have to make their decisions. Consequently, job-seekers might weigh the P and O components in a different way than PO fit researchers or selecting organizations tend to assume: some types of information may be weighed more heavily than other ones.

Traditionally people are expected to make an overall comparison between their personal values and the values of an organization when evaluating their PO fit (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). According to this assumption, it does not matter on what specific values job-seekers perceive fit or misfit with organizational values, what matters is the overall level of perceived fit. Therefore, overall PO fit perceptions are assumed to be equally based on the presence of values in the organization that support a person's own values, i.e.,

attractive values, and on the absence of values in the organization that contradict a person's own values, i.e. aversive values. However, research has shown that job-seekers rarely undertake such overall calculative comparisons between their own values and those of the organization (Edwards, et al., 2006; Van Vuuren, Veldkamp, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007). Yet, if PO fit perceptions do not reflect the overall similarity between a person's values and an organization's values, what then do they represent?

The precise comparison and weighing of personal and organizational information may, for example, depend on the salience of people's value preferences. People differ in the values they find attractive and those that are aversive or are more neutral to them (Cable & Edwards, 2004; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). The differences in attractiveness of values guide people to approach certain outcomes and to avoid others. Attractive values are the values that people typically try to attain. Aversive values, on the other hand, are the values they try to avoid (Feather, 1995). Based on the general assumption underlying PO fit, job-seekers should strive to maximize value congruence with an organization; i.e., they should strive to find an organization in which they could attain their personal attractive values and avoid their personal aversive values. There is good reason, however, to assume that the activity of job search may make some of people's preferences more salient than other ones. They may, therefore, focus on a limited set of organizational values. In this dissertation, I propose that job-seekers' specific goal (finding a job) and the relatively large psychological distance to the object of evaluation (the future organization) may cause them to weigh organizational information about attractive values more heavily than information about aversive values.

Job-search is aimed at attaining a future goal (a prospective job). Hence, job-seekers' thoughts about the prospective employing organization will be likely dominated by desirable goals and plans, and will rarely include considerations of failure or unpleasant outcomes (Armor & Taylor, 1998; Newby-Clark & Ross, 2003). From the basic hedonic principle that people approach pleasure and avoid pain, Higgins (1997) proposed that people are guided by two distinct self-regulatory systems: promotion and prevention. Promotion is related to aspirations, growth, and accomplishments and involves one's sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes. Prevention, by contrast, centers on one's sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes and is related to protection, safety, and responsibility. Regulatory focus can differ both across situations (momentary regulatory

focus) and across individuals (chronic regulatory orientation; Förster & Werth, 2009). Regulatory focus theory proposes that the attention given to positive versus negative information depends on whether an evaluation is made from a promotion or a prevention focus.

I contend that the situation of job-search induces a promotion orientation. Because job-seekers tend to pay more attention to the goals they want to attain than to the goals they want to avoid (Brodscholl, Kober, & Higgins, 2007; Pennington & Roese, 2003), they will be in promotion rather than prevention focus. In other words, job-seekers will be more sensitive to organizational information about attractive rather than aversive values, and fit or misfit on attractive values will be weighed more heavily than (mis)fit on aversive values. Job-seekers' momentary induced regulatory focus may, however, interact with their chronic regulatory focus. Chronically prevention-oriented job-seekers, who usually are more attentive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997), may also focus on information regarding the absence or presence of their personal aversive values. Hence, chronically prevention focused job-seekers may arrive at more balanced perceptions of their overall fit than their promotion focused counterparts.

Another characteristic of the job-search situation is that the outcome of the job search activity (a job) is by definition situated in the future. This future-oriented time perspective may affect the way in which PO fit perceptions are formed. The PO fit literature treats conceptions of anticipated future PO fit and present PO fit in similar ways, as if PO fit was always experienced in the present. However, people construct different representations of the same information depending on the temporal distance, that is, whether the information pertains to be more proximal or more distant in time (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003). With increasing time, people become more attuned to acquisition, achievement, and the presence of desired outcomes as opposed to caution, security, and the prevention of things unwanted (Brodscholl, et al., 2007; Pennington & Roese, 2003). Temporal distance seems to provide a cushion of resources: distance affords people greater opportunity for taking risks and making mistakes because there is some latitude for correction. Consequently, distance gives people room to focus on the desirable side of an option. Yet, as temporal distance decreases and events draw near, correction is less possible. In that case, the undesirable side of options become more salient (Eyal, Liberman, Trope, & Walther, 2004). Altogether, the distant time perspective that job-

seekers have during job-search may induce a focus on information about attractive values at the expense of information about aversive values.

To conclude, the central goal of this dissertation is to provide a more complete understanding of how people and especially job-seekers develop perceptions of fit as based on value-congruence. How do job-seekers form an impression of an organization's cultural values, how do they process organizational information, and how is this information weighed and compared with their own preferences? Below I will outline the chapters of this dissertation and the studies that were conducted to answer these research questions.

## **Overview of this dissertation**

The first empirical chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 2, entails a first endeavor to identify the sources of the PO fit that job-seekers use when assessing an organization. In this chapter, I examine how job-seekers' ideas and expectations about different organizations may rely on common stereotypes about the branch of industry in which these organizations operate. I introduce the construct of Person-Industry (PI) fit to indicate the fit between personal values and industry culture stereotypes as a first indicator of how well job-seekers may fit with an organization (PO fit). Furthermore, I examine whether an organization's website can affect the influence of job-seekers' initial PI fit impressions; a well-designed website may help drawing attention to relevant information about an organization's culture.

Whereas Chapter 2 mainly concerns the processing of ambiguous organizational information, Chapter 3 focuses on the weighing of explicit information about an organization's culture. Traditionally, people are expected to make an overall comparison between their personal values and those of the organization when evaluating their PO fit (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). Consequently, overall PO fit perceptions are assumed to be equally based on the presence of values in the organization that support a person's own values, i.e., attractive values, and on the absence of values in the organization that contradict a person's own values, i.e., aversive values. Chapter 3 questions this assumption and proposes that job-seekers weigh their personal attractive values more heavily than their personally aversive values. This basic proposition is examined across four studies all using an experimental repeated measure design, called policy-capturing, but differing in types of

measurements and samples. Unique to the design is that participants consider their PO fit with multiple organizational profiles that are personally relevant to them – thanks to an automatic yet hidden personal tailoring of the values presented to participants' own attractive, aversive, and neutral values.

Chapter 3 will draw a conceptually clearer picture of how job-seekers weigh their personal attractive, aversive, and neutral values in the formation of their PO fit perceptions. Chapter 4 continues on this by examining factors that could affect people's attention to and perception of particular organizational cues. It is proposed that regulatory focus may moderate the mechanisms as found in Chapter 3. This chapter tests whether job-seekers' proclivity for attractive or aversive indicators of PO fit may depend on their own regulatory focus, i.e. whether they are chronically promotion or prevention focused. Because prevention focused job-seekers may be sensitive to information about personal aversive values, they may arrive at more balanced and thus more accurate perceptions of their overall PO-fit.

Chapter 5 tests the idea that temporal distance is crucial in the formation of PO fit perceptions. Based on construal level theory, it is proposed that temporal (psychological) distance to the prospective organization influences the salience of attractive values and aversive values differently. The salience of fit or misfit on attractive values will increase with distance, whereas the salience of fit or misfit on aversive values will decrease. Furthermore, individual differences in regulatory focus could amplify and offset the effects of temporal distance. These ideas are tested in an experimental study.

The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 6, entails an overview of the main findings of the empirical studies in this dissertation. The general conclusions give ground to discuss theoretical implications for research on PO fit perceptions and to elaborate on future avenues for research on the determinants of people's PO fit perceptions. The chapter also outlines further practical implications for job-seekers and employees.

A final note: Chapters 2 through 5 have been prepared as separate (journal) articles and therefore may be read independently of each other. However, as a result of this, the reader may encounter similarities among parts of this dissertation.





# CHAPTER 2

Attracting applicants on the web: PO fit, industry culture stereotypes, and website design



Organizations' websites have become a major recruitment tool and source of information for potential applicants (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Cober & Brown, 2006). Job-seekers use these websites not only to learn more about the job options available, but also to form impressions about the organizations' culture (Cable, et al., 2000). The more job-seekers perceive an organization's culture to fit their own cultural preferences (Person-Organization fit), the more attracted they are to the organization (Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996) and the more likely they choose to apply (Dineen & Noe, 2009). This makes an organization's website vital for attracting suitable applicants. Yet, little is known about how organizational websites actually affect applicants' perceptions of organizational culture (Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004; Ployhart, 2006).

Previous research on organizational websites as a recruitment tool has mainly focused on the impact of website design on organizational attraction. The more appealing and user-friendly job-seekers judge an organization's website, the more positive they also evaluate the respective organization (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003; PfiEFFELMANN, Wagner, & Libkuman, 2010; Sinar, Reynolds, & Paquet, 2003; Williamson, Lepak, & King, 2003). The design of a website seems to act as a cue from which job-seekers infer the overall quality of an organization as a potential employer. Moreover, individuals' positive perceptions of the website design seem to increase their recall of the information provided (Cober, et al., 2003; Dineen, Ling, Ash, & DelVecchio, 2007; Konradt & Rack, 2006). This suggests that a positive first impression of an organizational website not only influences organizational attraction directly, but that it may also encourage and facilitate job-seekers' efforts to process the information provided.

The aim of the present study is to test whether websites can change preexisting ideas of organizational culture. Job-seekers are not 'blank slates' when entering an organization's website, but already have expectations about the organization based on common stereotypes about the organization's industry. These stereotypes may serve as anchors which influence how job-seekers react to an organization's website (Cober, et al., 2004). Job-seekers may well assume the organizational culture to equal the 'stereotypical culture' for that organization's industry. Upon entering the website however, they will be immediately exposed to the website's design. We suggest that job-seekers' perceptions of the web-design can influence their ideas of the organization's culture (Yu, 2009) – and thus reduce job-seekers' reliance on common industry culture stereotypes when estimating the

organization's culture. Therefore, we examine whether industry culture stereotypes are used to assess an organization's culture and whether this is affected by web-design.

### **The Importance of Person-Organization Fit**

According to Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) theory, people self-select themselves into and out of organizations (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). The proposed assumption underlying this self-selection is that people strive to fit with their organizational environment. Therefore, job-seekers find organizations differentially attractive as a function of how the characteristics of the organization match with their personal characteristics. Many Person-Organization (PO) fit studies have particularly examined the match between people's values and the values of the organization as reflected in its culture. Values represent conscious desires held by the person and encompass preferences, interests, motives, and goals (Chatman, 1991). They are conceived of as fundamental and relatively enduring and value congruence and PO fit are often treated as equivalent terms (Kristof, 1996).

A good PO fit has been associated with outcomes such as high job satisfaction and organizational commitment and low turnover intentions (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; O'Reilly, et al., 1991). Therefore, it does not surprise that the more an organization's culture fits a job-seeker's personal cultural preferences, the more attractive the organization is for this individual (Judge & Cable, 1997; Pfieffermann, et al., 2010). Prior research on Web-based recruitment has built on this knowledge. Most of these studies used fictitious organization websites that provided applicants either with highly explicit information about an organization's culture to establish fit perceptions (Braddy, Meade, & Kroustalis, 2006; Cober, et al., 2003) or with direct fit feedback (low or high actual fit; Dineen, et al., 2002; Dineen, et al., 2007; Hu, Su, & Chen, 2007). As expected, both explicit culture information and fit feedback influenced individuals' attraction to an organization.

However, although researchers have recognized the importance of PO Fit for applicant attraction, little is known about how PO Fit is established. PO fit has usually been treated as an exogenous and static construct that only could be influenced by the objective characteristics of the person and the organization; thereby ignoring how other variables - such as the design of an organization's website - could influence perceptions of organization (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). Organizations increasingly view the Internet as an attractive tool

for recruiting employees. Given the proclivity of the web to increase unqualified application traffic, it is important for organizations to know what types of applicants they attract due to their website and how they can restrict or broaden their applicant pool with the help of their website. On the one hand, organizations can move beyond simply trying to encourage attraction among all job-seekers and focus on the best way to align job-seekers' beliefs with intended organizational images (Cable & Yu, 2006; Dineen, et al., 2007). On the other hand, organizations may want to keep their applicant pool as large as possible in order to be able to select the best candidates, thus reducing the possibility of false negatives through applicant self-selection.

### **Industry Culture Stereotypes**

Past studies on web-based PO fit offer valuable insights into the power of organizational websites in influencing applicants' PO fit assessments and attraction to the organization. These studies indicate that job-seekers do not start the screening process of an organization's website blankly. Rather, they usually already hold some ideas and expectations about different organizations and their alleged cultures. They may, thus, approach a website with schemata in mind that serve as anchors and therefore influence job-seekers' reactions (Cable, et al., 2000; Cober, et al., 2004).

A schema could be an organizational image which represents a general, overall impression of an organization and its characteristics that is based on the facts, beliefs, and feelings associated with this organization. Relying on the web self-presentation of well-known Fortune 500 companies, several studies have shown that an organization's reputation or image indeed shapes applicants' evaluations of this organization (e.g., Allen, et al., 2007; Cober, et al., 2003). A positive organizational image provides incremental preferences for an organization as a potential employer (Allen, et al., 2007; Cable & Turban, 2003; Collins & Stevens, 2002). In addition, studies that examined people's PO fit perceptions with regard to recognizable and familiar organizations found that individuals assess the instrumental and symbolic characteristics of these organizations or use personality labels to describe these organizations, which in turn influences their PO fit perceptions (Gregory & Viswesvaran, 2009; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). Most organizations, however, do not have a well-known Fortune 500

reputation or image to rely upon. Job-seekers are often confronted with organizations that are not yet familiar and do not have a specific reputation. Thus, it is less clear what kind of symbolic attributes are associated with these unfamiliar organizations. Moreover, the websites of these organizations often do not offer any explicit information about organizational values (as in Braddy, et al., 2006; Cober, et al., 2003) or customized fit feedback (as in Dineen, et al., 2002; Dineen, et al., 2007; Hu, et al., 2007). Rather, most organizational websites are mainly designed to present product and service information. Job-seekers face much more ambiguous indicators of an organization's culture than previous research would suggest.

When job-seekers possess only limited information about these organizations, they have to draw inferences on the incomplete information available to them, such as product and service information (Tsai & Yang, 2010). Any characteristic observable to a job-seeker could activate a schemata or category stereotype that also includes perceptions of organizational culture (Cable, et al., 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban, 2001). For organizations that do not have a clear image or reputation, we expect the branch of industry in which these organizations operate to be the category stereotype and therefore to influence job-seekers' perceptions.

Indeed, job-seekers reflect on an organization's branch of industry when evaluating possible employers. For example, Cable and Graham (2000) asked their study participants to think aloud while making decisions or judgments about an organization. They found that people's statements were frequently related to the company's branch of industry, that is, its primary business and products, including the types of employees typically working in a particular industry. Hence, job-seekers use these general industry perceptions to form their impression of a specific organization. Given that organizations in the public sector, for example, may appear largely characterized by regulation, one particular governmental organization should also be perceived as being highly regulated (e.g., Luoma-aho, 2008). These industry culture stereotypes not only provide job-seekers with first impressions of an organization itself but they also give a first indication of how well job-seekers may fit with this organization (person-organization fit). For this purpose, we will refer to job-seekers' fit with the industry culture stereotypes as person-industry (PI) fit.

PI fit may at first bear some similarities to earlier concepts related to person-occupation or person-job fit developed in the vocational counseling literature (e.g., Dawis &

Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1985). A fundamental aspect of the work environment with which a person may fit is at the vocational or occupational level (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005) and much of the vocational counseling literature is concerned with person-job and person-vocation fit, for example in terms of vocational choice as in Holland's (1985) RIASEC model and the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). These theories however are mainly concerned with matching people with careers that meet their interests, in that people's abilities, needs, personalities, and competencies meet the requirements of an occupation or vocation. In this literature, fit is therefore focused on finding an occupation that matches the candidate's interests. Yet, the current research considers a later stage of the career process when the job-seeker has already chosen his or her basic occupation and is now seeking for a place to work in this occupation.

Schneider et al. (1995) argued for "separating the occupational from the organizational issue" (p. 761). Although some occupations may be associated with specific types of organizations or industries (a nurse will likely be associated with the health care industry), many other occupations can be pursued in more than one type of industry (e.g., HR-manager, accountant, lawyer, or management trainee). For example, a person may want to become an accountant because of his or her mathematical interests and skills but this profession is not directly linked to a specific type of industry (bank, consultancy, government). Hence, students who share their occupational interests yet have to choose from among many different organizational settings where they can perform their profession. This implies that person-vocation fit (the match between a person's personality and interests and the characteristics that are associated with the core occupational activities) cannot be equated with person-industry fit (the match between a person's values and the culture values that a person associates with specific types of industries). Instead, given the fact that perceptions about specific organizations are likely derived from perceptions about its branch of industry, we assume that job-seekers' fit with the industry culture stereotypes (PI fit) will relate to their fit with their web-based perceptions of organizational values (PO fit).

*Hypothesis 1: Person-industry (PI) fit will be positively related to person-organization (PO) fit.*

## Website Design

Organizations clearly cannot change their product or service line in order to alter their image among job-seekers. However, they may want to convince potential applicants that their organization's culture is unique and may diverge from other organizations in the same branch of industry. Job-seekers may tend to apply industry culture stereotypes to a particular organization or, alternatively, they may assess the target organization's culture independent of prevalent industry culture stereotypes. If job-seekers rely on industry stereotypes when judging an organization's culture, the relationship between PI fit and PO fit will be strong. The stereotype will be the main information source of job-seekers' perceptions about an organization's culture. If an organization manages to present itself as being different from the stereotype, the weaker the relationship between PI Fit and PO fit will be. Other sources than only stereotypes are used to form culture perceptions.

Organizations may attempt to use their website as a tool to reveal their uniqueness, for example, if their branch of industry has difficulties with attracting applicants due to a lower reputation as compared to other branches of industries. Information processing is not based only on the amount of information that is available to applicants, but also on the ways in which this information is presented and communicated. A website often provides the earliest exposure to an organization, cueing job-seekers about what further to expect about organizational values and leading them to form favorable or unfavorable first impressions of the organization (Cober, et al., 2004). The design of an organization's website is therefore crucial for attracting and maintaining job-seekers' attention. Recent research has shown that the aesthetic characteristics of websites can cause the content of a website to be processed more effortful (Dineen, et al., 2007). Moreover, a good website design motivates people to carefully process and remember the content of the information presented (Cober, et al., 2003; Konradt & Rack, 2006).

Such careful processing may diminish job-seekers' reliance on industry culture stereotypes when assessing an organization's culture and establishing their fit. However, people have a tendency to engage in preference-consistent evaluation of (new) information, often resulting in a continued adherence to their initial impression (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999). Hence, an organization's website should affect individuals to use new information less rigidly and to distance themselves from prevalent industry stereotypes.

People's affective attitudes influence the cognitive processing of information and activate or inhibit the use of stereotypes (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999). In a similar vein, job-seekers' affective reactions towards an organization's website design may activate or inhibit pre-existing industry culture stereotypes. The dual process model of information processing proposes that pre-existing ideas are less accessible when individuals have a personalized relationship with the target (e.g., Brewer & Harasty, 1996). Attractive website designs may create this personalized mode because they elicit feelings of communality ('the organization and I have similar preferences'). Further, stereotypes may remain present but individuals may not use them because the website design does not correspond with expectations (e.g., Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996) or the stereotypes may be inhibited as individuals get motivated to process the information in more detail (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1992). Altogether the literature on stereotyping emphasize that a category stereotype is the default option for impression formation. However, reliance on this stereotype can be reduced by information that is personalized.

The design of an organization's website could motivate job-seekers to spend more cognitive effort and to consider the information on it more carefully. Consequently, a website design that is appreciated by job-seekers should reduce the extent to which they rely on industry stereotypes when judging an organization's culture. The similarity between their perception of the organization's culture (O) and industry culture stereotypes (I) will be relatively low then. We refer to this similarity as organization-industry similarity (OI similarity). However, when a person does not like a website, processing will be less motivated and more heuristic in nature which will result in a stereotypical perception of the organization. The OI similarity will then be higher. We propose:

*Hypothesis 2:* Assessment of website design will be negatively related to organization-industry (OI) similarity.

We thus assume that the design of an organization's website influences the degree to which information is processed heuristically or systematically and thus the use of industry culture stereotypes when judging an organization's culture. Another possibility, however, is that the industry culture stereotype itself serves as an impetus for gathering additional information (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). That is, the extent to which individuals' own values fit with the

industry culture stereotypes should influence whether a website is processed systematically or heuristically as well.

People have a tendency to engage in preference-consistent evaluation of new information, resulting in judgments consistent with the original view (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999). We expect that job-seekers who experience a low fit with the industry culture stereotype (low PI fit) are less motivated to screen a website systematically and therefore engage in effortless and heuristic processing of information. Job-seekers with high PI fit, in contrast, are already more interested in the organization and thus more motivated to engage in deep, effortful information processing. Both groups likely want to make good decisions, but they differ in the extent to which they are willing to critically scrutinize new information and revise initial preferences. Both have a tendency to engage in preference-consistent evaluation of information, but they differ in the degree to which they are able to overcome this bias through information processing.

We expect that job-seekers who have a high PI fit are less sensitive to an organization's website design. Rather, they are motivated to process information about the organization of their interest in any case. A positive assessment of an organization's website may help extra information processing, but the motivation to search the website is already present. Low PI fit job-seekers on the other hand, have no innate interest in learning more about the organization and they, thus, may need an attractive website to draw their attention. Only when they find the website design attractive they may be motivated to process the website's information. After all, an attractive website of an organization representing a stereotypically poor fitting industry may create a discrepancy in job-seekers' experienced affect, and this discrepancy needs to be solved. Job-seekers cannot change the web-design, so they may have to change their ideas about an organization's culture (Yu, 2009).

*Hypothesis 3:* Person-industry (PI) fit will moderate the negative relationship between assessment of website design and organization-industry (OI) similarity. This relationship will be stronger when PI fit is low.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

This study involved a focal sample for measuring all the study variables except for organizational stereotypes, and a second sample providing information about these stereotypes.

**Sample 1.** Eighty advanced students (66% female), starting their final year of Master's education in which they would specialize in I-O psychology, volunteered to participate in this two-wave study in order to get insight in their job search process. Their average age was 23.76 years ( $SD = 3.86$ ) and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 6.37 years ( $SD = 3.52$ ). Seventy-four percent reported holding a part-time job, with an average of 14 working hours per week. We chose students who started their one-year specialization in I-O psychology, because this professional field is relevant for a wide range of possible employers. Besides, searching for a job and enquiring about possible employers represent a salient task for students approaching graduation. None of these students had undergone any mentionable study of the organizational culture literature at the time of assessment.

At Time 1, participants indicated their organizational values preferences. At Time 2, five weeks later, participants indicated their organizational culture perceptions of four organizations that offered an attractive vacancy for the job of junior HR consultant. The organizations were alike in location and size, but differed in their branch of industry: a consulting firm, a parcel post company, a municipality, and a hospital. These industries were selected, because of the relatively high level of employment of IO psychologist in these industries. By surfing through the actual websites of these organizations in randomized order, participants were able to learn more about each organization. After visiting the website of an organization, participants completed a (paper-and-pencil) survey regarding the design of the website, their culture perceptions of that organization, and their attraction to the organization. Then they proceeded to the website of the next organization. We maximized ecological validity by using actual organizational websites to capture important aspects of real organizations combined with a realistic scenario of website search. Our

participants reported on average a chance of 60 percent that they, after finishing their studies, would apply for the job offered in our study.

**Sample 2.** In order to ensure that results on the proposed relationship between PO and PI fit (*Hypothesis 1*) were not biased by consistency or demand effects, we used a separate sample for assessing industry culture stereotypes. Similar to the main sample, most participants among the 37 starting I-O psychology students of sample 2 were female (70%). The average age was 23.82 years ( $SD = 3.61$ ) and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 6.44 years ( $SD = 3.23$ ). Eighty percent reported holding a part-time job, with an average of 16 working hours per week.

The procedure was similar to the Time 2 procedure above. However, instead of visiting the websites, participants simply received a short description of each organization indicating the employer (e.g., municipality), industry (e.g., health care), and core business (e.g., distribution and logistics services).

## Measures

**Organizational values preferences** were measured at Time 1 with eight Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) to cover the distinct dimensions that capture different organizational cultures (Cable & Edwards, 2004; O'Reilly, et al., 1991; Van Vianen, 2000). Participants responded to the question: 'To function well in an organization, I prefer an organization where... [*value statement*].' The eight scales ( $\alpha = .64$  to  $\alpha = .84$ ), each including 4 items, were *peer cohesion* (e.g., support from colleagues), *positive feedback* (e.g., recognition for performance), *development of human resources* (e.g., opportunity to develop yourself), *innovation* (e.g., challenges are taken on), *regulation* (e.g., fixed procedures), *work pressure* (e.g., pressure of performance), *competition* (e.g., mutual competition), and *reward* (e.g., performance and reward are related).

**Organizational culture perceptions** were measured at Time 2 with the same eight scales that were used to assess the value preferences ( $\alpha = .85$  to  $\alpha = .98$ ). Participants responded for each organization to the question: 'The organization I just visited online, is an organization where... [*value statement*].'.

**Industry culture stereotypes** were measured with the same eight scales ( $\alpha = .78$  to  $\alpha = .98$ ), but now answered by Sample 2 participants. They responded for each organization to the question ‘This organization, is an organization where... [*value statement*].’ Intraclass correlations indicated high homogeneity among individuals in their industry culture perceptions (ICC (1) = .30; ICC (2) = .92). Consequently, industry culture stereotypes were for each organization operationalized as the mean of the industry culture perceptions across all participants of Sample 2.

**Person-Organization (PO) fit** was operationalized as the level of congruence between participants’ organizational values preferences measured at Time 1 and their organizational culture perceptions for each of the four organizations measured at Time 2. Congruence was estimated by correlating a participant’s values preferences profile with his or her culture perceptions profile for each organization. This holistic approach suits the global multidimensional job search process that we study and is consistent with fit conceptualizations (Caldwell, Chatman, & O’Reilly, 2007; O’Reilly, et al., 1991).

**Person-Industry (PI) fit** was operationalized as the level of congruence between participants’ organizational values preferences measured at Time 1 and the four industry culture stereotypes measured via Sample 2. Congruence was estimated by correlating a participant’s values preferences profile with each of the four industry culture profiles.

**Organization-Industry (OI) similarity** was operationalized as the level of congruence between organizational culture perceptions measured via Sample 1 and the four industry culture stereotypes measured via Sample 2. Congruence was estimated by correlating a participant’s culture perceptions profile with the associated industry culture profile for each of the four organizations.

**Website design** was measured with three Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) adopted from previous studies (Scheu, Ryan, & Nona, 1999; Williamson, et al., 2003). Five items measured *website content*, an individual’s attitudes towards the information provided on each organizational website (e.g., ‘The website provides information that is relevant to prospective employees’). Four items measured *website*

*aesthetics*, an individual's attitudes towards the visual design of each organizational website (e.g., 'The website has a nice lay-out'). Six items measured *website navigation*, an individual's attitudes towards the ease of use of each organizational website (e.g., 'The website is well organized'). The three scales were combined (averaged) in one measure of web design ( $\alpha = .69$ ).

**Organizational attraction** was measured with six Likert-type items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) adopted from Judge and Cable (1997). A sample item is: 'This company is attractive to me as a place for employment' (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Control variables** were background and demographic variables that could influence individuals' culture preferences or perceptions, such as age, gender, work experience, working hours, study grades, and perceived labor market perspective.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

First, we examined whether there was sufficient variance in preferred organizational values across participants. There was a low homogeneity among individuals in their preferred organizational values preference (ICC (1) .06, ICC (2) = .34). So values that were preferred by some participants were less preferred by others and vice versa. Moreover, the four organizational websites elicited on average different organizational culture perceptions ( $F(24, 732) = 19.59; p < .01$ ) in Sample 1, as did the four industry culture perceptions ( $F(24, 300) = 7.05; p < .01$ ) in Sample 2. As a result, each organization fit with some participants, but did not fit with others. These findings support the use of a within-design of this study.

Because we have multiple measures (level 1 variables) nested in participants (level 2 variables), we first used multilevel analyses (SPSS mixed models) to check how much variance in the dependent variables was due to differences between participants. These analyses take the grouping of the measurements within participants into account (Hox, 2002). On base of an intercept-only model, a model without any predictors, we estimated

Table 2.1  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations across Organizations*

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
PO Fit	.15	.45	.-								
PI Fit	.06	.38	.47**	-							
OI Similarity	.56	.37	-.06	.02	-						
Website design	3.13	.99	.27**	-.09	-.23**	-					
Organizational attraction	2.95	1.07	.38**	.10	-.30**	.58**	-				
Age	23.81	3.87	-.05	-.01	.06	.01	-.07	-			
Work experience	6.31	3.45	-.04	.03	.03	.02	.08	.53**	-		
Working hours	13.89	7.08	-.01	-.01	-.03	.08	.02	.49**	.43**	-	
Study grades	7.08	.49	-.02	-.04	.08	-.07	-.04	-.04	-.14	.05	-
Labor market perspective	4.16	.65	.01	.08	-.06	-.04	-.02	-.14**	-.03	-.08	-.07

*Note.* N= 80 participants, N = 320 observations. \*  $p < .01$ .

the intraclass correlation  $\rho$ , which is the ratio of variance between persons to the variance within persons. Due to our selection of organizations in different industries, the within-person variance was expected to be higher than the between-person variance. Indeed, there were no meaningful average differences among participants on the dependent variables PO fit ( $\rho = .02$ ), and OI Similarity ( $\rho = .01$ ). Because there is little variance ( $\rho = \text{trivial}$ ) to be explained at the highest level, the assumption of independence of errors is not violated and because we do not have individual (level 2) predictors, there is no need for multilevel analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). We report ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses because testing our hypotheses with mixed models yielded similar results.

### Hypotheses Testing

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables and across organizations are presented in Table 2.1. First, we examined the bivariate correlations between each demographic variable and our focal study variables. None of the correlations were significant, and therefore it makes little sense to determine the contribution of these variables when conducting a regression analysis (LeBreton, Hargis, Griepentrog, Oswald, & Ployhart, 2007). Demographic variables were therefore not included in subsequent analyses.

In line with ASA theory (Schneider et al., 2005) and earlier PO fit studies (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997), we found a significant and positive correlation between PO fit and organizational attraction ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ). In addition, confirming previous web-based studies (e.g., Cober et al., 2003), we found a significant and positive correlation between website design and organizational attraction ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between person-industry (PI) fit and person-organization (PO) fit. Table 2.1 shows a significant positive correlation between PI fit and PO fit ( $r = .47, p < .01$ ). A similar relationship was found with a regression analysis when controlling for type of organization ( $\beta = .55, p < .01$ ). These results support Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 predicted that the assessment of website design would be negatively related to organization-industry (OI) similarity. Table 2.1 shows a significant negative relationship between website design and OI similarity ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ), which supports Hypothesis 2. However, when controlling for organization in a regression equation this relation between website design and OI similarity became less strong and non-significant ( $\beta = -.11, p = .07$ ).

Table 2.2

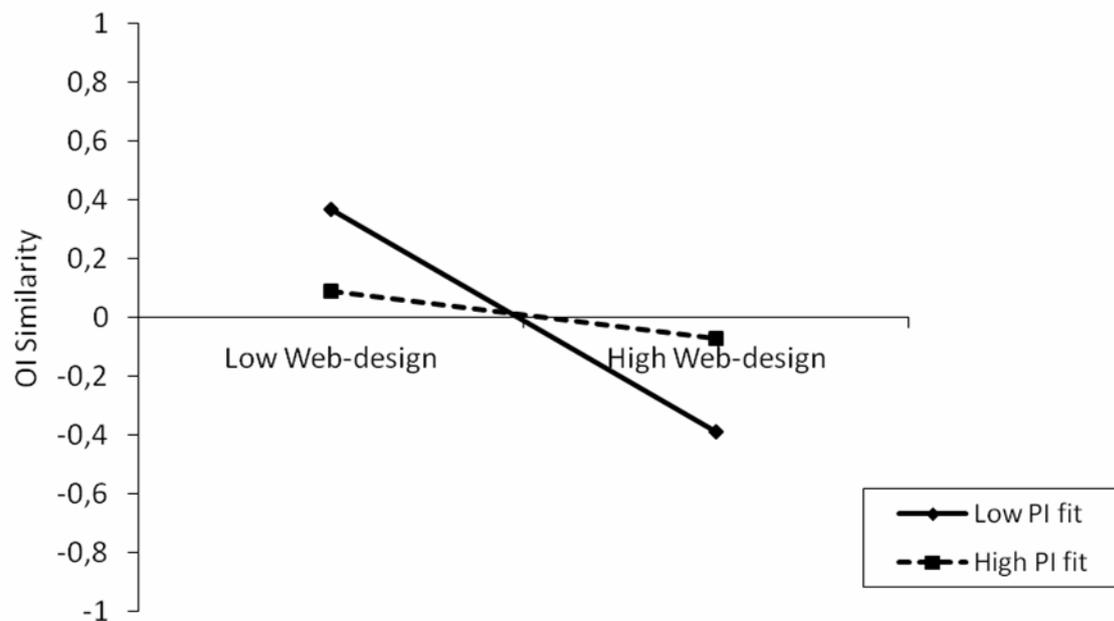
*Regression of OI Similarity on Website Design and PI Fit*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	.57	.020	
Webdesign	-.12	.026	-.25**
PI fit	-.00	.053	.00
PI fit * Webdesign	.19	.069	.15**

*Note.* N= 80 participants, N = 320 observations. \*  $p < .01$ .

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the negative relationship between website design and OI similarity would be stronger when individuals experience a low PI fit. Therefore, we performed a regression analysis with OI similarity as the dependent variable and website design, PI fit, and the interaction of website design and PI fit as independent variables. The independent variables were centered at their means

Figure 2.1

*Interaction of Website design and PO fit*

As can be seen in Table 2.2, the interaction term of website design and PI Fit was significantly related to OI similarity ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(313) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ ). PI Fit was not significantly related to OI similarity ( $\beta = .00$ ,  $t(313) = -.09$ , n.s.). Similar relationships were found when controlling for type of organization (respectively  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $\beta = -.03$ , n.s.).

Figure 2.1 presents the relationship between website design and OI similarity as moderated by PI fit. Simple slopes analyses showed that website design was not significantly related to OI Similarity when PI fit was high ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t(314) = -1.37$ , n.s.). However, website design was significantly and negatively related to OI Similarity when PI fit was low ( $\beta = -.39$ ,  $t(314) = -4.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence Hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

## Discussion

Past research has shown that PO fit is of major relevance for employee recruitment, performance, and retention (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). After all, individuals seek for organizations in which they will fit, that is, organizations with cultures that match their own values, and self-selection is particularly proposed to operate by means of PO fit (Schneider, et al., 1995). Yet, while many studies have studied the consequences of PO fit, we still know relatively little of how PO fit actually comes about (Van Vianen, 2000; Yu, 2009), especially in cases where organizations are unfamiliar to job-seekers. The current study is thus part of an endeavor to identify the sources of the fit that possible applicants experience with a given organization.

As such, the study makes a key contribution in combining factors in- and outside of an organization's control that determine job-seekers' experience of fit with this organization. The classic PO fit literature also assumes that PO fit is a match between a factor outside (the personal values of the candidate) and a factor inside of the organization's control (the organizational values). Yet, our results deepen our understanding of an organization's options of control. Particularly, they show that job-seekers are not blank slates when coming into contact with an organization, but that they already have expectations about the organization based on common culture stereotypes about the organization's industry. As results from our second sample indicated, these stereotypical perceptions about these industry-specific values appeared relatively strong and homogeneous. Thus, it does not take

a Fortune 500 organization to elicit a certain response. Rather, also lesser known organizations have an image that is related to their branch of industry.

Subsequently, our results indicated that job-seekers PI fit, the fit between personal values and industry culture stereotypes impacted upon their PO fit. People hold general ideas about the prevalent culture that is stereotypical for specific branches of industry and, consistent with theories and research on heuristic information processing and decision making (Kahneman, 2003), these ideas shape people's PO fit impressions. Thus, if no further specific information is available, job-seekers are guided by industry culture expectations and attraction towards an organization will often be based on these expectations. Hence, the first stage of self-selection may concern the self-selection of people who fit the industry culture stereotype. This implies that organizations may have limited options in attracting fitting applicants since the O in the PO-fit equation seems influenced by a factor outside the organization's control. Therefore, organizations seem to have an initial image, irrespective of their website. The present study has nevertheless shown that organizations' websites did make a difference.

We found that good website design can reduce the use of industry culture stereotypes for assessing an actual organization. Good website design suppresses stereotypic expectations, which in turn, promotes information processing. On a practical notion this implies that recruiting organizations need to be aware of not only the direct effects of their website, but also the indirect ones. Even if not developed as a recruitment tool, website design matters for three reasons. First, the website acts as a cue from which job-seekers infer the quality of an organization. Second, a good website encourages the processing of information. And third, a well-designed website will help job-seekers find the information needed. We found that job-seekers are less inclined to base their organizational culture perceptions on an organization's website when they do not like this website. In that case they will easily lapse into their industry culture expectations. Therefore, it may be in recruiting organizations best interest to pay close attention to website design in order to be able to communicate their values. After all, organizations do not only want to attract job-seekers who like their website, but particularly those who will fit the organization's cultural values (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005).

At the same time, and as a caveat to the above statement, also the effectiveness of an organization's website was not a given. Rather, it again depended on an individual's PI fit.

Individuals use industry culture stereotypes particularly if they find the website less attractive and PO fit is low. Prior research on web-based PO fit has mainly shown that only low-fitting individuals who see a nice website change their self-selection decisions (Dineen, et al., 2007). However those studies gave highly explicit culture information or direct fit feedback (Braddy, et al., 2006; Cober, et al., 2003; Dineen, et al., 2002; Dineen, et al., 2007) whereas our study focused on spontaneous culture impressions. Our findings suggest that a well-designed website may not affect those job-seekers who expect to fit, but may well enhance organizational attraction if job-seekers sense a lower fit but are not yet sure. That may give organizations that have an attractive website the benefit of the doubt. This is in line with recent interests in impression management tactics to directly influence subjective perceptions of organizational culture (Cable, et al., 2000; Cable & Yu, 2006).

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

This study, too, is not without its limitations and many questions regarding the role of industry-, organizational, and personal factors determining PO-fit are as of yet unanswered. First, the use of a student sample may have restrained the generalizability of our findings to more senior job-seekers. Unlike inexperienced job-seekers, applicants with more work experience will have more information about the context within which organizational self-presentations typically occur. Therefore, they may better know the degree to which the information presented on a website is representative for the organization (Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002) and are less susceptible to peripheral cues as website design (Walker, Feild, Giles, & Bernerth, 2008). At the same time, we believe that the use of student participants entering the labor market soon is justified since entry-level job-seekers constitute a major part of the job seeking population (Powell & Goulet, 1996) and organizations spend much time and effort on recruiting these career starters (Cober & Brown, 2006). Moreover, many entry-level job-seekers make the Internet their primary job search tool, because of its ease and accessibility. Learning how to direct this stream of job-seekers with the help of their website is certainly helpful for organizations. Conceptually, it might also be interesting to empirically test how organizations could not only alter the O of the PO-Fit equation, but also the P, e.g., via information, taster days, or internships. While repeatedly called for, we are not aware of any studies that have actually addressed the

effect of such organizational interventions on young people's value valences and/or strengths.

A second potential concern of the current study is that participants were asked to browse four websites and to subsequently respond to questions about an organization's culture. Although we would assume that this process largely reflects reality, participants may have been more strongly focused on aspects of organizational culture than normally would have been the case, at least when scanning from the second to the fourth website. By randomly changing the order of the websites we have at least tried to control for this effect across organizations. A related concern is that psychology students might differ in their reaction to industry stereotypes and webpage design from other job-seekers. Their educational background could have made them relatively skeptical in regard to superficial and/or organization-unspecific information, for example, they should have tried to keep their judgments about the organization relatively unbiased and not be 'fooled' by surface information such as an organizational website into taking the website as a valid indicator of their personal fit with the organization's culture (Murphy & Tam, 2004). In the current study, however, exactly this was the case: Even though a successful website design was unrelated to participants' fit with the respective industry, it did have a positive impact on participants' evaluation of the organization as being similar and suitable for themselves, thus replicating earlier findings obtained among other types of samples (e.g., Judge & Cable, 1997). In sum, this speaks against the assumption that psychology students might be a particularly pre-trained sample from which results may not generalize to other early job-seekers.

Third, a sample size of 80 study participants might be a concern as well since small sample sizes tend to reduce statistical power (Cohen, 1988). Yet, a power analysis conducted prior to the study indicated that a sample size of 80 participants suffice to run a regression analysis testing the effects of three predictors as proposed. In addition, a small sample size and lack of power is primarily a concern with regard to Type II errors, i.e., when rejecting the proposed hypotheses and falsely accepting null hypotheses (e.g., Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2008). However, the results generally supported our hypotheses. Moreover, due to the within-subject design, our analyses were actually based on 320 observations. Therefore, we would argue that our sample size was sufficient.

Fourth, by using organizations from different industries we were able to show the overall effect of industry. Future studies could nevertheless examine whether job-seekers

will also distinguish between cultures when inspecting organizational websites within one and the same branch of industry. On a more macro-oriented note, it may also be interesting to observe at a cross-industry level what it is that organizations within an industry possibly do in order to create and maintain a certain stereotype, nimbus or reputation.

Finally, participants were instructed to visit the websites. In using this approach, we did not address the factors that initially motivate job-seekers to enter specific websites in the first place. Job-seekers may have different motivations for entering a website, an organization's image being just one of them. Job-seekers motivation for entering websites seems a very interesting avenue for future research (Cober, et al., 2004).

## Conclusion

The present study has shown that job-seekers already have expectations about organizational culture before inspecting an organization's website. For organizations whose culture is similar to the industry culture, this may not be a problem. However, organizations that have a culture not similar to the industry may not attract applicants who fit the organization. Hence, our results have implications for organizations trying to capture and retain job-seekers' attention as well as attracting (suitable) applicants. Organizations should carefully design their website to stimulate active processing of culture relevant information and to attract those applicants who fit the organization\*.

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\* This chapter was published as De Goede, M.E.E., Van Vianen A.E.M., & Klehe, U.C.(2011). Attracting applicants on the web: PO fit, industry culture stereotypes, and website design. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 19, 51-61.



# CHAPTER 3

A tailored policy-capturing study on PO fit perceptions: The ascendancy of attractive over aversive fit



**W**hen people select themselves into and out of organizations, they often base these selection decisions on perceptions of person-organization fit (PO fit; cf. Schneider, et al., 1995). The more job-seekers perceive an organization's culture to fit their own culture preferences or values, the more attracted they are to this organization (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997), and the more likely they choose to apply (Dineen & Noe, 2009; Harold & Ployhart, 2008). Moreover, people perceiving high PO fit once they are employed have lower intentions to quit (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001) and are less likely to leave the organization (Tak, 2011). However, little is known about how people combine information about themselves and their environment into perceptions of PO fit (Edwards, et al., 2006; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006).

PO fit research generally assumes that PO fit perceptions reflect an overall comparison between a person and an organization (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). According to this assumption, it does not matter on what specific values job-seekers and organizations fit or fail to fit each other as long as the overall level of PO fit is sufficient. Consequently, overall PO fit perceptions are assumed to be equally based on the presence of values in the organization that support a person's own values, i.e., attractive values, and on the absence of values in the organization that contradict a person's own values, i.e., aversive values. Hence fits and misfits on attractive and aversive values are thus aggregated in a rational way, which finally result in an estimate of overall level of experienced fit.

Imagine, for example, a job-seeker (Mary) who is evaluating comparable job options in two different organizations: Organization A and Organization B. Mary prefers to work in a competitive environment (attractive value), but she dislikes rules and regulations (aversive value). Organization A is competitive - hence, there is fit with an organizational feature that Mary finds attractive, from now on labeled as *attractive fit*, but also rule-oriented - hence, there is misfit on an organizational feature that Mary finds unattractive, labeled as *aversive misfit*. Organization B, on the other hand, is not competitive - there is misfit on an organizational feature that Mary finds attractive, labeled as *attractive misfit*, but also not rule-oriented - there is fit on an organizational feature that Mary finds unattractive, labeled as *aversive fit*. Thus, both organizations have one feature that fits and one that doesn't fit with Mary's values, but with organization A there is attractive fit and aversive misfit, whereas with organization B there is aversive fit and attractive misfit. Traditional PO fit approaches would now assume that Mary's overall fit perceptions of organizations A and B

are the same. Yet, will she really evaluate both organizations equally, or will she envision more overall PO fit in one organization than in the other?

The aim of the present study is to examine more precisely which values job-seekers use when establishing their PO fit perceptions with prospective organizations. After all, people are not such good rational calculators. Moreover, research has shown that job-seekers rarely undertake such overall calculative comparisons between one's own values and those of the organization (Edwards, et al., 2006; Van Vuuren, Veldkamp, de Jong, & Seydel, 2008). Yet, if PO fit perceptions do not represent the overall similarity between a person's values and organizational values, what then do they represent?

In this study, we propose that PO fit perceptions do not stem from an overall similarity or fit between a person's own values and the values of an organization. Instead, we argue that job-seekers weigh personally attractive values more heavily than personally aversive values in establishing their PO fit perceptions. An experimental policy-capturing design allowed us to examine the separate effects of fit on attractive values, fit on aversive values, and fit on neutral values by asking respondents to consider their PO fit with multiple organizational profiles which varied systematically in their attractive and aversive fit and misfit. Unbeknownst to participants, we tailored these profiles on participants' earlier evaluations of their own attractive, neutral, and aversive values.

Herewith, we draw a conceptually clearer picture of the factors underlying job-seekers' PO fit perceptions, allowing for a better understanding and prediction of job-seekers' reactions towards organizations. Such understanding is important for both job-seekers and organizations. Job-seekers aim to find a fitting job and more insight into their job search and evaluation strategies could help them to improve these strategies. Also organizations aim to attract fitting applicants but the question is whether they are indeed able to attract these applicants by providing realistic information (e.g., De Goede, Van Vianen, & Klehe, 2011). In this, findings may show interesting leads for future measurement of PO fit and for selecting characteristics on which to compare people and organizations. In addition, this study may inform processes of job decision making, and the extent to which job-seekers are able to find a fitting job as based on their fit impressions during job search.

The following sections outline the implicit assumptions underlying the traditional overall comparison approach to PO fit, followed by the detailed arguments for the relevance of distinguishing between attractive and aversive fit.

### **PO fit perceptions: the assumption of overall similarity fit**

PO fit theories argue that people prefer work environments with characteristics that fit their own characteristics. The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, et al., 1995) in particular proposes that people are not randomly assigned to organizations, but that they select themselves into and out of organizations. Hence, job-seekers are attracted to organizations where they perceive congruence between their personal characteristics and the characteristics of the organization. Many PO fit studies especially emphasize the match between people's values and the values of the organization as reflected in its culture (e.g., Chatman, 1989, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1992; O'Reilly, et al., 1991), because values are conceived of as fundamental, relatively enduring, and transcending to specific situations (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Chatman, 1991).

Based on the argument that "people's preferences for particular organizations are based upon an implicit estimate of the congruence of their own personal characteristics and the attributes of potential work organizations" (Schneider, et al., 1995, p. 479), multi-dimensional PO fit estimates represent correlations between people's rank ordering of a set of different value dimensions and the organizations' rank ordering on the same dimensions<sup>1</sup> (Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, et al., 1991). The resulting indirect fit measure reflects the overall comparison of persons and organizations across multiple dimensions in which fits and misfits on different values are combined. This indirect fit measure is often, implicitly or explicitly, assumed to reflect to a large extent people's PO fit perceptions (Van Vianen, Stoelhorst, & De Goede, in press). However, research has shown that PO fit perceptions, as measured by asking people directly about their PO fit, seem not to converge with these more indirect measures that are based on separate person (P) and organization (O) assessments (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen, et al., 2002; Van Vuuren, et al., 2008). Thus, the relation between indirect PO assessments and direct PO fit perceptions seems more complex than implied by PO fit theories (Edwards, et al., 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Polynomial regression and surface analyses are used when fit estimation concerns one dimension.

### **PO fit perceptions: the ascendancy of attractive fit over aversive fit**

Implicit in indirect approaches as outlined above are two basic assumptions. The first is that people are able to combine all available information into a rational and calculative evaluation. The second is that all available information (the fit with each separate value) has an equal contribution to people's fit perception and that the direction of specific misfits ( $O_{\text{value}} > P_{\text{value}}$  or  $O_{\text{value}} < P_{\text{value}}$ ) is irrelevant. Both assumptions are criticized in many areas of psychology in general (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 2000; March, 1994; Sawyer, 1966) and in the PO fit literature in particular (e.g., Edwards, 1995; Van Vianen, 2005). Edwards and colleagues (2006) compared people's direct fit perceptions with their perceived discrepancies (between P and O), and with indirect measures of PO fit. They found that the relationships between these three fit operationalizations were rather weak: Thus, people's fit perceptions did not follow the basic logic of fit theory and were not based on an overall calculation of discrepancies. Drawing on regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) and construal level theory (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007), we propose that job-seekers' PO fit perceptions do not stem from an overall comparison of their own values with those of the organization, but that job-seekers mainly focus on a specific set of values at the cost of others.

People differ in the values they find attractive and those that are aversive or are more neutral to them (Cable & Edwards, 2004; O'Reilly, et al., 1991). The differences in attractiveness of values guide people to approach certain outcomes and to avoid others. Attractive values are the values that people typically try to attain. Aversive values, on the other hand, are the values they try to avoid (Feather, 1995). Based on the general assumption underlying PO fit, job-seekers should strive to maximize value congruence with an organization; i.e., organizations in which they could attain their personal attractive values and avoid their personal aversive values. Above we gave the fictitious example of Mary, a job-seeker who found 'competition' attractive and 'rule-orientation' aversive. Mary should experience the most positive PO fit perceptions when an organization values competition (attractive fit) and has not too many rules (aversive fit). Besides, following the general assumption underlying the current PO fit literature, PO fit perceptions should decrease equally when the organization either offers no room for competition (attractive misfit) or is very rule-oriented (aversive misfit). However, job-seekers' specific goal (finding a job) and

current psychological distance towards the object of evaluation (the future organization) may cause them to focus on a limited set of values. Below, we argue that job-seekers will particularly focus on their attractive values when evaluating an organization, and less on their aversive or neutral values.

People's evaluations are affected by situational factors. Job-seekers, particularly those in the stage of a school to work transition, often decide about job opportunities on the basis of incomplete information (Murphy & Tam, 2004). They may have what has been called 'bounded awareness', which means that cognitive blinders prevent them from seeing, seeking, using, or sharing highly relevant, easily accessible, and readily perceivable information (Bazerman & Chugh, 2006). Moreover, not all accessible relevant information is equally processed during decision-making, but some pieces of information get more attention while other information that might be just as easily observable and relevant is ignored. As a result, people may make judgments based only on a subset of available information and may overweigh attended information relative to the unattended information (Chugh & Bazerman, 2007; Schkade & Kahneman, 1998). In the case of PO fit, this implies that certain characteristics of an organization may absorb one's attention and divert attention away from other equally informative characteristics, resulting in a misalignment between the information available for a good decision and the information included in awareness (Chugh & Bazerman, 2007). Both regulatory focus theory and construal level theory suggest that the focus of this selective attention will be more towards the values that a job-seeker finds attractive rather than to the values that the job-seeker tries to avoid.

Regulatory focus theory argues that the more a situation draws attention to goal attainment, the more it will dispose decision makers to be sensitive to attainment goals rather than to maintenance goals (Brodsholl, et al., 2007; Higgins, 1997; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997; Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992). Attainment goals are focused on accomplishing positive outcomes (Förster & Werth, 2009; Higgins, et al., 1997) whereas maintenance goals are focused on ensuring protection from negative outcomes. Job-search is aimed at attaining a future goal (a prospective job). Hence, job-seekers' thoughts about the future will be likely dominated by desirable goals and plans, and will rarely include considerations of failure or unpleasant outcomes (Armor & Taylor, 1998; Newby-Clark & Ross, 2003). Therefore, we assume that job-seekers will be approach- rather than avoidance motivated during job-

search (Brodscholl, et al., 2007; Pennington & Roese, 2003), and will pay more attention to the goals they want to attain than to the goals they want to avoid. Consequently, they will be more focused on organizational information about attractive rather than aversive values, and their fit or misfit on attractive values therefore receives a greater weight than their (mis)fit on aversive values.

Construal level theory proposes that people construct different representations of the same information depending on the psychological distance, that is, whether the information pertains to the very near or the more distant future (Liviatan, Trope, & Liberman, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Trope and Liberman (2000) found that relative distance facilitated information-processing of desired characteristics and inhibited information-processing of non-desired characteristics (Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003). Given that the outcome of the job-search process is by definition projected in the future and that a prospective organization is still psychologically distant, it is plausible to assume that organizational information about attractive values will be processed more deeply than organizational information about aversive values. Additionally, the temporal distance from the future job provides the job-seeker a cushion of resources; distance affords people greater opportunity for taking risks and making mistakes because it provides some latitude for correction. With more time available, people become more attuned to acquisition, achievement, and the presence of things desired as opposed to caution, security, and the prevention of things unwanted (Brodscholl, et al., 2007; Pennington & Roese, 2003). Hence, at a psychological distance, people are better equipped to pursue attainment goals. All in all, both regulatory focus and construal level theories suggest that job-seekers will adopt an approach instead of an avoidance focus and will attend to attractive organizational values at the expense of aversive ones present at the same time (Markman & Brendl, 2000).

Hitherto, we have made a distinction between attractive and aversive values. However, some organizational characteristics may be of a more neutral value to job-seekers; these characteristics are neither attractive nor aversive. Therefore, organizational information with regard to these neutral values, and fit on these values (which we label as *neutral fit*), may not have a great impact on people's fit perceptions as well. Altogether, we hypothesize that fit on attractive values (attractive fit) will have the strongest impact on job-seekers' fit perceptions, whereas fit on neutral and aversive values (neutral and aversive fit, respectively) will influence these perceptions to a lesser extent.

## Overview of Studies

In four independent studies, we tested the weighing of attractive, aversive, and neutral values on PO fit perceptions. While all studies employed an experimental repeated measure design, called policy-capturing design (cf., Kristof-Brown, et al., 2002), they differed in sample and measurement approach to rule out alternative explanations for the found effects. Study 3.1 relied on a larger sample of university students to test our basic ideas that the attractive fit would have ascendancy over aversive fit in PO fit perceptions. Study 3.2 assessed whether findings remained stable with a sample of actual job-seekers. Study 3.3 ruled out that findings could be due to measurement effects caused by the traditional use of an ipsative rather than an independent assessment of value preferences. Finally, Study 3.4 assessed whether findings remained stable with a sample of job-seekers without employment.

### Study 3.1

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Ninety-nine students (57% female; 62% psychology undergraduates) volunteered in exchange for research points or a small payment. Their average age was 20.38 years ( $SD = 1.85$ ) and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 3.90 years ( $SD = 2.50$ ). Sixty percent reported holding a part-time job at the time of the study, with an average of 6 working hours per week.

Data were collected using computer-based surveys. First, we assessed participants' attractive, neutral, and aversive values with regard to a possible employer to have information on which to tailor the later policy-capturing cues. Then, participants took the perspective of a job-seeker. They were presented with a series of profiles, each representing a different organization. It was emphasized that each organization provided job opportunities in participants' area of interest, but that the organizations differed in their organizational culture for which the profiles could serve as an indication. After each

organizational profile, participants indicated their perceived PO fit with the described organization.

**Development of tailored policy-capturing cues.** Participants' preferences for organizational values were assessed with the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, et al., 1991), which is a Q-sort method containing 54 value and culture statements (e.g., being innovative, being people oriented). The OCP was used to cover the broad spectrum of distinct dimensions that capture individual and organizational values. Participants sort the values in 9 categories, ranging from *very aversive* (=1), via *neutral* (=5), to *very attractive* (=9), with a specified number of values in each category. Fewer values are allowed at the extremes than in the central more neutral categories, resulting in a somewhat flattened normal distribution (2-4-6-9-12-9-6-4-2). The result is an idiosyncratic profile that represents a person's values in any organizational context. We used these idiosyncratic profiles to select each participant's *attractive values* as the six values (16.7%) in the right-end ('very attractive') tail and each participant's *aversive values* as the six values (16.7%) in the left-end ('very aversive') tail. The 12 values (33.3%) in the middle category were selected as participant's *neutral values* (see Example 3.1).

Each participant received a total of 30 personalized organizational profiles. Unbeknownst to participants, profiles were based on their own personal six attractive, twelve neutral, and six aversive values (as measured with the OCP). That is, each profile contained three values: one attractive, one neutral, and one aversive value. For each new profile, the attractive value was – by means of a computer program – randomly selected from the participant's own unique choice of six attractive values. The neutral value of this profile was randomly selected from participant's unique choice of twelve attractive values, and the aversive value was randomly selected from participant's unique choice of six aversive values.

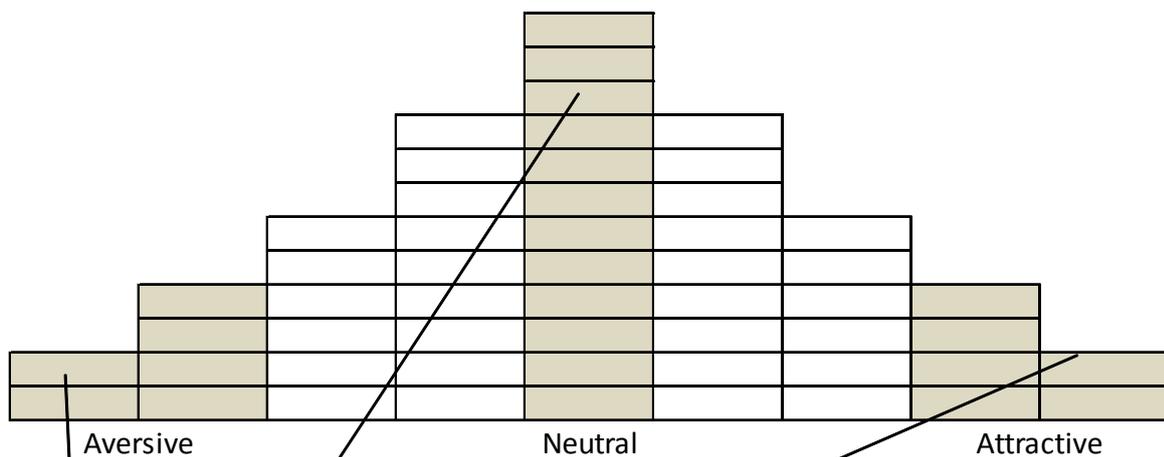
This random selection of values was done independently for each profile (see Example). Hence, although all profiles comprised of one attractive, one neutral, and one aversive value, they differed with regard to the specific content of the values that were shown to participants. Furthermore, the three values in the profile varied in level (low, medium, or high), and the level of each value was systematically varied across profiles.

An orthogonal structure was accomplished by completely crossing all possible combinations of values (attractive, aversive, and neutral) and their levels (-1 = *low*, 0 = *medium*, and 1 = *high*) in a fully randomized order, resulting in 27 profiles. Additionally, 3 organizational profiles were included to assess within-rater judgment consistency, resulting in a total set of 30 profiles. We found adequate test-retest reliability (average  $\alpha = .73$ ), which suggests that participants attended carefully to all the organizational profiles.

Example 3.1

*Construction of Personalized Organizational Profiles as Based on a Participant's OCP*

**Participant's OCP**



**Participant's personalized organizational profiles**

This organization is characterized by:	Level
<Attractive value> (one randomly selected out of six)	<low>, <medium>, or <high>
<Neutral value> (one randomly selected out of twelve)	<low>, <medium>, or <high>
<Aversive value> (one randomly selected out of six)	<low>, <medium>, or <high>

Each participant received the 30 profiles in randomized order to limit sequencing effects. In addition, value order within the profiles was varied across participants. Repeated measures of variance indicated no differences in fit perceptions due to order ( $F(2,96) = 1.80, n.s.$ ). We tested for fatigue effects by comparing the variance explained in attraction for the first 10 profiles with the last 10. A substantial decrement in the squared multiple correlation for the last set of 10 profiles would indicate respondent fatigue (Judge & Bretz, 1992). The difference in  $R^2$  between these two sets of profiles was less than 1 percent. Thus, participants' responses to the profiles did not appear to be affected by fatigue.

**Independent variables: Attractive, aversive, and neutral fit.**

**Attractive fit** reflects the level of a participant's attractive value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high); the higher the level of the attractive value in an organization, the higher the attractive fit between a person and an organization.

**Aversive fit** reflects the level of a participant's aversive value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high); the lower the level of the aversive value in an organization, the higher the aversive fit between a person and an organization.

**Neutral fit** reflects the level of a participant's neutral value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high) served as the neutral fit measure; a medium level of the neutral value in the organization gives the highest fit between a person and an organization.

**Dependent variable: PO fit perceptions.** Participants assessed each organizational profile by indicating how much they fit a specific organization. PO fit perceptions were rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) on one general Likert-scale item (cf., Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

**Results**

First, we examined whether the 54 values included in the OCP showed sufficient variance across participants. On average the range of rankings for a particular value was 7.24 ( $SD = 0.73$ ; maximum possible range is 8) and average mean, mode, and median were 5.00 ( $SD = 1.05$ ), 4.65 ( $SD = 1.52$ ), and 5.00 ( $SD = 1.21$ ), respectively. Thus, values that were attractive

to some participants were neutral or aversive to others and vice versa. Only two of the 54 organizational values ('opportunities for professional growth' and 'being supportive') failed to reach the two 'aversive' categories, so none of the participants found these values aversive. Only one value ('being rule oriented') failed to reach the two 'attractive' categories. All in all, there was a wide variation in attractive and aversive organizational values among participants, which supports the use of a personalized within-person design in this study.

We tested the predicted relationships between the independent variables attractive fit, neutral fit, and aversive fit and the dependent variable PO fit perceptions with multilevel modeling (via SPSS mixed models). Multilevel modeling takes into account that measurements are repeated within participants and are thus not independent of one other by allowing a parsimonious examination of within- and between person variance (Hox, 2002). We started with a random intercept-only or null model to calculate the intraclass correlation, which reflects the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is attributable to between-person variables. Only 5.69% of the variance ( $SD = 1.54$ ) in PO fit perceptions could be explained by between-person differences. Therefore, most of the variance lay within persons. Against this null model we tested the model with attractive, neutral, and aversive fit in order to test their relationship with PO fit perceptions. We first computed the explained variance accounted for by this model, as the total variance observed in the null model minus the unexplained variance in this model, divided by the total variance. Averaged across participants, attractive, neutral, and aversive fit accounted for 37.36% of the variance in PO fit perceptions (within-persons).

In analyzing policy-capturing questionnaires, slope coefficients represent the average weight placed on each fit across all participants; such that higher numbers indicate that a predictor is weighed more heavily in the judgment process. The slope coefficients for attractive, neutral, and aversive fit were all significant (see Table 3.1). In support of our hypothesis, attractive fit was positively related to PO fit perceptions; as levels of persons' attractive value rose, they perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = 1.00, p < .01$ ). Also aversive fit was positively related to PO fit perceptions; which for aversive fit implies that as levels of persons' aversive value lowered, they perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .25, p < .01$ ). Contrary to expectations, neutral fit was also related to PO fit perceptions; as levels of persons' neutral values rose, people perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .37, p < .01$ ). The results of the regression model allowed us to compare the contribution of each of the

three fit measures to PO fit perceptions. As expected, attractive fit demonstrated the largest effect on PO fit perceptions, with the 95% confidence interval around the found effect not overlapping with the confidence intervals of either the neutral or aversive fit (see Table 3.1). These results confirm our hypothesis.

## **Discussion**

This study was the first one to examine people's considerations of (mis)fits that generate their PO fit perceptions. Perceptions of PO fit are usually assumed to arise from a balanced weighing of information about organizational values that people find attractive, those that they find aversive, and those that are relatively neutral to them. In this study, we proposed that attractive, aversive, and neutral fit would contribute to PO fit perceptions. In addition, based on regulatory focus and construal level theories we expected that attractive fit in particular would contribute to PO fit perceptions. Findings showed significant relationships between all three fit measures and PO fit perceptions. Moreover, we found that attractive fit contributed most. The findings of this first study, thus, suggest that people are particularly sensitive to information that signals their organizational fit or misfit on values they find attractive.

Given that this study was the first one to test how PO fit perceptions are affected by attractive, neutral, and aversive fits, it seemed important to extend and replicate this finding. Further, the use of an undergraduate student sample may have restrained the generalizability of the findings. Participants of Study 3.1 were young and not yet involved in a full-time work career. Conceivably, their ideas of organizational cultures and preferred and non-preferred organizational values may not have been fully developed (Murphy & Tam, 2004). Without much work experience, it might be difficult to imagine aversive organizational values, whereas it is probably easier to envision what one would like in a future job. Individuals' work experience may impact the formation of PO fit perceptions (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2002). Therefore, Study 3.2 involved an older group of participants who were actively seeking for a job.

Moreover, we separated measurements in time. Study 3.1 participants had been asked to rank values according to their preferences in the same session during which they reported their PO fit perceptions with organizational profiles. So, there was only a small time

lag between assessing participants' values and their PO fit perceptions. Their ranked preferences might thus have been still fresh in mind while processing the organizational profiles. Therefore, Study 3.2 employed a two week time-lag between the assessment of participants' attractive, aversive, and neutral values, and of their PO fit perceptions to the organizational profiles.

## Study 3.2

### Method

**Participants.** People actively looking for a job ( $N=38^2$ ; 58% female) were recruited in employment agencies, institutions for higher education, and career courses. Their average age was 24.08 years ( $SD = 2.19$ ) and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 5.49 years ( $SD = 3.64$ ). All held a (part-time) job at the time of the study, with an average of 28 working hours per week. Participants were asked to volunteer because they were looking for a job and this study could help them to get insight in their job search process.

**Procedure and policy-capturing survey.** The procedure was as in Study 3.1, except for a time lag. At Time 1, a paper-and-pencil survey assessed job-seekers' attractive, neutral, and aversive values with the OCP. After completion, each job-seeker's six most *attractive values*, six most *aversive values*, and the twelve *neutral values* were selected from their idiosyncratic profiles. Approximately two weeks later (Time 2), job-seekers responded to a web-based policy-capturing questionnaire with the tailored series of 27 + 3 organizational profiles. As in Study 3.1, and unbeknown to participants, these profiles were based on participants' personal attractive, neutral and aversive values as assessed at Time 1. Profiles were developed as in Study 3.1. Reliability analyses showed that participants were consistent in their evaluations of the profiles: Evaluations of original and replicated profiles were corresponding (average  $\alpha = .76$ ).

As in Study 3.1, the independent variables were *attractive fit*, *aversive fit*, and *neutral fit*, and *PO fit perceptions* served as the dependent variable.

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<sup>2</sup> The within subject nature of our policy capturing design allows for a smaller number of participants, because the analyses are based on  $N \times 27$  observations (i.e., profiles).

## Results

The analytical strategy and presentation of results parallel those in Study 3.1. As in Study 3.1, there was a wide variation in preferred organizational values among participants. On average the range of value preferences was 6.63 ( $SD = 0.83$ ) and average mean, mode, and median were respectively 4.99 ( $SD = 0.98$ ), 4.61 ( $SD = 1.47$ ), and 4.87 ( $SD = 1.14$ ). So participants differed in their personal preferences.

As in Study 3.1, we used multilevel modeling to test the relationships between attractive, neutral, and aversive fits and PO fit perceptions. We started with the random intercept-only or null model. Intraclass correlation showed that only 9.93% of the variance ( $SD = 1.43$ ) in PO fit perceptions was due to between person differences; most of the variance was, as expected, to be explained within persons. Against the null model, we tested the model with attractive, neutral, and aversive fits in order to test for their relationship with PO fit perceptions. Averaged across participants, this model accounted for almost 26.49% of the within-person variance in PO fit perceptions.

Table 3.1 presents the estimates of the average slope coefficients. These can be interpreted as the regression weights for attractive, aversive, neutral fit across all participants. All slope coefficients were significant. Attractive fit was positively related to PO fit perceptions: i.e., as levels of persons' attractive values rose in the described organization, they perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .69, p < .01$ ). Aversive fit was also positively related to PO fit perception, which means that as levels of persons' aversive organizational values lowered, they perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .17, p < .01$ ). Finally, neutral fit was also related to PO fit perceptions, as levels of neutral values rose, participants' PO fit perceptions were significantly higher ( $b = .45, p < .01$ ). Results showed that attractive fit contributed more than neutral and aversive PO fits, with the 95% confidence interval around the found effect not overlapping with the confidence intervals of either the neutral or aversive fit (see Table 3.1). Altogether, our hypothesis that attractive fit in particular would contribute to PO fit perceptions was confirmed also in this sample of job-seekers.

## Discussion

This study generally confirmed the findings of Study 3.1: Information about organizational values that people find attractive, those that they find aversive, and also those that are relatively neutral to them all contributed to perceptions of fit, yet again, results also showed that attractive fit in particular had a positive relation with PO fit perceptions. Replicating the findings of Study 3.1 with a sample of actual job-seekers, this speaks for the ecological validity of the reported results.

Yet, there still is one important limitation. Until now we used a Q-sort method to assess organizational value preferences. By using this ipsative measure, participants were forced to rank the organizational values in a pre-specified normal distribution. Due to this forced distribution, participants might have ranked characteristics as aversive in the left extreme categories that might not really have been aversive to them but only less attractive than other characteristics. Therefore, we performed a third study in which we used a Likert-scale format to assess attractive, neutral, and aversive values.

## Study 3.3

### Method

**Participants.** Thirty-three<sup>3</sup> master students (45% female; 56% psychology) within a year from the job market volunteered to participate in this study. Their average age was 23.45 years ( $SD = 2.81$ ) and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 6.05 years ( $SD = 3.53$ ). The majority (82%) reported having a part-time job at the time of the study, with an average of 13 working hours per week.

**Procedure and policy-capturing survey.** The procedure paralleled that of Study 3.2. At Time 1, a web-based survey assessed participants' attractive, neutral, and aversive values with a Likert-type version of the OCP measure (amending the Q-sort procedure to a normative scale). Instead of sorting the 54 values in nine fixed categories, participants indicated their

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<sup>3</sup> The within subject nature of our policy capturing design allows for a smaller number of participants, because the analyses are based on  $N \times 27$  observations (i.e., profiles).

preference for each value along a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from *very aversive* (=1) to *very attractive* (=7). We selected each participant's six highest rated values as the *attractive values*, each participant's six lowest rated values as the *aversive values*, and each participant's 12 values in the middle as the *neutral values*. About two weeks later (Time 2), participants responded to the policy-capturing questionnaire with the unique set of organizational profiles as based on their Time 1 responses. Again the independent variables were *attractive fit*, *aversive fit*, and *neutral fit* and a *PO fit perceptions* item served as the dependent variable.

## Results

The analytical strategy and presentation of results parallel those of our prior studies. There was a wide variation in preference ratings of values. On average the range of value ratings was 4.48 ( $SD = 0.79$ ; maximum possible range is 6) and mean was 4.97 ( $SD = 1.15$ ; midpoint scale is 4). The skewness and kurtosis averaged  $-0.46$  and  $0.15$  respectively, so the distribution of preferences was slightly right skewed.

Again, we used multilevel modeling to test the hypothesized relationships between attractive, aversive and neutral fit and PO fit perceptions. Based on the random intercept-only model we calculated the intraclass coefficient. This showed almost no variance to be explained between individuals (3.08%), leaving most of the variance to be within persons. Adding the model with the independent variable, we calculated that 36.24% of the variance in PO fit perceptions was accounted for by attractive, neutral, and aversive fit. Table 3.1 shows significant average slope coefficients for the attractive, neutral, and aversive fit measures. All three fit measures were positively related to PO fit perception. As organizations scored higher on a person's attractive and neutral values, the person perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .97, p < .01$ ;  $b = .45, p < .01$ ); as levels of aversive values lowered in the target organization, participants perceived significantly more PO fit ( $b = .33, p < .01$ ). Again the 95% confidence interval around the effect for attractive fit did not overlap with the confidence intervals of either the neutral or aversive fit (see Table 3.1). Thus, our hypothesis was confirmed also with the Likert-type of OCP: attractive fit was most strongly related to PO fit perceptions.

Because the distribution of values was slightly skewed, we reran analyses, controlling for participants' average Likert ratings of attractive, aversive, and neutral values. However, relationships were similar.

## **Discussion**

This study generally confirmed the earlier studies' findings. This time we did not force participants to rate values as either attractive or aversive, but used a Likert-scale format which allowed participants to rank each value independently of the others. Once more, attractive, neutral, and aversive fits were all related to PO fit perceptions. Moreover, we found that people are particularly sensitive to information that signals their organizational fit or misfit on values they find attractive. Thus, results in all three studies, relying on students and active job-seekers, are very consistent.

Still, all three samples consisted of young people with relatively little work experience. Moreover, all participants in these studies were either still studying or currently working. Hence, they had no direct need to find a job. One could suggest that results might differ for people with more work-experience and people who are unemployed and thus in dire need of finding a job.

Earlier, we argued with regulatory focus and construal level theories that job-seekers' specific goal (finding a job) and current distance towards the object of evaluation (the future organization) may cause them to be particularly approach oriented and more focused on attractive fit. However, this raises the question whether this approach orientation may be attenuated by work experience and unemployment. First, one could expect that work experience might make a prospective organization less distant. People with more work experience should be more aware of the positive effects of finding their desired values reflected in their organization, but should also be more aware of the negative effects of facing an organizational culture that is aversive to them. This concrete experience and therewith proximity of organizational culture may attenuate job-seekers' approach motivation (Pennington & Roese, 2003). People with more work experience might therefore also rely more on the signals of aversive organizational values than people with less work experience. Second, unemployment gives people less of a cushion of resources than when job-seeking out of a safer situation. People who are unemployed have less opportunity for

taking risks and making mistakes. Therefore, they might take more fit information into account than implied in the previous three studies. Therefore, the fourth study explored the effects of work-experience and length of unemployment on the weighing of attractive fit, neutral fit, and aversive fit when forming PO fit perceptions.

### Study 3.4

#### Method

**Participants.** People who had registered for employment at a division of a large reemployment agency in the Netherlands were asked to volunteer to get insight in their job search process (N =75; 41% female). All candidates received unemployment benefits from the government as well as job-search support from the reemployment agency. Their average age was 35.61 years ( $SD = 10.44$ ). Prior to unemployment, they had an average of 11.41 years ( $SD = 9.66$ ) of full-time work experience in 4.24 ( $SD = 3.30$ ) organizations. About three quarter ( $n=57$ ) of participants had been unemployed for less than 6 months, with an average of 4.21 ( $SD = 4.18$ ) months. The majority of participants (79%) held a degree from higher education (university or vocational), the others held all degrees from secondary education (3%), pre-university education (4%) or intermediate vocational education (15%).

**Procedure and policy-capturing survey.** The procedure paralleled the procedures in our prior studies. Questionnaires were created with an online tool and accessible through a personal internet link. At Time 1, we assessed candidates' attractive, neutral, and aversive values with the OCP. After completion, each job-seeker's six most *attractive values*, six most *aversive values*, and the twelve *neutral values* were selected from their idiosyncratic profiles. After a week (Time 2), candidates filled out the policy-capturing questionnaire with the tailored series of 27 + 3 organizational profiles based on their personal attractive, neutral and aversive values as assessed at Time 1. Participants were consistent in their evaluations of the profiles: Reliability analyses showed that evaluations of original and replicated profiles were corresponding (average  $\alpha = .69$ ). The independent variables were *attractive fit*, *aversive fit*, and *neutral fit*, and *PO fit perceptions* served as the dependent variable.

## Results

As in our prior studies, there was a wide variation in preferred organizational values among participants. On average the range of value preferences was 6.63 ( $SD = 0.83$ ) and average mean, mode, and median were 4.99 ( $SD = 0.98$ ), 4.61 ( $SD = 1.47$ ), and 4.87 ( $SD = 1.14$ ), respectively. So participants differed in their personal value preferences.

Again, we used multilevel modeling to test the relationships between attractive, neutral, and aversive fits and PO fit perceptions. The calculated intraclass coefficient showed that 7.96% of the variance ( $SD = 1.65$ ) in PO fit perceptions was due to individual differences; most of the variance lay, again, within persons. Comparing the null model with a model with attractive, neutral, and aversive fit as predictors allowed us to compute the explained variance accounted for by attractive, aversive, and neutral fits. Averaged across participants, attractive, neutral, and aversive fits accounted for almost 26.49% of the variance in PO fit.

Table 3.1, shows significant average slope coefficients for the attractive, aversive, and neutral fit measures. Attractive fit and neutral fit were positively related to PO fit perceptions: as levels of attractive values and neutral values rose, participants' PO fit perceptions were significantly higher ( $b = 1.15, p < .01$ ;  $b = .44, p < .01$ ). Also aversive fit was positively related to PO fit perceptions, which implies that as levels of aversive values rose, participants' PO fit perceptions were significantly lower ( $b = .33, p < .01$ ). The model showed that attractive fit demonstrates the largest contribution to PO fit perceptions, with the 95% confidence interval around this effect not overlapping with the confidence intervals of either the neutral or aversive fit (see Table 3.1). Altogether, our main hypothesis was also confirmed in this sample of unemployed participants.

Subsequently, we tested whether the relationships between attractive, neutral, and aversive fits and PO fit perceptions varied between persons. As can be seen in Table 3.1, only the attractive fit measure varied significantly between persons ( $\sigma^2 = .13, p < .01$ ). We explored whether this between-person variance in the relationship between attractive fit and PO fit perceptions could be explained by either work experience or length of unemployment.

Table 3.1

*Impact of Attractive, Aversive, and Neutral Fit Measures on PO Fit Perceptions*

Study 3.1	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	$\sigma^2$
(N=99; 2673 observations)					
Intercept	3.79	.05	80.66	3.69 - 3.88	.17 <sup>*b</sup>
Attractive Fit	1.00	.03	35.78	.95 - 1.06	
Neutral Fit	.37	.03	13.27	.32 - .43	
Aversive Fit	.25	.03	-8.90	.19 - .30	
Effect size ( $R^2$ ) <sup>c</sup>					37.36%
Study 3.2	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	$\sigma^2$
(N=38; 1026 observations)					
Intercept	3.61	.08	44.16	3.44 - 3.78	.20 <sup>*b</sup>
Attractive Fit	.69	.04	15.51	.61 - .78	
Neutral Fit	.45	.04	10.00	.36 - .54	
Aversive Fit	.17	.04	-3.75	.08 - .26	
Effect size ( $R^2$ ) <sup>c</sup>					26.49%
Study 3.3	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	$\sigma^2$
(N=33; 891 observations)					
Intercept	3.72	.07	50.58	3.57 - 3.87	.12 <sup>*b</sup>
Attractive Fit	.97	.05	19.13	.87 - 1.07	
Neutral Fit	.45	.05	8.85	.35 - .55	
Aversive Fit	.33	.05	-6.59	.23 - .43	
Effect size ( $R^2$ ) <sup>c</sup>					36.24%
Study 3.4	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	$\sigma^2$
(N=75; 2025 observations)					
Intercept	4.13	.06	66.04	4.00 - 4.25	.24 <sup>*b</sup>
Attractive Fit	1.15	.05	22.21	1.05 - 1.25	.13 <sup>*</sup>
Neutral Fit	.44	.04	11.61	.37 - .52	.03
Aversive Fit	.33	.04	-7.59	.24 - .42	.07
Effect size ( $R^2$ ) <sup>c</sup>					44.86%

Note. <sup>\*</sup>  $p < .01$ . <sup>a</sup> Average estimated SE of the regression coefficient. <sup>b</sup> Between person variance around the intercept. <sup>c</sup> % within-person variance in PO fit perceptions explained

However, we found no direct effects of years of work experience, number of organizations worked for or unemployment length on PO fit perceptions, nor did we find (cross-level) interactions between these variables and the weighing of attractive fit on PO fit perceptions, thus suggesting that neither work experience nor length of unemployment attenuate the ascendancy of attractive fit over aversive fit.

## **General Discussion**

Past research has shown that PO fit perceptions are of major relevance for job-seekers' self-selection decisions (e.g., Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Harold & Ployhart, 2008; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001). People assess the values of an organization and compare those to their own values to determine how well they will fit with this organization. Although past literature on PO fit has generally assumed that people develop an overall perception of their fit with an organization – i.e., make an overall comparison between their personal values and those of the organizations – our findings show that fit on attractive values is particularly important, whereas the neutral and aversive fits receive far less deliberation.

### **Theoretical implications and future directions**

The findings of this study bear several theoretical implications. First, substantial differences among individuals' culture preferences showed that job-seekers' PO fit perceptions are indeed unique, rather than being led by organizational values that are universally preferred. Moreover, results showed that these differences in individual culture preferences are fundamental to the development of PO fit perceptions. So, it does not per se matter whether a specific organizational value fits or fails to fit a person. What matters is how attractive this specific value is to a person. Hence, PO fit is best measured when a broad array of personal values are compared to those of organizations.

Second, the found tendency to put more weight on some sources of information at the expense of other – equally relevant – sources of information can explain why previous studies found indirect measures of fit in the form of an overall calculation of discrepancies to

be such a poor predictor of people's fit perceptions (Edwards, et al., 2006; Finegan, 2000; Van Vianen, 2005; Van Vuuren, et al., 2008). In this line of research, it is also important to note that most PO fit studies have examined individuals' fit experiences while these people already are in a specific organizational context. Accordingly, past literature has mostly treated the conceptions of anticipated future PO fit during job search and present PO fit while being in the organization in similar ways, that is, as if prospective PO fit would be experienced in the present. However, a growing body of research challenges the idea that PO fit is a stable concept and that PO fit perceptions do not change over time (De Cooman et al., 2009; Edwards, 2008; Shipp & Jansen, 2011; Yu, 2009). The current results showed that in a situation where they have to assess an organization they don't know yet, fit on attractive values represents people's PO fit perceptions best. We argued with construal level theory that this process is due to a job-seekers' future orientation which is psychologically distant, and therefore abstract. This raises the question whether a different process may occur when people have to establish their fit with their current organization. As people become more familiar with their organization, their perceptions of organizational values likely become more certain and concrete. A smaller psychological distance may foster other foci, such as for instance a focus on organizational values employees find aversive. Hence, psychological distance could be a crucial factor in the way in which different sources of PO fit assessments are processed and weighed.

The findings of this study suggest that a distinction between attractive, neutral, and aversive values could be useful for future studies as well. When choosing a job, people tend to rely on impressions of attractive fit (the extent to which an organization adheres to their preferred cultural values) rather than neutral or aversive fit. When employed, people may also (unconsciously) distinguish between their attractive, neutral, and aversive fits. Hence, future research could examine whether this distinction is also relevant for measuring people's fit perceptions in other stages of the attraction-selection-attrition cycle. That is, rather than asking individuals to indicate their overall perceived fit with the organization, it may be useful to assess their attractive and aversive fits separately. In this way, researchers could investigate the dimensionality of fit measures: PO fit perceptions might not be one-dimensional after all. Moreover, various PO fit dimensions may affect specific outcomes differently. For example, attractive fit might most strongly relate to approach-type

outcomes, such as organizational attraction, whereas aversive fit might most strongly relate to avoidance-type outcomes, such as turnover.

### **Practical implications**

If the proposed effect of psychological distance on PO fit perceptions holds true, then it would also have considerable practical relevance: job-seekers' focus on attractive values in predicting prospective PO fit with an organization may turn out not to align with PO fit perceptions once employed. People may experience a different type of fit or misfit once they are employed, just because they may base their judgment more heavily also on the presence or absence of dominant organizational values they do not like but did not think of beforehand. In sum, our results suggest that scientists and practitioners in the PO fit literature should pay attention not only to PO fit as a general concept, but also to attractive and aversive fits separately, which may help to avoid problems caused by PO incompatibility later.

A second practical implication concerns the solution usually suggested to adjust job-seekers' expectations to match organizational reality, namely Realistic Job Preview (RJP; Phillips, 1998). The idea behind RJP is that providing realistic job information to job-seekers results in better self-selection decisions and in their having their job expectations met. Yet, all theories about the effectiveness of realistic job previews share the underlying assumption that applicants indeed receive and also process all information available to them (Phillips, 1998). Our results would suggest that RJP's could be helpful to make job-seekers aware of a lack of their attractive values in the organization, but they might still not be able to detect an excess of aversive values in the organization. It is important for recruitment and selection practices to understand what actions might be needed to help job-seekers to be aware of possible negative aspects in a prospective organization.

### **Limitations**

One potential limitation of our studies is the use of the policy-capturing design. Although the design of these studies has offered insight in how information about organizational values is weighed, the experimental control that is required for such a design may raise some

concerns about generalizability. Yet, we reduced the task's cognitive demands by presenting the hypothetical organizations in summary profiles. Another potential limitation is that these studies were only focused on one type of fit, namely PO fit. Therefore, additional research is needed to further confirm our findings with realistic organizational information, such as website information or job advertisements. Besides, future studies could examine the influence of attractive, aversive, neutral, and overall fits on perceived fit with these other entities.

Second, the relative small sample sizes in studies 2 and 3 may be a concern as small samples tend to reduce statistical power and may involve sampling errors. Yet, we used a within-person design in all our studies collecting a large number of data points (the organizational profiles) per participant. Rather than responding to a single organizational profile, participants responded to multiple organizational profiles which increase the reliability and decrease the standard errors of the measures. Moreover, the number of profiles was sufficient to yield stable estimates of regression coefficients (Aiman-Smith, Scullen, & Barr, 2002). Generally, unless participants are very inconsistent in their evaluations, fewer participants are needed in a within-person design as compared to a single-observation design. Furthermore, a small sample size is primarily a concern with regard to Type II errors, that is, when rejecting the proposed hypotheses and falsely accepting null hypotheses (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2008). In our studies, hypotheses were supported and findings were stable across four distinct and independent samples made up of different types of participants (students vs. job-seekers of different age groups). We, therefore, believe that the samples sizes were sufficient and that our findings were not due to sampling error.

A third limitation, although we have found strong indications that people's attractive values in particular affect their perceptions of PO fit during job search, we did not yet examine the process underlying this phenomenon. Our proposition that aversive values would be weighed relatively less was based on regulatory focus theory and construal level theory. Future research should further investigate these theories in the context of the job seeking process, and possible alternative theories should be tested as well. For example, aversive values might be more ambiguous than attractive values because it might be easier to imagine what one wishes to attain than what one wishes to avoid (Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003), and this ambiguity could cause the relative neglect of aversive fit. Or

alternatively, since people attach greater weight to possible losses than to comparable gains (Tversky & Kahneman, 2000), misfit on aversive values might be felt as a lower loss than misfit on attractive values.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, this study has thrown more light on which characteristics of people and organizations are crucial for establishing PO fit perceptions during job search: Instead of trying to capture an overall level of similarity with an organization, job-seekers particularly focus on the presence or absence of their personal attractive values. Using job-seekers' personally attractive, neutral, and aversive values may lead to a better prediction of their actual or perceived PO fit once employed.\*

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\* This chapter is under review (R&R) as De Goede, M.E.E., Van Vianen, A.E.M., & Klehe, U.C. A tailored policy-capturing study on PO fit perceptions: The ascendancy of attractive over aversive fit. The first two studies in this chapter were also presented at the 24<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), New Orleans, LA, April 2009.

# CHAPTER 4

Job-seekers' regulatory focus and the formation of their PO fit perceptions



Research has shown that job-seekers are attracted to an organization when they perceive a fit between their personal values and the organization's cultural values - referred to as job-seekers' person-organization fit (PO fit) perceptions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). An implicit assumption in research on job-seekers' PO fit perceptions is that these perceptions reflect their overall comparison of personal and organizational values (Van Vianen, 2005). Job-seekers would then perceive optimal fit if values that they find attractive are highly represented in the organization's culture and if values that they find aversive are hardly represented. Yet, recent PO fit literature has started to question the basic assumption that job-seekers weigh all organizational values equally when arriving at an overall comparison. Instead this literature has suggested that job-seekers weigh some information more than other (Edwards, 2008; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Van Vianen, 2005). Indeed it was found that job-seekers focus on their personally attractive values rather than on values they find personally aversive when evaluating a prospective organization (De Goede, Van Vianen, & Klehe, 2009).

In the present study, we propose that job-seekers' tendency to weigh attractive values more heavily in their PO fit perceptions than they weigh aversive values is a logical consequence of the approach focused task at hand (i.e., seeking a job) and therefore is affected by people's regulatory orientation. From the basic hedonic principle that people approach pleasure and avoid pain, Higgins (1997) proposed that people are guided by two distinct self-regulatory systems: promotion and prevention. A promotion focus is related to aspirations, growth, and accomplishments and involves one's sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes. A prevention focus, by contrast, centers on one's sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes and is related to protection, safety, and responsibility. Regulatory focus is a state and can differ both across situations (momentary regulatory focus) and across individuals (chronic regulatory orientation; Förster & Werth, 2009).

We argue that the situation of job search will imply a greater promotion than prevention orientation among job-seekers. The choice of different organizations to work for will likely draw more attention to potential success than to security needs. In this promotion orientation, people will have more attention for the presence or absence of positive outcomes. Thus, they will weigh information regarding their personal attractive values more

heavily in their formation of PO fit perceptions. However, we propose that also job-seekers' chronic regulatory focus will affect the weighing of attractive and aversive values. We especially expect that chronically prevention focused job-seekers, who usually are also more attentive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997) will also weigh information on their personal aversive values in their PO fit perceptions. Consequently, they may arrive at more balanced and thus more accurate perceptions of their overall PO-fit.

Taken together, this study incorporates regulatory focus theory within the theory of PO fit. Herewith, we contribute to the growing call for research to specify situational and individual factors that could affect people's PO fit perceptions. In addition, this study may provide further insight into processes of job decision making and the extent to which job-seekers are able to find a fitting job as based on their fit impressions during job search.

### **PO fit perceptions**

When searching for a job, people are confronted with a wide variety of information about an organization. PE fit theories hold that people will seek for the information that helps them to determine the best fit with their personal characteristics. As is described in the attraction component of Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA; Schneider, et al., 1995) model, people will self-select into organizations where they perceive congruence between their own personal values and an organization's culture. Research has typically focused on values, because values are conceived as fundamental, relative enduring and transcend to specific situations (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Chatman, 1991; Kristof, 1996). People's values pertain to desired end-states, vary in terms of relative importance, and guide the selection of behaviors and events (Cable & Edwards, 2004).

People differ in the values they find attractive and those that are aversive or are more neutral to them (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010; O'Reilly, et al., 1991). The differences in attractiveness of values guide people to approach certain outcomes and to avoid others. Attractive values are the values that people typically try to attain. Aversive values, on the other hand, are the values they try to avoid (Feather, 1995). Based on the implicit assumption in PO fit research that people develop PO fit perceptions on their overall degree of fit with organizations, job-seekers should search for organizations where there is maximal value congruence; i.e., organizations in which they could attain their personal attractive

values and avoid their personal aversive values. For example, a job-seeker to whom autonomy is an attractive value and competition an aversive value should search for an organization where autonomy is highly represented in the culture and competition hardly represented to maximize PO fit. However, contrary to this basic assumption of the PO fit literature, recent research found that fit on a personal attractive values was sufficient to perceive PO fit (De Goede, et al., 2009). Job-seekers seem to weigh attractive values more heavily than aversive values in their formation of PO fit perceptions.

These findings bear considerable consequences as people's PO fit affects many attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Verquer, et al., 2003). That is, job-seekers' overweighing of attractive values (as compared to aversive values) may lead to inaccuracies in predicting their prospective PO fit with an organization which in turn may have negative consequences for themselves as well as for their organization. When people mainly rely on their attractive fit perceptions for choosing an organization, they may become disappointed when discovering a misfit on values they find aversive once they are employed in the organization. If hired, people with unrealistic expectations are thought to become more easily dissatisfied with their position than job-seekers who have more accurate expectations (Breaugh & Starke, 2000).

The solution usually suggested to adjust job-seekers expectations to match organizational reality is Realistic Job Preview (RJP; Phillips, 1998). The idea is that providing realistic job information to job-seekers results in better self-selection decisions and in their having their job expectations met. Yet, all theories about the effectiveness of realistic job previews share the underlying assumption that indeed applicants also receive and process all information (Phillips, 1998). However, even in the presence of information about aversive values, job-seekers are inclined to weigh information about attractive values more (De Goede, et al., 2009) and people react more positively to positive-valenced information than negatively to negative-valenced information (Highhouse, Stanton, & Reeve, 2004).

All in all, it appears that negative information about prospective organizations is discounted more than positive information. Regulatory focus theory proposes that the attention given to positive versus negative information depends on the degree to which the context of an evaluation is more oriented towards obtaining a positive outcome or maintaining the absence of a negative outcome.

## Regulatory Orientation

People have different self-regulatory orientations either related to aspirations, growth, and accomplishments (promotion focus), or to protection, safety, and responsibility (prevention focus; Higgins, 1997). Both promotion and prevention elicit different strategic inclinations that are directed towards different end-states (attaining a positive end state or avoiding a negative end state). Promotion-oriented people dedicate their full attention to a desired goal to make sure that a positive outcome will occur and concentrate on those activities that are tied to wishes, ideals, and hopes (so-called ideal/maximal goals). When people are oriented towards promotion goals, they think about gains: experiencing a gain would be the desired positive outcome; not experiencing gaining (non-gain) would indicate the undesired negative outcome. Hence, promotion-oriented people are sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Shah & Higgins, 1997).

Prevention-oriented people emphasize the avoidance of an undesired end-state. Thus, they are concerned with the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Shah & Higgins, 1997). They focus on activities that allow them to fulfill their responsibilities and duties and that are in service of their own safety (so-called oughts). When people pursue prevention goals, they think in terms of losses: not experiencing a loss (non-loss) would then be seen as the positive outcome. On their way towards their goal, they try to prevent mistakes and avoid possible dangers. Both promotion and prevention are assumed to co-exist in every person and to be independent of each other. However one or the other may be temporarily or chronically more activated in a given person. Regulatory orientation can be either induced from the situation or be superimposed by structure or evolve from past experiences into a chronic motivational state (Förster & Werth, 2009; Pham & Avnet, 2009).

Promotion and prevention orientation lead to different information foci and process (e.g., Brockner, Paruchuri, Idson, & Higgins, 2002; Pham & Avnet, 2009; Roese, Hur, & Pennington, 1999). Identical bits of information could have substantially different effects on outcomes depending on a person's regulatory orientation. For example, while reading an essay in which a target person experienced events reflecting different types of psychological situations (e.g., the presence of a positive outcome; the absence of a negative outcome) people in a promotion focus remember more the presence or absence of positive

biographical events for a fictitious person, whereas people in a prevention focus remember the presence or absence of negative biographical events more (Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992). Further, people in a promotion situation mainly focus on information that will help them to attain desired end-states, while people in a prevention situation particularly consider information that is relevant for preventing undesired end-states (Brockner, et al., 2002). Moreover, these differences in focus also result in differences in the information people require in order to make a decision. People in a high promotion focus require sufficiency. That is, promotion focus is associated with the belief that any information about goal attainment is sufficient. In contrast, people in a high prevention focus require necessity. Thus, prevention focus is associated with the belief that all information is necessary for goal attainment (Brockner, et al., 2002; Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2005).

Building on regulatory focus theory, we conjecture that chronic regulatory orientation will affect the formation of job-seekers PO fit perceptions. Imagine that the organization for which job-seekers have to judge their PO fit gives information about one personally attractive value, one personally neutral value, and one personally aversive value. Classic PO fit research would assume that to maximize their fit with the organization people would consider information about each value, estimate their fit on these three values, and subsequently combine them into an overall fit perception. However, prior research has suggested that the approach-oriented situation of job search could affect the weighing of the different values in forming PO fit perceptions. The situation of job search and evaluating different organizations induces a promotion orientation and therefore job-seekers particularly attend to the presence or absence of positive information. As a result fit on the positive personally attractive values is weighed more heavily (De Goede, et al., 2009).

At the same time, it can be expected that job-seekers will focus on information that is particularly compatible with their chronic regulatory orientation (Aaker & Lee, 2006; Higgins, 2000). That is, promotion-oriented job-seekers will focus most on the presence or absence of positive outcomes, which is fit and misfit on attractive values. They want fit on attractive values to accomplish their goal, whereas fit on aversive values will not help them reach their positive end-state. Consequently, people with a chronic promotion orientation will weigh the positive information even more at the cost of negative fit information. In contrast, prevention-oriented job-seekers will tend to focus on the presence or absence of negative outcomes, which is fit and misfit on aversive values. Therefore we propose that - despite the

approach oriented situation of job search - people with a chronic prevention orientation will weigh the negative fit information to a larger extent.

Since promotion and prevention are assumed to co-exist in every person and to be independent of each other we hypothesize that in the situation of job search in general fit on attractive values (attractive fit) will weigh most in the formation of job-seekers PO fit perceptions, whereas fit on neutral and unattractive values (neutral and unattractive fit) will weigh to a lesser extent (*Hypothesis 1*). However, the relationships between attractive fit, neutral fit, and aversive fit will be moderated by regulatory orientation. The influence of attractive fit on PO fit perceptions will be stronger for people with a high chronic promotion orientation as compared to those with a lower promotion orientation (*Hypothesis 2*), and the influence of aversive fit will be stronger for people with a high prevention orientation as compared to those with a lower prevention orientation (*Hypothesis 3*).

## Method

### Participants and procedure

Sixty-eight students (65% female) with a mean age of 22.84 ( $SD = 6.70$ ) volunteered in exchange for research points or a small payment. Prior (part-time) work experience averaged 5.43 years ( $SD = 5.65$ ) and 77% reported holding a part-time job at the time of the study ( $M = 9.41$  working hours per week).

In the first part of the study, we assessed how participants evaluated different organizational values. After this, participants completed an ostensibly unrelated set of individual differences measures, including the regulatory orientations questions. In the second part of the study, participants were instructed to take the perspective of an actively looking job-seeker. They were presented with a series organizational profiles and were asked to rate their PO fit with each of these organizations. It was emphasized that each organization provided job opportunities in participants' area of interest, but that the organizations differed in their organizational culture for which the profiles could serve as an indication. Unbeknown to participants, each series of organizations had been tailored to

each participant as each profile was based on participant's own attractive, neutral, and aversive values.

## Materials

**Development of tailored policy-capturing cues.** Participants' preferences for organizational values were assessed with the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, et al., 1991), which is a Q-sort method containing 54 value and culture statements (e.g., being innovative, being people oriented, paying attention to detail, being action oriented). The OCP covers the broad spectrum of distinct dimensions that capture individual and organizational values. Participants sort the 54 values into 9 categories, ranging from very aversive (=1), via neutral (=5), to very attractive (=9), with a specified number of values in each category (in the pattern 2-4-6-9-12-9-6-4-2), leading to a somewhat flattened normal distribution. The result is an idiosyncratic profile that represents a person's values in any organizational context. We selected each participant's *attractive values* as the six values (16.7 %) in the right-end ('very attractive') tail of the distribution and each participant's *aversive values* as the six values (16.7 %) in the left-end ('very aversive') tail. The 12 values (33.3 %) in the middle category were selected as participant's *neutral values*.

Each participant received a unique set of profiles based on his or her attractive, neutral, and aversive values, which was constructed by a computerized program as developed by the researchers. Each profile contained three cues, each representing one of the independent variables (attractive fit, neutral fit, and aversive fit). The level of each value was systematically varied across profiles as low, medium, or high.

Following the procedure used in earlier studies (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2002), an orthogonal structure was accomplished by completely crossing all possible combinations of values (attractive, neutral, and aversive) and their levels (-1 = low, 0 = medium, and 1 = high), resulting in 27 profiles (3 x 3 x 3). Thus, each participant rated his or her PO fit perceptions for all possible organizational profiles in a full factorial design, permitting assessment of the independent effect of attractive, aversive, and neutral values on perceived PO fit. Each participant received the 30 profiles in randomized order to limit sequencing effects. In addition, value order within the profiles was varied across participants. Repeated measures of variance indicated no differences in fit perceptions due to order ( $F(2, 65) = 1.11, n.s.$ ).

Furthermore, three replicated profiles were included to assess within-rater judgment consistency, bringing the total number of profiles to 30, which showed adequate test-retest reliability (average  $\alpha = .87$ ), which suggested that participants attended carefully to all the organizational profiles.

**Independent variables: Attractive, aversive, and neutral fit**

**Attractive fit** reflects the level of a participant's attractive value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high); the higher the level of the attractive value in an organization, the higher the attractive fit between a person and an organization.

**Aversive fit** reflects the level of a participant's aversive value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high); the lower the level of the aversive value in an organization, the higher the aversive fit between a person and an organization.

**Neutral fit** reflects the level of a participant's neutral value in an organizational profile (low, medium, or high) served as the neutral fit measure; a medium level of the neutral value in the organization gives the highest fit between a person and an organization.

**Dependent variable: PO fit perceptions.** Participants indicated with one general item rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) Likert scale how much they fitted with each of the 30 (27 + 3) organizations (cf., Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

**Regulatory orientation.** To assess participants' regulatory orientation we used Higgins' regulatory focus questionnaire (Higgins et al., 2001) that contains two dimensions representing promotion orientation (6 items, e.g., "Do you often do well at different things that you try?") and prevention orientation (5 items, e.g., "Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times." (reverse scored)). Participants rated on a scale from 1 (e.g., *never or seldom*) to 5 (e.g., *very often*) scale how well each item characterized them. Both subscales were reliable (promotion;  $\alpha = .71$ ; prevention,  $\alpha = .82$ ), and independent from one another ( $r = -.07$ , n.s.).

**Control variables.** This study controlled for demographics that could influence participants' value preferences or PO fit perceptions, such as age, gender, work experience (in years and number of organizations worked for), working hours (per week), study grades, and perceived labor market perspectives (1 = *very pessimistic* to 5 = *very optimistic*).

## Results

First, we examined whether the 54 values included in the OCP showed sufficient variance across participants. On average the range of rankings for a particular value was 6.91 ( $SD = 0.81$ ; maximum possible range is 8) and the average mean, mode, and median were 5.01 ( $SD = 1.09$ ), 4.72 ( $SD = 1.46$ ), and 4.91 ( $SD = 1.24$ ), respectively. Thus, there was a wide variation in attractive and aversive organizational values among participants and values that were attractive to some participants were neutral or aversive to others and vice versa.

As in previous studies, we expected relationships between the measures of attractive, neutral, and aversive fit and the measure of participants' PO fit perceptions across organizational profiles (*Hypothesis 1*). Furthermore, in this study we hypothesized that relationships between attractive fit, neutral fit, and aversive fit on the one hand and PO fit perceptions on the other hand would be moderated by regulatory orientation (*Hypotheses 2 and 3*). We used multilevel modeling (with SPSS mixed models with maximum likelihood) to test this. Multilevel modeling is a hierarchical regression analysis that takes the grouping of the measurements within participants into account (Hox, 2002). This method controls for the fact that we have multiple measures (level 1 variables) nested in participants (level 2 variables), and that measures are thus not independent of one other. We started with a random intercept-only or null model, a model that contains no predictors at all, as a reference model. All independent variables were scored with 0 as midpoint. The intercept refers therefore to PO fit perceptions of the average participant with the average fitting organization ( $M = 3.85$ ). We then calculated an intraclass correlation (ICC) which reflects the portion of total variance to be explained by between person differences. The resulting ICC of 4% indicates that only relatively little variance can be explained by individual differences.

Table 4.1  
*Regression of PO Fit Perceptions on Fit Measures*

	-2 LL	B	SE <sup>a</sup>	t	$\sigma_e$	$\sigma^2$ <sup>b</sup>
<u>Model 0</u>	6649.46				2.13	
Intercept		3.85**	.05	77.08		.09
<u>Model 1</u>	5805.99				1.22	
Intercept		3.85**	.05	77.08		.12
Attractive Fit		.99**	.03	30.07		
Neutral Fit		.37**	.03	11.27		
Aversive Fit		-.23**	.03	-7.06		
<u>Model 2</u>	5772.69				1.22	
Intercept		3.85**	.05	77.08		.12
Attractive Fit		.99**	.04	22.64		.06**
Neutral Fit		.37**	.04	9.42		.04*
Aversive Fit		-.23**	.04	-5.52		.05**
<u>Model 3</u>	5621.85				1.18	
Intercept		3.86**	.05	80.34		.11
Attractive Fit		.99**	.04	23.47		.05**
x promotion		.11	.07	1.45		
x prevention		-.08	.05	-1.49		
Neutral Fit		.36**	.04	9.78		.03
x promotion		-.02	.07	-0.36		
x prevention		-.13**	.05	-2.78		
Aversive Fit		-.24**	.04	-6.05		.04*
x promotion		.02	.07	0.29		
x prevention		-.17**	.07	-3.42		
Promotion		-.05	.08	-0.34		
Prevention		.12*	.06	2.05		

Note. N = 68 participants; 1836 observations. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

<sup>a</sup> Average estimated SE of the regression coefficient. <sup>b</sup> Between person variance around the effects.

Against this null model we tested a model with attractive, neutral, and aversive fit measures as predictors in order to test for their relationship with PO fit perceptions. This model provides information on the average contribution of these three types of fit to PO fit perceptions. We computed the explained variance accounted for by the predictors (attractive, aversive, and neutral fit) as the total variance to be explained ( $\sigma_e$  in Model 0, see Table 4.1) minus the variance not attributable to the predictors ( $\sigma_e$  in Model 1), divided by the total variance. Averaged across participants, the model with the attractive, neutral, and aversive fit measures accounted for almost 38% of the variance in PO fit perceptions.

In analyzing policy-capturing questionnaires, slope coefficients represent the average weight placed on each predictor such that higher numbers indicate that a predictor is weighed more heavily in the judgment process. The slope coefficients for the attractive, neutral, and aversive organizational values were all significant and model fit improved over and above the null model ( $\chi^2_{\text{dif}}(3) = 843.46, p < .01$ ; see Table 4.1). As levels of attractive values rose, participants' PO fit perceptions increased significantly ( $b = .99, p < .01$ ) and as levels of aversive organizational values rose, participants PO fit perceptions decreased significantly ( $b = -.23, p < .01$ ). Finally, as levels of neutral values rose participants' PO fit perceptions increased significantly ( $b = .37, p < .01$ ). These results confirm our Hypothesis 1 and the findings of previous studies that people weigh all organizational values in their PO fit perceptions, but that they weigh attractive values most.

Subsequently, we tested whether the relations between attractive, neutral, and aversive fit and PO fit perceptions varied between persons. Hereto, we allowed in Model 2 between person variance. As can be seen in Table 4.1, all three fit measures varied significantly between persons (attractive fit,  $\sigma^2 = .06, p < .01$ ; neutral fit,  $\sigma^2 = .04, p < .05$ ; aversive fit  $\sigma^2 = .05, p < .01$ ) and model fit improved ( $\chi^2_{\text{dif}}(3) = 33.30, p < .01$ ). This is a necessary condition to test our second and third hypotheses, namely whether this variance between persons in their weighing of the different fit measures could be explained by regulatory orientation. However, prior to testing this, we ran exploratory analyses to determine the effect of demographics. We especially wanted to assess whether the weighting of fit measures varied with participants' age, work experience, working hours, study grades, and perceived labor market perspective. Results revealed no effects of demographics on the relationships between attractive, neutral, and aversive fit and PO fit perceptions (see also Table 4.2).

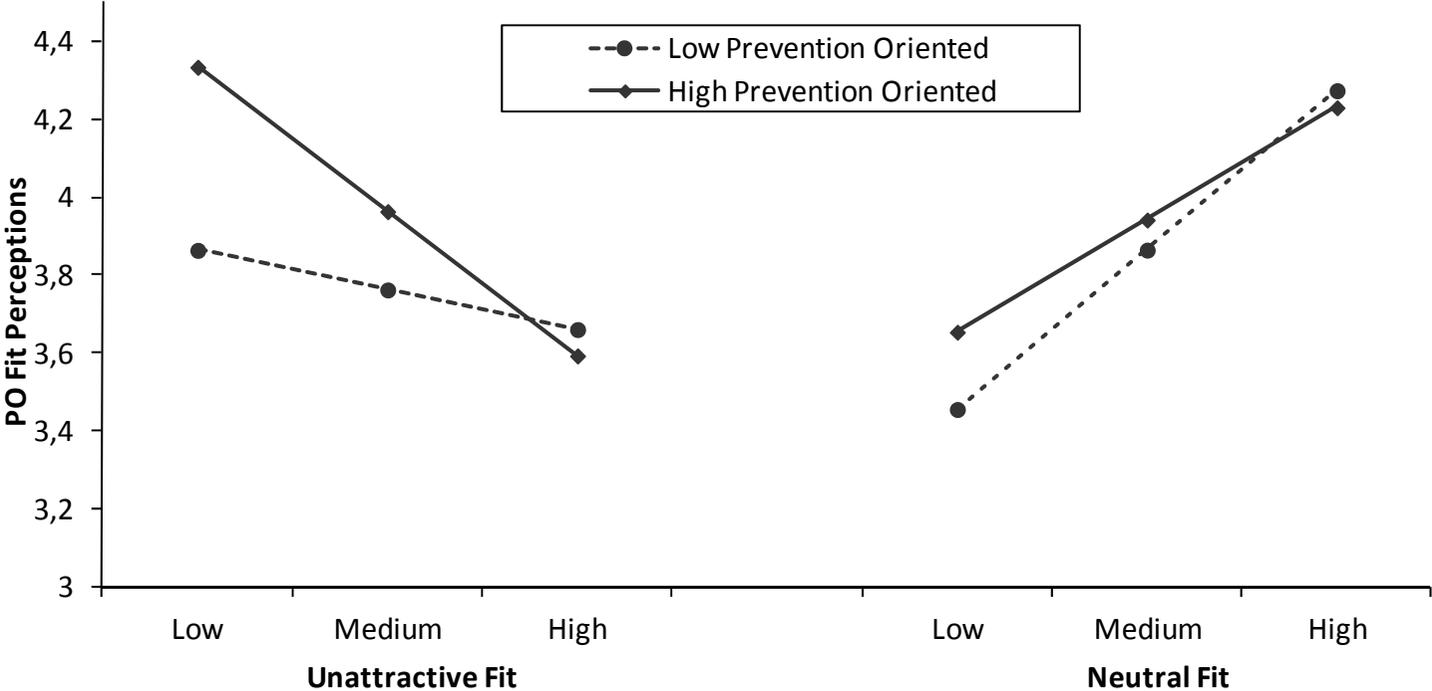
Table 4.2

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of PO Fit Perceptions, Regulatory Orientation, and Demographics*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Attractive fit coefficient	0.57	0.18	-										
2. Neutral fit coefficient	0.22	0.18	-.12	-									
3. Aversive fit coefficient	-0.14	0.20	.01	.25*	-								
4. PO fit Perceptions	3.85	0.42	-.34**	-.04	.07								
5. Promotion Orientation	3.76	0.58	.11	-.04	.05	-.08	(.71)						
6. Prevention Orientation	3.47	0.81	-.06	-.25*	-.38**	.25*	-.07	(.82)					
7. Age	22.84	6.70	-.10	.11	-.04	-.06	-.29*	-.03	-				
8. Work experience (years)	5.43	5.65	-.07	.12	.04	-.01	-.05	-.10	.75**	-			
9. Work experience (orga)	4.40	2.95	.06	.02	-.04	.03	.07	.05	.10	.38**	-		
10. Working hours (p week)	9.41	9.38	.12	.15	.05	.03	-.03	-.17	.32**	.59**	.17		-
11. Study grades (1-10)	6.82	1.61	-.01	-.04	.02	-.13	.38**	.05	.12	.13	.20	-.30*	
12. Labormarket perspective (1-5)	2.20	1.10	-.07	-.02	.01	-.09	-.33**	-.00	.16	-.02	-.14	-.12	.04

Note. N = 68 participants; 1836 observations. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Figure 4.1.  
*The Moderating Role of Prevention Orientation on the Relationships between Aversive Fit and PO fit Perceptions and Neutral Fit and PO fit Perceptions*



Next, we tested our hypotheses on the interaction between the attractive, neutral, and aversive fit and both promotion (*Hypothesis 2*) and prevention orientation (*Hypothesis 3*) on PO fit perceptions. There was no indication that participants' promotion orientation affected the relationships between the fit measures and PO fit perceptions. So, participants who were more promotion oriented did not put more or less weight on the attractive, neutral, or aversive fit information in their PO fit perceptions than participants who were less promotion oriented. However, participants' prevention orientation significantly moderated the impact of both neutral and aversive fit (respectively  $b = -.13, p < .01$ ;  $b = -.17, p < .01$ ). Participants who were more prevention oriented put less weight on the neutral fit information than participants who were less prevention oriented; i.e., the positive relation between neutral fit and PO fit perceptions was negatively affected, and as a result less positive. Furthermore, prevention oriented participants put more weight on the aversive fit information; the negative relation between aversive fit and PO fit perceptions is negatively affected, and as a result more negative. The moderating role of prevention orientation is graphically displayed in Figure 4.1.

## Discussion

Past research has shown considerable support for Schneider's proposition that jobs-seekers are attracted to organizations where they perceive congruence between their own values and those of an organization (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Verquer, et al., 2003). The general assumption in most PO fit research was that both attractive and aversive values are considered equally in the formation of PO fit perceptions and that fit on both was necessary to maximize PO fit perceptions. However indirect and direct measures of PO fit often do not converge (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). Our findings may help to account for these up to now puzzling results. Contrary to the basic assumption of ASA we found that job-seekers especially weigh information on values they find personally attractive while putting less weight on than information on values that is more neutral or aversive to the. This replicated previous findings (De Goede, et al., 2009) that people in the situational context of job-search perceive particularly high PO fit when information about a prospective employer supports values that are attractive to them. Additionally, this study shows that perceptions of PO fit

are contingent on people's chronic regulatory orientation. People with a high prevention orientation also take the information on the aversive values into account. This latter finding seems to result in a more balanced weighing of attractive and aversive values.

This study contributes to the literature on PO fit, by introducing regulatory orientation as a crucial variable in the formation of PO fit perceptions. Herewith, we extend the literature by showing that developing PO fit perceptions may be more complex than previously envisioned. This study gives more insight in understanding why and when job-seekers' personally attractive values have more impact on PO fit perceptions. Job-seekers' tendency to weigh attractive values more heavily in their PO fit perceptions than they weigh aversive values is a logical consequence of the approach focused task at hand (i.e., seeking a job) and therefore is affected by people's regulatory orientation. However, parallel to this situational promotion orientation, people's chronic prevention orientation might help to form more balanced PO fit perceptions as assumed in the literature till now. People with a high prevention orientation take also information on their personally aversive values into account, without diminishing the use of information about their personally attractive values and thus possibly arriving at a more balanced and realistic perception on how well they fit with a potential prospective organization.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

This study, too, is not without its limitations and many questions regarding the role of individual differences, as regulatory orientation, and contextual effects, as the situation of job search, determining PO fit perceptions are of yet unanswered. First, the use of a student sample may have restrained the generalizability of our findings to more senior job-seekers. Unlike inexperienced job-seekers, applicants with more work experience will have more information about the effect of their personal aversive and attractive values on their attraction to the organization (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2002) and might be more aware of the importance of PO fit (Backhaus, 2003). At the same time, we believe that the use of student participants is justified since entry level job-seekers constitute a major part of the job seeking population (Powell & Goulet, 1996) and organizations spend much time and effort on recruiting these career starters (Cober & Brown, 2006). Moreover, many of the students in our sample have considerable part-time work experience. Still, learning how different

samples of job-seekers weigh organizational values is an interesting avenue for future research. Thus, future research might benefit from focusing on people with more work experience or people with a clear negative experience they want to avoid.

Subsequently, based on regulatory focus theory we argued that the context of job search might induce a situational promotion orientation. This raises the question whether a different process may occur when people have to establish their PO fit perceptions once they are employed in an organization. As people become more familiar with a situation it might become clearer what one wants to avoid or to maintain and it might be less clear what is left to approach. The situation of being employed might therefore induce more of a prevention orientation, and therefore a stronger focus on the absence and presence of aversive values. Comparing how context influences the formation of PO fit perceptions should be further examined; or ideally one may examine the formation of PO fit perceptions longitudinally.

An additional question not addressed in this study is job-seekers' ability to correct for the effects of regulatory orientation. In other words, the question is whether the overweighing of attractive values due to and chronic and or situational regulatory orientation can be decreased, eliminated, or even reversed if people are made aware that their regulatory orientation may lead to biased information processing. Related to this is the question whether a balanced weighing of attractive and aversive values in PO fit perceptions leads to better actual fit. Investigating 'correction' processes in how regulatory orientation affects PO fit perceptions is a promising avenue for future research (Chernev, 2004). For example, could job-seekers improve the predictive power of their fit perceptions by applying other decision strategies?

## **Conclusion**

All in all, this study has thrown some more light on the processes underlying job-seekers' PO fit perceptions. In the promotion context of job-search - so we argue - people mostly focused on the presence and absence of attractive organizational values or attractive fit. However, the more participants became prevention oriented, the more they also attended

to their aversive fit, the presence or absence of aversive values when judging their PO fit with an organization. So to promote a better fit, one should also prevent.\*

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# CHAPTER 5

Person-Organization fit and temporal distance: Future and present PO fit perceptions



Perceptions of person-organization fit (PO fit; Schneider, et al., 1995) are of major relevance for recruiting organizations. The more job-seekers perceive their own personal values to fit an organization's culture value system, the more attracted they are to the organization (Judge & Cable, 1997), and the more likely they choose to apply (Dineen & Noe, 2009). Most past research assumes PO fit perceptions to be equally based on organizational values that support a person's values, i.e., attractive values, and values that contradict the person's values, i.e., aversive values. For example, in deciding whether to apply to an organization, a competitive but not very rule-oriented job-seeker might consider the opportunity to compete in the organization (attractive fit) as well as the possible threat of being constrained by too many rules (aversive misfit). However, recent findings suggest that job-seekers' overall PO fit perceptions do not reflect all information equally. Rather, job-seekers weigh the presence or absence of attractive values in the organization more heavily than the presence or absence of aversive values (De Goede, et al., 2009).

In the present study, we propose, based on construal level theory, that job-seekers in forming their PO fit perceptions are more focused on information about fit, which reflects the attainment of one's goal, than on information about misfit, which reflects a constraint for reaching one's goal. Therefore, they not equally balance different pieces of information about fit on attractive values (*attractive fit*), misfit on attractive values (*attractive misfit*), fit on aversive values (*aversive fit*), and misfit on aversive values (*aversive misfit*). Moreover, construal level theory proposes that people's decisions may change as a function of temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2000). Research has shown, for example, that positive information becomes more salient for decisions in a distant future (as compared to a near future), whereas negative information becomes less salient (Eyal, et al., 2004). In a similar vein, the temporal distance from a prospective organization (e.g., a week or a year from now) could differentially influence the salience of attractive and aversive values in the formation of PO fit perceptions. Finally, the unbalanced weighing of attractive and aversive values may also be influenced by individual differences. In this regard, we are particularly interested in job-seekers' promotion versus prevention focus as these variables show links to people's focus on attractive versus aversive stimuli as well as differing time-perspectives (e.g., Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000; Pennington & Roese, 2003).

This study contributes to a growing call for research that challenges the idea that PO fit is a stable concept and that PO fit perceptions do not change over time (Edwards, 2008;

Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Shipp & Jansen, 2011). Instead of assuming that PO fit perceptions are based on the overall similarity or fit between a person's values and an organization's values, we propose that fit or misfit on a person's attractive values is weighed more heavily in PO fit perceptions than is fit or misfit on a person's aversive values. Second, we incorporate temporal distance as a crucial variable in the formation of PO fit perceptions. We expect that the time until the start in a prospective organization influences the salience of attractive values and aversive values differently. We propose that fit or misfit on attractive values becomes more salient as temporal distance increases, whereas fit or misfit on aversive values becomes more salient when temporal distance decreases. Finally, we explore whether individual differences in regulatory orientation amplify or offset the effects of temporal distance. We expect that a future perspective affects particularly the PO fit perceptions of job-seekers with a high promotion orientation, whereas a near time perspective affects particularly the PO fit perceptions of job-seekers with a high prevention orientation.

### **PO fit perceptions: The role of attractive and aversive values**

PO fit theories hold that people prefer work environments with characteristics that fit their own characteristics. The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, et al., 1995) in particular proposes that people are not randomly assigned to organizations, but that they select themselves into and out of organizations. The ASA framework is based on the fundamental assumption that people have a basic need to fit their environment. Therefore, they will seek for and stay in organizations that match their own characteristics. Meta-analyses on PO fit have convincingly shown that fit is related to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Verquer, et al., 2003). Especially PO fit perceptions are among the strongest predictors of people's reactions towards their organization, such as their organizational commitment, and of career-related decisions, such as withdrawal (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Van Vianen, 2005).

The congruence between a person and an organization has typically been understood as the match between a person's own values and the cultural value system of an organization, because values are conceived of as fundamental, relative enduring, and transcending to specific situations (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Cable & Judge, 1994; Chatman,

1991; Kristof, 1996). A person's values vary in relative importance, pertain to desirable end-states or behaviors, and guide the selection or evaluation of behaviors and events (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Besides, values guide people to approach certain outcomes and to avoid others and determine which activities have a positive and which have a negative valence for an individual in a given situation (Feather, 1995). Thus, values affect the way a person construes or defines a situation.

People differ in the values that they find highly attractive, those that they find highly aversive, and those that are more neutral to them (De Goede, et al., 2009). Attractive values are values that people typically try to attain; aversive values, on the other hand, are values that people try to avoid. An organization can thus fit or misfit a job-seekers' value profile on both attractive and aversive values. As job-seekers aim to maximize their value congruence with an organization, they should search for organizations that fit on both, i.e., that signal the presence of attractive values and the absence of aversive values. For example, the aforementioned competitive but not very rule-oriented job-seeker should search for an organization with a high level of competition (*attractive fit*) and a low level of rules (*aversive fit*), whereas an organization with a low level of competition (*attractive misfit*) and a high level of rules (*aversive misfit*) should not be considered because of the misfit.

However, contrary to the basic assumption of PO fit that job-seekers evaluate information on both attractive and aversive values equally, De Goede et al. (2009) found that job-seekers primarily attend to what they want to attain rather than to what they want to avoid in a prospective organization. Job-seekers weighed attractive values more heavily than aversive values while assessing their PO fit perceptions. Returning to our example of the competitive but not very rule-oriented job-seeker; this job-seeker's PO fit perceptions will be based more on the level of competition in an organization as compared to the level of rules in the organization. We expect to replicate this finding in the current study. However, we further examine whether the centrality of information on an organization's attractive values concern both situations of fit and misfit. Specifically, we examine how information on attractive fit is weighed as compared to information on aversive fit, and similarly, how information on attractive misfit is weighed as compared to information on aversive misfit.

### **Balancing attractive and aversive fit and misfit: Construal level theory**

Construal level theory (CLT) may explain how information about attractive and aversive fits and misfits will be weighed. The theory distinguishes between high- and low-level construals. High-level construals abstract the essential qualities of events and therefore consist of superordinate and more central features. In contrast, low-level construals may include subordinate, less essential features of events. An important difference between high-level and low-level construals is their emphasis on primary or central versus secondary or peripheral considerations (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope, et al., 2007). Primary considerations refer to the value of attaining a goal, whereas secondary considerations refer to possible constraints in reaching this goal. Although values are in and of themselves high-level constructs, it is possible to distinguish between a person's central, core values and peripheral, secondary values. It has been shown, for example, that people resolve conflicts between values in favor of the value that is deemed more central (Trope, et al., 2007). De Goede et al. (2009) found that when searching a job, individuals' attractive values were more central, whereas aversive values were more peripheral.

Furthermore, the centrality of the values is only one determinant of level of construal, and it may be amplified or attenuated by other aspect of level of construal such as, whether information supports or contradicts ones' values. Eyal and colleagues (2004), for example, demonstrated that when considering a specific action, information in favor of the action was ascendant to information against the action. Moreover, supporting information constitutes a higher level of construal than opposing information. Hence, from prior findings and construal level theory it could be argued that information about central values (attractive rather than aversive values) as well as information that is supportive (value fit rather than misfit) will prevail when evaluating organizations.

Since job-seekers particularly strive to find fit on attractive values they may be satisfied when they note that some of their attractive values will be found in the organization and they have, thus, attained their goal. In reality, people are confronted with different pieces of fit and misfit information. For example, the aforementioned job-seeker may fit with one attractive value (e.g., competition), but this fit observation goes together with misfit on another attractive value (e.g., team work), or misfit on an aversive value (e.g., regulation). If a job-seeker has found some sort of attractive fit (e.g., high competition in the

organization), and the goal of attaining fit has been satisfied, he or she may lose interest in other types of information. Consequently, this may result in a relatively neglect of information about possible misfits, whether these concern attractive or aversive values. However, if an organization does not provide information that is a direct indicator of attractive fit (e.g., no information about competition in the organization) but instead provides information about one's aversive fit (e.g., little regulation in the organization), the job-seeker may continue to evaluate other types of information, specifically those that point to possible attractive misfits. All in all, we propose that information about attractive values is superordinate to information about aversive values, and that fit information is superordinate to misfit information.

In the present study participants were asked to evaluate four organizations that were each described with two indicators of attractive and/or aversive (mis)fits. Specifically, we used a 2 x 2 design in which an indicator of attractive fit or misfit was combined with an indicator of aversive fit or misfit, respectively. Based on the above reasoning we expect to replicate De Goede et al.'s (2009) prior findings that information about attractive values is superordinate to information about aversive values. We propose that attractive fit will lead to higher PO fit perceptions than aversive fit (*Hypothesis 1a*) and, in a similar vein, that attractive misfit will lead to lower PO fit perceptions than aversive misfit (*Hypothesis 1b*). Moreover, we propose that hypothesis 1b will particularly hold when an indicator of misfit is combined with an indicator of aversive fit, whereas this hypothesis will not hold when an indicator of misfit is combined with an indicator of attractive fit (*Hypothesis 1c*). Hence, information about attractive values prevails, and particularly those that refer to attractive fit.

### **Temporal distance**

ASA theory emphasizes different stages of PO fit formation, namely when searching for a job, during selection, and in the organization. However, there is substantial lack of detailed knowledge about how people's PO fit perceptions arise before, during and after selection for a job (Edwards, 2008; Van Vianen, et al., in press). An implicit assumption is that PO fit perceptions remain stable over time as if the information on which individuals' fit perceptions are based remains the same throughout the entire process. Yet, individuals do acquire additional information during the different ASA stages and, therefore, their fit

perceptions may change accordingly (Harold & Ployhart, 2008). Furthermore, individuals tend to evaluate the same information differently at different points in time (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009) and also for this reason they may adjust their judgments over time.

Conceptions of anticipated future PO fit and present PO fit are often treated in similar ways, as if PO fit was always experienced in the present. However, people construct different representations of the same information depending on the temporal distance, that is, whether the information pertains to be more proximal or more distant in time (Liberman, et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003). People arguably use more abstract schemas or higher level construal to represent distant time situations and more concrete schemas or lower level construal to represent near time situations (Liberman, et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003). For example, if an event is temporally distant (e.g., looking for a job next year), people form a high-level construal of this event (i.e., applying for a job). However, when it is temporally near (e.g., looking for a job this week), the same event is more often represented in terms of low-level features (e.g., writing an application letter to organization X).

There is good evidence that construal level influences people's perceptions, judgments, and behaviors. When people are primed with a distant future, they tend to adopt a higher level of construal in which abstract and primary features such as goals, desirability concerns and positive arguments are emphasized. When, in contrast, individuals are primed with a near future, they tend to adopt a lower level of construal in which secondary, concrete features such as means, feasibility concerns, and negative features and arguments are emphasized (Trope & Liberman, 2000; 2003). Trope and Liberman (2000), for example, asked people about a job that would be available in the near or distant future. People had an overall preference for an interesting job with a boring training than for an uninteresting job with a nice training. However, this effect was more pronounced in the distant future. Distance seems to facilitate information-processing of the desirable information and discount information-processing of undesirable information.

Since we argue that attractive values are superordinate to aversive values, construal level theory would propose that temporal distance to a prospective organization would similarly affect the weighing of attractive and aversive values in the formation of PO fit perceptions. Therefore, increasing temporal distance should lead to more focus on

information on attractive values at the expense of information on aversive values present at the same time. In other words, fit or misfit on attractive values becomes more salient as temporal distance increases, whereas fit or misfit on aversive values becomes more salient when temporal distance decreases.

A possible reason for the increasing focus on desirability and decreasing focus on feasibility information with increasing temporal distance is that temporal distance provides a cushion of resources; distance affords people greater opportunity for taking risks and making mistakes because it provides some latitude for correction. With increasing amounts of time, people become more attuned to acquisition, achievement and the presence or absence of positive outcomes. As temporal distances decrease and events draw near, concerns of desirability give way to concerns of feasibility; correction is less possible with smaller distances and thus negative information becomes more salient (Eyal, et al., 2004). Therefore, what might seem attractive in the future may lose its desirability when one also focuses on the constraints. With decreasing time, people become more attuned to caution, security, and the prevention of things unwanted (Broscholl, et al., 2007; Pennington & Roese, 2003).

In summary, we therefore hypothesize that the ascendancy of attractive values over aversive values will be particularly true in a distant time perspective, whereas the stronger impact of attractive values compared to aversive values will be attenuated in a near time perspective resulting in more balanced weighing of attractive and aversive values (*Hypothesis 2*).

### **Temporal distance and regulatory orientation**

In addition to the contextual effect of temporal distance, it seems relevant to also consider who is making the decision. People differ, for example, in their focus towards an end-state. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 2000; Higgins, et al., 1997) identifies two basic motivational orientations: a promotion orientation, which involves a focus on the presence or absence of positive outcomes and a prevention orientation which involves a focus on the presence or absence of negative outcomes. Whereas promotion centers on outcomes associated with the advancement and achievement of aspirations and ideals (i.e., standards one hopes to meet), prevention centers on outcomes associated with security and

obligations (i.e., standards one needs to meet). Thus promotion and prevention orientations operate in different ways. The hopes and aspirations associated with promotion orientation function like maximal goals, the most one could wish for; whereas the duties and obligations associated with prevention orientation function more like minimal goals, the bare necessities or the least one could comfortably tolerate (Idson, et al., 2000).

People feel most engaged when they pursue a goal in a manner that sustains or fits their own current self-regulatory orientation (Higgins, 2005; Higgins & Freitas, 2007). When an anticipated future outcome sustains or fits a person's regulatory state, the motivation to engage in the approach or avoidance process that would make the outcome happen (if desirable) or not happen (if undesirable) increases in intensity. Regulatory fit makes anticipated positive feelings about a prospective positive outcome more positive and anticipated negative feelings about a prospective negative outcome more negative (Lee, Keller, & Sternthal, 2010). Therefore, making a desirable choice has a higher regulatory fit for people in a promotion orientation: People in a promotion orientation should have a stronger motivation to approach and feel more positive when anticipating a prospective desirable choice. In contrast, making an undesirable choice has higher regulatory fit for people in a prevention focus: People in a prevention focus should have a stronger motivation to avoid and should feel more negative when anticipating a prospective undesirable choice.

We hypothesize that the impact of time perspective on the weighing of attractive and aversive values will be affected by regulatory orientation; the ascendancy of attractive values over aversive values in a distant time perspective will be intensified for people with a high promotion orientation, whereas the balanced weighing of attractive and aversive values in a near time perspective will be especially true for people with a high prevention orientation (*Hypothesis 3*).

## **Method**

### **Participants, design and procedure**

Seventy-four students (38% male; 66% psychology undergraduates) volunteered in exchange for research points or a small cash payment. Their average age was 22.01 years ( $SD = 4.98$ )

and prior (part-time) work experience averaged 5.32 years ( $SD = 3.73$ ). Sixty-eight percent reported holding a part-time job at the time of the study, with an average of 8 working hours per week.

First, we assessed participants' personally most attractive and aversive values to enable idiosyncratic fit manipulations. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two temporal distance conditions (present vs. future) in a 2 (fit attractive/aversive) x 2 (misfit attractive/aversive) within-person design. They read scenarios about four different organizations. After each scenario participants indicated their perceived fit with the described organization. The order of the two within-person factors was varied systematically, variation had no effects whatsoever.

### **Temporal distance conditions.**

The temporal distance manipulation was embedded in the instructions. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Trope & Liberman, 2000), participants in the present condition were asked to imagine that they just had started in a new job this week, whereas participants in the future condition were asked to imagine that they would start in a new job next year.

### **Idiosyncratic fit manipulations: attractive and aversive fit and misfit**

Participants' attractive and aversive values were assessed with a reduced version of the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; O'Reilly, et al., 1991). The OCP assesses people's relative preferences for values that characterize organizational culture (e.g., being people oriented, paying attention to detail). We selected 16 (out of the 54 original) values that were shown to be idiosyncratically attractive to different organizations and job-seekers<sup>4</sup>. Also, we focused on values that were not correlated with one another and were from different categories identified by O'Reilly et al. (1991). Participants selected from this list of sixteen organizational values their two most attractive values and their two least attractive values.

Subsequently, participants read four (2 x 2) idiosyncratic descriptions of organizations. It was emphasized each time that the organization was good for its employees

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<sup>4</sup>As based on internal research reports at the University of Amsterdam, under supervision of Annelies E. M. Van Vianen. Data and reports are available upon request.

and that some aspects of the organization's culture were in support of one's values, whereas other aspects were not supportive. Each of the descriptions gave information about two values; one value was an indication for a personal fit (either attractive or aversive), one value was an indication for a personal misfit (either attractive or aversive). A personally attractive fit was indicated by a high level of a person's attractive value in the organization, a personally aversive fit was indicated by a low level of a person's aversive value. And vice versa, attractive misfit was indicated by a low level of a person's attractive value; aversive misfit was indicated by a high level of a person's aversive value in the organization.

For example, in the future condition a person who indicated risk-taking and autonomy as attractive values and decisiveness and informality as aversive values could read the following description: "This organization is characterized by a *high level of risk-taking* and a *high level of informality*." In the aforementioned organization there is thus attractive fit and aversive misfit for this candidate. Across conditions the words in italics varied to describe the different organizations.

### **Dependent variable: PO fit perceptions**

PO fit perceptions were measured by two items that captured the extent to which participants thought that they would fit the organizations. Participants indicated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) Likert scale how much they fitted and wanted to work for each of the four organizations.

### **Individual differences measures**

**Regulatory focus** ( $N=44$ ). We measured regulatory focus with the General Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002) that contains two dimensions representing promotion orientation (9 items; e.g., "*In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life*") and prevention orientation (9 items; e.g., "*I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations*"). Participants rated on a 1 (*very untrue*) to 9 (*very true*) scale how well each item characterized them. Both subscales were reliable (promotion;  $\alpha = .84$ ; prevention  $\alpha = .82$ ) and independent from one another ( $r = -.18$ , n.s.).

**Control variables.** This study controlled for demographics that could influence participants' value preferences or PO fit perceptions, such as age, gender, work experience (in years and number of organizations worked for), working hours (per week), study grades, and perceived labor market perspectives (1 = *very pessimistic* to 5 = *very optimistic*).

## Results

First, we examined whether there was sufficient variance across participants in their attractive and aversive values. All 16 values, except for 'competition', were selected by at least one participant as most attractive, and most values were selected by at least one participant as most aversive (except for 'opportunities for professional growth' and 'developing friends at work'). Thus, values that were attractive for some participants were aversive to others and vice versa.

### Hypotheses testing

As De Goede et al. (2009), we hypothesized that attractive values would have a stronger impact on PO fit perceptions than aversive values. We conducted a two-way factorial repeated-measures analyses of variance to determine whether organizations varying in fit and misfit on levels of attractive and aversive values yielded different PO fit perceptions. Hypothesis 1a and 1b suggested that fit on attractive values (*attractive fit*) should lead to higher PO fit perceptions than fit on aversive values (*aversive fit*) and misfit on attractive values (*attractive misfit*) should lead to lower PO fit perceptions than misfit on aversive values (*aversive misfit*). Our results support these assumptions. Attractive fit had a stronger positive impact on PO fit perceptions ( $M = 4.41$ ) than aversive fit ( $M = 3.39$ ;  $F(1,73) = 46.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .39$ ). Attractive misfit also had a stronger negative impact on PO fit perceptions ( $M = 3.72$ ) than aversive misfit ( $M = 4.07$ ;  $F(1,73) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ ).

Furthermore, we proposed (Hypothesis 1c) that attractive misfit would lead to lower PO fit perceptions than aversive misfit, but only when an indicator of misfit is combined with an indicator of aversive fit. No such differences in fit perceptions would occur when an indicator of misfit is combined with an indicator of attractive fit. There was indeed a

significant difference in PO fit perceptions due to attractive and aversive misfit when these misfits were combined with aversive fit ( $M = 3.14$  vs.  $M = 3.64$ ), whereas this difference did not occur when these misfits were combined with attractive fit ( $M = 4.30$  vs.  $M = 4.51$ ; see also Table 5.1). However, the interaction between fit and misfit was not significant;  $F(1,73) = 1.59$ ,  $p = .11$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , that is, the impact of attractive or aversive misfit was not dependent on attractive or aversive fit.

Table 5.1

*Means and standard deviations for the different combinations of fit and misfit in the total sample, the present condition and the future condition*

Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Total		Present		Future	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attractive	Attractive	4.30 <sup>a</sup>	1.15	4.32 <sup>ac</sup>	1.14	4.28 <sup>a</sup>	1.16
	Aversive	4.51 <sup>a</sup>	1.26	4.55 <sup>a</sup>	1.09	4.46 <sup>a</sup>	1.43
Aversive	Attractive	3.14 <sup>b</sup>	1.51	3.35 <sup>b</sup>	1.58	2.93 <sup>b</sup>	1.42
	Aversive	3.64 <sup>c</sup>	1.28	3.67 <sup>bc</sup>	1.24	3.71 <sup>c</sup>	1.34

*Note.*  $N = 74$ . Means not sharing the same superscript letter within a column differ significantly ( $p < .05$ )

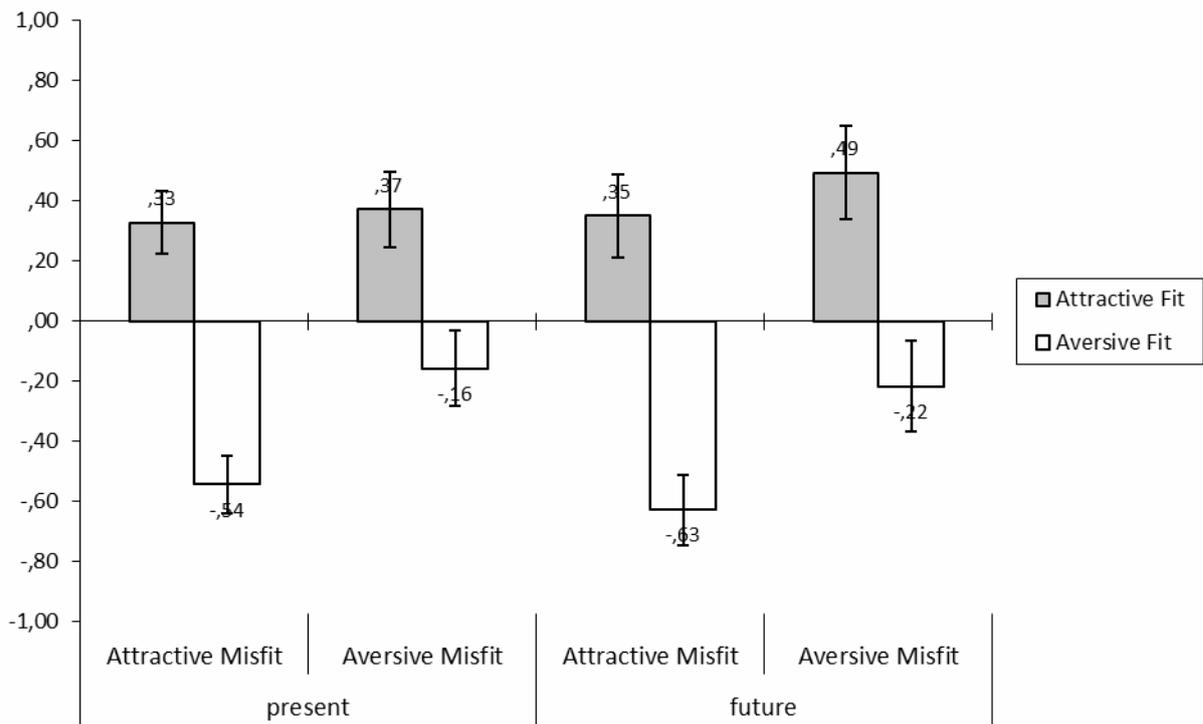
Hypothesis 2 proposed that the strong impact of attractive values would be particularly true for a distant time perspective (future), whereas in a near time perspective (present) the weighing of attractive and aversive values would be more equal. Overall, our results (tested with two-way factorial repeated-measures analyses of variance) only partially supported these assumptions (see Figure 5.1). First, contrary to hypothesis 2, we found no effect of time perspective when values were fit: both in a future ( $F(1,36) = 30.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .46$ ) and in a present ( $F(1,36) = 7.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .33$ ) time perspective attractive fit had a stronger positive impact on PO fit perceptions ( $M = 4.37$  and  $M = 4.44$  respectively) than aversive fit ( $M = 3.27$  and  $M = 3.51$ ).

However, as proposed in Hypothesis 2, in a future time perspective attractive misfit showed a stronger negative impact on PO fit perceptions ( $M = 3.61$ ) than aversive misfit ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $F(1,36) = 3.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ ), whereas in a present time perspective, both attractive and aversive misfits had similar effects on PO fit perceptions ( $M = 3.84$  and  $M = 4.12$ ;  $F(1,36) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .14$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ). Hence, only in a future time perspective we found an

interaction between fit and misfit ( $F(1,36) = 2.11, p < .10, \eta_p^2 = .06$ ), whereas in a present time perspective this interaction was not significant ( $F(1,36) = 0.09, p = .39, \eta_p^2 = .00$ ).

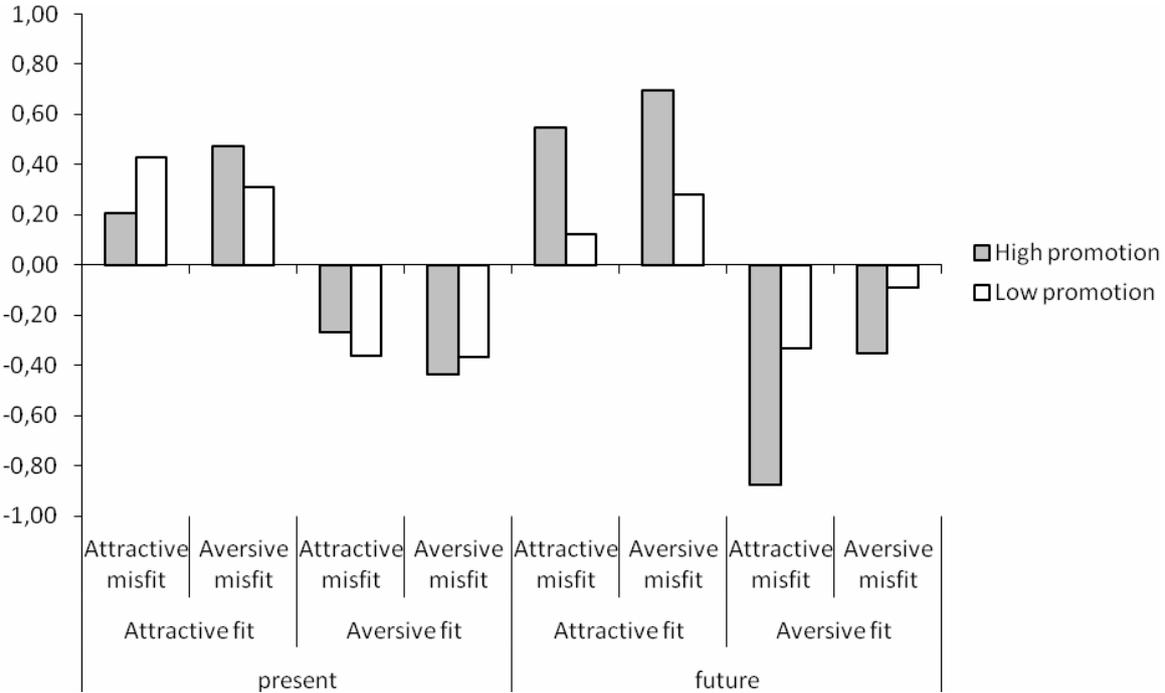
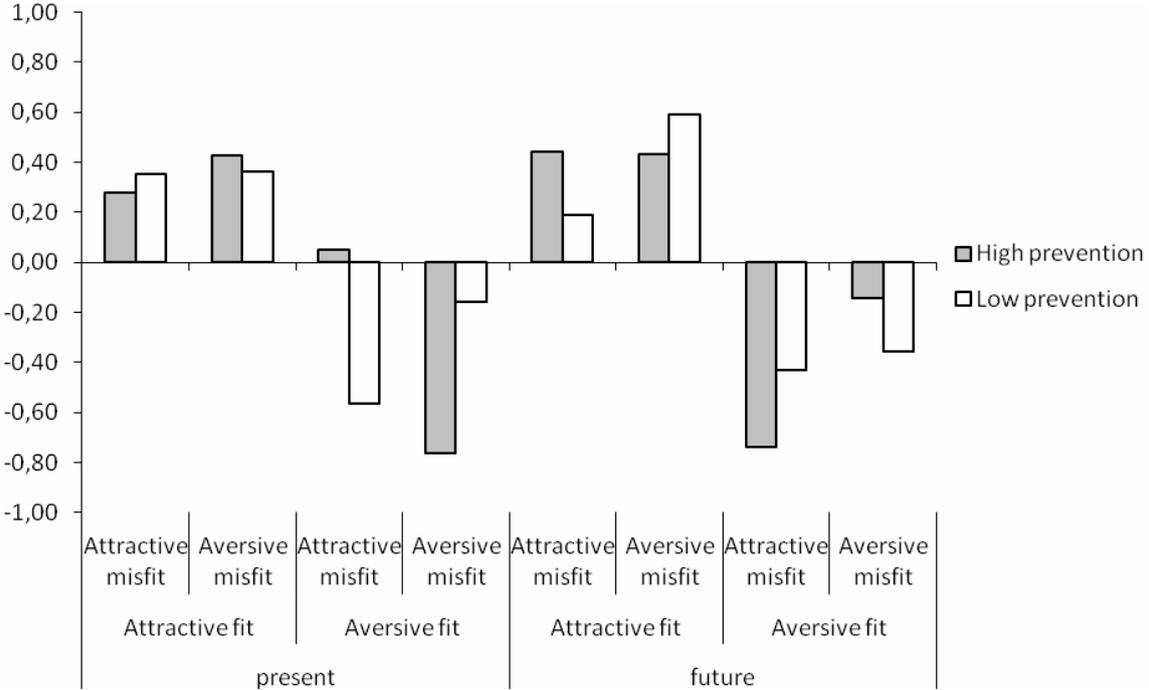
Figure 5.1

*The within-person standardized means for PO fit perceptions in the present and future time condition*



In a future time perspective the impact of misfit was dependent on whether this misfit was combined with an indicator of attractive or aversive fit. Attractive misfit had a stronger negative impact on PO fit perceptions when combined with aversive rather than attractive fit. The three-way factorial repeated-measures analyses of variance showed, however, no overall differences in the present and future time condition on the effects of fit and misfit of attractive and aversive values on PO fit perceptions;  $F(1,72) = .92, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .01$ .

Figure 5.2  
*The relation between attractive and aversive fit and misfit on perceptions of PO fit with present and future time condition and regulatory orientation*



Finally, Hypothesis 3 proposed that the effect of time perspective on the impact of attractive and aversive fits on PO fit perceptions would be influenced by job-seekers' regulatory orientation. We expected that a future time perspective would especially influence people with a high promotion orientation, whereas a present time perspective would especially influence people with a high prevention orientation. That is, the ascendancy of attractive values over aversive values in a distant time perspective would be intensified for people with a high promotion orientation. A more balanced weighing of attractive and aversive values in a near time perspective would be especially true for people with a high prevention orientation.

Findings of the repeated measures of variance with promotion and prevention orientation added as continuous variables partially supported this third hypothesis. In the future time perspective impact of attractive and aversive fits was affected by promotion orientation;  $F(1,19) = 13.90, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .42$ : especially people with a high promotion orientation showed dominance of attractive fit over aversive fit information;  $F(1,19) = 35.65, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .64$ , whereas this effect was less prominent for people with a low promotion orientation;  $F(1,19) = 3.72, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .16$  (see Figure 5.2).

## Discussion

Past research has shown that PO fit perceptions are of major relevance for attracting job-seekers (e.g., Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Harold & Ployhart, 2008; Judge & Cable, 1997). People not only assess the characteristics of the job but also those of the organizational environment to determine whether they fit with the organization. Unfortunately, theories of PO fit say little about the processes through which individuals' perceptions of fit and misfit emerge (Edwards, 2008). The implicit assumption is that people make an overall comparison between their personal values and those of the organization weighing all values to a similar extent. However, this experimental study shows that job-seekers weigh values that they find highly attractive more heavily than values that they find highly unattractive. Job-seekers have particularly high PO fit perceptions when information about a prospective employer supports values that are attractive to them.

Besides, we found partially support that temporal distance (present vs. future) could affect this weighing of values. Based on construal level theory we proposed that job-seekers with a distant time perspective would mainly weigh attractive values in forming PO fit perceptions, whereas job-seekers in a near time perspective would weigh attractive and aversive values more equally. Findings supported this prediction when there was misfit between a person's value and an organization's value; with a near time perspective both misfit on attractive values and misfit on aversive values had similar impact on PO fit perceptions. However time perspectives did not affect the weighing of fitting values; both in a near time perspective and in a more distant time perspective fit on attractive values resulted in more positive PO fit perceptions than fit on aversive values.

Finally, this study showed that the effect of temporal distance on the weighing of attractive and aversive misfit would be affected by a person's regulatory orientation. We proposed that a distant time perspective would especially influence people with a high promotion orientation, whereas a present time perspective would especially influence people with a high prevention orientation. Indeed, in a distant time perspective people with a high promotion orientation showed stronger ascendancy of attractive fit over aversive fit than people with a low promotion orientation. In a near time perspective, people with a high prevention orientation showed weaker ascendancy of attractive misfit over aversive misfit than people with a low prevention orientation. However, this was only true when the fit information (the fit indicator that was combined with the misfit indicator) was aversive rather than attractive.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

As with any study, the findings from the current research should be interpreted in the light of certain limitations. First, although past research has indicated that university students are an important group for recruitment practices (e.g., Collins & Stevens, 2002) they are usually prospective job-seekers and not actual ones. Therefore the use of a student sample may restrain the generalizability of our findings. We, however, think that with this sample we found first valuable new insights in the formation of PO fit perceptions. It is, of course, possible that different findings emerge in a sample of actual or experienced job-seekers. Job-seekers presented with real organizations might need to be more realistic in their job search.

Moreover they may have more information about an organization than we provided in our descriptions. Therefore, they may be more sensitive to aversive values than our inexperienced sample.

Second, we used an experimental design to assess the effect of temporal distance on the formation of PO fit perceptions. Because we experimentally manipulated the different levels of fit, we were able to determine which values were responsible for participants' fit perceptions and to isolate the effects of temporal perspective and fit. However, the information we used to describe organizations was limited and participants may have found this task somewhat artificial. Yet, examining all possible information for job-choice was not the focus of this study. Rather, we showed that participants used information differently according to idiosyncratic preferences and temporal distance. This actually indicates that the same information is used differently in different contexts. Future studies could examine if job-seekers, when forming their fit perceptions, are also influenced by personal preferences and are sensitive to temporal factors in a more realistic context.

Third, in this study we only focused on PO fit operationalized as fit on values or value congruence. Our findings may, therefore, exclusively concern PO fit assessment and may not be generalizable to other types of fit, such as person-job fit, person-supervisor fit, and person-team fit. Furthermore, values are often construed abstractly and therefore more indicative for outcomes in a distant time perspective compared to a near time perspective (Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, & Chaiken, 2009). It might be that we found only partially support for our proposed effects of temporal perspectives because the values that were used in this study were construed in abstract rather than concrete terms. All in all, the role of temporal distance within and across the different types of fit seems a very interesting avenue for future research.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

The findings of this study have several theoretical implications for research on PO fit. First, although most fit researchers agree that PO fit is the compatibility between a person and the culture of an organization, there is less agreement about the characteristics that should be involved for establishing similarity between persons and organizations (Edwards, 2008; Schneider, et al., 1995). However, it has remained quite unclear how the different

characteristics should be weighed in the process of developing PO fit perceptions. Our findings challenge the general assumption that all available information about each characteristic has an equal contribution to people's PO fit perception. Instead, we found that some values are weighed more heavily than others, dependent on their valence to individuals as well as individuals' temporal distance to the organization. People's tendency to put more weight on some sources of information at the expense of other sources of – equally relevant – information could explain why PO fit perceptions are stronger predictors of people's reactions to organizations than more objective measures of fit, such as profile similarity and discrepancy indices (Finegan, 2000; Van Vianen, 2005; Van Vuuren, et al., 2008).

Second, most PO fit studies have examined individuals' fit experiences while already being in a specific organizational context. Accordingly, the conceptions of anticipated future PO fit and present PO fit are treated in similar ways, that is, as if PO fit is experienced in the present (Yu, 2009). In this study, we found that psychological distance could affect the way in which different sources of PO fit assessments are processed and weighed; fit on attractive values represents people's PO fit perceptions both in near and in distant temporal perspectives. However, a smaller temporal distance seems to foster a focus on organizational values that job-seekers find aversive. This findings add to the existing fit literature by showing that the PO fit perceptions are less stable than previously envisioned (Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Yu, 2009). An interesting avenue for future research would be how the formation of PO fit perceptions will develop over time as people are employed and become more familiar with their organization and, consequently, their perceptions of organizational values become more certain and concrete.

This research also bears considerable practical implications. Meta-analyses on PO fit have convincingly shown that fit is related to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Verquer, et al., 2003). Job-seekers' inaccuracies in predicting prospective PO fit with an organization may, therefore, have negative consequences both for individuals and organizations. When job-seekers mainly rely on their attractive fit perceptions for choosing an organization, they may experience a different type of fit or misfit once they are employed in the organization. Employees in an organization may for example establish their PO fit perceptions on more concrete information and this concreteness of the information may lead to a focus on aversive values. What seems a perfect fit beforehand could then change in

misfit once employed. Not because the situation is different, but because other aspects become more salient.

Our results also have implications for organizations trying to attract job-seekers. In our study we induced differences in construal by either focusing on the future or the present in our communications to participants. In a future time perspective attractive misfit was more detrimental for PO fit perceptions than in a present time perspective. This would implicate that organizations can prevent job-seekers from self-selecting out of the job-search process by priming a near time perspective in their recruitment messages.

## **Conclusion**

This study showed that job-seekers do not equally balance attractive and aversive fit, and misfit. Especially attractive fit is important for establishing PO fit perceptions. However, both temporal context and individual differences can change a person's focus and therewith their PO fit perceptions. Distant PO fit assessments seem to promote people's wishes to attain whereas near PO fit assessments seem to promote their wishes to avoid.\*

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\* This chapter was presented at the 15th biannual conference of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP), Maastricht, The Netherlands, May 2011.

# CHAPTER 6

## General Discussion



In addition to instrumental motives such as pay, career opportunities, and location, job-seekers' attraction to an organization seems to be based on their impression of fit with their prospective environment. Especially, perceptions of Person-Organization (PO) fit are strong predictors of affective responses toward organizations (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). To estimate how well they will fit with an organization, people assess an organization's values and compare these to their own values. However, as people vary in their own cultural values preferences and organizations vary in their cultural values, different people are attracted to different organizations.

In Chapter 2, for example, it became evident that the culture of a for-profit organization is quite different from that of a governmental organization which in turn is quite different from that of a hospital. Moreover, the participants in Chapter 2 varied in their responses to the four organizations that were involved in this study (a consulting firm, a parcel post company, a municipality, and a hospital); some participants considered a particular organization as highly attractive whereas others considered the same organization to be highly unattractive. To illustrate, when asked which organization they would apply for, 24% of the respondents chose the hospital as their first choice, but another 25% of the participants indicated the hospital to be the least favorite option.

PO fit perceptions are of major relevance for employee recruitment, selection, and retention (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). Therefore, PO fit perceptions are conceived of as an important basis for responses toward organizations. It thus seems vital to know how perceptions of PO fit arise. Surprisingly, the sources for and development of PO fit perceptions are hardly studied to date. This dissertation aimed to provide a more complete understanding of how people, and especially job-seekers, develop perceptions of PO fit as based on impressions of value congruence. How do they perceive organizations, how do they process organizational information, and how is this information compared with their own preferences?

The general idea of fit seems quite plain. Basically, a person needs to be aware of his or her own values and the values of an organization and then needs to combine these into an assessment of PO fit. Following this reasoning, people's PO fit perceptions are generally assumed to encompass an overall comparison of personal and organizational values. However, in contrast to this general assumption, the chapters in this dissertation have shown that PO fit is not an exogenous and static construct that is the result of an objective

comparison of personal and organizational characteristics. Rather, the findings of this dissertation indicate that perceptions of PO fit evolve from unbalanced and flawed information processing. Moreover, both individual and situational characteristics could affect the way in which personal and organizational values converge into a general PO fit perception.

The studies in this dissertation examined the signals that job-seekers use to make inferences about an organization. In addition, they investigated job-seekers' attention to and weighing of organizational cues. Finally, personal characteristics that affect the processing of organizational information were taken into account. Findings of this dissertation lead to the conclusion that extant PO fit theory is based on assumptions about calculative P and O comparisons that do not exist in reality. First, the content of the P and O components as operationalized by researchers and (recruiting) organizations does not reflect the content that people themselves have in mind when assessing their PO fit (Chapter 2). Second, people weigh the P and O components in a different way than PO fit researchers tend to assume: some types of information are weighed more heavily than other ones. As a result, job-seekers tend to focus on a limited set of organizational features when assessing their future PO fit instead of making an overall comparison (Chapter 3). In addition, PO fit perceptions are less stable than previously expected: the sources of PO fit perceptions can change depending on someone's regulatory orientation or time perspective (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

The section below summarizes the main findings from the studies that have led to these conclusions. The theoretical relevance of these findings will be explicated afterwards as will pathways for future research. This discussion will continue with practical implications and will be closed with some concluding remarks.

## **Overview of main findings**

### **Chapter 2 - Attracting applicants on the web**

The first conclusion of this dissertation is that the content of the P and O components as theorized does not reflect the content that job-seekers themselves have in mind when

assessing their PO fit. This may not be surprising, because when looking for a new job, people often do not receive obvious and explicit information about an organization's values. Instead, they often face rather ambiguous indicators of an organization's culture and thus have to draw inferences from the incomplete information available to them. To evaluate the available information about an organization's culture, job-seekers probably make use of their schematic or stereotypical ideas and expectations about different types of organizations and their alleged cultures (Cable, et al., 2000; Cober, et al., 2004). In Chapter 2, I theorized that job-seekers' ideas and expectations about different organizations may be based on the branch of industry in which these organizations operate. These general industry perceptions influence job-seekers' culture perceptions of a specific organization. In addition, the fit between a person's values and these industry culture stereotypes (Person-Industry fit) gives a first indication of how well job-seekers may fit with an organization (PO fit). However, an organization's website may also be able to influence job-seekers' initial fit impressions. Especially when people's initial fit impressions are low as due to their industry culture stereotypes, an attractive website may help drawing their attention to relevant culture information.

To study the role of industry culture stereotypes and website design for the formation of PO fit perceptions, I confronted study participants with four actual organizational web sites. The four selected organizations were alike in location and size, but they differed in branch of industry. Eighty student participants completed a two-wave questionnaire. First, they indicated their organizational value preferences. Then, participants visited the four organizational web sites and indicated their organizational culture perceptions of these organizations and assessed the design of each website. Finally, participants rated their attraction to each of the four organizations. To assess industry culture stereotypes, a second group of comparable participants indicated their organizational culture perceptions as based on very short descriptions of the types of organizations included in the study and without visiting their websites.

Findings show that job-seekers already have expectations about an organization's culture before they learn more about that specific organization, for example, through the organization's website. Based on industry culture stereotypes, people make inferences about specific organizations. Most interesting, they use these stereotypes especially if they find the design of an organization's website not very attractive and their initial fit with the

industry culture (PI fit) is low. Hence, organizations with cultures different from the common stereotypical culture in their branch of industry may have problems attracting people who would fit their organization. Organizations should thus carefully design their website to stimulate active processing of culture relevant information in order to attract those applicants who may fit the organization.

### **Chapter 3 - Ascendancy of attractive over aversive fit**

While chapter 2 showed that job-seekers pay particular attention to the content of an organization's website if they generally fit well with at least the stereotypical organization in the respective industry, chapters 3 to 5 show that people subsequently also weigh the P and O components in a different way than PO fit researchers tend to assume: some types of information are weighed more than other ones. Traditionally, people are expected to make an overall comparison between their personal values and those of the organization when evaluating their PO fit (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2010). According to this assumption, it does not matter on what specific values job-seekers and organizations fit or fail to fit each other as long as the overall level of PO fit is sufficient. Consequently, overall PO fit perceptions are assumed to be equally based on the presence of values in the organization that support a person's own values, i.e., attractive values, and on the absence of values in the organization that contradict a person's own values, i.e., aversive values. Hence fits on values that are personally attractive, aversive, or relatively neutral should be weighed equally.

Chapter 3 questioned this assumption and proposed that PO fit perceptions do not stem from an overall similarity or fit between a person's own values and the values of an organization. Instead, job-seekers are argued to weigh personally attractive values more heavily than personally aversive values in establishing their PO fit perceptions. To test this proposition, I developed four studies that investigated the weighing of attractive, aversive, and neutral values on PO fit perceptions. In each of these studies, I used an experimental policy-capturing method that allowed me to estimate the separate effects of attractive fit, aversive fit, and neutral fit. In these studies, participants considered their PO fit with multiple organizational profiles. Unique to the design used in these studies is that the organizational profiles were personally relevant for each participant. Unbeknownst to participants, their own evaluations of attractive, neutral, and aversive values were used to

tailor these profiles which contained three values: one personally attractive, one personally neutral, and one personally aversive value. For each new profile, values were randomly selected from the participant's own unique choice of attractive, neutral, and aversive values. Hence, although all profiles comprised of one attractive, one neutral, and one aversive value, they differed with regard to the specific content of the values that were shown to participants. Furthermore, the three values in the profile varied in level (low, medium, or high), and the level of each value was systematically varied across profiles.

The findings showed that there was a wide variation in value preferences among participants, so values that were attractive to some participants were neutral or aversive to others and vice versa, which supports the use of tailored idiosyncratic cues. Furthermore, as proposed, all four studies showed that job-seekers do not weigh all value-fits equally; rather, they weigh fit on personally attractive values more heavily than fit on personally aversive and neutral values when indicating their perceived fit with the organization. Thus, job-seekers perceive high PO fit particularly when information about a prospective organization supports values that are personally attractive to them. This was true both for university students (Study 1) and for job-seekers without (Study 2) and with (Study 4) direct need for a new job. Moreover, findings were stable when participants ranked each value by means of a Likert scale (Study 3) or were forced to rate their most attractive and most aversive values by means of a Q-sort technique (Study 1, 2, and 4).

#### **Chapter 4 - Regulating PO fit perceptions**

Though job-seekers should search for organizations that signal the presence of attractive organizational features and the absence of unattractive ones, they seem to base their fit perceptions mainly on the amount of fit with organizational features they find attractive and to neglect available fit information about organizational features that they perceive as unattractive. Why do they use this strategy? To what extent is it, for example, caused by the specific nature of the job-search task? Answering this question was the main purpose of Chapter 4, which aimed to identify factors that affect people's attention to and perception of particular organizational cues. I applied regulatory focus theory that argues that the attention given to positive versus negative information depends on the degree to which a person is promotion or prevention focused. A promotion focus is aimed at potential success

and therefore people will display a greater sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes. Prevention, by contrast, centers on security needs or preventing loss and thus people will display greater sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes. Regulatory focus is a state and can differ both across situations (momentary regulatory focus) and across individuals (chronic regulatory orientation; Förster & Werth, 2009).

In Chapter 4, I hypothesize that success is more related to security needs. This in turn implies a greater promotion focus than prevention and that the job-search task draws more attention to promotion focus among job-seekers. Due to this focus they will pay more attention to information regarding the absence or presence of their personally attractive values. However, also job-seekers' chronic regulatory focus will affect information processing. Chronically prevention-oriented job-seekers, who usually are more attentive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997), will also focus on information regarding the absence or presence of their personally aversive values. Consequently, they may arrive at more balanced and thus more accurate perceptions of their overall fit with a potential organization.

I used an experimental policy-capturing design to examine the separate effects of attractive fit, aversive fit, and neutral fit as due to participants' regulatory focus. In this study, the main findings of Chapter 3 were replicated: when searching for a job, people perceive particularly high PO fit when information about a prospective employer supports values that are attractive to them. In addition, the results of this study showed that perceptions of PO fit are – at least partly - contingent on people's chronic regulatory orientation. People with a high prevention orientation also take the information on their personally aversive values into account. This latter finding seems to result in a more balanced and possibly more realistic perception of how well a person may fit with a potential prospective organization.

### **Chapter 5 - Future and present PO fit perception**

Chapter 3 showed that personally attractive values seem more salient to job-seekers than personally aversive values. Additionally, Chapter 4 showed that a person's regulatory focus affects the weighing of values. The aim of Chapter 5 was to investigate whether this process could be affected by temporal context. I used Construal Level Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003) that argues that people's time perspective affects their evaluations: the longer the time perspective, the more weight people tend to put on possible positive outcomes. I,

therefore, proposed that PO fit perceptions are primarily based on attractive fit when people hold a distant time perspective. In a similar vein, aversive fit will also play a role when people hold a near time perspective.

I examined the effect of temporal distance on the weights assigned to attractive and aversive values in an experimental study. Participants evaluated four different organizations that were each described with two indicators of attractive and/or aversive fits and misfits. As in Chapters 3 and 4, organizational information was based on participants' own value preferences. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two temporal conditions (near vs. distant) and – as in Chapter 4 – their regulatory orientation was assessed. Participants reported their PO fit with each of the four organizations.

As proposed, PO fit perceptions were more strongly related to people's attractive values and less to their aversive values. However, this effect was partially attenuated in the 'near time' condition as compared to the 'distant time' condition. That is, both in the near and more distant time perspective, attractive fit resulted in more positive PO fit evaluations than aversive fit, but time perspective affected the weighing of misfits (rather than fits). In a distant time perspective, attractive misfit resulted in more negative PO fit perceptions than aversive misfit, whereas in a near time perspective both had a similar impact. Finally this study showed that the effect of temporal distance on the weighing of attractive and aversive (mis)fit was affected by a person's regulatory orientation.

## **Theoretical Implications and Future Directions**

As described in the introduction of this dissertation, very little was known about how an organization's culture is represented in the minds of people when they assess their PO fit, let alone how they assess their PO fit directly. Thus, despite the many PO fit studies conducted in the past, the question what is actually being measured when measuring PO fit was still left open (Edwards, et al., 2006). The findings of this dissertation have provided a better understanding of the content of people's PO fit perceptions and how these perceptions are shaped. Moreover, they have implications for PO fit theories and are a prelude to future research.

A first implication regards the validity of extant PO fit measures. Many PO fit measures in extant research may not reflect the construct as described in seminal PO fit theories. This dissertation has shown that most of the indirect PO fit operationalizations (subjective and objective fit indices, see Chapter 1) will hardly present job-seekers' direct PO fit impressions. In other words, the content of individual and organizational values as employed in prior empirical research cannot be equated with the content that individuals themselves have in mind when searching for a job. In addition, person and organizational values are weighed in a different way than most PO fit theories seem to assume: the P and O components are weighed in a lopsided rather than balanced way. Finally, both individual differences, such as individuals' regulatory focus, and contextual factors, such as psychological distance to the organization, affect the relevance and thus the weighing of attractive versus aversive PO fit information.

One way to improve validity and to solve current inconsistencies in PO fit concepts and measures is to create a stronger link between the aim of a PO fit study and the choice of a specific PO fit operationalization. For example, if researchers aim to predict job-seekers' actual fit with the prospective organization, they should use an 'objective' fit index (that combines job-seekers' values with the culture perceptions of organizational members) rather than using a subjective PO fit index (both P and O ratings are derived from individuals themselves) or job-seekers' direct fit perceptions. This latter operationalization is more adequate, for example, when researchers aim to estimate the relative contribution of job-seekers' PO fit (e.g., in comparison to other factors such as salary, travel distance, etcetera) to their job choices; job-seekers' own PO fit perceptions are probably most predictive then.

When using indirect PO fit measures, most researchers tend to include only a restricted set of individual and organizational values, particularly if they employ polynomial regression as recommended by Edwards (1994). The polynomial regression technique allows only a small number of variables because each variable is represented with five terms in the polynomial regression equation ( $P$ ,  $O$ ,  $P \times O$ ,  $P^2$ , and  $O^2$ ). The studies in this dissertation have shown that people largely differ in their cultural preferences: values that are highly attractive for one person may be aversive or neutral for another person. Consequently, employing only a limited number of values in the assessment of cultural preferences may fail to sufficiently cover the breadth of differing preferences between people – with the result that the PO fit effects that were found in prior research may not reflect true PO fit effects;

the first will be weaker than the second ones. Unfortunately, methodological and statistical issues have dominated the PO fit literature and researchers may have obeyed to popular analytical approaches at the cost of theoretical and conceptual considerations. Future studies that employ indirect PO fit measures should include a broad array of cultural values so that individual differences in preferences are no longer masked.

In addition, the findings of this dissertation suggest that a distinction between attractive, neutral, and aversive values could be useful for future studies as well. When choosing a job, people tend to rely on impressions of attractive fit (the extent to which an organization adheres to their preferred cultural values) rather than neutral or aversive fit. When employed, people may also (unconsciously) distinguish between their attractive, neutral, and aversive fits. Hence, future research could examine whether this distinction is also relevant for measuring people's fit perceptions in other stages of the attraction-selection-attrition cycle. That is, rather than asking individuals to indicate their overall perceived fit with the organization, it may be useful to assess their attractive and aversive fits separately. In this way, researchers could investigate the dimensionality of fit measures: PO fit perceptions might not be one-dimensional after all. Moreover, various PO fit dimensions may affect specific outcomes differently. For example, attractive fit might most strongly relate to approach-type outcomes, such as organizational attraction, whereas aversive fit might most strongly relate to avoidance-type outcomes, such as turnover.

The findings of this dissertation are particularly interesting for further research into the development of PO fit experiences over time. Apparently, in the context of job-search where individuals make prospective PO fit assessments, the power of attractive values to attract is greater than the power of aversive values to repel. Hence, the presence of aversive values in organizations is not felt as a serious threat to one's future fit with an organization during job search. Indeed, a number of biases enable individuals to believe that, through their own actions, they can avoid negative factors in the future. That is, people have an overly optimistic conception of the self and an exaggerated perception of personal control (Okhuysen, Galinsky, & Uptigrove, 2003; Taylor, 1991; Taylor & Brown, 1994). These positive biases lead them to hold overly optimistic perceptions about the future and to neglect or misjudge the presence of aversive features. Job-seekers may view the presence of aversive values as a factor they can easily deal with in their future job. For example, if they notice the presence of an aversive organizational value, they may assume that they will not suffer that

much and will furthermore believe that even if they would suffer, this misery can be solved. Altogether, job-seekers may reappraise the future situation in a way that aversive values can be managed. Furthermore, job-seekers may assume that it will be easier to exert control over present organizational features they find aversive (aversive misfit) than to exert control over absent organizational features they find attractive (attractive misfit). This may explain why only misfits on aversive features are discounted and not misfits on attractive features. The role that expectations of control play in the appraisal of organizational information and the extent to which these perceptions are adaptive for adjustment to the organization could be further explored in future research.

During job search, job-seekers may predominantly take the self, that is, their own core attributes and values, as the main reference to assess whether the organization will fit them. However, once employed they may possibly change their focal point of view, taking also the organization as referent and focusing more on the salient attributes and values of the organization as the main reference for establishing their fit (Van Vianen, et al., in press). In other words, the focal perspective from which individuals assess their PO fit may change, which will influence the content of their PO fit experiences as well. Most likely, the content of PO fit perceptions before organizational entry will be different from the content of PO fit perceptions after organizational entry. Future research could investigate the sources and development of PO fit perceptions after organizational entry. Of particular interest is the question how organizational employees come to weigh attractive and aversive fits once they have worked in the organization for a while, thus passing the organizational socialization process with all its possible honeymoons and hangovers (e.g., Boswell, Shipp, Payne, & Culbertson, 2009). Are employees' fit perceptions influenced by attractive fit, aversive fit, or both?

In addition, it would be worthwhile to investigate the possible validity of PO fit measures that are taken from an organization's point of view. That is, how do employees fit with present and dominant organizational values, how do they fit with values that are of less importance to the organization, and how do they weigh these fits? Ideally, the development of PO fit perceptions (that stem from both the individual and the organization's perspective) should be studied throughout the Attraction-Selection-Attrition stages longitudinally, with a within-person design following individuals and their self-selection decisions during these stages.

A final implication of this dissertation concerns the basic assumptions of PO fit theory: *'people need to fit with their environment'* and *'people make the place'* (Schneider, 1987). These assumptions seem to suggest that people, environments, and their mutual fit can be assessed objectively. However, many psychological theories acknowledge that people's perceptions of reality are more important for their behaviors than reality itself. Furthermore, it is recognized that human perceptions are far from objective. Indeed, this dissertation has evidenced that PO fit is primarily based on subjective and, thus, inaccurate environmental information processing. Therefore, PO fit theories should more explicitly frame the PO fit concept as a subjective phenomenon: PO fit is in people's mind rather than reality.

### **Practical Implications**

The theory and findings in this dissertation also bear considerable practical implications, both for individuals and organizations. People decide on the basis of their perceptions rather than reality, and self-selection decisions such as seeking for and staying in organizations are based on perceptions of PO fit rather than on actual PO fit (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). PO fit matters, but the content and focus of people's PO fit assessments apparently differ, depending on the stage of the PO relationship in which they are assessed, that is during attraction, selection, or after organizational entry (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Van Vianen, et al., in press). Before organizational entry, thus during attraction and selection, PO fit perceptions concern an organization that is not yet known but is distant, with the resulting fit perceptions depending on vastly different factors (such as industry stereotypes and selectively desirable features) than the factors that may determine candidates' PO fit and PO fit perceptions after organizational entry, i.e., when one is employed and is highly familiar with the organization. As a result, people may experience different types of fit and misfit before and after organizational entry.

During job search people have to assess their PO fit with an unknown organization. Most often job-seekers possess only limited information about these organizations and have to draw inferences from the incomplete and 'managed' information that is available to them through sources such as websites, products, and service interactions. These sources of information may activate mental models that encompass impressions of an organization's

values and culture. As found in Chapter 2, people hold general ideas about the prevalent culture that is stereotypical for specific branches of industry and these stereotypes trigger the respective mental models to shape people's PO fit perceptions.

However, it is easy to imagine that these mental representations will be different from those models that people hold once they are in close contact with or are employed in the organization. Yet, it will be in recruiting organizations' best interest to pay close attention to the messages they communicate for they may propagate cultural values that are different from those that represent their actual cultural value system.

Communicating clearly about the organizational value system may be a good first step to align PO fit perceptions before and after organizational entry and the study presented in Chapter 2 highlights the importance of good website design in order to convey to job-seekers organizational values that differ from the general stereotypes held about this organization's industry. However, additional measures may be needed as well. Some literatures have advocated the use of a Realistic Job Preview (RJP; Phillips, 1998) as a means to adjust job-seekers' expectations to organizational reality. These literatures propose that providing realistic job information to job-seekers will result in better self-selection decisions and, once employed, to a higher level of met job-expectations. However, the findings of this dissertation raise some doubts about the degree to which applicants will actually consider all the information provided to them.

The proponents of RJPs assume that job-seekers will receive and process all available information (Phillips, 1998). Chapter 2 in this dissertation, however, shows that people do not use all information, particularly when they do not feel an initial fit with their mental model of the organization's industry. Rather, they have to be tempted into processing the information by a nice website design. In addition, even when information is presented in a clear and straightforward manner and cannot be overlooked, some information seems more salient than other: While job-seekers should process both attractive and unattractive organizational features, they tend to base their PO fit perceptions mainly on the amount of fit with attractive organizational features and to neglect unattractive ones (Chapter 3). Hence, despite complete information, they attend to what they want rather than to what they do not want in their future organization. The findings of this dissertation seem to suggest that organizations' ability to influence job-seekers' fit impressions is relatively limited since these impressions mainly depend on job-seekers' own preferences, i.e., the

unique set of values they find attractive. Consequently, RJP's may only be helpful to make job-seekers aware of the presence or lack of attractive values in an organization. Yet, they may not promote the processing and weighing of information regarding job-seekers' aversive values.

For recruitment and selection practices it is important to find and understand additional actions that could promote the processing of information about aversive values. For example, in addition to providing comprehensive organizational information, it might be useful to also guide job-seekers' perspective from which they assess their PO fit. The perspective that people take when making a decision significantly impacts decision processes and outcomes (Kahneman, 2000, 2003). As argued by Van Vianen and colleagues (in press), job-seekers seem mainly focused on their own salient preferences as the main source for appraising organizations, because they often have only sparse organizational information. However, when becoming more familiar with the organization, during selection and particularly after entrance, they may shift their attention to the characteristics of the organization in order to successfully adapt. Thus, the main reference that people use to establish their PO fit may change from the self (P) to the organization (O). Consequently, people may use different self and organizational features when assessing their fit with a *future* organization (during job search) than when assessing their fit with a *present* organization (when working in the organization). In other words, prospective PO fit perceptions may be based on attractive 'apples' whereas current PO fit perceptions may include aversive 'oranges'.

Hence, while job-seekers appear to predominantly take the self, that is, their own core attributes and values, as a reference to assess whether the organization matches the self, they may come to take the organization as the focal referent, thus focusing more on the salient attributes and values of the organization as the main reference for establishing their fit. In other words, job-seekers should be guided through organizational information in a way that they also process an organization's aversive 'oranges'. Therefore, an avenue for future research is to examine the precise impact of perspective taking during job search. Meanwhile, practice could try to find ways for encouraging job-seekers to take the perspective of the organization during the recruitment process. That is, instead of asking themselves: "Is this the organization that will fit *me*?" they could ask themselves: "Am I the person that will fit this *organization*?"

Another method for getting a more accurate and overall impression of an organization's culture and its related values could be to reduce the distance between the job-seeker and the organization so that job-seekers feel more familiar or 'close' with the organization. In keeping with the results of Chapter 5, job-seekers could judge the information in a near rather than distant time perspective, for example, by better visualizing how daily life will look and feel like when working in a specific organization. Another and even better strategy is to offer job-seekers the opportunity for 'test days' or 'short internships'. Bringing an organization closer and thus making it more concrete may likewise help to activate job-seeker's prevention orientation (Chapter 4).

To conclude, job-seekers as well as organizations should be aware that job-seekers' PO fit perceptions should be a valid reflection of future reality. Most importantly, organizational information should be processed in a way that PO fit perceptions during job search are a good predictor of PO fit perceptions after being employed. Both factors in- and outside of an organization's control determine people's experience of PO fit with a specific organization. Thus, for job-seekers it is important to deliberate not only on what they positively expect and want, but also on what they negatively expect and do not want in a future organization. For organizations it is important to not only focus on their positive image to attract applicants but also on providing information that reflect their dominant values which may or may not diverge from the values associated with their industry. Further, organizations could encourage job-seekers to also take the organization's perspective when processing her information.

## **Concluding remarks**

This dissertation started with theorizing about and testing the underlying mechanisms of job-seekers' PO fit perceptions. The studies in this dissertation have shown that PO fit is a matter of idiosyncratic information processing. To date, fit research has mainly built on prevalent fit theories and prior fit research, restraining its scientific sources almost exclusively to the fit domain. Future fit research could gain by relying more heavily on extant basic theories concerning people's information processing, decision-making, and attitude change. Since the ultimate aim of psychological sciences is to predict human behavior and fit

perceptions are strong determinants of behaviors, more research efforts should be directed to predicting fit perceptions in the first place.





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# SAMENVATTING



**D**e meeste mensen zijn wel eens op zoek geweest naar een geschikte baan, niet alleen aan het begin van hun loopbaan maar ook later. Naast instrumentele motieven, zoals salaris, carrièremogelijkheden en locatie, bepalen mensen de aantrekkelijkheid van een organisatie als werkgever ook op basis van hun indruk van de 'fit' met een toekomstige werkomgeving. Vooral Persoon-Organisatie (PO) fit percepties bepalen het gevoel dat iemand heeft bij een organisatie. Werkzoekenden vormen zich een beeld van de cultuurwaarden van een organisatie en vergelijken deze cultuurwaarden met hun eigen waarden om in te schatten hoe goed ze zullen passen bij deze organisatie. Mensen verschillen in hun voorkeuren voor organisatiecultuurwaarden en organisaties verschillen in hun organisatiecultuurwaarden, dus verschillende mensen voelen zich aangetrokken tot verschillende organisaties.

PO fit percepties zijn belangrijk voor de werving, de selectie en het behoud van werknemers. Het lijkt dus van vitaal belang om te weten hoe deze PO fit percepties ontstaan. Verrassend genoeg is het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van PO fit percepties tot nu toe nauwelijks onderzocht. Doel van dit proefschrift was beter te begrijpen hoe mensen, en met name werkzoekenden, PO percepties vormen op basis van hun indruk van de congruentie tussen hun persoonlijke waarden en die van de organisatie. Hoe zien werkzoekenden organisaties, hoe verwerken ze informatie over een organisatie en hoe vergelijken ze deze informatie met hun eigen voorkeuren?

Het algemene idee van fit lijkt vrij eenvoudig. In principe zou een persoon op de hoogte moeten zijn van zijn eigen waarden en die van een organisatie en dan deze beide combineren tot een indruk van de PO fit. In het algemeen wordt aangenomen dat PO fit percepties gebaseerd zijn op een alomvattende vergelijking van iemands persoonlijke waarden en die van een organisatie. In tegenstelling tot deze algemene veronderstelling, laten de hoofdstukken in dit proefschrift zien dat PO fit niet het gevolg is van een objectieve rekenkundige vergelijking van persoonlijke en organisatiekenmerken. In plaats daarvan laten de bevindingen van dit proefschrift zien dat PO fit percepties ontstaan op basis van eenzijdige en onvolledige informatieverwerking. Bovendien kunnen zowel individuele als situationele kenmerken van invloed zijn op de vergelijking en weging van persoonlijke en organisatiewaarden.

Het eerste onderzoek in dit proefschrift (beschreven in Hoofdstuk 2) onderzocht de signalen die werkzoekenden gebruiken om een idee te krijgen van de cultuur van een

organisatie. Bij het zoeken naar een nieuwe baan krijgen mensen vaak geen duidelijke en/of uitvoerige informatie over de waarden van een organisatie. In plaats daarvan moeten ze bij de beoordeling van hun toekomstige fit vertrouwen op summiere informatie die vaak voor meerdere uitleg vatbaar is, bijvoorbeeld de informatie die ze vinden op de website van een organisatie. Om hun PO fit te beoordelen baseren werkzoekenden hun indruk van organisaties en de vermeende organisatiecultuur op de onvolledige informatie waarover zij op dat moment beschikken. Hierbij maken ze gebruik van schematische of stereotype ideeën en verwachtingen over de verschillende soorten organisaties en hun vermeende cultuur, bijvoorbeeld gebaseerd op de industriële sector waarin een organisatie opereert.

De fit tussen de waarden van een persoon en de stereotype cultuur binnen een industrie (Persoon-Industrie (PI) fit) is een eerste indicatie voor hoe goed werkzoekenden zullen passen bij een organisatie (PO fit). De website van een organisatie kan er vervolgens voor zorgen dat werkzoekenden deze eerste PO fit indruk bijstellen. Een goed ontworpen website kan bijvoorbeeld de aandacht vestigen op relevante informatie over de organisatiecultuur. Om dit te onderzoeken inspecteerden (studerende) deelnemers de bestaande websites van vier organisaties. De vier geselecteerde organisaties kwamen overeen qua locatie en grootte, maar ze verschilden wat betreft de industriële sector waarin ze opereerden. Deelnemers rapporteerden eerst hun eigen voorkeuren voor organisatiewaarden. Vervolgens gaven zij voor elke organisatie hun perceptie van de organisatiecultuur en beoordeelden ze het ontwerp (aantrekkelijkheid en gebruiksvriendelijkheid) van de websites. Om een idee te krijgen van stereotype beelden over de cultuur van een industrie rapporteerde een tweede groep van vergelijkbare deelnemers hun perceptie van de organisatiecultuur op basis van zeer korte beschrijvingen van de verschillende organisaties, maar zonder de websites van deze organisaties te bezoeken.

Deze studie toonde aan dat werkzoekenden vooral aandacht besteden aan de inhoud van de website van een organisatie als ze denken te passen bij de stereotype organisatiecultuur die hoort bij de industriële sector van de organisatie. Werkzoekenden hebben al verwachtingen over de cultuur van een organisatie voordat ze meer te weten komen over die specifieke organisatie via haar website. Zij maken gebruik van stereotypen over de cultuur binnen een sector om conclusies te trekken over een specifieke organisatie. Interessanter is echter dat zij vooral gebruik maken van deze stereotypen als ze het ontwerp

van een organisatie-website niet erg waarderen en ze een lage fit ervaren met de vermeende cultuur binnen de desbetreffende sector. Organisaties met een organisatiecultuur die afwijkt van de stereotype organisatiecultuur in hun tak van industrie kunnen daarom problemen hebben met het aantrekken van mensen die passen binnen hun organisatie. Om kandidaten te trekken die passen bij de organisatie moeten organisaties dus hun website zorgvuldig ontwerpen zodat relevante informatie over de organisatiecultuur actief verwerkt wordt.

Hoofdstuk 2 lijkt te suggereren dat de inhoud van de P en O componenten zoals geoperationaliseerd door onderzoekers en wervende organisaties niet overeenkomt met de inhoud die kandidaten zelf in gedachten hebben als zij hun PO fit bepalen. De studies in Hoofdstuk 3 tonen bovendien aan dat de P en O componenten op een andere manier worden gewogen dan PO onderzoekers geneigd zijn aan te nemen. Traditioneel wordt verondersteld dat mensen bij het bepalen van hun PO fit een alomvattende vergelijking maken tussen hun eigen waarden en die van de organisatie. Volgens deze veronderstelling maakt het niet uit op welke specifieke waarden werkzoekenden en organisaties bij elkaar passen of niet bij elkaar passen, zolang het totale niveau van PO fit voldoende is. Bijgevolg wordt aangenomen dat globale PO fit percepties in gelijke mate zijn gebaseerd op de aanwezigheid van waarden in de organisatie die iemands persoonlijke waarden steunen, dat wil zeggen attractieve waarden, en op de afwezigheid van waarden in de organisatie die strijdig zijn met iemands persoonlijke waarden, dat wil zeggen aversieve waarden. Daarom zou fit op de waarden die persoonlijk attractief, aversief, of relatief neutraal zijn, gelijk moeten worden gewogen.

De vier studies in Hoofdstuk 3 onderzochten hoe attractieve, aversieve en neutrale waarden worden gewogen. Daarbij werd gebruik gemaakt van een experimentele *policy-capturing* methode. Deze methode maakt het mogelijk de afzonderlijke effecten van attractieve fit, aversieve fit en neutrale fit op PO fit percepties vast te stellen. In deze studies rapporteerden de deelnemers hun PO fit met een aantal organisatieprofielen. Uniek aan de gebruikte methode in deze studies is dat de organisatieprofielen voor iedere deelnemer persoonlijk relevant waren. Buiten medeweten van de deelnemers werden deze profielen afgestemd op hun persoonlijke waarden; ieder organisatieprofiel bevatte drie waarden: een persoonlijk attractieve, een persoonlijk neutrale en een persoonlijk aversieve waarde. Voor elk nieuw profiel werden de waarden willekeurig geselecteerd uit de eigen attractieve,

neutrale en aversieve waarden van de deelnemer. Dus hoewel ieder profiel bestaat uit een attractieve, een neutrale en een aversieve waarde verschillen de profielen met betrekking tot de specifieke inhoud van de waarden die werden getoond aan deelnemers. Tenslotte varieerde het niveau van de drie waarden in het profiel (laag, gemiddeld, of hoog) en werd dit niveau van elke waarde systematisch gevarieerd tussen profielen.

De bevindingen lieten zien dat er grote variatie was onder de deelnemers in hun persoonlijke voorkeuren voor cultuurwaarden zodat waarden die attractief waren voor sommige deelnemers, neutraal of aversief waren voor anderen en vice versa. Dit ondersteunt het gebruik van persoonlijk afgestemde organisatieprofielen. Bovendien laten alle vier de studies zien dat, zoals verondersteld, werkzoekenden de fit op de verschillende waarden niet in gelijke mate wegen. Integendeel, werkzoekenden wegen fit op persoonlijk attractieve waarden zwaarder dan fit op persoonlijk aversieve en neutrale waarden wanneer ze hun fit met een organisatie bepalen. Ze ervaren vooral hoge PO fit wanneer de informatie over een toekomstige organisatie laat zien dat de waarden die voor hen persoonlijk aantrekkelijk zijn gesteund worden. Dit gold zowel voor universitaire studenten (Studie 1) en voor werkzoekenden zonder (Studie 2) en met (Studie 4) directe noodzaak tot het vinden van een nieuwe baan. Bovendien werden dezelfde resultaten gevonden als de deelnemers hun waarden aan de hand van een Likert-schaal rapporteerden (Studie 3) of als ze gedwongen werden om hun meest aantrekkelijke en meest onaantrekkelijke waarden te beoordelen met een *Q-sort* techniek (Studie 1, 2, en 4).

Hoofdstuk 3 liet zien dat sommige soorten informatie zwaarder worden gewogen dan andere. Als gevolg daarvan hebben werkzoekenden de neiging zich te richten op een beperkt aantal organisatiekenmerken bij de beoordeling van hun toekomstige PO fit en maken ze geen alomvattende vergelijking. Hoewel werkzoekenden zouden moeten zoeken naar organisaties die gekenmerkt worden door de aanwezigheid van aantrekkelijke organisatiekenmerken en de afwezigheid van onaantrekkelijke organisatiekenmerken lijken ze hun fitpercepties vooral te baseren op de hoogte van fit met organisatiekenmerken die ze aantrekkelijk vinden. De beschikbare fitinformatie over onaantrekkelijke organisatiekenmerken zijn ze geneigd te verwaarlozen. Hoofdstuk 4 onderzocht of werkzoekenden deze strategie gebruiken vanwege de specifieke aard van het zoeken naar een baan.

De aandacht voor en waarneming van informatie over organisaties wordt beïnvloed door iemands regulatiefocus, dat is de mate waarin een persoon meer gericht is op promotie of preventie. Promotie is gericht op potentieel succes en het behalen van winst en promotiegerichte mensen zullen dan ook gevoeliger zijn voor de aan- of afwezigheid van positieve uitkomsten. Preventie daarentegen gaat over de behoefte aan zekerheid of het voorkomen van verlies. Preventiegerichte mensen zullen dus gevoeliger zijn voor de aanwezigheid of afwezigheid van negatieve uitkomsten. Bij het zoeken naar werk gaat de aandacht vaak meer uit naar mogelijk succes dan naar mogelijk verlies. Dit impliceert een grotere promotie- dan preventiegerichtheid bij werkzoekenden. Hierdoor besteden werkzoekenden vooral aandacht aan informatie over de aan- of afwezigheid van hun persoonlijk aantrekkelijke waarden.

In Hoofdstuk 4 liet een experimentele *policy-capturing* studie die de afzonderlijke effecten van attractieve fit, aversieve fit en neutrale fit onderzocht, zien dat de deelnemers vooral hoge PO fit ervaren als informatie over een potentiële werkgever hun persoonlijke aantrekkelijke waarden ondersteunt. Echter, de resultaten van deze studie lieten ook zien dat PO fit percepties – althans gedeeltelijk – afhangen van iemands dispositionele regulatiefocus. Blijkbaar houden mensen met een hoge preventiegerichtheid ook rekening met informatie over hun persoonlijk aversieve waarden. Dit laatste lijkt te resulteren in een meer evenwichtige en mogelijk meer realistische perceptie van hoe goed iemand past bij een mogelijk toekomstige werkgever.

Vervolgens wordt in Hoofdstuk 5 aangetoond dat ook de afstand in de tijd tot een toekomstige organisatie de wegging van attractieve en aversieve waarden kan beïnvloeden. Iemands beslissingen kunnen veranderen als functie van de resterende tijd tot een specifieke gebeurtenis. Bijvoorbeeld, voor uitkomsten in een verre toekomst hebben mensen de neiging om meer gewicht toe te kennen aan mogelijk positieve resultaten, terwijl in de nabije toekomst negatieve uitkomsten meer nadruk krijgen. Op soortgelijke wijze kan de temporele afstand tot een toekomstige organisatie (bijvoorbeeld deze week versus volgend jaar) van invloed zijn op het wegen van attractieve en aversieve waarden wanneer PO fit percepties worden gevormd. Dat wil zeggen, PO fit percepties zullen voornamelijk gebaseerd worden op attractieve fit wanneer mensen een ver tijdsperspectief hebben (volgend jaar), terwijl aversieve fit een grotere rol zal spelen wanneer mensen een nabij tijdsperspectief hebben (deze week).

In een experimentele studie beoordeelden deelnemers vier verschillende organisaties die elk werden beschreven met twee indicatoren van attractieve en/of aversieve fit en misfit. Net als in de Hoofdstukken 3 en 4 werd de informatie over organisaties afgestemd op de persoonlijke waarden van de deelnemers. De deelnemers werden willekeurig toegewezen aan een van twee tijdscondities (nabij of ver) en – net als in Hoofdstuk 4 – werd hun regulatiefocus bepaald. Deelnemers beoordeelden hun PO fit met elk van de vier organisaties. Bevindingen laten zien dat PO fit percepties meer gebaseerd zijn op iemands attractieve waarden en minder op iemands aversieve waarden. Echter, dit effect was wat zwakker in de 'nabije tijd'-conditie in vergelijking tot de 'verre tijd'-conditie. Dat wil zeggen, zowel in het nabije als verre tijdsperspectief leidde attractieve fit tot meer positieve PO fit evaluaties dan aversieve fit. Tijdspectief was wel van invloed op het wegen van misfit; in een ver tijdsperspectief leidde aantrekkelijke misfit tot meer negatieve PO fit percepties dan aversieve misfit, terwijl in een nabij tijdsperspectief beide een vergelijkbaar effect hadden. Tot slot toonde deze studie aan dat het effect van temporele afstand op het wegen van attractieve en aversieve (mis) fit werd beïnvloed door iemands regulatiefocus.

Kortom, de bevindingen van dit proefschrift leiden tot de conclusie dat bestaande PO fit theorie is gebaseerd op veronderstellingen over een rekenkundige en rationele vergelijking van P en O die in werkelijkheid nauwelijks voorkomt. Ten eerste komt de inhoud van de P en O componenten zoals door onderzoekers en wervende organisaties geoperationaliseerd niet overeen met de inhoud die men zelf in gedachten heeft bij de beoordeling van PO fit (Hoofdstuk 2). Ten tweede, werkzoekenden wegen de P en O componenten op een andere manier dan PO fit onderzoekers geneigd zijn aan te nemen: sommige informatie wordt zwaarder gewogen dan andere. Als gevolg daarvan hebben werkzoekenden de neiging zich te richten op een beperkt aantal organisatiekenmerken bij het beoordelen van hun toekomstige PO fit en maken ze geen alomvattende vergelijking (Hoofdstuk 3). Daarnaast zijn PO fit waarnemingen minder stabiel dan eerder werd gedacht: PO fit percepties kunnen veranderen afhankelijk van iemands regulatiefocus of tijdsperspectief (Hoofdstuk 4 en Hoofdstuk 5). De bevindingen van dit proefschrift leiden tot een beter begrip van de inhoud van PO fit percepties en hoe deze percepties worden gevormd. Bovendien hebben de bevindingen implicaties voor theorievorming over PO fit en geven ze aanleiding voor verder toekomstig onderzoek.

Tot slot, over het algemeen werd aangenomen dat PO fit percepties een alomvattende vergelijking impliceren van de waarden van een persoon en de waarden van een organisatie. Deze veronderstelling suggereert dat personen, organisaties en persoon-organisatie fit op objectieve wijze kunnen worden beoordeeld. Echter, veel psychologische theorieën erkennen dat iemands waarneming van de werkelijkheid belangrijker is voor zijn of haar gedrag dan de werkelijkheid zelf. Bovendien staat vast dat de menselijke waarneming verre van objectief is. Ook dit proefschrift laat zien dat PO fit primair gebaseerd is op subjectieve, en daarmee onvolledige, verwerking van informatie over de organisatie. PO fit theorieën zouden daarom PO fit meer expliciet moeten omschrijven als een subjectief fenomeen: PO fit bestaat meer in iemands hoofd dan in de werkelijkheid.

Zowel werkzoekenden als organisaties moeten zich ervan bewust zijn dat de PO fit percepties van werkzoekenden misschien niet een goede afspiegeling zijn van hun werkelijke PO fit. Het belangrijkste is dat de beschikbare informatie over een organisatie niet op zo'n manier wordt verwerkt dat de waargenomen PO fit tijdens het zoeken naar werk een goede voorspeller zal zijn van de ervaren PO fit na aanstelling. Zowel factoren waarover organisaties controle hebben als ook factoren waarover ze geen controle hebben bepalen of mensen PO fit ervaren met een specifieke organisatie. Voor werkzoekenden is het belangrijk om niet alleen positieve verwachtingen en wensen te overwegen, maar zich ook te beraden op mogelijk negatieve aspecten in een toekomstige organisatie. Voor organisaties is het belangrijk om zich niet alleen te richten op een positief imago om kandidaten aan te trekken, maar ook op het verstrekken van informatie over hun dominante cultuurwaarden die al dan niet afwijken van de waarden die geassocieerd worden met de industriële sector.

# SUMMARY



**M**ost people have been involved with seeking a suitable job, not only at the start of but also during their careers. In addition to instrumental motives such as pay, career opportunities, and location, job-seekers' attraction to an organization seems to be based on their impression of fit with their prospective work environment. Especially, perceptions of Person-Organization (PO) fit are strong predictors of affective responses toward organizations. To estimate how well they will fit with an organization, people assess an organization's values and compare these to their own values. However, as people vary in their own cultural values preferences and organizations vary in their cultural values, different people are attracted to different organizations.

PO fit perceptions are of major relevance for employee recruitment, selection, and retention. It thus seems vital to know how perceptions of PO fit arise. Surprisingly, the sources for and development of PO fit perceptions are hardly studied to date. This dissertation aimed to provide a more complete understanding of how people, and especially job-seekers, develop perceptions of PO fit as based on impressions of value congruence. How do they perceive organizations, how do they process organizational information, and how is this information compared with their own preferences?

The general idea of fit seems quite straightforward. Basically, a person needs to be aware of his or her own values and the values of an organization and then needs to combine these into an assessment of PO fit. Following this reasoning, people's PO fit perceptions are generally assumed to encompass an overall comparison of personal and organizational values. However, in contrast to this general assumption, the chapters in this dissertation have shown that PO fit is not an exogenous and static construct that is the result of an objective comparison of personal and organizational characteristics. Rather, the findings of this dissertation have indicated that perceptions of PO fit evolve from unbalanced and flawed information processing. Moreover, both individual and situational characteristics could affect the way in which personal and organizational values converge into a general PO fit perception.

The first study in this dissertation (described in Chapter 2) examined the signals that job-seekers use to make inferences about an organization. When looking for a new job, people often do not receive obvious and explicit information about an organization's values. Instead they have only sparse and ambiguous information to rely on when assessing their prospective fit, for example the information that they find on an organization's website. To

assess their PO fit, job-seekers develop an impression of organizations and their alleged cultures based on the incomplete information available to them. To evaluate this sparse information they may use schematic or stereotypical ideas and expectations about different types of organizations and their alleged culture as, for example, derived from the branch of industry in which an organization operates.

The fit between a person's values and these industry culture stereotypes (Person-Industry (PI) fit) gives a first indication of how well job-seekers may fit with an organization (PO fit). However, an organization's website could modify job-seekers' initial PI fit impressions. A well-designed website in particular may draw attention to relevant information about an organization's culture. To study these assumptions, student participants visited four actual organizational web sites. The four selected organizations were alike in location and size, but they differed in branch of industry. First, participants reported their own organizational value preferences. Then, they indicated their organizational culture perceptions of each organization and evaluated each website's design. In order to assess industry culture stereotypes, a second group of comparable participants indicated their organizational culture perceptions as based on very short descriptions of the types of organizations included in the study and without visiting organizations' websites.

This study showed that job-seekers pay particular attention to the content of an organization's website if they generally fit well with at least the stereotypical organization in the respective industry. Job-seekers already have expectations about an organization's culture before they learn more about that specific organization through the organization's website. They use industry culture stereotypes to make inferences about a specific organization. Most interesting, they use these stereotypes especially if they find the design of an organization's website not very attractive and their initial fit with the industry culture (PI fit) is low. Hence, organizations with cultures different from the common stereotypical culture in their branch of industry may have problems attracting people who would fit their organization. Organizations should thus carefully design their website to stimulate active processing of culture relevant information in order to attract those applicants who may fit the organization.

Chapter 2 seems to suggest that the content of the P and O components as operationalized by researchers and (recruiting) organizations does not reflect the content that people themselves have in mind when assessing their PO fit. The studies in Chapter 3

show that people weigh the P and O components in a different way than PO fit researchers tend to assume. Traditionally, people are expected to make an overall comparison between their personal values and those of the organization when evaluating their PO fit. According to this assumption, it does not matter on what specific values job-seekers and organizations fit or fail to fit each other as long as the overall level of PO fit is sufficient. Consequently, overall PO fit perceptions are assumed to be equally based on the presence of values in the organization that support a person's own values, i.e., attractive values, and on the absence of values in the organization that contradict a person's own values, i.e., aversive values. Hence fits on values that are personally attractive, aversive, or relatively neutral should be weighed equally.

The four studies in Chapter 3 examined the weighing of attractive, aversive, and neutral values on PO fit perceptions via an experimental policy-capturing method that allows estimating the separate effects of attractive fit, aversive fit, and neutral fit. In these studies, participants considered their PO fit with multiple organizational profiles. Unique to the design used in these studies is that the organizational profiles were personally relevant for each participant. Unbeknownst to participants, their own evaluations of attractive, neutral, and aversive values were used to tailor these profiles which contained three values: one personally attractive, one personally neutral, and one personally aversive value. For each new profile, values were randomly selected from the participant's own unique choice of attractive, neutral, and aversive values. Hence, although all profiles comprised of one attractive, one neutral, and one aversive value, they differed with regard to the specific content of the values that were shown to participants. Furthermore, the three values in the profile varied in level (low, medium, or high), and the level of each value was systematically varied across profiles.

The findings showed that there was a wide variation in value preferences among participants, so values that were attractive to some participants were neutral or aversive to others and vice versa, which support the use of tailored idiosyncratic cues. Furthermore, as proposed, all four studies showed that job-seekers do not weigh all value-fits equally. Rather, they weigh fit on personally attractive values more heavily than fit on personally aversive and neutral values when indicating their perceived fit with the organization. Thus, job-seekers perceive high PO fit particularly when information about a prospective organization supports values that are personally attractive to them. This was true both for university

students (Study 1) and for job-seekers without (Study 2) and with (Study 4) direct need for a new job. Moreover, findings were stable when participants ranked each value by means of a Likert scale (Study 3) or were forced to rate their most attractive and most aversive values by means of a Q-sort technique (Study 1, 2, and 4).

Chapter 3 revealed that some types of information are weighed more heavily than other ones. As a result, job-seekers tend to focus on a limited set of organizational features when assessing their future PO fit instead of making an overall comparison. Though job-seekers should search for organizations that signal the presence of attractive organizational features and the absence of unattractive ones, they seem to base their fit perceptions mainly on the amount of fit with organizational features they find attractive and to neglect available fit information about organizational features that they perceive as unattractive. Chapter 4 examined whether job-seekers might use this strategy because of the specific nature of the job-search task.

People's attention to and perception of particular organizational cues is affected by someone's regulatory focus, that is the degree to which a person is promotion or prevention focused. A promotion focus is aimed at potential success and promotion focused people will therefore display a greater sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes. Prevention, by contrast, centres on security needs or preventing loss and prevention focused people will display greater sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes. Job-search draws more attention to potential success than to security needs, which implies a greater promotion than prevention focus among job-seekers. As a result, job-seekers pay more attention to information regarding the absence or presence of their personally attractive values.

In Chapter 4 an experimental policy-capturing study, examining the separate effects of attractive fit, aversive fit, and neutral fit, showed that participants perceived particularly high PO fit when information about a prospective employer supported values that were attractive to them. However, the results of this study also showed that perceptions of PO fit were – at least partly – contingent on participants' chronic regulatory orientation. Apparently, people with a high prevention orientation also take the information on their personally aversive values into account. This latter finding seems to result in a more balanced and possibly more realistic perception of how well a person may fit with a potential prospective organization.

To follow up on this, Chapter 5 revealed that also the temporal distance to the prospective organizations could affect the weighing of attractive and aversive values. People's decisions may change as a function of the time left to a specific event. For example, for outcomes in a distant future people tend to put more weight on possible positive outcomes, whereas in a near future negative outcomes become more salient. In a similar vein, the temporal distance to a prospective organization (e.g., a week or a year from now) could affect the weighing of attractive and aversive values in the formation of PO fit perceptions. That is, PO fit perceptions may be primarily based on attractive fit when people hold a distant time perspective, whereas aversive fit will also play a role when people hold a near time perspective.

In an experimental study, participants evaluated four different organizations that were each described with two indicators of attractive and/or aversive fits and misfits. As in Chapters 3 and 4, organizational information was based on participants' own value preferences. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two temporal conditions (near vs. distant) and – as in Chapter 4 – their regulatory orientation was assessed. Participants reported their PO fit with each of the four organizations. Findings showed that PO fit perceptions were more strongly related to people's attractive values and less to their aversive values. However, this effect was partially attenuated in the 'near time' condition as compared to the 'distant time' condition. That is, both in the near and more distant time perspective, attractive fit resulted in more positive PO fit evaluations than aversive fit, but time perspective affected the weighing of misfits (rather than fits). In a distant time perspective, attractive misfit resulted in more negative PO fit perceptions than aversive misfit, whereas in a near time perspective both had a similar impact. Finally this study showed that the effect of temporal distance on the weighing of attractive and aversive (mis)fit was affected by a person's regulatory orientation.

To sum up, findings of this dissertation lead to the conclusion that extant PO fit theory is based on assumptions about calculative P and O comparisons that do not exist in reality. First, the content of the P and O components as operationalized by researchers and (recruiting) organizations does not reflect the content that people themselves have in mind when assessing their PO fit (Chapter 2). Second, people weigh the P and O components in a different way than PO fit researchers tend to assume: some types of information are weighed more heavily than other ones. As a result, job-seekers tend to focus on a limited set

of organizational features when assessing their future PO fit instead of making an overall comparison (Chapter 3). In addition, PO fit perceptions are less stable than previously expected: the sources of PO fit perceptions can change depending on someone's regulatory orientation or time perspective (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). The findings of this dissertation have provided a better understanding of the content of people's PO fit perceptions and how these perceptions are shaped. Moreover, they have implications for PO fit theories and are a prelude to future research.

To conclude, PO fit perceptions were generally assumed to encompass an overall comparison of personal and organizational values. This assumption seems to suggest that people, organizations, and their mutual fit can be assessed objectively. However, many psychological theories acknowledge that people's perceptions of reality are more important for their behaviors than reality itself. Furthermore, it is recognized that human perceptions are far from objective. Indeed, this dissertation has evidenced that PO fit is primarily based on subjective and, thus, inaccurate environmental information processing. Therefore, PO fit theories should more explicitly frame the PO fit concept as a subjective phenomenon: PO fit is in people's mind rather than reality.

Job-seekers as well as organizations should be aware that job-seekers' PO fit perceptions might not be a valid reflection of future reality. Most importantly, organizational information might not be processed in a way that PO fit perceptions during job search are a good predictor of PO fit perceptions after being employed. Both factors in- and outside of an organization's control determine people's experience of PO fit with a specific organization. Thus, for job-seekers it is important to deliberate not only on what they positively expect and want, but also on what they negatively expect and do not want in a future organization. For organizations it is important to not only focus on their positive image to attract applicants but also on providing information that reflect their dominant values which may or may not diverge from the values associated with their industry.





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