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

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# CHAPTER 5

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Temporal distance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Method**

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

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

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

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

### **Temporal distance conditions.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Individual differences measures**

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

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

## Results

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

### Hypotheses testing

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

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

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

Table 5.1

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

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

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

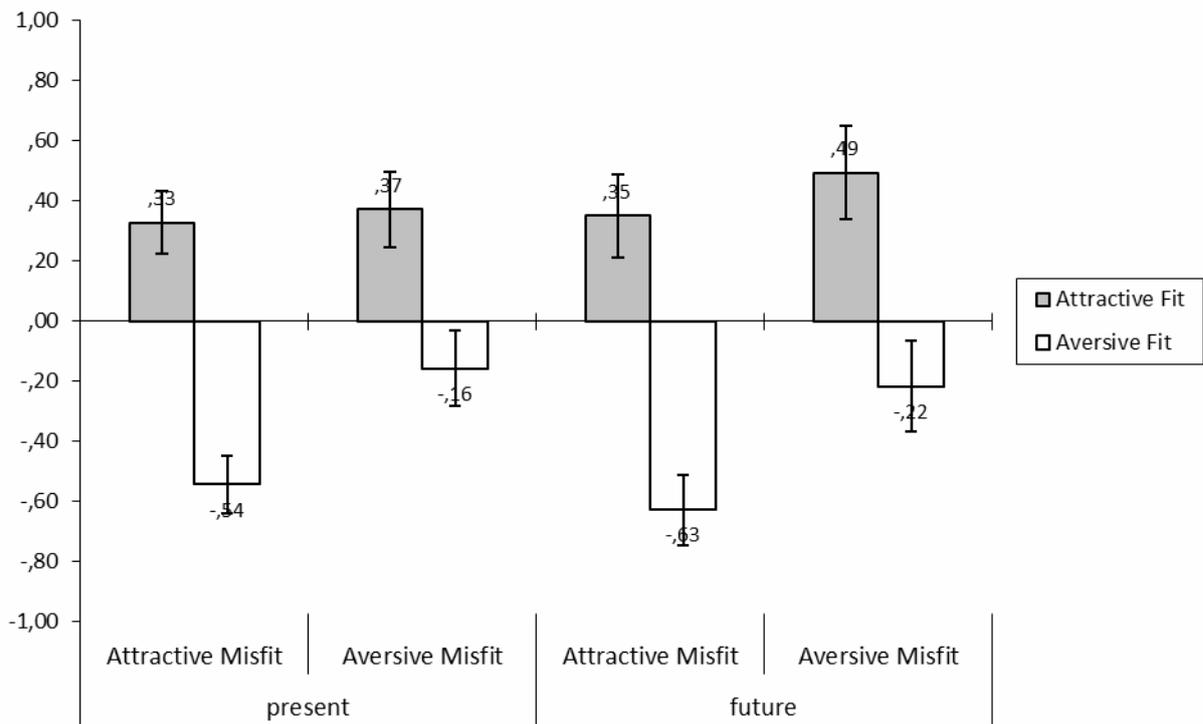
Hypothesis 2 proposed that the strong impact of attractive values would be particularly true for a distant time perspective (future), whereas in a near time perspective (present) the weighing of attractive and aversive values would be more equal. Overall, our results (tested with two-way factorial repeated-measures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

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

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

Figure 5.1

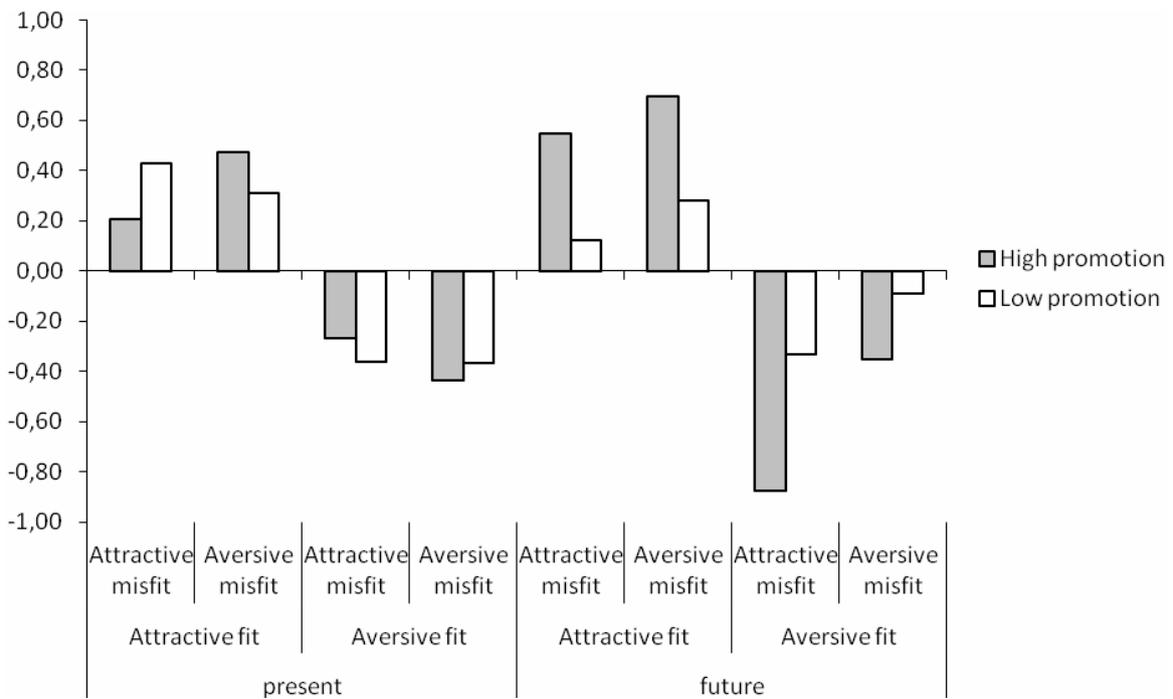
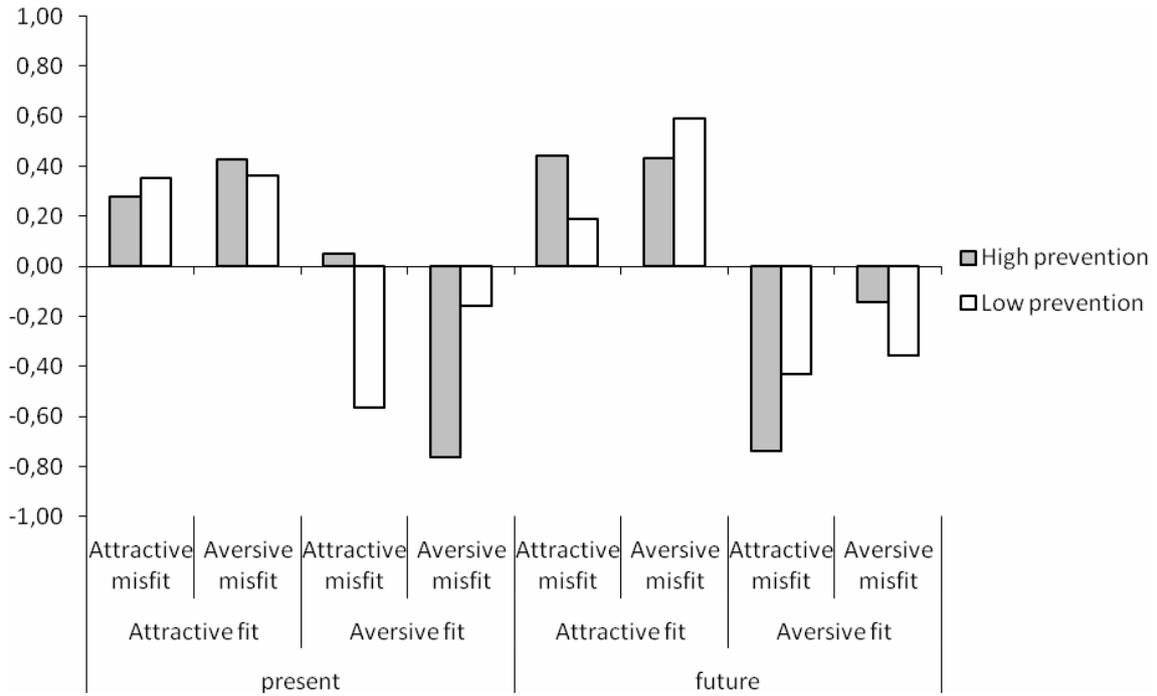
*The within-person standardized means for PO fit perceptions in the present and future time condition*



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

Figure 5.2

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



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

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

## Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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

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