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### Up or out? Archetypes and person-organization fit in Dutch law firms

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*Changes over time,  
qualitative analysis,  
interviews*

1. *Introduction*

In Chapter 3, I discussed the development of values and value fit of young lawyers in the first years of their employment. By using two consecutive surveys, I hoped to be able to analyze the time-sequential and causal relations between fit, values and attitudes. I also wanted to investigate whether objective and perceived measures of fit converged and the respondents developed other, perhaps more realistic needs and perceptions of their firms.

The sample of 67 respondents to survey T2 was relatively small but large enough for the intended analysis in Chapter 4. However, only 38 lawyers responded to both surveys. This number was too small to conduct solid statistical, longitudinal analyses, especially polynomial analyses with a large number of variables. To compensate this deficiency, I inspected the individual answers of the 38 respondents and the changes in their answers over time. Section 2 of this Chapter describes the results of this inspection. Furthermore, to support the interpretation of the survey results and the changes over time, the experiences and views of the lawyers themselves could prove helpful. I interviewed 11 young lawyers from the respondent group and used their stories to explain, refine and illustrate the results of the surveys. I report the findings in Section 3 of this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 3, longitudinal studies have followed P-O fit and socialization during several years after entry and found a continuing change of fit and attitudes such as satisfaction, intention to leave or career ambitions (Cooman et al., 2009; Sturges et al., 2002). Changes in fit through the adjustment of values and of perceptions predict changes of the outcomes of fit, of satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay (Chatman, 1991).

Young lawyers will gradually gain insight in the real character of their work environment and their firm. As their first year of employment is dedicated to intensive training, their involvement in the legal practice of the firm is only partial. Performance appraisals probably become more serious after the first year. In many law firms, trainees are obliged to switch to another practice area after one and a half year. This switch is an event of major concern for many trainees. So the trainee's understanding and perceptions of the firm will probably continue developing in the second year of employment. Further, as the end of the trainee period, the first important stage in the lawyers' career, is coming closer, they will probably develop their ideas about the desirability of a career within their firm. Their own values and goals may still change dependent on their experiences.

Following the discussion of the literature and the results of both surveys separately described in Chapter 3 and 4, I expected that the changes between survey T1 and survey T2 would indicate a relationship of stable or improved fit with higher outcome levels and vice versa (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hanking, & Michaels III, 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider et al., 1995). In general, the level of satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay is presumed to decrease, as discussed by Cooper-Thomas et al. (2005). ASA theory would suggest an improvement of fit and attitudes, due to the turnover (attrition) of non fitting employees. However, during the lawyers' traineeship period, attrition is postponed. The non fitting lawyers gradually discover the discrepancy between their values and ambitions and those of their firms, leading to a deterioration of their attitudes. Also, as Bretz and Judge (1994) proposed, positive fit and negative misfit effects are expected to become more pronounced.

Further I expected that a lower perception of firm values might be related to lower outcomes (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; Ployhart, Weekley, & Baughman, 2006). Growing insights in the nature of law practice and the level of their expertise abilities in the first year of employment might lead to changes in the expertise values of some lawyers. The surveys demonstrated a strong relation between satisfaction and lawyers expertise values. I presumed that changes in lawyers' expertise values would be related to corresponding changes in their satisfaction and commitment. The effects of changes in short term reward value fit probably are ambiguous, as indicated by the literature and by the results of the surveys regarding the effect of short term rewards on attitudes (Trevor, Hausknecht, & Howard, 2007). Changes in lawyers long term perspective values might be linked to changes in their intention to stay (Moynihan et al., 2007). Finally, the outcomes of

objective and subjective fit measures are supposed to converge as time passes. Changes in the perception of the firm's values therefore would lead to more congruency between the values as perceived by the lawyers and the archetypical character of the firm as established by the interview scores objective and subjective fit (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004).

## 2. *Method and analysis.*

I selected the data of the 38 lawyers who responded to both surveys and grouped them for each firm. The purpose was to discover patterns in the changes of their responses: their personal values, their perception of firm values, their core self evaluations, satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay.

I inspected first the development of perceived P-O value fit in each respondent's case. When the difference between the scores of personal values and perceived firm values was lower in survey T2 than in survey T1, I noted this as an indication of increasing value fit; when the difference was higher, as an indication of diminished fit. Then I determined the relations between the changes in fit and the changes of the outcome variables. I disregarded small differences (changes of 0.33 or lower). Further, I inspected whether a change of each of the Exp, Mgmt and Short lawyers' and firm value scores was matched by a change of the outcome variables satisfaction and commitment, and whether changes of expertise and Long value scores was matched by a change of intention to stay.

I also analyzed the changes in congruency between the perceived firm values and the archetype scores of the firm. Higher expertise and long term perspective values I noted as indication of growing congruence with the professional partnership, while increasing Management and Short values indicated growing fit with the managed professional business. Finally, I studied possible similarities in the response of lawyers of the same firm.

### 2.1. *Results.*

The results are summarized in Table 1. The table compares the respondents' cases where the changes of fit or values and the changes of the outcomes have the same direction – that is, both increase or decrease) with the cases with changes in opposite directions (e.g. an increasing value level and a decreasing level of the outcomes). For example, in 17 cases the changes of P-O fit and attitudes had the same upward direction, while in 5 cases an increased fit was found together with decreased outcomes.

Appendix VI shows the responses of the 38 lawyers, grouped per

**Table 1**  
**Number of respondents' cases with changes in the scores of fit, values and outcomes**

	Same direction	Opposite direction	
P-O FIT AND OUTCOMES			
Stable or increased fit	18	5	
Decreased fit	7	0	
VALUES AND OUTCOMES *.		up	down**
All firm values - outcomes	8	2	6
Exp. lawyers values - satisfaction and commitment	7	3	4
Exp. firm values - satisfaction and commitment	9	4	5
Exp. firm values – intention to stay	7	4	3
Long lawyer values - intention to stay	5	3	2
Long firm values - intention to stay	7	2	5
Mgmt lawyers - satisfaction and commitment	5	1	4
Mgmt firm values - satisfaction and commitment	5	1	4
Short lawyers values - satisfaction and commitment	0	0	0
Short firm values and satisfaction and commitment	4	2	2

\* only the cases with changes in value and outcome level are represented in the table

\*\*number of upward and downward changes in the same direction

firm (numbered 1-19) with a summary of the changes and most striking aspects in their responses. The level of the outcome variables satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay decreased in 18 of the 38 cases. In 7 cases, the outcome levels rose and in 13 cases they remained more or less stable. These numbers reflect the decrease of satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay in survey T2, as presumed.

*Value fit and outcomes.* In 7 cases, I found a decrease of the outcome variables together with a decrease in fit, which I marked as 'pattern A' in Appendix VI. In 17 cases, a stable or somewhat increased fit was joined by stable or increased outcomes (indicated as 'pattern B'). There appeared a large minority of 45% demonstrating this pattern. Together, the (mis)fit effects of patterns A and B characterized 25 of the 38 cases. Some lawyers reported a decreasing satisfaction, commitment and/or intention to stay that combined with a stable or slightly increased fit ('pattern C', 5 cases). In some cases I noted the opposite pattern, diminishing fit and increased outcomes,

for some of the values and/or outcomes (pattern D). Eight respondent cases could not be attributed to one of these patterns but had mixed elements of two patterns, due to differences between the value elements or different directions of change of the outcomes.

*Perceived firm values and outcomes.* As shown in Table 1, positively corresponding changes of perceived values and outcome levels outnumbered the changes in opposite directions, for all values together as well as the separate value scales, except for Short firm values. For all values together, most cases with corresponding outcome changes were downward (6 out of 8). Mostly, the differences between the numbers of corresponding and opposite changes were small; only the interaction of expertise firm values and satisfaction and of Long firm values and intention to stay showed a relatively large majority of positively corresponding changes. This is in line with the results of survey T2: satisfaction levels corresponded clearly to the perceived expertise values of the firm. Downward and upward changes of lawyers' expertise values and outcomes were almost equal in number. A change of perceived long term perspective values of the firm corresponded in 7 cases with a change of intention to stay. In five of these cases, the changes were downwards, the two other upwards. When lawyers perceived the long term perspective in their firm as lower, a simultaneous adjustment of their intention to stay could be observed. In five cases with downward adjustments of the perceived Long value level, three were related also to lower satisfaction and commitment; in the two other cases, these outcomes were stable. Almost all changes of lawyers' and firm management values with corresponding outcome changes were in downward direction. For Short firm values, there were five changes in opposite direction to four in the same direction. The difference and absolute numbers are small, but they support the ambiguous relationship between Short values, satisfaction and commitment that was found in the survey.

*Lawyers' expertise values and satisfaction; long term perspective values and intention to stay.* The difference between positive and negative relations is small (Exp.) or non-existent (Long); so this part of the analysis does not permit any conclusions.

*Congruency of perceived and actual firm values.* The development of the congruency of the perceived and actual values proved more or less neutral: there were almost as many cases of increasing as decreasing congruency. In this sample no support for an increasing congruency could be found.

*Firm patterns.* I studied the firms with more than one responding lawyer to discover common patterns. With some PP-like firms, long term

perspective values and fit were at a relatively low level, corresponding with decreasing outcomes (1, 6, 9). Apparently, lawyers did not perceive the long term perspectives at these firms as they had expected upon entrance. A stable fit of the expertise, management and Short values corresponded with stable or increasing satisfaction and commitment in firms 2, 5, 12, 14 and 17; with some firms, higher level Long value fit was linked to increasing intention to stay (12, 14). In firm 13, decreased firm values and fit corresponded with lower outcomes. Other firms (8, 11) did not exhibit a recognizable common pattern.

## *2.2. Discussion*

The 38 cases of the respondents to both surveys indicated a corresponding change pattern of fit and attitudes and a predominantly negative direction of changes in perceived values, satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay. In 50% of the individual cases, the outcome variables decreased. This confirms the presumption of diminishing outcomes that was deduced from the postponed attrition effect. During traineeship, fit and attitudes decrease as some lawyers discover the lack of fit with their firm but do not yet leave the firm. An alternative explanation could be that mainly dissatisfied lawyers responded to both surveys, but there are no results from the surveys and interviews nor from other research that support this explanation.

The case patterns showed a variety of mechanisms behind the decline of the outcomes. Nevertheless, in a large majority of 25 cases, stable to increasing outcomes could be related to stable or increasing value fit or decreasing outcomes to a decrease of fit (patterns A and B). Although the sample size did not allow determining causality, this observation supported the presumed relation between changes of value fit and changes of the outcomes. The case analysis supported the findings that the management values of the firm are primarily a source of dissatisfaction and that an increase of Short firm values might have ambiguous, and sometimes negative effects on satisfaction and commitment.

Changes of intention to stay could be linked to changes of perceived long term firm values. Changes of intention to stay may have a different direction than the changes of satisfaction or commitment. In some firms, a decreasing level of perceived Long values is incongruent with their archetypical character. The analysis of the cases supports the assumption that these firms are not very successful in communicating their long term career policies clearly nor in reducing the uncertainty of their young lawyers.

### 3. *Looking for explanations: young lawyers speaking*

#### 3.1. *Introduction*

The analyses of the survey data permitted a comparison between lawyers in their first and second years of employment. Although patterns could be discerned, these analyses were less suited to explain the precise mechanisms of P-O fit effects and changes. Qualitative methods offer a helpful addition (Miles et al., 1994; Yin, 2003). To enlarge the explanatory potential of the data, I used interviews with lawyers from the target population.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover explanations for the survey outcomes and to explore the nature of the changes in values and goals that were investigated in the surveys as well as the lawyers' attitudes regarding firm values. How did the lawyers interpret the sets of values that I extracted from the archetype elements? The surveys indicated a slight decrease in expertise ambitions as well as an increasing differentiation of these ambitions between lawyers in the second year of employment. Fit effects of expertise values on intention to stay appeared significant in survey T1 and effects on satisfaction and commitment in survey T2, while the outcomes increased as the fitting value level was higher. Did the lawyers perceive a change of expertise ambitions and how did their perception of the values of their firms develop? Could they link their expertise values to the level of self-esteem, as indicated by the survey results?

The effects of management value fit did not change considerably from survey T1 to survey T2. Significant effects were mainly observed for the misfit of these values. How did the lawyers in their first years of employment experience the management values of their firms? Presumably, young lawyers do not yet have the experience or the insight to evaluate profoundly the management practices of their firms. What aspects of management were relevant for their satisfaction and commitment?

The surveys indicated a delicate balance between short term reward values, value fit and satisfaction and commitment. In survey T1, the highest level of these outcomes was reached at a low or moderate level of fitting values. When moderated by CSE, the outcome level rose at the high and low levels of fitting values for lawyers with high CSE; high fitting value levels were not related to high outcomes for low CSE lawyers. In survey T2, after moderating by CSE, the pattern was quite different: the highest outcome levels appeared at moderate firm value levels. High personal values remained associated with low outcome levels. Self-confident lawyers did not

appear to appreciate low nor high levels of firm values. The interviews might clarify these different findings.

Long term perspective value fit lost some of its explanatory potential in survey T2. Nevertheless, the analysis of the cases of the lawyers who responded to both surveys indicated that firm values affected intention to stay, almost regardless of the level of personal values, especially for lawyers with a high level of CSE. The changes in long term ambitions of the lawyers and the influence of firm values on intention to stay might be explained by the interviewed lawyers.

At last, the correlations between perceived firm values and the actual archetypical character of the firms were found in both surveys, somewhat stronger in the second, for expertise and short term reward values. Did the lawyers recognize the presumed archetypical character of their firms?

### *3.2. Method*

For the interview sample, I aimed at equal shares of lawyers from PP and MPB-like firms. Another purpose was to interview three lawyers from a single PP-like firm and three lawyers from a MPB-like firm. This might have the disadvantage of limiting the number of firms, but the advantage of offering insights in different firm patterns at opposite positions in the PP-MPB range. Further, I approached new interviewees until the last interview provided no more additional information and insights. After informing the law firms involved and obtaining their approval, I approached the lawyers from the target population of 305 lawyers for an interview. Fifteen lawyers responded positively. After 11 interviews, the sample met my purposes; I also observed that the patterns in the answers had become repetitive and the last interview did not add to the information gained by the previous. Therefore I discontinued after 11 interviews.

The lawyers that I interviewed were employed by 6 of the 19 law firms; firms 1, 6, 12, 13, 14 and 17. From firms 1 and 17, I interviewed 3 lawyers each. From firm 14, I interviewed two lawyers. The interviews took place from September 2010 to February 2011. At the time of the interview, the lawyers were employed between 16 and 32 months (on average 24 months). All lawyers within the population had been employed between May 2008 and February 2009. Six interviewed lawyers were female, five male.

I chose a semi-structured interview form, asking the lawyers for their considerations while choosing a firm, their expectations upon entry, general experiences in the first year and later on, and then focusing on the development of their expertise ambitions, their attitudes and experiences regarding management and short term rewards in the firm and on their long

term ambitions and perspective with the firm.

After each interview I made a summary report that I sent to the interviewed for feedback. All interviewed lawyers agreed with the report, sometimes after some minor adjustments.

### *3.3. Results*

The outcomes of the interviews are presented in order of the explanations they provide for the results of the surveys and the change analysis, for each of the four analyzed value sets.

#### *3.3.1. Objective fit*

Several interviewed lawyers mentioned the lack of realistic perceptions when choosing the firm(s) they applied for. "Even though I had worked at an employment service agency that worked for law firms, I did not really have any insight in the difference between the firms". This supports a possible explanation for the limited correlations between perceived firm values and the PP-MPB character of the firm, as well as the lack of significant regression results when using the actual firm values. Furthermore, in some of the firms that had more MPB-like characteristics, lawyers emphasized the differences in expertise and management values between different departments or practice areas. These differences may distort the perception of the archetypical character of the firm as a whole.

#### *3.3.2. Expertise values*

Almost all interviewed lawyers expressed a high level of expertise ambition as well as a perception of high firm expertise. In many cases, these ambitions and perceptions determined the choice of firm. Seven interviewed lawyers chose their firm because of its reputation on specific expertise areas; three did so because of the general expertise reputation. Examples of specific expertise ambitions were the preference for administrative law at firms 6 and 17, for competition law at firm 1 or real estate law at firm 14. In the first year, these expectations were confronted with reality. Some lawyers were disappointed in the expertise level of their work, for instance because it consisted for a large part in repetitive small parts of big cases, such as compliance or due diligence. One lawyer remarked that lawyers with high expectations about the expertise level of the work and about development opportunities risk disappointment. But also the opposite development appeared: two lawyers expressed that they found the work more intellectually challenging than they had expected. Both these lawyers observed that this had a negative effect on their self-confidence and that they had to readjust their expectations. One of them succeeded to regain her self-efficacy and the expertise level of her work, the other did not and

hoped that a change of practice area would help. Two lawyers reported a lack of work due to economic or incidental factors, a frustrating experience. At the time of the interview, most lawyers had developed mixed feelings – mainly moderately positive – about the expertise level of their work. “My experiences with work quality are mixed, but mainly positive” .... “Often you handle only a small part of a puzzle, but mostly your parts are interesting enough” .... “Not all your cases are fun, but taken together the work is interesting and varying.”

Most firms organize an intensive first year training period. Lawyers follow courses in the legal areas that dominate the big law firm practices; some firms have pooled these training efforts in the joint Law Firm School. Some of the largest firms have an arrangement with legal aid insurance companies who refer small cases for the purpose of providing young lawyers with a wide range of legal experience and litigation possibilities. Most interviewed lawyers appreciated the training – for many of them it was an important argument to join their law firm. However, some of them remarked that the intensive training had postponed their involvement in the law practice of their firm and limited their acquaintance with their expertise area in the first year. One lawyer indicated this as the cause of a temporary setback in his wellbeing and performance at the end of this first year; he also had observed this with his colleagues.

A high perception of the firms’ expertise level is not limited to the firms that resemble the professional partnership archetype. The lawyers of firm 1 mentioned the general expertise level of their firm as well as their specific practice area as important arguments for their initial choice but also for their intention to stay. “If I were to become partner, it would be at this firm”. For the lawyers at firm 17, the main consideration was the expertise level of their practice area. Remarkably, the most MPB-like firms had abandoned the obligatory change of practice area halfway the three years traineeship period. In these firms, lawyers who were specifically attracted to a practice area were allowed to remain working in that area. This finding fits with the presumed diversified career and development tracks these firms offer. At most firms however, lawyers would soon change to another practice area or had done so recently at the time of the interviews. Two of them expected an improvement in the level of their work; the other lawyers who changed practice areas were indifferent or still insecure about the effects of this change for the expertise level of their work. But all of those hoped to return to their initial area after completing their traineeship, maintaining the strong preference they had upon entry. Four of them indicated they would leave for

another firm or another legal occupation (e.g. the competition authority or the judiciary) if their firm would not accommodate this preference in the future.

The experiences of the interviewed lawyers offer explanations how lawyers gained realistic insights – positive, negative but most often mixed - in the expertise level of their firm and practice area, as well as in their own expertise level and ambitions. In this process, the general high level of their ambitions and perceptions in the first year after entry became more differentiated. The increase of the explanatory potential of the expertise values in survey T2 is reflected by this differentiation. Nevertheless, the interviews indicated that most lawyers maintained high expertise ambitions and that these ambitions were a major factor in the commitment to their firm, as the analyses of the cases of respondents to both surveys had confirmed. The opportunity to realize these ambitions in their practice area of choice remained a major reason to stay with their firm. Also, the interviews gave some examples of how the lawyers' perceptions of the expertise values of their firms gradually converged with actual firm values.

### 3.3.3. *Management values*

The interviewed lawyers associated their management values and the perceived firm values with different aspects of the management of the firm and the practice. The support organization of the firm – aspects such as secretarial support, ICT tools, library and documentation – was generally appreciated as good to excellent. The interviews gave only one example of temporary dissatisfaction, caused by a reduction of secretarial staff. The quality of support facilities therefore did not differentiate between firms or between interviewed lawyers. A second and more distinctive aspect was the organization of the lawyers' work unit or practice group, including the division of work, process management, coaching and supervision. Most interviewed lawyers were critical or negative about the structuring and organization of the work processes. "A lot of freedom, no management" ... "No structured division of work, work processes or case evaluation" ... "Apart from the helpful coaching of experienced associates, there was no structured feedback or evaluation process." Only some lawyers reported positive experiences in this matter; all of them were employed by the more MPB-like firms (14 and 17).

Some lawyers regarded the deficiency of work unit management as a serious disadvantage; these lawyers also had other problems such as a shortage of work or a strained relationship with the partner. The others saw it as a fact of law firm life ("I did not have high expectations of lawyers' management capabilities") or even an opportunity. "To promote your own

interests, to lobby ... directly with the partner involved... is the only way to get somewhere”.

The third aspect of firm management that appeared relevant for the interviewed young lawyers was the firms’ formal and informal management structure, especially the distribution of authority between the partner(s) and firm management, including the authority in HRM matters. The lawyers were faced with the effects of the management configuration at critical moments in their employment, such as the transition to another practice area half way the traineeship, formal evaluations or incidental problems. One lawyer experienced some burn-out symptoms; in another case, the departure of several senior lawyers caused unrest and uncertainty. All interviewed lawyers had the perception that, in the end, the partners decided. According to some lawyers, the influence of others on decisions is negligible; firm management or HRM department are unobtrusive (“HRM could not intervene, was only supporting the partner”... ). In the more PP-like firms, the perception is that partners can only be corrected by other partners (“They can be addressed only by other partners during partner appraisal” .... “HRM is OK but has no position in important matters such as practice area transition when partners are involved”). Most interviewed lawyers spoke positively about attitudes and interventions of the partners, but “there also are bastards among them”.

In the more MPB-resembling firms, the partners also had final authority, but the involvement of firm management, notably HRM staff, appeared more intensive. “The performance of HRM is a positive contribution, although ultimately the partner decides”. At the same firm, another lawyer had appreciated the intervention of HRM after several senior lawyers had left the department. HRM in this firm also took the lead in organizing practice group transitions. One of the lawyers at these firms mentioned with positive appreciation the support received from her mentor. Lawyers at firm 17 had different opinions about the elaborate performance appraisal in this firm. They appreciated the feedback but two of them had doubts about the relevancy of the large number of criteria. The third lawyer of this firm thought the performance criteria useful, but was less satisfied by the way these criteria were linked to the bonus system.

The aspects of management structure and processes that most affected the young lawyers appeared to be the organization of and support by the work unit – including the partner – and the counterbalance to the partners’ dominance at critical moments. The interviewed lawyers did not report high expectations of management values at the onset, but several of them were

disappointed by a lack of structure and support in the unit. This especially concerned the lawyers who (temporarily or permanently) suffered from a lack of self-esteem or self-confidence, sometimes due to temporary circumstances such as a shortage of work or health problems. Support of the partner and the direct colleagues in the work unit was reported to be essential in difficult times and uncertainty. Confident lawyers trusted their abilities to deal directly with the partners involved and had less need for management support. "The most important asset is your self-confidence" as a lawyer remarked who suffered from lack of self-confidence in the first year of her traineeship. The interviews illustrate some fit effects of management values that can be attributed to more PP- or more MPB-like firms. Lawyers who were employed by PP-like firms seemed to have modest expectations of management quality and to take the dominance of the partners for granted. At the more MPB-like firms the approach was more balanced; quality of practice management appeared to have a more prominent role in the lawyers' experience. However, even with more countervailing factors, also in the MPB the partners are regarded as the ultimate decisive factor. Self-confidence appeared as an important differentiating factor between the lawyers in regard of their need for management structure and support, explaining the moderating effects of CSE as found in the surveys.

The interviewed lawyers had limited experience with and insight in management structure and issues. The most important aspect, the direct work relations, may differ between partners and practice areas within the same firm. These and similar factors may explain the lack of convergence of perceived and actual firm values. Nevertheless, the degree in which one's needs and expectations are met by the firms' management was an important reason for satisfaction of the lawyers. The interviews suggested that management value fit does not influence commitment and intention to stay as much as expertise values do. The effects of management values on satisfaction appeared stronger than the effects on commitment. Despite negative experiences with his work environment, "the commitment with my firm is not weakened".

#### *3.3.4. Short term reward*

Only the interviewed lawyers at firm 17 had some experience with short term, variable pay. This firm linked the variable pay to the appraisal of a large number of performance criteria. One lawyer commented that the system made it very difficult to rise above a medium score. "Good performance should be better rewarded." The other lawyers at this firm only complained about the content and complexity of the appraisal system.

The interviewed lawyers at the other firms did not report any experiences with variable pay at their firm. The data on compensation and benefits in law firms confirm that most firms with bonus systems do not apply these systems during traineeship. For these lawyers, short term reward is represented rather by the informal and formal feedback from the supervising partner and other senior colleagues. Several of them reported to receive hardly any feedback, neither positive nor negative. "No appreciation for my efforts was ever expressed". "Except for the formal appraisal, direct positive or negative feedback was very scarce". Another lawyer remarked that you had to ask for feedback to receive it. One lawyer at a MPB-like firm praised her supervisor for the positive feedback as well as formal and informal feedback in general, but this was exceptional.

The interviews did not produce more helpful information than this to explain the effects of short term reward value fit. It is clear that lawyers with high expectations of short term reward and feedback at the start could be easily disappointed, even when firms applied more or less elaborate appraisal systems. This may explain the negative correlation between lawyers' values and satisfaction in survey T1. Some remarks also shed light on the results of survey T2. Lawyers stated that they needed self-confidence to ask for feedback; confident lawyers apparently are less appreciative of elaborate feedback systems, but nevertheless want to be rewarded and appraised for their performance. A moderate level of short term reward values of lawyer and firm might therefore be linked to the highest level of satisfaction and commitment.

Short term reward and feedback systems apparently are features of the firm that send a relatively clear message about firm values, as was also supported by the significant correlation between actual and perceived firm values. The effects of these values appeared mixed and the balance between too little and too much rather delicate.

### *3.3.5. Long term perspective*

Of the interviewed lawyers, one expressed a clear partnership ambition; some others made their intentions conditional upon other choices or developments. One of them remarked: "If I stay working as a lawyer in a law firm, my ambition is to become partner at my present firm" and another had a similar outlook. Two of them hoped for better work-life balance for partners: "I don't expect to be able to combine family life with partnership, but partnership conditions may develop to make this combination better feasible". They did not recognize partnership as an important topic among their peers; for most of them the invitation to stay at their firms after

traineeship was the only explicit goal, in almost all cases the most important goal. Only a few colleagues were really 'into' partnership. In the two most PP-like firms those were referred to positively ("there are a few; they are ambitious, smart, eager, driven"), at the other firms more critically ("we have one of those; we call him the partner-trainee").

Several lawyers expressed their specialist expertise ambitions as the dominant factor in their career choices. "My long term ambitions depend on the opportunities to develop my expertise (in this specific area)". Another considered that "My ambition might be directed towards the expertise part of partnership", meaning that he would aim at the expertise level of the partners' work, not so much at the commercial or management implications.

A few interviewed lawyers seemed already to have established that partnership did not fit their ambitions. "It dominates your life too much", remarked a male lawyer. Almost all interviewed female lawyers doubted if they would be able or prepared to combine a partnership career with having children. "I do not see many examples of successful and attractive ways to combine these two".

Alternative career tracks such as senior associate and salary partner received mixed reactions. At both PP-like firms, it was not considered a serious proposition. "At our firm, for associates, partnership potential is decisive". "Lawyers join our firm for the training and education programs or to become partner". At the other firms, appraisals ranged from critical to positive. "It is very well possible to stay as senior associate or counsel without partnership ambitions"; "I do not exclude the possibility of staying on as non-partner"; "it is possible to stay without being partner, but this is still looked upon as exceptional"; "although there are alternatives, partnership still is the norm"; "the senior associate position does not seem really attractive"; "at the end, the salary partnership is a phase before partnership". It is clear that the alternative permanent positions are part of the career options at MPB-like firms, but their appeal to young lawyers varies. For some, they are associated with working part-time "which is possible in some practice areas such as labour and litigation but less so in others".

The survey results therefore find some resonance in the interviews. During the traineeship period, some lawyers appeared to develop stronger and more realistic long term ambitions. Especially the female lawyers, but also some men, expressed a growing self-confidence after the first year of introduction and intensive training. "I experienced a dip after half a year – I see that many trainees have similar experiences. After the training period

you get more grip on your cases, your confidence grows". However, it is also clear that for these young lawyers, the major career concern is surviving the traineeship period more than the long term perspectives. As the end of traineeship approaches, this concern grows and probably has a predominant effect on attitudes. This would illustrate the decline of the explaining potential of long term values in survey T2. Only the confident lawyers allow themselves to look beyond the end of traineeship. Although most of them did not yet develop an outspoken ambition, they nevertheless seemed to appreciate it when their firms offered long term perspectives. Lawyers with low long term values are less satisfied than their colleagues, possibly because they find themselves less at home in a law firm that expects a career focus, at least to some degree. But lawyers with *high* long term values appeared less satisfied as well. Probably, they did not find their values matched by their firms, as some interviews illustrated. These observations are in line with the survey results after moderation for application success (survey 1) and CSE (survey 2), that showed a maximum satisfaction level at the combination of high (but not extremely high) firm values and moderate lawyers values.

None of the lawyers was offered personal career advice or counselling by their firms. Probably law firms consider the traineeship to be too early, but several lawyers said they would have welcomed the opportunity.

### 3.3.6. *Summary*

The interviews have illustrated the (mis)fit effects found in the cases of the respondents to both surveys, but also gave different explanations for different values. Most interviews illustrated the relation between fit, satisfaction and commitment, but some findings illustrated how in specific circumstances an increasing fit could coincide with diminishing outcomes. For instance, a fit of short term reward values might not lead to a high level of satisfaction when the lawyer did not agree with the results of a feedback or bonus system. Also, expertise values might fit, but nevertheless a lawyer could be frustrated in her specific expertise ambitions. So, individual experiences might counter positive or negative fit effects.

The interviews also provided several illustrations of the relations between firm expertise values and satisfaction and between firm long term perspective values and intention to stay, that appeared from the cases of the respondents to both surveys. As discussed, although young lawyers may not have determined their personal long term perspectives, their attitudes were nevertheless influenced by the long term perspectives the firm offered, especially by the uncertainty or lack of perspectives. Also, the interviews

illustrated the multidimensional nature of management values as well as the ambiguous attitudes towards short term rewards.

#### 4. *Discussion*

Using qualitative methods such as interviews may not be the most suitable method to establish and determine the effects of P-O fit. Interviews can nevertheless illustrate why some fit effects occur and other expected effects do not. It is no surprise that the opportunity to become an expert in their profession is vital to young professionals, but the survey results and interviews are revealing about the risk of disappointment of these ambitions in the big law firm practices. This risk is larger in the professional partnership, because this firm type attracts and selects lawyers with the most outspoken ambitions. The abandonment, by the MPB-like firms – that have more differentiated levels of expertise values along different practice areas - of the obligatory change of practice area for trainees is a decision that might help to improve fit opportunities for their lawyers.

The interviews also pointed out the different aspects of law firm management that are relevant for the lawyers during traineeship. Remarkable was the absence of any form of case or process management in almost all firms, at least in the perception the young lawyers. Further, the role of firm and HR management appeared to range from invisible to modest. Young lawyers who are (temporarily) less confident or encounter setbacks in their personal development and performance run a serious risk of losing their perspective at the firm or even in the legal profession by lack of support. Confident lawyers are capable to find their own way and prefer to do so, but they also recognize the dependence on the supervising partner or the support of direct colleagues. In the MPB, this dependence is compensated more or less by management and systems, in the PP the dominance of the partners appeared only restricted by peer feedback. Young lawyers in these firms took this as a fact of life they had to deal with. Fit and misfit of management values probably concern these aspects of law firm management. The interviews illustrated the dissatisfying effect of the lack of management values that also appeared in the surveys and the change analysis of the 38 cases.

At most firms, material short term rewards through incentive pay systems are not yet part of the conditions during traineeship. The survey results demonstrated that the young lawyers' perceptions of their firms' systems and policies nevertheless approached the actual firm values according to

the archetype scores. These systems are probably frequently discussed by more senior lawyers and form a distinctive firm characteristic. In the interviews, lawyers at the more MPB-like firms appeared to be somewhat more concerned about the effects of short term reward and the underlying appraisal systems. A few of them expressed their concern that differences in performance should be treated fairly. The practice areas of these firms are more diversified than the PP and the partnership also is less homogeneous; it is imaginable that these firms attract lawyers with more diverse capabilities and that differences in performances of these firms' lawyers are more noticeable among colleagues. Among the interviewed lawyers of the more PP-like firms, material short term rewards did not appear an issue. This attitude may be influenced by their firms' culture as expressed by its reward systems, but also by a more homogeneous peer group.

The short term reward value scale leaves room to include non material rewards such as positive feedback from the supervisor. In general, the experiences of the interviewed young lawyers with (positive) feedback were scarce. High expectations, high personal values appeared easily disappointed. The interviews illustrated that short term reward value fit is well imaginable when lawyers and firm values are both low, but much less so when lawyers values are high. The surveys and change analysis pointed at possibly negative effects of a perception of high level short term reward values. The balance between too little and too much short term reward and feedback is delicate, as the interviews and survey T2 demonstrated. Even self-confident lawyers preferred a moderate level. According to equity theory (Trevor et al., 2007) it can be argued that confident lawyers in MPB-like firms have a greater need for short term rewards than their peers at PP-like firms. Confident lawyers expect to be rewarded for their performance and abilities, especially when they perceive the performances of their colleagues as varying, as might be expected in the more heterogeneous MPB. This reward is conditional for their commitment and satisfaction. Further, in the MPB partnership perspective is not as strong a motivator as in the PP. Firms would do wise to align their reward and appraisal systems to their archetype and carefully design these systems to express what lawyers themselves find distinctive.

Fit of long term perspective values lost some of its explanatory power in survey T2. According to the interviewed lawyers, only few of their peers have clear long term or partnership ambitions. The approaching expiry of the traineeship period did not lead to a stronger articulation of long term ambitions, as I had expected. On the contrary, uncertainty about their

career wishes, possibilities and perspectives seemed to have reduced the expression of these wishes. While almost all interviewed female lawyers expressed doubts on the possibility of combining partnership career and family life, the survey did not show a gender difference in long term values and intention to stay. Apparently, male lawyers also had doubts about the desirability or feasibility of a law firm career. The interviews gave several examples. Meanwhile, the modest expression of the long term ambitions of young lawyers does not justify the conclusion that long term perspectives are not yet relevant to this group. On the contrary, young lawyers appreciate the long term perspectives their firms offer, even when they did not (yet) decide on their own ambitions. Firms could be advised to offer them more clarity on individual perspectives and support in making career choices. Strong personal long term values reduced satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay, especially for lawyers with high application success (survey T1) and CSE (survey T2), compared to a moderate value level. This indicates a serious risk that the most talented and confident lawyers get dissatisfied and leave the firm when their firms do not explicitly express their career perspectives already in the early years. This risk is mirrored by the predominantly negative direction of the corresponding changes of intention to stay and perceived long term perspective values of the firm. In PP-like firms, these perspectives are linked to partnership; in the MPB, they may also be directed to alternative positions.

#### *4.1. Limitations*

In Chapter 3 I discussed the limitations that followed from the limited number of respondents to both surveys and the lack of data for longitudinal analysis. I did not intend the methods and findings presented in this Chapter as a substitute for longitudinal analysis. The cases of the 38 lawyers that responded to both surveys and the eleven interviews mainly served to support the interpretation of the results of the surveys.