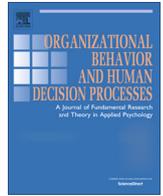




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Person–organization fit effects on organizational attraction: A test of an expectations-based model



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mechanisms that explain why person–organization (PO) fit impacts organizational attraction. Adopting Edwards and Cable's (2009) approach, an integrative model is developed around the idea that experiencing value congruence during the recruitment process perpetuates certain expectations about future work environments and employer relationships. These expectations in turn have a positive impact on organizational attraction. Evidence from a longitudinal study on a sample of job seekers suggests that expected opportunities for value expression and need fulfillment offered the most viable explanations of value congruence effects. The implications of important observed differences in the experience of PO fit between job seekers and full-time employees are discussed.

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Introduction

Hiring the right talent is a key concern for all organizations, where attracting top applicants constitutes an important way to build competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Yu & Cable, 2012). Although several predictors of organizational attraction have been identified from years of research, few have garnered as much recent attention as person–organization (PO) fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The importance of PO fit to organizational attraction is highlighted by Chapman et al.' (2005) meta-analysis, which indicates that PO fit accounts for as much as 31% of the variance in organizational attraction. More recently, fit perceptions have also been identified as the strongest predictor of applicant attraction relative to other factors like job and organization characteristics, and the recruitment process (Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). Establishing PO fit has thus been identified as a powerful tactic to attract high quality talent for organizations (Collins & Han, 2004). Yet, despite a good amount of evidence supporting the use of PO fit as a tool for attracting talent, several issues continue to cloud our current understanding of PO fit experience in a job search context.

First, there is a general lack of understanding about why PO fit affects organizational attraction. Most research has relied on the common notion that “fit” is a good thing and hence must lead to

positive outcomes like attraction (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006; Yu, 2009). Though several different explanations have been used to account for the relationship between PO fit and organizational attraction, they have largely gone untested. For instance, Tom (1971) argues that individuals choose to join organizations with similar personality traits because it facilitates self-enhancement by allowing them to express or “implement” their self concept (p. 575). In contrast, Schneider's (1987) Attraction–Selection–Attrition model suggests that people are attracted to employers with similar qualities so as to ensure that their psychological needs will be satisfied on the job (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Cable & Judge, 1996). Though these arguments may both constitute plausible explanations of PO fit effects, such explanations have seldom been explicitly tested, compared, or integrated into a single parsimonious model.

Second, existing recruitment research also largely fails to take into account the multidimensional nature of the PO fit construct. In her influential review, Kristof (1996) highlighted two distinct forms of fit where the supplementary version is based on similarity between person and organizational entities, whereas the complementary version depends on whether either the person or the organization provides what the other party needs (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Unfortunately, early PO fit research among job seekers has seldom distinguished between these distinct types of fit (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994; Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Cable & Judge, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Turban & Keon, 1993).

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Although some recent research draws a distinction between the two (Carless, 2005; Kristof-Brown, 2000), it has not gone beyond examining the independent effects of complementary and supplementary fit on recruitment outcomes. As such, our knowledge about how these distinct types of fit may be interrelated during the recruitment process is limited. Given that both types of PO fit draw from the same general PO fit framework and are often linked to the same recruitment outcomes, this issue also signifies a problematic lack of parsimony (Cable & Edwards, 2004).

Edwards and Cable (2009) recently addressed similar issues when they developed and tested an integrated model that brought together key explanations of value-based supplementary fit (i.e. value congruence) effects on attitudinal outcomes. Their findings provided insight into the exact processes through which fit influenced outcomes like job satisfaction and organizational identification. This study adopts a similar approach to address the paucity of research that explains why supplementary and complementary types of PO fit matter to job seekers. Specifically, the current theoretical model is developed based on the foundational work provided by two studies that have provided crucial insight into PO fit effects. The first study is Cable and Edwards' (2004) integration of supplementary and complementary versions of fit, which showed that both types of fit could work together to impact outcomes. The second study is Edwards and Cable's (2009) investigation of the mediating processes that are involved in transmitting value congruence effects onto positive outcomes. The current model adopts Edwards and Cable's (2009) approach to integrate key explanations drawn from the job search literature, positioning them as mediators of the effects of value congruence on organizational attraction. Rather than just being a straightforward replication of Edwards and Cable's (2009) study on full-time employees in a different job search context, the current model incorporates and develops theoretical explanations that are unique to the context of job search. For instance, the current model contains specific relationships between the two distinct types of supplementary and complementary fit that were not investigated in Edwards and Cable's (2009) study.

This model is tested using longitudinal data gathered from a sample of job seekers progressing through their job search. Like in Edwards and Cable's (2009) study, results indicate that certain explanations hold significantly more weight compared to others. However, the explanations that receive support differ considerably from those that Edwards and Cable (2009) observed in their study. Current findings thus point toward different psychological processes governing the experience of PO fit between job seekers and full-time employees.

Theory and hypothesis development

PO fit, expectations, and organizational attraction

Expectations about the rewards of organizational membership are hugely influential during job search (Wanous, 1977). Job seekers invariably form expectations about organizational and job characteristics when evaluating future employers (Irving & Meyer, 1994). Recruiters thus try to create positive expectations about future workplaces through their recruitment activities and communications (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000).

Expectations are salient during job search because job seekers face a good amount of uncertainty about future employers and their work environments. Signaling theory argues that such uncertainty encourages job seekers to try to make sense of their job search through socio-cognitive processes that involve reflection, interpretation, and giving meaning to their experiences with potential employers (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973). Such sense-making takes place when individuals

infer unobservable characteristics of employer organizations based on their experiences prior to organizational entry. For example, Rynes et al.' (1991) found that job seekers interpreted a variety of experiences during recruitment as symbolic of other unobserved organizational attributes such as organizational efficiency and workplace culture. Thus, individual experiences during job search serve as an inferential base for the formation of expectations about what working at a particular organization is going to be like.

The current model of PO fit is based on the idea that perceived PO fit with employers during job search is important because it encourages the development of certain expectations about organizations and future employment relationships. Individuals associate value congruence with certain important organizational attributes that in turn influence how attracted they are to certain employers. Therefore, understanding the type of expectations that value congruence engenders contributes to the literature by improving our understanding of why PO fit affects organizational attraction.

Research has typically conceptualized job seeker expectations using a wide range of job and organizational attributes ranging from functional aspects like pay, work hours, and security to more symbolic aspects like prestige and personal growth (Greenhaus, Sugalski, & Crispin, 1978; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Sheard, 1970). The present investigation builds on such work to investigate and compare different types of expectations that explain how PO fit impacts organizational attraction. Research on recruitment and job search has used several distinct expectations-based explanations to account for the relationship between PO fit and organizational attraction. These expectations are seen to mediate the relationship between PO fit and organizational attraction in the proposed model.

The majority of recent research on PO fit has conceptualized the construct in the form of value congruence, which exists when job seekers and potential employers attach similar importance to certain work-based values such as relationships, autonomy, and prestige (Chatman, 1989). Such research typically suggests that job seekers are more attracted to employer organizations whose perceived values match their own (Adkins et al., 1994; Cable & Judge, 1996, 1997; Judge & Bretz, 1992). The specific types of values investigated in this study are: *relationships*, *security*, *prestige*, and *autonomy*. These values are drawn from Schwartz's (1992) circumplex model of human values, which reflects a comprehensive range of values across all individuals and societies. Subsequent research by Cable and Edwards (2004) identified these values as core work-related values that represent markers along the ends of the two axes along which basic human motivations are differentiated. Relationships (i.e. social connections with coworkers) and prestige (i.e. enjoying status and respect) represent values at either end of the *self-transcendence versus self-enhancement* axis respectively. In contrast, security (i.e. job stability) and autonomy (i.e. control over how work is performed) represent corresponding ends of the *conservation versus openness to change* axis (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). Selecting these dimensions does not deny the existence of other ones that could potentially also apply to PO fit. Rather, focusing on these four dimensions allows the current investigation to focus on a manageable set of dimensions that are relevant and comprehensive enough to investigate relationships involving PO fit (cf. Cable & Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999).

Expectations of opportunities for value expression

Value expression has significant implications for individuals and their self-esteem. The ability to express one's values is important to maintaining a positive sense of self, where opportunities for value expression can bring about self-affirmation and protect against threats to self-esteem (Steele & Liu, 1983). The opportunity to express one's values also plays an important role during job

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