THE ROLE OF SITUATAIONAL STRENGTH IN ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTION: AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

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THE ROLE OF SITUATAIONAL STRENGTH IN ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTION: AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

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SUMMARY

Organizational environment (broadly conceptualized) has been shown to have an important influence on job choice (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005). Controversy exists, however, regarding how to operationalize organizational environment in a way that is both useful and parsimonious. Consistent with the perspective that situational strength meets these criteria (Meyer & Dalal, 2009), the present study found that participants were attracted to hypothetical organizations that were strong with respect to clarity, consistency, and consequences, but weak with respect to constraints. Further, individual differences in various psychological needs were shown to influence the strength of the relationship between situational strength and organizational attraction; for example, those with a high need for achievement were particularly attracted to organizations that were high with respect to consequences. These results not only contribute to the job choice literature, but also suggest that situational strength is more than just a moderator of personality-outcome relationships – it is an important psychological construct in and of itself, with its own nomological network that is worthy of continued research attention.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On any given weekday, an average employed American spends 7.9 hours working (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Therefore, finding a job that is fulfilling is a worthwhile endeavor. In an effort to evaluate how job seekers go about making such important decisions, job choice researchers have attempted to better determine the job/organizational attributes that are most attractive to applicants, how preferences for these attributes change across the job search process, and the outcomes/implications of application decisions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005; Crossley & Highouse, 2005; Jurgensen, 1978; Powell, 1984). Although an ample number of articles, books, and chapters have been written on the factors that influence job choice (Chapman et al. 2005), one environmental variable that has yet to be studied in this literature, but is argued to cut across all components and conceptualizations of situations (Hattrup & Jackson, 1996), is situational strength.

Situational strength is defined as “implicit or explicit cues provided by external entities regarding the desirability of potential behaviors” (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010, p.122). Therefore, strong situations place “psychological pressure on the individual to engage in and/or refrain from particular courses of action” (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010, p.122). Previously, situational strength has primarily been studied and conceptualized as a moderator of the personality-behavior relationship such that these relationships are attenuated in strong situations and maximized in weak situations (Meyer, Dalal & Bonaccio, 2009). However, given that situational strength is a way of conceptualizing those aspects of organizational context that are most likely to influence human behavior (Meyer & Dalal, 2009; Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010), it may also be a useful construct for defining the work environment when examining job choice, such that situational strength may be an important factor in applicant attraction.

The purpose of this study is to extend situational strength's nomological network beyond that of a moderator of personality-behavior relationships and into the job choice literature. Specifically, the first goal of this study is to systematically examine the extent to which perceived situational strength influences attraction to hypothetical organizations. Furthermore, given that employees have been shown to have preferences or "needs" for a variety of environmental characteristics (e.g., autonomy, structure, closure; Murray, 1938; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), it is possible that discernible preferences for situational strength also exist. For example, some people may perceive a job or organization that is characterized by strong situations as providing necessary guidance, whereas others may perceive this job/organization as unnecessarily restrictive. Therefore, the second goal of this study is to examine the extent to which psychological needs moderate the relationship between situational strength and attraction. The following sections provide a conceptual overview of the situational strength, organizational attraction, and person-environment fit literatures to better frame the contribution of the current study.

Situational Strength

Most contemporary theorizing on situational strength came from the ideas of Walter Mischel, who defined situations as strong "to the degree that they lead everyone to construe the particular events the same way, induce uniform expectancies regarding the most appropriate response pattern, provide adequate incentives for the performance of that response pattern and require skills that everyone has to the same extent" (Mischel, 1977, p. 347). He goes on to define situations as weak "to the degree that they are not uniformly encoded, do not generate uniform expectancies concerning the desired behavior, do not offer sufficient incentives for its performance, or fail to provide the learning conditions required for successful genesis of the behavior" (p. 347). Since Mischel's initial work, many psychologists have primarily utilized the concept of situational strength when discussing how the situation can restrict expression of various individual differences (e.g. Meyer, Dalal & Bonaccio, 2009; Mullins & Cummings, 1999; Weiss & Adler, 1984), such that in a strong situation individuals are encouraged to engage in specific behaviors that they would not otherwise engage in when left to their own devices (Stagner, 1977). Conversely, in a weak situation, an individual's behavior is more likely to be reflective of his/her individual differences profile.

Within an organization, situational strength can be operationalized as the relative presence of norms, incentives, formal policies and procedures, or social information that guides employees to act in a certain way (Meyer, Dalal & Bonaccio, 2009). For example, organizations defined by strong situations might strictly enforce procedures regarding various job-related tasks, whereas organizations defined by weak situations might allow significant freedom when conducting job-related tasks. Despite the long history of situational strength in the organizational sciences, some have recently argued that it is not as well understood or as empirically vetted as it should be (Cooper & Withey, 2009). Recently, however, Meyer, Dalal and Hermida (2010) examined past operationalizations of situational strength to develop a four-faceted conceptualization of this construct, thereby bringing needed structure to this literature. Specifically, these authors suggest that situational strength's construct space can be defined by four facets: clarity, consistency, constraints, and consequences (all of which are defined and described subsequently) and the combination thereof, known as global situational strength. This framework is used here to examine situational strength's influence on organizational attraction and job choice.

Situational Strength’s Role in Organizational Attraction

Understanding the factors that go into job choice decisions is potentially useful for both job seekers and recruiting organizations (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). On the one hand, job seekers learn how to utilize the information that is available to them in order to make the best choice; on the other hand, organizations can enhance their appeal in order to have the best choice of applicants. Recognizing that attraction to the specific characteristics of a job or organization is one of the primary reasons why job seekers decide to apply for, accept, or reject specific jobs, the job choice literature has made great strides in understanding the specific attributes job seekers find attractive (e.g. Carless & Imber, 2007; Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Jurgensen, 1978; Nkomo & Fields, 1994; Posner, 1981). In a recent meta-analysis of this literature, Chapman et al. (2005) showed that some of the primary factors that influence applicant attraction include recruiter behaviors (ρ=.29), perceptions of the recruitment process (ρ=.42), perceived fit (ρ=.45), perceived alternatives (ρ=.16), and hiring expectancies (ρ=.33). However, the strongest predictor of organizational attraction was perceived work environment (ρ=.60).

This last finding, however, is somewhat obfuscated by the fact that perceived work environment can be conceptualized in many different ways. For instance Turban, Forret and Hendrickson (1998) define the work environment by its level of supportiveness (e.g., warm, friendly coworkers) whereas, Powell (1984) includes type of work, training programs, and reputation in his characterization of the work environment. Situational strength represents a unique way to conceptualize work environments because it focuses strictly on those aspects of work environments that encourage specific employee behaviors (Meyer & Dalal, 2009). As such, it is likely that job applicants will have different preferences for situational strength depending on their baseline behavioral tendencies and various perceptual differences, thereby suggesting the need for an interactionist perspective.

Taking an Interactionist Perspective

Psychologists have long acknowledged that individuals will seek out situations that are compatible with their personalities and will avoid situations with which they perceive themselves to be incompatible (e.g. Allport, 1937). For instance, Diener, Larsen and Emmons (1984) found that extraverts spend more time in social situations, individuals high in need for achievement spend more time in work situations, and individuals high in need for order spend more time in typical versus novel situations. Thus, an individual's level of attraction to organizations and job choice can be thought of as a reflection of their personality.

One concept related to this idea is person-environment (P-E) fit (i.e., the extent to which individuals match their environment; Edwards & Shipp, 2007). P-E fit is inherently an interactionist perspective in that certain job attributes are predicted to be appealing to some applicants, but not to others (Rynes & Cable, 2003). Further, ample evidence suggests that P-E fit plays a prominent role in job choice decisions, including organizational attraction (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1996; Carless, 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Judge & Cable, 1997; Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier & Geirnaert, 2001; Rynes & Cable, 2003). One particular subset of P-E fit is person-organization fit (P-O fit), defined as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share familiar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (Kristof, 1996, p. 4-5). P-O fit has been shown to be a significant predictor of important positive work outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Resick, Baltes & Shantz, 2007, Verquer, Beehr & Wagner, 2002).

P-O fit can be conceptualized in multiple ways (Kristof, 1996). One such conceptualization is needs-supplies fit, which occurs “when an organization satisfies individuals’ needs, desires, or preferences” (Kristof, 1996, p. 3) through the financial, physical and psychological resources supplied by the organization. Needs-supplies fit plays an important role in applicant job choice decisions and organizational attraction (Judge & Cable, 1997; Trank, Rynes & Bretz 2002; Turban & Keon, 1993; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow & Si, 2001). For example, Turban and Keon (1993) examined the moderating effects of need for achievement on attraction to various firm characteristics. They found that participants were generally more attracted to decentralized firms with performance-based pay, but that this effect was stronger for participants with a high need for achievement. These authors proposed this effect was based on the notion that individuals high in need for achievement "prefer situations in which they are personally responsible for their outcomes" (Turban & Keon, 1993, p. 186). These results are consistent with the idea that the match between personality characteristics and organizational characteristics influences organizational attractiveness and, therefore, job choice.

One theory that is relevant to the ideas of P-O fit and applicant attraction is Schneider's (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition model. The attraction portion of this model states that people are differentially attracted to organizations with attributes that are congruent with their own interests and personality (Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995). The selection portion of this model states that organizations exist in particular environments and need people with particular competencies and, since different types of people have different types of competencies, they end up hiring very similar people (Schneider, 1987). Finally, the attrition portion in the model states that people will leave the organization if they determine they do not fit within it (Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995), making it important for organizations to hire applicants who fit within their organization in order to attract the top talent and prevent turnover.

Taking this perspective, it is plausible that individuals assign different *meaning* to strong and weak situations. For example, certain individuals may perceive an organization with strong consequences for employee performance (e.g., commission-based pay) as stressful because this pay structure leads to uncertainty about one's income over any given period of time, whereas other types of people may perceive such an organization as providing an opportunity to be rewarded for hard work. Ensuring a good needs-supplies fit between an employee and the level of situational strength within an organization is important because P-O fit is critical when selecting employees for longterm employment (Bowen, Ledford & Nathan, 1991), in-part due to its positive effect on mobility within the organization (Kristoff, 1996). The following section develops exploratory research questions regarding the influence of global situational strength on organizational attraction and uses a needs-supplies fit perspective to develop specific hypotheses about the ways in which the situational strength facets may be more or less appealing to various types of individuals.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Global Situational Strength

Work environments in general have been shown to have a substantial influence on organizational attraction (Chapman et al., 2005; Powell, 1984; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998), but research in this area has been rather scattered and heterogeneous because of psychology's lack of common system for operationalizing this broad category of stimuli. Using a situational strength perspective is, therefore, beneficial because it reduces the number of characteristics that can be said to conceptualize one's work environment down to those that specifically shape and influence on-the-job behaviors. However, it is unclear exactly how situational strength will influence organizational attraction because there are theoretical reasons to believe that situational strength will have both positive and negative effects on attraction.

For instance, there is reason to believe that global situational strength (that is, the net behavioral influence of each of the subsequently defined facets of situational strength) will have a negative influence on attraction because research suggests that individuals gravitate toward (and are generally more satisfied and healthy in) those environments that permit the expression of their true selves. For example, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan

& Deci, 2000) posits that external influencers of behavior are viewed as either supporting autonomy (i.e., self-determination) or controlling one's behavior and that those that fall into the former category lead to a host of positive psychological responses (e.g., intrinsic motivation, reduced tension, higher self-esteem), whereas those that fall into the latter category lead to a host of negative psychological responses (e.g., reduced intrinsic motivation, increased stress and tension). Further, recent research suggests that engaging in behaviors that do not come naturally (i.e., demonstrating "contra-trait effort") creates a neurologically detectable psychological conflict (Venkatraman, Payne, Bettman, Luce & Huttel, 2009) that is both effortful and depleting (Gallagher, Fleeson & Hoyle, 2011). Therefore, this line of research would suggest that strong situations would be less attractive to job applicants because they do not allow for the expression of one's true self.

Conversely, research on role clarity would lead to a different conclusion. Role clarity is defined as the "presence or absence of adequate role-relevant information due either to restriction of this information or to variations of the quality of the information" (Lyons, 1971, p. 100). Role clarity is theoretically related to situational strength because strong situations are likely to provide more role-relevant information than weak situations, whereas weak situations are more ambiguous and may not provide enough information for an employee to adequately perform his/her job. High role clarity (i.e., low role ambiguity) has been found to relate to many positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, reduced tension, decreased stress, and decreased turnover (Lyons, 1971). Therefore, it is also possible that job seekers will be more attracted to organizations with higher levels of situational strength in which their roles are more clearly outlined. Thus, although it is unclear exactly how it will influence organizational attraction, situational strength would appear to be a particularly fruitful way of conceptualizing occupation-level work environments.

Research Question 1: How will organizational level situational strength influence organizational attraction?

Although one's perceived work environment has been shown to have a stronger influence on organizational attraction than several other organizational characteristics, such as organizational image (ρ=.48), location (ρ=.32), size (ρ=.12), familiarity (ρ=.31), and hours (ρ=.20; Chapman et al., 2005), it is difficult to predict *a priori* whether it will remain a stronger predictor of relevant outcomes after restricting its operationalization to situational strength. On the one hand, the fact that a broad domain of stimuli (in this case "organizational environments") has been restricted to a particular subset suggests that situational strength's influence will not be as strong as that of work environments generally. On the other hand, the aforementioned theory and research suggests that focusing on those aspects of one's environment that necessarily facilitate (in the case of weak situations) or inhibit (in the case of strong situations) the expression of one's trait profile suggests that situational strength's influence might be stronger than that of work environments generally. Given these contradictory predictions, this issue is addressed via an exploratory research question.

Research Question 2: What is the relative influence of organizational level situational strength on organizational attraction compared to other organizational characteristics?

Clarity

Clarity is defined as “the extent to which cues regarding work-related responsibilities or requirements are available and easy to understand” (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010, p. 125). Clarity can be influenced through well-developed and well-communicated procedures, well-established norms, perceived support, and formal instruction (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). Individuals may differ, however, in the meaning they assign to high clarity. Some individuals may perceive organizations high in clarity as providing necessary guidance and feedback, whereas others may view high clarity as an indicator of a lack of trust/respect.

One established individual difference that is likely to influence one's perceptions of and reactions to clarity is need for structure. Need for structure is defined as individuals’ desire for simplicity in their mental representations of their experiences, meaning that people “differ in the extent to which they are dispositionally motivated to cognitively structure their world in simple, unambiguous ways” (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993, p. 113). By gravitating toward situations and environments wherein cues regarding work-related responsibilities or requirements are made readily available and are easy to understand, individuals are able to reduce their cognitive load by “enabling clean, clear interpretations of new events” (Neuberg & Newson, 1993, p. 114). It is therefore likely that individuals who are high in need for structure will seek out environments that allow them to more easily form simple cognitive structures. It is believed that organizations that are perceived as high in clarity will provide such an environment because they will be viewed as unambiguously providing clear support and instruction. Thus, organizations that are perceived as providing high clarity should be attractive to job seekers who have a high need for structure.

Hypothesis 1: Need for structure will moderate the relationship between clarity and organizational attraction such that the relationship between clarity and organizational attraction will become more positive as need for structure increases.

Consistency

Consistency is defined as "the extent to which cues regarding work-related responsibilities or requirements are compatible with each other" (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010, p. 126). This facet accounts for the fact that various sources of information within an organization may provide discrepant information and/or information that may change over time. Similarly, individuals may differ in the extent to which they seek out versus become frustrated by incompatible information. For example, some individuals may view situations in which their supervisor and a written policy provide them with incompatible information as an opportunity to enact their own will and/or justify their preferred course of action, whereas others may experience stress as a result of such contradictions.

Need for closure is a particularly relevant individual difference that is likely to influence one's perception of and reactions to consistency. This need is defined as the desire for an answer on a given topic compared to a state of confusion or ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals high in this need have a preference for order and structure in their environment and feel uncomfortable in environments that do not provide them with these characteristics (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Furthermore, such individuals like to know what to expect from their environment in the future and become frustrated by inconsistent evidence (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). As a result of their preference to avoid inconsistency, it is likely that job seekers who are high in need for closure will be more attracted to organizations that are perceived as likely to provide them with consistent information.

Hypothesis 2: Need for closure will moderate the relationship between consistency and organizational attraction such that the relationship between consistency and organizational attraction will become more positive as need for closure increases.

Constraints

Constraints is defined as "the extent to which an individual's freedom of decision and action is limited by forces outside of his or her control" (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010, p. 126). Organizations that have many formal policies and procedures, close supervision, and external regulation systems are likely to score high on the constraints facet (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). Similar to the other facets, individuals may differ in the extent to which they are able to tolerate environments wherein their behavior is constrained versus unconstrained by external forces. Thus, whereas some individuals may view such environments as overly restrictive, others are likely to view constraints as comforting and/or necessary to ensure order.

An established individual difference that is likely to influence one's perceptions of and reactions to constraints is the need for autonomy. The need for autonomy can be defined as an individual's propensity "to resist influence or coercion. To defy an authority or seek freedom in a new place. To strive for independence" (Murray, 1938, p. 82). Autonomy in the workplace has been operationalized as the amount of control an individual has regarding his/her method of scheduling, completing, and evaluating their own work (Strain, 1999). Thus, those individuals who are high in need for autonomy are likely to feel restricted in an organization that highly constrains their behavior because such an environment is not congruent with their needs. Therefore, it is predicted here that job seekers who are high in need for autonomy will seek out organizations that put few constraints on their behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Need for autonomy will moderate the relationship between constraints and organizational attraction such that the relationship between constraints and organizational attraction will become more negative as need for autonomy increases.

Consequences

Consequences is defined as “the extent to which decisions or actions have important positive or negative implications for any relevant person or entity” (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010, p. 127). Consequences within organizations may refer to the rewards or punishments coming from a supervisor for good or bad performance, external agencies, or the outcomes of the work itself (Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010). Individuals may differ, however, in the meaning they assign to high consequences. Thus, whereas some individuals may prefer that their decisions and actions have important implications, thereby perceiving highly consequential jobs/organizations as fulfilling, others may view high consequences as potential sources of unwanted pressure.

One individual difference that is likely to influence one’s perceptions of and reactions to consequences is need for achievement. Murray (1938) defined need for achievement as the desire

> “to accomplish something difficult. To master, manipulate, or organize physical objects, human beings, or ideas. To do this as rapidly, and as

> independently as possible. To overcome obstacles and attain a high standard. To excel one's self. To rival and surpass others. To increase self-regard by the successful exercise of talent" (p. 164).

Individuals who have a high motive (or need) to achieve are predisposed to believe that they should be held accountable for their successes or failures (James & Rentsch, 2004). Therefore, individuals high in need for achievement may seek-out environments that are characterized by strong consequences. For example, individuals high in need for achievement prefer organizations with outcome-oriented cultures, as opposed to those that are less demanding with lower expectations for their employees (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Given that organizations likely vary in the extent to which there are consequences for employee performance (Meyer, Dalal & Bonaccio, 2009), it is predicted here that job seekers who are high in need for achievement will be more attracted to organizations that are strong with respect to consequences.

Hypothesis 4: Need for achievement will moderate the relationship between consequences and organizational attraction such that the relationship between consequences and organizational attraction will become more positive as need for achievement increases.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Data for this study were collected across two sessions. In the first session, participants provided information about their individual differences. The second session consisted of two sub-parts and utilized the same sample of participants. Part one of the second session addressed the first two research questions about global situational strength by utilizing "policy-capturing," which "involves asking decision makers to judge a series of scenarios describing various levels of explanatory factors, or cues, and then regressing their responses on the cues" in order to "assess how decision makers use available information when making evaluative judgments" (Karren & Barringer, 2002, p. 337). This is a technique commonly used in job choice and P-E fit research (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1994; Dalal & Bonaccio, 2010; Judge & Bretz, 1992). Part two of the second session assessed hypotheses 1-4 by utilizing situational strength facet descriptions and correlational techniques.

Participants

Undergraduates from the Atlanta Metropolitan Area were recruited through the Experimetrix online recruitment system and earned course credit for their participation. In order to avoid issues associated with demand characteristics, the recruitment advertisement did not mention situational strength; rather it stated that the goal of this study was to "examine individual differences in attraction to organizations with various characteristics." A total of 223 participants completed the experiment, however, 10 of these participants scored a 2 or above on the PRF-E Infrequency Scale (described subsequently) indicating that these participants may have been responding in an implausible or pseudorandom manner (Jackson, 1974). Therefore, these participants were eliminated from the analysis, leaving a total of 213. There were 77 (36.2%) males and 136 (63.8%) females in the study, with a mean age of 20.0 (SD = 2.1). On average, participants reported that they will likely begin searching for a job in 2.0 years (SD = 1.8).

Materials

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to provide information about their age, gender, past work experience, and proximity to beginning a job search.

Primary Individual Differences

Need for structure was measured using the Personal Need for Structure scale developed by Neuberg and Newsom (1993). This instrument consists of 11 statements for which participants were asked to indicate on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale the extent to which they agree with each statement. An example statement from this scale is: “It upsets me to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.” Cronbach’s alpha for the Need for Structure scale was .86.

Need for closure was measured with the Need for Closure Scale developed by Kruglanski, Webster, and Klem (1993). This instrument consists of 42 items for which participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). An example statement from this scale is: “I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.” Cronbach’s alpha for The Need for Closure Scale was .85.

Need for autonomy was measured using Mageau and Vallerand's (1999) seven-item Need for Autonomy Scale. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements related to the importance of autonomy in their life using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all in agreement) to 11 (Very strongly in agreement). An example item from the scale is: “It is essential for me to never feel forced to do things.” Cronbach’s alpha for the Need for Autonomy Scale was .86.

Finally, need for achievement was measured with the Personal Mastery scale from the Motivational Trait Questionnaire (MTQ; Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). This scale is made up of 16 items for which respondents were asked to indicate how well the statement describes themselves on a 1 (Very Untrue of Me)- 6 (Very True of Me) Likert-type scale. An example item from the scale is: “When I am learning something new, I try to understand it completely.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .91.

Valid Responding

The PRF-E Infrequency scale was administered in order to eliminate participants who provided implausible answers possibly due to “carelessness, poor comprehension, passive non-compliance, confusion, or gross deviation” (Jackson, 1974, p.7). This scale consists of 16 items in which participants are asked to answer true or false to items that nearly all participants would answer in the same way if they were to respond in a serious manner. An example item from this scale is “I have never bought anything in a store.” Jackson (1974) recommends eliminating those participants who score highly on this scale. In this sample, 95.5% of the subjects scored below two on this scale. Thus, because participants completed this study in an unproctored environment, in order to ensure only those subjects who answered in a valid manner are included, the 10 individuals who scored a two or above were eliminated from the analysis.

Organizational Attraction

Organizational attraction was assessed using a general attraction measure consisting of 5 items developed by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). For each item, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is: "For me, this company would be a good place to work." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .90.

Procedure

Session 1: Measuring Individual Differences

Participants were sent a link and an email asking them to complete Session 1 within 48 hours. Participants first provided demographic information, then they completed all of the individual differences measures listed previously, including the PRF-E Infrequency scale. After they completed these individual difference measures, participants were thanked for their participation and were told they would receive an email in one week describing the second session.

Session 2a: Policy-Capturing

The second session took place at least one week after the first session in an effort to minimize common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). For the first part of the second session (i.e., the policy-capturing portion), participants were asked to assume they were thinking of applying to organizations that differ in the following characteristics: (1) situational strength, (2) image, (3) familiarity, (4) location, and (5) hours. The last four specific characteristics were chosen because they have previously been shown to have some of the strongest influences on job attraction (Chapman et al., 2005) and are not theoretically related to task-oriented situational strength. Then, as recommended for policy-capturing studies (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002), participants were given a brief description of each characteristic in order to ensure that they understood each of them (See Appendix A for the descriptions).

Next, participants viewed descriptions of fictitious organizations wherein the aforementioned organizational characteristics were systematically manipulated. In each of these descriptions, each of the five organizational characteristics had one of two levels, shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Organizational Characteristics Cue Wording

Characteristic	High	Low
Situational Strength	This organization has a **high level of situational strength**.	This organization has a **low level of situational strength**.
Organizational Image	This organization is very **innovative.**	This organization is very **traditional.**
Familiarity	You are **familiar** with this organization.	You are **not familiar** with this organization.
Location	This organization is located in a **city.**	This organization is located in a **small town.**
Hours	This organization has highly **predictable work hours.**	This organization has highly **flexible work hours.**

A fully crossed design (i.e., one that provided each participant with all possible cue combinations) was utilized, meaning that each participant saw 32 organizational descriptions. The following is an example of one such description:

- **“<u>Situational Strength:</u>** This organization has a **high level of situational strength**.
- **<u>Organizational Image</u>**: This organization is perceived as very **traditional.**
- **<u>Familiarity:</u>** You are **not familiar** with this organization.
- **<u>Location:</u>** This organization is located in a **city.**
- **<u>Hours:</u>** This organization has highly **predictable work hours.**”

For each of these descriptions, participants could click on a link at anytime so that they could see the descriptions of the characteristics if they needed. In order to control for any order effects of the descriptions, two random orders of the descriptions were utilized. Out of the 213 participants who were included in the analysis, 108 participants completed the first description order and 105 participants completed the second order. Following each organizational description, participants were asked questions regarding their attraction to that organization.

Session 2b: Situational Strength Facet Assessment

After participants completed the policy-capturing portion of the study, they were told that they would next only see the level of situational strength within the organization, and to assume that they were otherwise moderately attracted to the organization. They were also told that, similar to the first part of the experiment, they would be asked to answer questions regarding their attraction to that organization. They were then presented with brief descriptions of organizations that contained information only related to one of the four facets of situational strength. The following is an example of an organizational description:

> "Employees are generally **provided with instructions** regarding work-related responsibilities and requirements. For example, well-developed procedures are clearly communicated to employees, but employees are told what to do on the job."

There were two possible levels of each facet (see Table 2). These facet descriptions were specifically written to highlight both the potential pros and cons of each facet in order to help minimize potential confounds associated with weak being equated with good and strong being equated with bad (or vice versa). Each participant saw each possible facet description, eight total. Just as with the policy-capturing portion, there were two possible facet description orders. The same 108 participants who completed the first possible policy-capturing order completed the first facet order and the 105 participants who completed second possible policy-capturing order completed the second facet order. After each description, they answered the same organizational attraction questions they did for the policy-capturing portion.

Table 2.

Situational Strength Facet Cue Wording

Facet	High	Low
Clarity	Employees are generally **provided with instructions** regarding work-related responsibilities and requirements. For example, well-developed procedures are clearly communicated to employees, but employees are told what to do on the job.	Employees are generally **not provided with instructions** regarding work-related responsibilities and requirements. For example, proper procedures are often unclear, but employees are encouraged to define how to best do their jobs.
Consistency	Employees generally receive **the same information from multiple sources** regarding what is expected of them and these expectations rarely change over time. For example, the information provided to employees by their supervisors and peers is generally consistent, but the organization is often unwilling to change its policies (even when it may be beneficial to do so).	Employees sometimes receive **different information from multiple sources** regarding what is expected of them and these expectations may change over time. For example, the information provided to employees by their supervisors and peers is inconsistent at times, but the organization is willing to change its policies when necessary.

Table 2 continued.

Facet	High	Low
Constraints	There are **many organizational regulations** that limit an employee’s actions. For example, formal procedures prevent employees from engaging in behaviors that may be harmful to their performance or well-being, but employees are highly monitored.	There are **few organizational regulations** that limit an employee’s actions. For example, few formal procedures prevent employees from engaging in behavior that may be harmful to their performance or well-being, but employees are rarely monitored.
Consequences	Employee actions have **important implications for one's self and others**. For example, one's pay is largely affected by his/her performance. Thus, there is pressure placed on employees to perform well, but they are rewarded for good performance.	Employee actions **do not have important implications for one's self and others**. For example, one's pay is generally unaffected by his/her performance. Thus, there is little pressure placed on the employee, but there are no monetary rewards for good performance.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Policy-Capturing Analysis

Justification for the Multilevel Approach

Multi-level models are recommended for analyzing policy-capturing data (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002) because there are two levels of analysis: the within-person level (i.e., the organizational descriptions) and the between-person level (i.e., differences across participants). The first step in multi-level modeling is to determine the amount of variance in the criterion due to within versus between-person factors (i.e., individual factors; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Snijders & Bosker, 2011). In this case, the primary criterion variable was organizational attraction[1]. This model is conceptually equivalent to running an ANOVA with organizational attraction as the dependent variable and decision maker ID number as the independent variable (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Results indicated that 11.16% of the variance was between-persons. Furthermore, a chi-square test indicated that the amount of between-person variance was significantly greater than zero, χ^2 (212 *df*) = 1064.31, $p<0.001$. Thus, the significance of the amount of between-person variance justifies using a multi-level approach (Snijders & Bosker, 2011),

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[1] Note. As most of the reasoning behind the interactionist perspective centers around P-O fit literature, perceived P-O fit (as measured by Cable and Judge's (1996) 3-item scale) was also examined as a dependent variable in all of the same analyses as attraction. In all cases except one, the results were the same as the attraction analyses. The one exception was the clarity relative weights analysis, which revealed need for structure was the most important moderator of the clarity-fit relationship.

whereby both individual characteristics and organizational characteristics simultaneously influence attraction.

Evaluations of Organizational Characteristics

Utilizing Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), organizational attraction was regressed on the five organizational characteristics examined here (i.e., situational strength, organizational image, familiarity, location, and hours). Description order did not significantly influence organizational attraction ($\gamma = -0.014$, $p > .05$), so it was unnecessary to control for this consideration in subsequent analyses (Becker, 2005). Results from the HLM analyses are presented in Table 3. This model takes a nomothetic approach whereby the standardized regression coefficients represent the aggregate across all participants.

Table 3.

The Impact of Organizational Characteristics on Organizational Attraction (Nomothetic Results)

	Organizational Characteristics				
	SS	Image	Familiarity	Location	Hours
Attraction	.251***	.213***	.133***	.232***	-.074***

Note. Numbers in the table represent standardized regression coefficients for the average person in the sample. SS=Situational Strength. Situational Strength was coded as weak situation = 0, strong situation = 1. Image was coded as traditional organization = 0, innovative organization = 1. Familiarity was coded as unfamiliar = 0, familiar = 1. Location was coded as small town = 0, city = 1. Hours was coded as flexible hours = 0, predictable hours = 1. $*p \leq .05$. $** p \leq .01$. $*** p \leq .001$.

Research Question 1 is associated with the influence that situational strength has on organizational attraction and the results indicate that situational strength has a significant positive influence ($\gamma = .251$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that potential job seekers are more attracted to high levels of situational strength than low levels of situational strength. Furthermore, the present results also indicate that all of the other organizational characteristics examined here also significantly influence attraction with standardized regression coefficients ranging from -0.074 to .232. Specifically, potential job seekers are attracted to organizations that are more innovative versus traditional, more familiar versus unfamiliar, located in a city versus a small town, and have flexible versus predictable work hours. The means in Table 4 support these findings.

Table 4.

Mean Attraction for Each Level of the Organizational Characteristics

Organizational Characteristic	Level	Attraction M	Attraction SD
Situational Strength	High	17.602	4.494
	Low	15.254	4.541
Image	High	17.421	4.506
	Low	15.435	4.615
Familiarity	High	17.053	4.634
	Low	15.803	4.617
Location	High	17.513	4.467
	Low	15.343	4.612
Hours	High	16.084	4.661
	Low	16.772	4.649

Note. For situational strength, high = strong, low = weak. For image, high = innovative, low = traditional. For familiarity, high = familiar, low = unfamiliar. For location, high = city, low = small town. For hours, high = predictable hours, low = flexible hours.

Research Question 2 is associated with the *relative* importance of situational strength compared to the other organizational characteristics. The regression coefficients are interpretable as measures of relative importance because the organizational characteristics are orthogonal from one another (Karren & Barringer, 2002). Thus, the organizational characteristic with the highest coefficient in absolute value can be interpreted as having the greatest influence on attraction. Situational strength had the highest regression coefficient, suggesting that it was the most important organizational characteristic. In order to further assess this research question, four planned pairwise contrasts were conducted to examine whether situational strength had a significantly stronger influence on attraction than the other four organizational characteristics. Results indicated that situational strength had a stronger influence than the characteristics associated with familiarity (χ^2 (1 *df*) = 16.367, p <0.001) and hours (χ^2 (1 *df*) = 107.353, p <0.001), but did not have a significantly stronger influence than organizational image (χ^2 (1 *df*) = 1.090, p >.05) or location (χ^2 (1 *df*) = 0.281, p >.05).

Between-Subjects Cross-Level Moderation Analysis

The previous analysis demonstrated that all organizational characteristics significantly influenced attraction for the average participant in this sample. However, chi-square tests also demonstrated that the extent to which the organizational characteristics influenced attraction varied significantly between potential job seekers (χ^2s (212 *df*) = 4204.71, 2222.74, 820.88, 2998.72, 1525.47 for situational strength, organizational image, familiarity, location, and hours respectively, p <.001 for all). Thus, although no hypotheses were developed regarding the ways in which personality traits might affect the influence of situational strength on organizational attraction, it is possible that they will influence preferences for global situational strength such that some types of people will be more attracted to high levels of global situational strength than others. As discussed previously, there is reason to believe certain personality traits might influence perceptions of the facets of situational strength. Specifically, the four "needs" were added to the model to assess their interaction with the level of situational strength. The correlations between these between-subjects variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Correlation Matrix of Between-Subjects Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Need for Structure	42.43	8.70	(.855)			
2. Need for Closure	156.36	19.11	.782***	(.854)		
3. Need for Autonomy	49.45	11.87	-.031	.032	(.857)	
4. Need for Achievement	74.63	10.37	.016	.032	.340***	(.914)

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent scale reliabilities. *$p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

In order to avoid issues of multicollinearity, which would lead the calculated regression coefficient to be unreliable and difficult to interpret (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), all individual difference variables were added to the model separately. Additionally, the primary interest of this study is the influence of each of the individual difference variables individually rather than their influence in the context of the other variables, which further justifies this approach. The resulting coefficients are presented in Table 6. Bonferroni's correction was used to correct for family-wise error rate, so only those coefficients with *p*-values less than or equal to .0125 (i.e. .05/4) are considered significant. With this criterion, only need for closure ($\gamma = 0.190$, $p < .01$) had a significant interaction with the level of situational strength on attraction. Specifically, as need for closure increases, the relationship between situational strength and attraction becomes stronger.

Table 6.

Impact of Cross-Level Moderation Coefficients for Situational Strength on Attraction

Individual Difference	γ
Need for Structure	.128*
Need for Closure♦	.190**
Need for Autonomy	.026
Need for Achievement	.077

Note. Numbers in the table represent standardized regression coefficients. *$p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. ♦ Indicates the need that was significant after Bonferroni's correction (i.e. $p \leq .0125$).

Situational Strength Facet Analysis

Justification for Regression Approach

Similar to the policy-capturing data analyzed previously, the situational strength facet data also involved two levels of analysis: the within-person level (i.e. the facet descriptions) and the between-person level (i.e. individual differences across participants). Thus, a multilevel approach might be justified (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Snijders & Bosker, 2011). However, when the multilevel analysis was run to determine the amount of within and between-person variance, there was not a significant amount of between-person variance in attraction associated with any of the four facets (χ^2s (212 *df*) = 90.85, 90.49, 82.65, 100.41 for clarity, consistency, consequences, and constraints respectively, $p > .50$ for all). This implies that there were no significant differences in mean attraction scores across individuals. Consequently, a multilevel approach was not necessary, and a simple linear regression model was justified for all facet-based analysis (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for attraction for the two levels of each of the facets. In order to test hypotheses 1-4, attraction was regressed onto each facet with needs-based individual differences serving as moderators.

Table 7.

Mean Attraction for Each Level of the Facets

		Attraction	
Facet	Level	M	SD
Clarity	High	19.46	3.38
	Low	13.17	4.48
Consistency	High	18.83	4.34
	Low	11.63	4.32
Constraints	High	13.69	4.35
	Low	17.55	4.07
Consequences	High	19.51	3.27
	Low	13.44	4.36

Controlling for Order Effects

Similar to the policy-capturing analysis, preliminary tests were conducted to assess potential order effects. Once again, facet order did not significantly influence attraction to any of the four facets (β = .007, .048, .026, .044 for the clarity, consistency, constraints, and consequences analysis respectively, p > .05 for all). Consequently, facet order was excluded from any further analysis (Becker, 2005).

Clarity Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 shows the results from the clarity regression analysis. The results of step 1 indicate that there was a main effect of the level of clarity (β = .622, p < .001), such that high clarity was more attractive than low clarity. Furthermore, in support of hypothesis 1, the interaction between need for structure and the level of clarity was significant (β = .892, p < .001), with the positive relationship between the level of clarity and attraction being stronger for those individuals with a higher need for structure (see Figure 1).

Table 8.

Clarity Regression Analysis: Investigating the Interactive Effects of Need for Structure

	Step and Source	R^2	ΔR^2	β
1.	Clarity	.387	.387***	.622***
2.	Clarity	.387	.000	.622***
	Need for Structure			-.013
3.	Clarity	.418	.031***	-.235
	Need for Structure			-.188***
	Clarity X Need for Structure			.892***

Note. A high level of clarity was coded as 1 and a low level of clarity was coded as 0. Beta weights represent standardized regression coefficients. *$p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

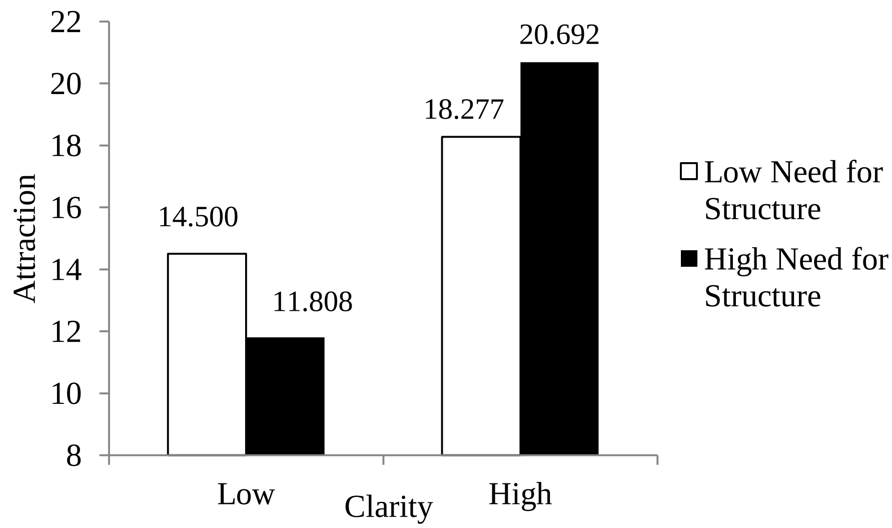

Figure 1. The mean attraction ratings for participants in the upper and lower quartiles of need for structure for the two levels of clarity.

Although need for structure was the individual difference hypothesized to interact with the level of clarity, it is likely that the other individual difference based needs are also related to attraction to clarity given that the facets are theoretically related to each other (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). In order to assess the relative importance of the need for structure compared to the other needs, a relative weights analysis (Johnson, 2000) was conducted. Relative weights analyses assess the "proportional contribution each predictor makes to R^2, considering both its unique contribution and its contribution when combined with other variables" (Johnson, 2000, p. 1). This type of analysis was used instead of assessing their standardized regression coefficients because the needs variables were correlated and the confounding influence of their correlations would make the coefficients uninterruptable (Johnson, 2000). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 9. Although only need for structure was hypothesized to interact with clarity on attraction, the results of the relative weights analysis indicated that, although the need for structure interaction did have a high relative importance, the need for closure interaction was equally as important.

Table 9.

Relative Weights Analysis Comparing the Relative Importance of the Interaction between the Four Needs and Clarity on Attraction

Need Interacting with Clarity	Raw RW	RW as % of R^2
Need for Structure♦	.108	26.8
Need for Closure	.108	26.6
Need for Autonomy	.093	22.9
Need for Achievement	.096	23.7

Note. RW= Relative Weight. ♦= Need predicted to be important.

Consistency Hypothesis Testing

Table 10 shows the results from the consistency regression analysis. The results of step 1 indicate that there was a main effect of the level of consistency (β = .640, p < .001), such that high consistency was more attractive than low consistency. Furthermore, in support of hypothesis 2, the interaction between need for closure and the level of consistency was significant (β = .898, p < .01). As shown in Figure 2, the positive relationship between the level of consistency and attraction was stronger for those individuals with a higher need for closure. Although the regression results supported hypothesis 2, a relative weights analysis revealed that the need for structure interaction had a slightly higher relative weight than the need for closure interaction on attraction. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 11.

Table 10.

Consistency Regression Analysis: Investigating the Interactive Effects of Need for Closure

	Step and Source	R^2	ΔR^2	β
1.	Consistency	.410	.410***	.640***
2.	Consistency	.410	.000	.640***
	Need for Closure			.010
3.	Consistency	.421	.012**	-.245
	Need for Closure			-.098
	Consistency X Need for Closure			.898**

Note. A high level of consistency was coded as 1 and a low level of clarity was coded as 0. Beta weights represent standardized regression coefficients. $*p \leq .05$. $** p \leq .01$. $*** p \leq .001$.

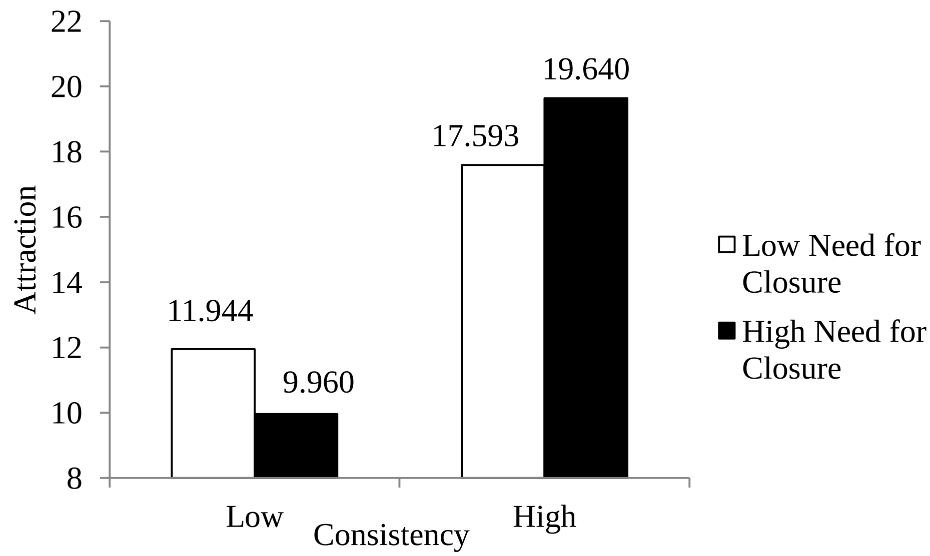

Figure 2. The mean attraction ratings for participants in the upper and lower quartiles of need for closure for the two levels of consistency.

Table 11.

Relative Weights Analysis Comparing the Relative Importance of the Interaction between the Four Needs and Consistency on Attraction

Need Interacting with Consistency	Raw RW	RW as % of R^2
Need for Structure	.110	26.2
Need for Closure♦	.108	25.6
Need for Autonomy	.099	23.5
Need for Achievement	.104	24.7

Note. RW= Relative Weight. ♦= Need predicted to be important.

Constraints Hypothesis Testing

Table 12 shows the results from the constraints regression analysis. The results of step 1 indicate that there was a main effect of the level of constraints (β = -.417, p<.001), such that low constraints was more attractive than high constraints. Furthermore, in support of hypothesis 3, the interaction between need for autonomy and the level of constraints was significant (β = -.407, p < .05). As shown in Figure 3, the negative relationship between the level of constraints and attraction was stronger for those individuals with a higher need for autonomy. The relative weights analysis also indicated that need for autonomy interaction had a stronger influence on attraction than the other needs interactions. The results of the relative weights analysis are presented in Table 13.

Table 12.

Constraints Regression Analysis: Investigating the Interactive Effects of Need for Autonomy

	Step and Source	R^2	ΔR^2	β
1.	Constraints	.174	.174***	-.417***
2.	Constraints	.174	.000	-.417***
	Need for Autonomy			.014
3.	Constraints	.177	.009*	-.037
	Need for Autonomy			.079
	Constraints X Need for Autonomy			-.407*

Note. A high level of consistency was coded as 1 and a low level of constraints was coded as 0. Beta weights represent standardized regression coefficients. $*p \leq .05$. $** p \leq .01$. $*** p \leq .001$.

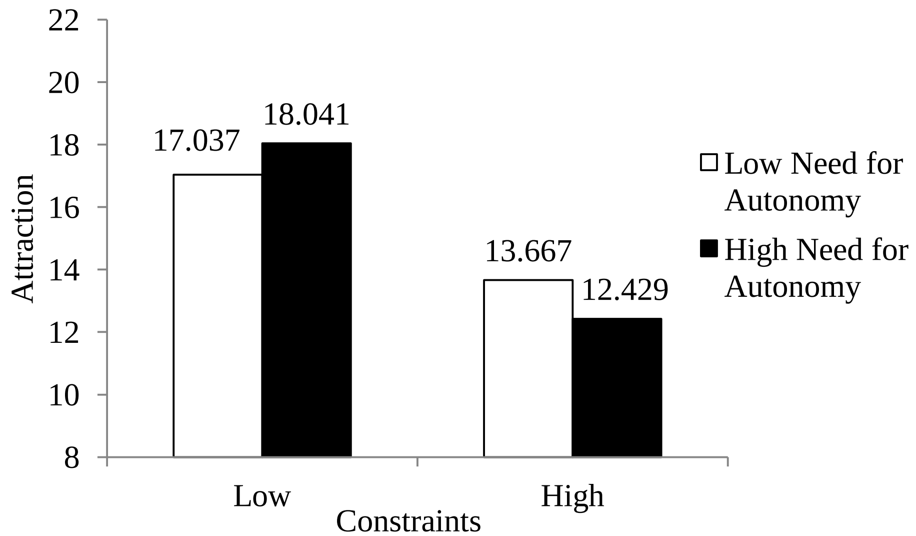

Figure 3. The mean attraction ratings for participants in the upper and lower quartiles of need for autonomy for the two levels of constraints.

Table 13.

Relative Weights Analysis Comparing the Relative Importance of the Interaction between the Four Needs and Constraints on Attraction

Need Interacting with Constraints	Raw RW	RW as % of R^2
Need for Structure	.035	18.1
Need for Closure	.044	22.5
Need for Autonomy♦	.060	30.7
Need for Achievement	.056	28.7

Note. RW= Relative Weight. ♦= Need predicted to be important.

Consequences Hypothesis Testing

Table 14 shows the results from the consequences regression analysis with attraction as the criterion. The results of step 1 indicate that there was a main effect of the level of consequences (β = .619, p<.001), such that high consequences was more attractive than low consequences. Furthermore, in support of hypothesis 4, the interaction between need for achievement and the level of consequences was significant (β =1.480, p<.001). As shown in Figure 4, the relationship between the level of consequences and attraction was stronger for those individuals with a higher need for achievement. The relative weights analysis further supported hypothesis 4, indicating that need for achievement interaction had a stronger influence on attraction than the other needs interactions. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 15.

Table 14.

Consequences Regression Analysis: Investigating the Interactive Effects of Need for Achievement

		Attraction		
	Step and Source	R^2	ΔR^2	β
1.	Consequences	.384	.384***	.619***
2.	Consequences	.384	.000	.619***
	Need for Achievement			.003
3.	Consequences	.424	.041***	-.833**
	Need for Achievement			-.198***
	Consequences X Need for Achievement			1.480***

Note. A high level of consistency was coded as 1 and a low level of constraints was coded as 0. Beta weights represent standardized regression coefficients. $*p \leq .05$. $** \ p \leq .01$. $*** \ p \leq .001$.

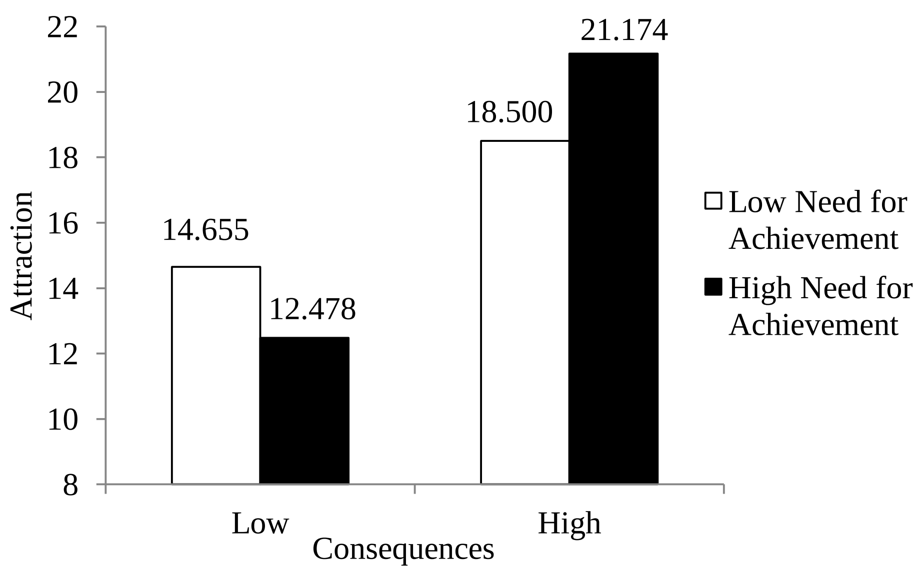

Figure 4. The mean attraction ratings for participants in the upper and lower quartiles of need for achievement for the two levels of consequences.

Table 15.

Relative Weights Analysis Comparing the Relative Importance of the Interaction between the Four Needs and Consequences on Attraction

Need Interacting with Consequences	Raw RW	RW as % of R^2
Need for Structure	.088	21.3
Need for Closure	.101	24.6
Need for Autonomy	.107	25.9
Need for Achievement♦	.116	28.2

Note. RW= Relative Weight. ♦= Need predicted to be important.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Although situational strength has not previously been conceptualized as a construct that could influence job choice, the results of the present study support the proposition that it strongly influences organizational attraction. In some cases, this influence is even stronger than that of other organizational characteristics already known to be significant influencers of attraction. Specifically, the level of situational strength in an organization had a stronger influence on attraction than the individuals' level of familiarity with the organization and whether the organization offers flexible versus predictable work hours and as strong an influence on attraction as the organization's level of innovation and whether the organization was located in a city versus a small town.

The main effects analysis revealed that, in general, individuals prefer organizations that provide them with clear guidance regarding their work-related responsibilities and requirements, convey responsibilities and requirements that are compatible with each other, and provide them with the opportunity to have important implications for their decisions and actions, but do not restrict their freedom of decisions or actions. Consistent with these findings, the results also suggest that participants preferred organizations with a high level of global situational strength compared to those that have low levels of situational strength. Therefore, it seems as if average potential job seekers are not automatically dismissive of having their behavior influenced by outside sources but, instead, seem to prefer guidance that will help them achieve important end states without completely eliminating self-determination.

However, as hypothesized, certain individual needs moderated the relationships between situational strength and attraction. Specifically, there was a stronger positive relationship between global situational strength and attraction when individuals were high in need for closure. Similarity the clarity and consistency facet analysis revealed that the positive relationships between clarity and attraction and consistency and attraction were stronger when the individual was high in need for structure or need for closure. Although only need for structure was hypothesized to moderate the relationship between clarity and attraction and only need for closure was hypothesized to moderate the relationship between consistency and attraction, it is not surprising that both of the needs turned out to be important moderators of these relationships given the significant correlation between the two needs. Furthermore, the negative relationship between constraints and attraction was stronger for individuals with higher levels of need for autonomy. Finally, the positive relationship between consequences and attraction is stronger for individuals with higher levels of need for achievement. Therefore, although there are important main effects of situational strength on attraction, the strength of these relationships are influenced by differences in the needs of the individuals. Thus, these results suggest that individuals react to organizational situational strength differently depending on their psychological needs.

Implications

In previous organizational psychology literature, situational strength has only been examined and discussed as a construct important in moderating the relationship between personality and workplace behavior (e.g. Meyer, Dalal & Bonaccio, 2009). However, the results indicate that researchers are potentially overlooking an important factor that influences organizational attraction to the extent that they exclude situational strength from their research. This research gap is potentially problematic because conceptualizations of work environments have been either quite broad or exceedingly specific. Broad conceptualizations (e.g. those that include aspects of type of work, training programs, and reputation; Powell, 1984) are problematic because it is difficult to parse observed effects in a way that permits a true synthesis of knowledge. Conversely, studies that examine specific aspects of organizational environments, such as pay systems (e.g. Turban & Keon, 1993), are limited in their generalizability and may not provide the whole picture of when and why the relationships exist. Situational strength has the potential to provide a middle ground and help the field move beyond this state of affairs by focusing on those aspects of the work environment that are predicted to directly influence employee behavior, thereby allowing organizational attraction researchers (and others) to adopt a more fine-grained conceptualization of work environments that is both practically useful and theoretically grounded.

The present results suggest that, in order to be maximally attractive, organizations should strive to create work environments that are clear, consistent, and consequential, yet permit employees to conduct their work in a relatively unconstrained manner. Furthermore, individuals may have different reactions to and interpretations of situational strength depending on their individual needs. Therefore, establishing appropriate levels of situational strength becomes even more important in organizations wishing to attract employees with particular personality characteristics For example, having employees who are highly achievement motivated would likely be beneficial for most organizations as it can lead to higher job performance (Baruch, O’Creevy, Hind & Vigoda-Gadot, 2004), so stressing the consequential nature of the work one will be performing in a particular job should help to attract this type of applicant.

Currently, information regarding the level of situational strength in a particular organization is not widely available to many job applicants before they accept a job. However, the present results suggest that organizations would benefit from making information about situational strength available to potential applicants. By not providing this information, there may be negative implications for both organizations and employees given that research suggests failing to make selection decisions on the basis of needs-supplies fit can lead to negative work outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction, job performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors, as well as increased intent to quit and actual turnover (Carless, 2005; Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Resick, Baltes & Shantz, 2007; Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995; Verquer, Beehr & Wagner, 2002).

There are many ways that organizations could convey information to prospective employees. One option would be to provide the information directly in the job advertisement or during a conversation/interview with the employee. In this case, the organization can be very clear about what and how information is conveyed to the employee regarding the ways in which they should be performing their job and the consequences that follow both good and bad performance. Another option would be to provide this information indirectly via a mission statement or feature it when describing the company's work environment more broadly. Although the direct approaches would likely be more effective, even the indirect methods of presenting this information to potential employees will help to ensure that the needs of individuals who accept the job are congruent with what the organization will provide.

Limitations

Although this study has important implications for organizational attraction and our interactive understanding of the ways in which situational strength is perceived by various types of individuals, its standing as a first step in this literature means that it will suffer from important limitations. First, it utilized a college student sample. College students often have not had or searched for a career-related job, and therefore, might have a different way of assessing organizations than adults who have had prior career-relevant employment. Related to this limitation, college students also tend to be younger than the working population and age might also affect what attracts applicants to organizations. Future studies should use a broader population in order to achieve more generalizable results.

The second limitation is that the hypothetical organizational descriptions utilized in this study provided the participants with very specific information that may not completely or accurately reflect the way real organizations might provide this information. However, many prior studies on job choice have used hypothetical information and are thought to have valid results (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1994; Turban & Keon, 1993). Additionally, using such a design allows for more control and, therefore, more information about causal relationships. Regardless, it would be interesting to examine the effects of embedding situational strength-based information in diverse ways within job ads to see if its effects are robust or are unique to direct methods of communication. It would also be interesting to assess participants' perceptions of (and reactions to) an organization's level of situational strength based on actual job ads in order to determine the extent to which situational strength-relevant information is conveyed by organizations (perhaps unintentionally). Therefore, future studies should utilize participants' reactions to real organizations. Doing so will not only allow researchers to assess the extent to which situational strength is conveyed in actual job ads, but will also provide a clearer picture of the relationship between situational strength and attraction, which might not be as linear as the present results imply.

The third limitation of this study is that all data was collected using self-reports. Thus, although steps were taken in the methods to reduce its effects (i.e. one week duration between the individual differences data collection and the attraction measures), common method variance might be influencing the results. However, attraction is not accessible via alternative sources of data (e.g., other-report) and, although many needs are posited to exist outside of conscious awareness, implicit measures were not available for all of them. Furthermore, common method variance cannot create an artificial interaction effect. In fact, common method variance can only attenuate interaction effects (Siemsen, Roth & Oliveira, 2010). Therefore, given the significant interactions present in this study, common method variance did not hinder the results of this study, and in fact, may highlight the significance of the interactions detected.

Finally, the fourth limitation of this study is that it only assesses organizational-level situational strength. However, situational strength can also be assessed at other levels. For instance, job- or even team-level situational strength may also play an important role in job choice and work outcomes. It would, therefore, be beneficial for future research to assess the effects of multiple levels of situational strength on these outcomes. Thus, while this study provides a good starting point for the assessment of situational strength on job choice and work outcomes, it should not be the end of such research based on these limitations.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that situational strength plays an important role in organizational attraction. The results also suggest that personality moderates the relationship between situational strength and organizational attraction, thus insinuating that the influence of situational strength on work outcomes may be different based on the employee’s personality. In particular, individuals with a high need for structure and need for closure and more likely to be particularly attracted to organizations that provide them with clear and consistent information concerning what is considered appropriate/expected workplace behavior, individuals with a high need for autonomy are likely to be more attracted to organizations that are unlikely to constrain their decisions and actions, and individuals with a high need for achievement are likely to be more attracted to organizations that provide them with meaningful consequences for their performance. Thus, this study (a) makes an important contribution to the situational strength literature by expanding its use beyond that of a moderator of the personality-behavior relationship and (b) introduces situational strength to the job choice literature by demonstrating that it is a useful way to conceptualize those aspects of organizational context that influence attraction to organizations.

APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTIC DESCRIPTIONS

Situational Strength- Situational strength is defined as the cues provided by a person's work environment regarding the desirability of certain workplace behaviors. For instance, an organization with a high level of situational strength provides employees with an ample amount of information concerning the behaviors they expect from their employees. In such an organization, employees know exactly what is expected of them, conform to expectations, and have limited freedom in choosing their own course of action while at work. Conversely, in an organization with a low level of situational strength, employees do not always know what is expected of them, are free to express their own personality, and have a large amount of freedom to choose how they behave at work.

Organizational Image- Organizational image is defined as people's beliefs about the characteristics that are central, distinctive, and enduring about the organization. For instance, one distinctive characteristic about an organization may refer to the level of innovation. For example, a highly innovative organization may frequently come out with new products, thereby allowing it to adapt to customers' changing needs, but possibly never spending enough time to perfect any single product. Conversely, more traditional organizations may focus on the production of the same products, thereby ensuring that each product is perfected and that the organization has a well established reputation for this small number of products. However, such a traditional organization may not take advantage of new market opportunities and may become static over time.

Familiarity- Familiarity refers to the amount of prior knowledge individuals have about the organization. For example, individuals may be very familiar with a given organization because they have heard about it on television or people they know have talked about it. If people are highly familiar with an organization, they should have a better idea of what to expect if they chose to work there, but they also may be likely to have inaccurate preconceptions that may influence their ability to accept aspects of the organization's culture that they were not aware of. Conversely, if people are not familiar with an organization, they would not have a good idea of what to expect with regard to the organization's work environment, but they would be able to start working for the organization with an open-mind.

Location- The location of an organization refers to the geographic area in which their workplace resides. While location may refer to many aspects of the geographic area, one distinction that can be made between organizations is whether they are located in a small town versus a city. For example, employees working for organizations in large cities tend to have access to many opportunities to attend social and cultural events. However, cities tend to be more polluted, have more traffic, and be noisier than rural areas. Conversely, employees working for organizations in small towns tend to live in quieter neighborhoods, have a stronger sense of community, deal with less traffic and have cleaner air, but do not have the same options that individuals living in cities have to attend various social and cultural events.

Hours- Hours refers to the timing of when work gets done. For instance, some organizations have highly predictable work schedules where employees always work the same hours (e.g. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.). This means that employees are easily able to plan their daily activities, but it also means that they might have to stay at work on days where they do not have any assignments that they need to be working on. Conversely, employees in organizations that have more flexible work hours can choose when they work, but it is also means that they cannot plan non-work activities as easily because they may have to come in early or stay late when an important assignment needs to be completed.

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