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### Searching for a match: the formation of person-organization fit perceptions

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# 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; Pfieffelman, 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

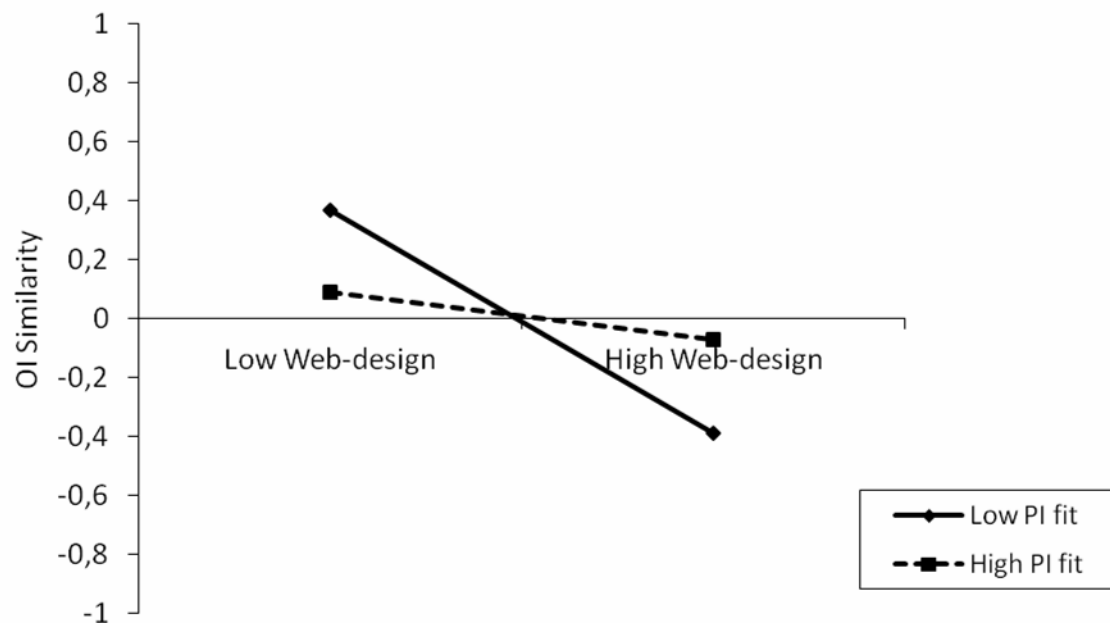
*Regression of OI Similarity on Website Design and PI Fit*

	<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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