



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

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

de Goede, M.E.E.

Publication date
2012

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Goede, M. E. E. (2012). *Searching for a match: the formation of person-organization fit perceptions*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

SUMMARY



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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