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

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# CHAPTER 4

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



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

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

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

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

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

### **PO fit perceptions**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Regulatory Orientation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Method

### Participants and procedure

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

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



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

## Materials

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Results

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

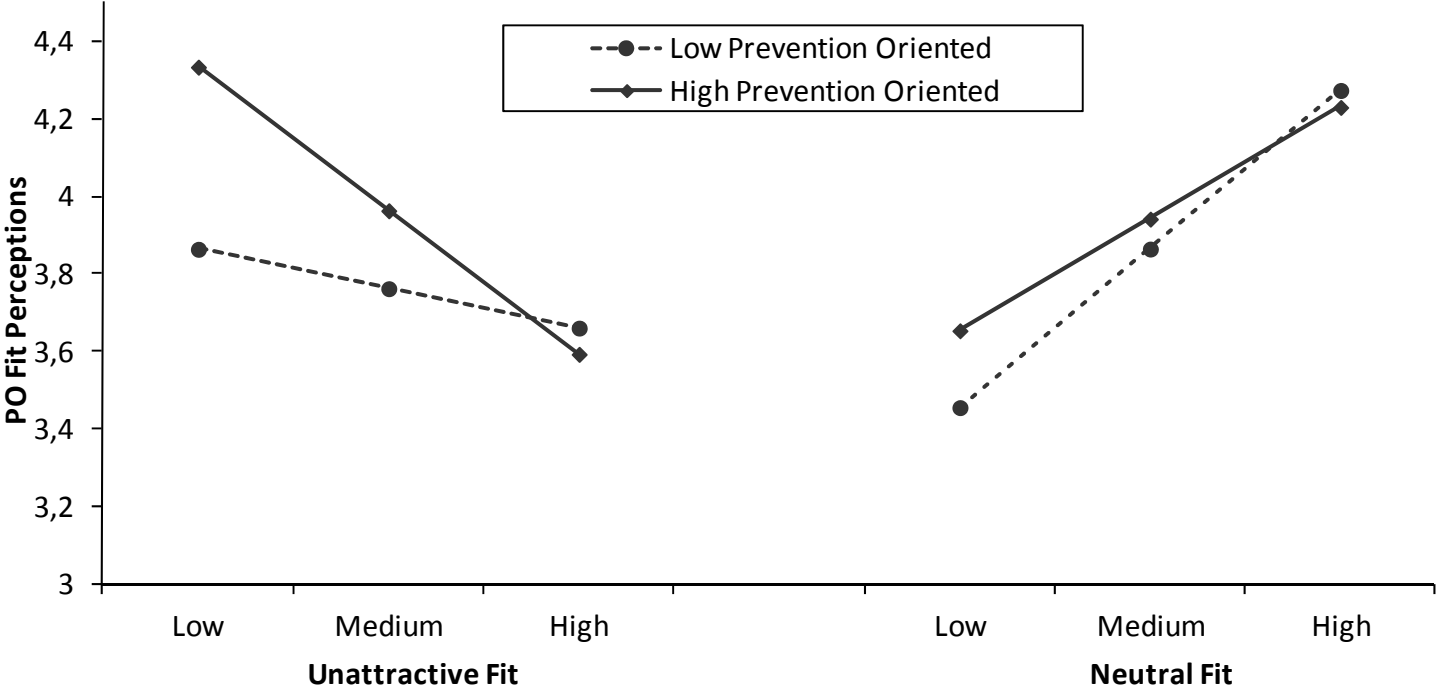
Table 4.2

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

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

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

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



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

## Discussion

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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

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

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