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

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CHAPTER 3

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



When 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 dimensions¹ (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).

¹ 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.

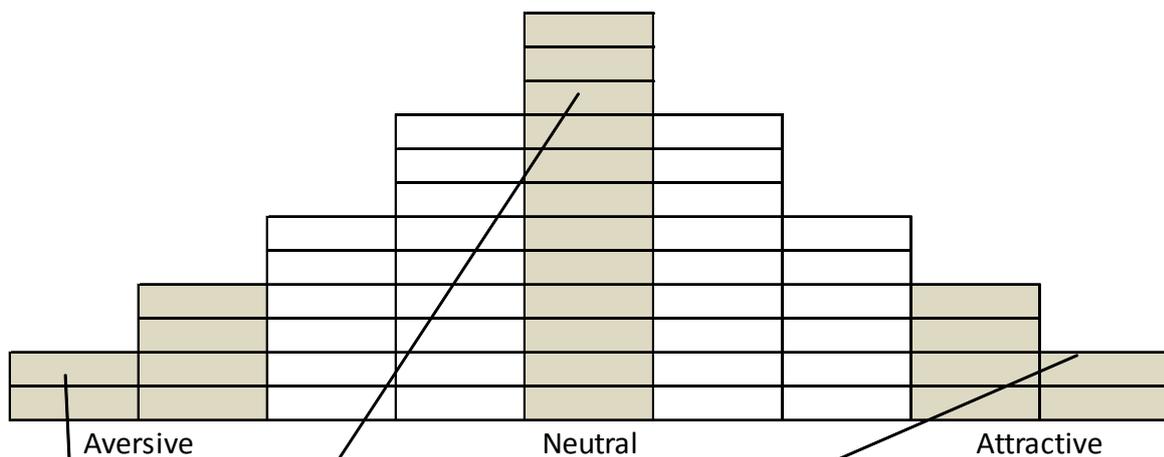
This random selection of values was done independently for each profile (see Example). Hence, although all profiles comprised of one attractive, one neutral, and one aversive value, they differed with regard to the specific content of the values that were shown to participants. Furthermore, the three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

² 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-three³ 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

³ 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> ^a	<i>t</i>	95% CI	σ^2
(N=99; 2673 observations)					
Intercept	3.79	.05	80.66	3.69 - 3.88	.17 ^{*b}
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) ^c					37.36%
Study 3.2	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ^a	<i>t</i>	95% CI	σ^2
(N=38; 1026 observations)					
Intercept	3.61	.08	44.16	3.44 - 3.78	.20 ^{*b}
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) ^c					26.49%
Study 3.3	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ^a	<i>t</i>	95% CI	σ^2
(N=33; 891 observations)					
Intercept	3.72	.07	50.58	3.57 - 3.87	.12 ^{*b}
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) ^c					36.24%
Study 3.4	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ^a	<i>t</i>	95% CI	σ^2
(N=75; 2025 observations)					
Intercept	4.13	.06	66.04	4.00 - 4.25	.24 ^{*b}
Attractive Fit	1.15	.05	22.21	1.05 - 1.25	.13 [*]
Neutral Fit	.44	.04	11.61	.37 - .52	.03
Aversive Fit	.33	.04	-7.59	.24 - .42	.07
Effect size (R^2) ^c					44.86%

Note. ^{*} $p < .01$. ^a Average estimated SE of the regression coefficient. ^b Between person variance around the intercept. ^c % 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.*

* 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 24th annual conference of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), New Orleans, LA, April 2009.