

Values Matter: Exploring How Job Seekers' Personal Values Influence Organization Attractiveness



DOI: 10.26573/2024.18.1.1

Volume 18, Number 1

January 2024, pp. 1-10

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The person-organization fit (P-O fit) literature suggests that job seekers are attracted to organizations that match their personal values; but, to date, little is known about how individuals' personal values might affect their preferences for particular job attributes when seeking a job. In this paper, using data from 497 job seekers in France, we show how values like family security, comfortable life, pleasure, self-respect, intellectual and ambitious impact the level of attraction towards specific attributes, while salvation does not. Findings will help recruiters create job ads targeting applicants whose values fit with the organization.

Keywords: Rokeach Values Survey, Personal Values, Job Attributes

1. Introduction

Employers may invest a great amount of time and money to attract job applicants. Potential applicants, on the other side, will use information about job attributes, communicated by companies, in determining where to apply for employment. The person-organization fit (P-O fit) literature suggests that job seekers' personal values will influence their decisions about where to work. However, to date, little is known about how those values influence which job attributes are particularly salient to job seekers. In this exploratory work, we investigate whether job seekers' personal values influence the salience of the job attributes signaled by employers and evaluated by job seekers as part of their job search process. Based on the P-O fit literature and signaling theory, we hypothesize generally that job seekers, in their job searches, will emphasize job attributes that fit their personal values. Job seekers will evaluate the job attributes communicated by organizations as signals, based upon which they will develop a positive or negative attitude toward the job and/or organization, which should influence their intention to apply for the job. Knowledge about any such links between values and job attribute preferences could conceivably allow human resource managers to identify the most pertinent job attributes to communicate to job seekers.

In a job search context, job seekers' behavior is the consequence of the interpretation of the information they can access about a job and/or an organization (Barber & Roehling, 1993). More specifically, Barber (1998) argues that job search is a multi-phase process in which job seekers start by gathering information about a job and/or an organization. They process the information and develop a positive or negative attitude toward the organization. In accordance with the theory of planned behaviour,

a positive attitude is expected to lead to a higher level of attraction, which, in turn, leads to a higher probability of developing the intention to apply for the job, and of subsequently applying (Rynes, 1991).

The behavior of job seekers is the consequence of an attitude derived from the interpretation of the information gathered during the job search (Mauger and Bryant-Lees, 2022). Depending on the context of the job search, job seekers will focus on specific attributes. Therefore, we argue that personal values might influence job seekers' attitudes by influencing the evaluation of the information. Our purpose in this paper, then, is to investigate the relationship between job seekers' personal values and their preferences regarding the attributes evaluated during the job search process.

2. Literature and Hypotheses

Background

Milton Rokeach (1973) described values as deep-seated core-beliefs or guiding principles that transcend specific situations to direct human behavior in decision-making. He defines a personal value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973, 5). In simple terms, personal values represent what is important to an individual. Past research argues that personal values occupy a central position in an individual's cognitive makeup and thought processes. A person's personal values influence her perceptions and interpretations of situations, and thereby affect her attitudes, decisions, choices, and behaviors (Rokeach, 1973). For example, empirical evidence suggests that managerial decisions are influenced by the values of decision makers.

Companies communicate information about their jobs, their organization and/or their recruitment process in order to attract potential candidates (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Turban et al., 1995). Attribute preferences refer to the job attributes emphasized by job seekers in comparing job options and deciding whether or not to apply for a particular position (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Rynes, 1991). Signaling theory offers rationales for why job seekers are attracted to an organization. They recall their knowledge about the attribute as a signal to direct their job pursuit intention. To date, researchers have found that about 30 attributes have an impact on organization attractiveness. These include attributes such as location, company size, industry (Turban et al., 1995; Barber & Roehling, 1993), salary (Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Rynes et al., 1983), advancement opportunity, availability of training programs, benefits, job security (Collins & Stevens, 2002) diversity management, human resource systems/supervisors (Posner, 1981), image (Aiman-Smith, Baeur & Cable, 2001), corporate social responsibility (Turban & Greening, 1997), reputation (Wang, 2013), culture (Catanzaro, Moore, Marshall, 2010), and type of ownership (Turban, 2001).

Past studies are clear about the effect of values on the level of attraction towards attributes signaling corporate social responsibility and performance (Wang, 2013) or pay preference (Bretz and Judge, 1994). Less is known on the impact of values on other attributes communicated by companies during the recruitment process. Research on organization attractiveness shows that among the attributes communicated by companies, job seekers are evaluating more than 30 attributes to make a decision to apply or not (Posner, 1981). The content-oriented decision-making theory suggests

that job attribute preferences will not be the same for all job seekers: that is, job seekers will differ in their perceptions of the salience of various job attributes.

P-O fit theory also suggests that differences in personal values between job seekers will manifest themselves in differences in perceptions of the attractiveness of potential employers: job seekers are more likely to be attracted to organizations that they see as reflecting or supportive of their own personal values (Kristof, 1996)

In a similar vein, Holland's theory of personalities and work environments (1997) suggests that vocational choice is an expression of the personality of job seekers: people will seek out environments in which they can use their particular skills, express their attitudes, and maintain a liked role.

From these various perspectives, the attributes influencing organizational attractiveness are assumed to be heterogeneous across job seekers: various job seekers will react differently to an organization's recruitment activities, depending on their personal characteristics, including their personal values. We therefore suggest that the salience of various job attributes communicated by employers will vary across job seekers to some degree, based on the personal values of those job seekers. In what follows, we assess the possibility of a relationship between the possession of certain personal values and the salience of various job attributes.

3. Hypotheses

Below, we articulate hypotheses concerning possible relationships between particular personal values and the salience of specific job attributes communicated to job seekers by employers.

A Comfortable Life. Previous research has suggested that individuals who value a comfortable life tend to pay attention to financial gain. In a job search context, financial gain is communicated by potential employers through the rewards the company gives to employees, including pay, benefits, and promotions (Cable & Judge, 1996). Accordingly, we hypothesize that job seekers who place a high value on a comfortable life will emphasize job attributes communicating salary, financial benefits and advancement.

H1a: Job seekers who value a comfortable life highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling salary.

H1b: Job seekers who value a comfortable life highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling financial benefits.

H1c: Job seekers who value a comfortable life highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling advancement opportunities.

Family Security. Job seekers who value family security may be reluctant to work in some specific geographic areas that they consider unsafe. They may also pay attention to educational opportunities and the activity sector in which the firm operates, as these attributes communicate the idea of professional security. Accordingly, we anticipate that individuals who place a high value on family security will be pay closer attention to attributes communicating educational opportunity, location and activity sector.

H2a: Job seekers who value family security highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling educational opportunities.

H2b: Job seekers who value family security highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling location.

H2c: Job seekers who value family security highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling activity sector.

Pleasure. Self-determination theory asserts that positive emotions are developed when individuals engage in an intrinsically motivated activity. When individuals engage in an activity they have control over, they have higher intrinsic motivation and consequently they experience pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In a job search context, job seekers valuing pleasure highly are expected to look for an activity they can have control over to experience pleasure at work. Pleasure obtained from work can also result from the relationships with the colleagues or supervisors. For example, managers can give some autonomy and control to employees in their way to perform the task. Hence, it is expected that:

H3a: Job seekers who value pleasure highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling job description.

H3b: Job seekers who value pleasure highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling work environment.

H3c: Job seekers who value pleasure highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling job organization.

H3d: Job seekers who value pleasure highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling familiarity with someone within the company.

Salvation. The workplace spirituality literature develops the idea that spirituality is good for individuals and business profits (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009), as honest work will lead to financial rewards (Dyck & Wiebe, 2012). In contrast, social salvationists place more emphasis on “promoting an egalitarian society” (Miller, 2007: 25) as well as “organizational transformation and social justice in the economic sphere” (Miller, 2007: 60). Based on these two approaches to salvation, we anticipate that job seekers valuing salvation highly will have the tendency to pay close attention to financial attributes such as salary and financial benefits, as well as organizational attributes such as management system and diversity.

H4a: Job seekers who value salvation highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling salary.

H4b: Job seekers who value salvation highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling financial benefit.

H4c: Job seekers who value salvation highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling diversity.

H4d: Job seekers who value salvation highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling management system.

Self-Respect. Self-respect relates to the idea of being proud of oneself and confident of who one is (Guarel-Atay, Xie, Chen & Kahle, 2010). One way an employee might facilitate self-respect is by improving their skills through educational opportunities.

Another mode might be through performance of a task that corresponds with her skills or values. Finally, self-respect can come from the way she is managed by others: job seekers will maintain self-respect if they feel they are respected by managers within a respectful work environment and management system. Accordingly, we anticipate:

H5a: Job seekers who value self-respect highly are less likely to emphasize attributes signaling educational opportunities.

H5b: Job seekers who value self-respect highly are less likely to emphasize attributes signaling job description.

H5c: Job seekers who value self-respect highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling work environment.

H5d: Job seekers who value self-respect highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling management system.

Intellectual. An intellectual individual is intelligent and reflective (Rokeach, 1973). Several studies in France, investigating job seekers have shown that individuals with a lower level of education are more attracted to continuing education. Accordingly, we anticipate.

H6: Job seekers who value intellect less are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling educational opportunities.

Ambitious. Ambition refers to the strong desire to do or achieve something. This value is also associated with hard work and aspiration to succeed (Rokeach, 1973). Research has shown that ambitious individuals do better at school; and, in their professional lives, they tend to obtain more prestigious positions and higher salaries than individuals with less ambition (Otto et al., 2017). Based on previous research, we expect that job seekers valuing ambition will pay attention to attributes communicating about salary and advancement. We also anticipate that ambitious individuals will pay attention to the reputation and the image of the organization.

H7a: Job seekers who value ambition highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling advancement.

H7b: Job seekers who value ambition highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling salary.

H7c: Job seekers who value ambition highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling reputation of the company.

H7d: Job seekers who value ambition highly are more likely to emphasize attributes signaling image of the company.

4. Methods

Over a three-month period, 500 job seekers from twelve employment agencies in the Normandie region of France were asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire during in-person meetings, during a three-month period. Participants were invited by mail, email and/or during face-to-face meetings with their advisors to participate. At the time of the invitation, they were informed that participation was not mandatory, and

that data would be collected anonymously for academic research purposes only. It was clearly communicated that declining to participate would not result in any negative repercussions. Every participant gave a verbal approval without any type of reward in return. During the distribution process, research assistants delivered a written definition for each attribute and stayed available to answer potential questions from participants. Due to missing data, the final sample size is $N=497$.

A four-page questionnaire was created in English and then translated to French by a private company. The local language version was then translated back into English by another private company to ensure translation's accuracy. A direct estimation approach was chosen (Schwab *et al.*, 1987) in which the participants responded to the question: "How important are the following criteria in your intention to send an application?" from a list of twenty-six attributes impacting organization attractiveness compiled from the literature review (e.g., Mauger and Bryant-Lees, 2022; Posner, 1981; Ployhart and Ryan, 1998; Rynes and Miller, 1983; Schwoerer and Rosen, 1989). Each attribute was evaluated by participants using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - *very important* to 5 - *not at all important*. The questionnaire also asked participants about relevant demographic questions including gender, age, education level, industry and duration of job seeking.

Personal values were measured using the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS). We measured attribute salience by asking, "Are the following criteria important in your intention to send an application?" Participants identified their perceptions of the importance of various job attributes derived from the organizational attractiveness literature, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'very important' to 'not important at all'.

5. Results

Results are summarized in Table 1. They suggest that job seekers who value comfortable life tend to pay closer attention to the attributes, salary ($F= 3.943$; $p=.048$) and financial benefit ($F= 5.632$; $p=.018$). However, individuals valuing comfortable life do not pay more attention to the potential for advancement ($F= 1.144$; $p=.285$). Concerning family security, location ($F= 4.132$; $p=.043$) was emphasized by job seekers valuing family security highly. However, the relationship between family security and educational opportunities was contrary to what we had anticipated, with job seekers who valued family security less placing more emphasis on educational opportunities ($F= 3.857$; $p=.050$). We found no evidence of a relationship between family security values and the salience of attributes related to the employer's sector of activity.

Regarding pleasure, results suggested a positive relationship between that value and the work environment attribute ($F= 3.553$; $p=.060$; $\beta=.100$). We found a negative relationship between pleasure and familiarity with people in the organization ($F= 2.810$; $p=.095$; $\beta=-.089$) suggesting that, contrary to our hypothesis, the more highly job seekers value pleasure, the less attention they pay to knowing people within the company. We found no significant relationship between pleasure and job description ($F= .009$; $p=.923$) nor between pleasure and job organization ($F= .927$; $p=.336$).

Contrary to our hypotheses, we found no significant relationship between salvation and the attributes of salary ($F= 2.694$; $p=.102$), financial benefit ($F= 1.444$; $p=.230$), diversity ($F= .418$; $p=.518$), and management system ($F= .106$; $p=.745$).

There was a negative relationship between self-respect and both educational opportunities ($F=2.801$; $p=.095$) and job description ($F=3.159$; $p=.076$), meaning that job seekers paid less attention to job description and educational opportunities the more they valued self-respect. We found no evidence of a relationship between self-respect and work environment ($F=.139$; $p=.710$), nor between self-respect and management system ($F=.929$; $p=.336$).

In accordance with our hypothesis, we observed a negative relationship between the 'intellectual' value and educational opportunities ($F=4.625$; $p=.032$). Likewise, consistent with our hypotheses, there was a positive relationship between ambition and various attributes: advancement ($F=3.071$; $p=.081$), salary ($F=4.346$; $p=.038$), reputation ($F=5.017$; $p=.026$), and image ($F=7.700$; $p=.006$).

Table 1 Summary of Results

Value	Attribute	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	β	R^2		
Comfortable life	Salary	3.943	.048**	.106	.011	H1a	Supported
	Financial benefit	5.632	.018**	.126	.016	H1b	Supported
	Advancement	1.144	.285			H1c	Rejected
Family security	Educational opportunities	3.857	.050*	-.105	.011	H2a	Supported
	Location	4.132	.043**	.108	.012	H2b	Supported
	Activity sector	.022	.883			H2c	Rejected
Pleasure	Job description	.009	.923			H3a	Rejected
	Work environment	3.553	.060*	.100	.010	H3b	Supported
	Job organization	.927	.336			H3c	Rejected
	Familiarity with people in the org	2.810	.095*	-.089	.008	H3d	Supported
Salvation	Salary	2.694	.102			H4a	Rejected
	Financial benefit	1.444	.230			H4b	Rejected
	Diversity	.418	.518			H4c	Rejected
	Management system	.106	.745			H4d	Rejected
Self-respect	Educational opportunities	2.801	.095*	-.089	.008	H5a	Supported
	Job description	3.159	.076*	-.095	.009	H5b	Supported
	Work environment	.139	.710			H5c	Rejected
	Management system	.929	.336			H5d	Rejected
Intellectual	Educational opportunities	4.625	.032**	-.115	.013	H6	Supported
Ambitious	Advancement	3.071	.081*	.094	.009	H7a	Supported
	Salary	4.346	.038**	.111	.012	H7b	Supported
	Reputation	5.017	.026**	.119	.014	H7c	Supported
	Image	7.700	.006**	.147	.022	H7d	Supported

Note: ** $P<0.050$ (95% Confidence Interval) * $P<0.100$ (90% Confidence Interval)

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings suggest possible relationships between some job seeker's personal values and the attraction towards specific job attributes communicated by companies. This corroborates the position that job seekers' personal values influence both the evaluation of the information communicated by companies during the recruitment process and their vocational choices and suggests that HR managers might adapt their job postings to tailor the job attributes they highlight to the value profiles of the job seekers that best fit their requirements.

7. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Companies are facing the challenge of communicating the most efficient signals in order to differentiate themselves from the competition as well as attract the best pool of candidates. Results from this study can aid organizations in understanding the way job seekers evaluate these signals. Using these results, human resource managers will be able to select the attributes to communicate depending on the type of job seekers' personality they want to attract. Results show that the way to communicate about the job characteristics should not be standardized. Companies have to emphasize on the attributes that will attract the targeted pool of candidates based on their personality. For example, organizations, in need for more extroverted employees, have to communicate signals about rewards, nature of the work and work life balance to the labor market in order to attract the adequate personalities.

In addition, since personality impacts job seekers' evaluation of the attributes sent by the companies, this study can also be useful for employment agency advisors. Testing job seekers' personalities can help advisors understand the type of jobs to propose that best corresponds with the candidate.

8. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The research design is identical to the one used by Posner (1981) and more recently by Mauger and Bryant-Lees (2022). However, the use of a single-item scale to measure organization attractiveness can be seen as a limitation. Many researchers are using the multi-item scale developed by Fisher et al. (1979) combining organization attractiveness general assessment and intention assessment (Highhouse et al., 1999, 2003; Turban et al., 1998; Turban & Keon, 1993; Yüce & Highhouse, 1998). The decision to use a research design with a single item scale was made based on the number of attributes investigated and the limited amount of time available at meetings to collect data at employment service agencies.

Since the purpose of the study was to measure the direct impact of personality on the job seekers' level of organization attractiveness, the signals were analyzed as a category, without specificity. For example, respondents were asked if the salary was important in their decision to send an application, without ranges of salaries. This can be seen as a limitation as for example some job seekers can look for service-oriented jobs while others are looking for jobs without contact with customers. In this case, job seekers with different personalities would be targeting different types of jobs. However, the study could not measure this difference as the attribute is not specified. Future research should investigate the field of research by adding different levels of attributes in order to be more specific in the conclusion.

Lastly, the dataset was collected in France in an economic situation with high unemployment (near 10% at the time). In this context, the generalization of the results can only be made to countries with similar economy and culture. Future research should investigate job seekers in countries with different socio-economic environments to generalize the results. Variables such as unemployment rate, perceived level of job opportunity, financial context of the job seekers can be studied. Moreover, this study investigates the direct impact of personality on organizational attractiveness, future research should focus on other personal variables such as self-esteem and self-efficacy.

9. Declaration of Interested

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

10. Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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