Organizational Attractiveness: An Interactionist Perspective

Daniel B. Turban and Thomas L. Keon

We adopted an interactionist perspective to investigate how the personality characteristics of self-esteem (SE) and need for achievement (nAch) moderated the influences of organizational characteristics on individuals' attraction to firms. Subjects read an organization description that manipulated reward structure, centralization, organization size, and geographical dispersion of plants and offices and indicated their attraction to the organization. Although subjects were more attracted to firms that were decentralized and that based pay on performance, results supported the interactionist perspective. Subjects with low SE were more attracted to decentralized and larger firms than high SE subjects. Subjects high in nAch were more attracted to organizations that rewarded performance rather than seniority. Finally, organization size influenced attraction differently for individuals high and low in nAch.

Person–organization fit has become a popular topic for researchers (e.g., O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991), and the implications for practitioners are numerous. An area of investigation that has not been adequately addressed concerns the impact of person–environment fit on individuals' employment decisions (Wanous, 1980). This is surprising because a considerable amount of research has investigated the role of person–environment fit for vocational choices (Holland, 1973; Super, 1953). Nonetheless, it seems likely that theories of person–environment fit are applicable to applicants' decisions about organizations (Keon, Latchée, & Wanous, 1982; Tom, 1971). Research investigating person–environment fit for job choice decisions has theoretical implications, and such research also may be utilized by practitioners who are attempting to attract job candidates. Rynes and Barber (1990) suggested that organizations can proactively mold selected organizational characteristics such as the ability to pay, business strategy, culture, and values as a strategy to attract those considered most desirable in the labor force. For example, they argued that pay incentives can be modified to best suit the current desires of the labor force, thus creating an individual–organization fit to attract desirable applicants.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how person–environment fit influences applicant attraction to organizations. Specifically, we investigated the fit between personality characterics and organization characteristics. Although organizational characteristics are thought to influence applicants' job decisions, little research has investigated such influences (Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, 1982). We extend earlier research by investigating influences of organizational characteristics on attraction to firms and by investigating whether individual characteristics moderate the influence of organizational characteristics.

Review of the Literature

Overview

One of the earliest considerations of the relationship between the individual and the organization was provided by Barnard (1938). Barnard believed that an individual selects and then remains in an organization by choice. The extent to which the organization provides inducements for an individual's contributions establishes an organizational context in which the person may stay or leave. Individual differences determine the extent to which the organization's inducements meet the individual's needs, and it is the balance between organizational characteristics and individual needs that characterizes the interactionist perspective.

In this study, we use the interactionist perspective to study individuals' attraction to organizations. Several authors have suggested that individuals differ in their attraction to certain organizational characteristics, although the empirical research in this area is limited. For example, Schneider (1987) proposed that different kinds of people are attracted to different organizations. In a similar vein, Chatman (1989) suggested that people are attracted to organizations they view as having values and situational norms they deem important. Pervin (1989) noted that individuals' behaviors are influenced by personal goals and their perceptions of the opportunities for goal attainment provided by the situation. Such arguments suggest that an individual–organizational interaction may be important in understanding organizational attractiveness.

In an early study adopting the interactionist perspective, Burke and Deszca (1982) found that Type A behavior scores

---

Daniel B. Turban, Department of Management, University of Missouri—Columbia; Thomas L. Keon, College of Business, Florida Atlantic University.

We acknowledge financial support for this research provided by the Ponder Faculty Development and Research Fund, College of Business and Public Administration, University of Missouri, to Daniel B. Turban.

We would like to thank Thomas W. Dougherty, H. John Bernardin, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft; and Linda Allen and Natalie Cleten for their help in preparing the article.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel B. Turban, Department of Management, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65211.
were related to organizational climates. Specifically, individuals higher in Type A behavior preferred work environments that had high performance standards and were less structured. Bretz, Ash, and Dreher (1989) investigated the interaction of personality and organizational characteristics on organizational attractiveness. The organization's reward system was manipulated such that organizations were described as having either an individual-oriented reward system, which rewarded individual performance, or an organization-oriented reward system, which rewarded behaviors directed at the organization's collective performance. Results indicated that individuals high in need for achievement preferred the individual-oriented reward system more than the organization-oriented reward system. Bretz et al. (1989) noted that such results support the interactionist perspective, and they called for future research to investigate influences of additional organizational and individual characteristics. In part, we replicate their research by examining reward systems and need for achievement. We extend their research, however, by examining additional organizational and individual characteristics.

Organizational Characteristics

Although little research has specifically investigated the effects of organizational characteristics on job decisions, evidence suggests that organization characteristics influence personnel practices (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989). Furthermore, organization characteristics influence job attitudes and behaviors of organizational members (Porter & Lawler, 1965). Therefore, one might expect that organizational characteristics affect applicants' perceptions of and attraction to organizations. Organizational characteristics that are easily observable and are likely to affect applicants' impressions of organizations would be most likely to influence applicant attraction to organizations (Rynes & Barber, 1990). In addition, characteristics that vary across organizations and that can be known with certainty by applicants before job choice are likely to influence applicant attraction to organizations (Rynes, 1989; Schwab, Rynes, & Al-dag, 1987). We investigated the effects of four organizational characteristics that are thought to be salient to applicants, to influence impressions of the organization, and to vary across alternatives: reward structure, centralization of decision making, organization size, and geographical dispersion of the organization's plants and sites.

Reward structure. An organization's reward structure is an important dimension of the organization's climate (James & Jones, 1974; Joyce & Slocum, 1979; Schneider, 1987). Furthermore, the organization's reward structure can be used to describe and differentiate organizations to applicants (Bretz et al., 1989). For example, the reward structure may provide individuals with knowledge of future career paths (Thompson, 1967). One aspect of the reward structure is the extent to which pay is based on job performance. Although pay is important to most employees, evidence is mixed concerning whether employees want pay to be based on job performance. Lawler (1971) suggested that managers prefer to have their pay based on performance, although most workers (lower level than managers) may be against merit-based pay plans. Little research has specifically investigated the influence of the reward structure on applicant attraction to organizations. Nonetheless, the reward structure is a salient characteristic of an organization that allows applicants to assess the organization's culture and values (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Because the sample consists of future managers who would be expected to be most satisfied with a pay system based on performance, we hypothesize that subjects will be more attracted to organizations that base pay on performance rather than on seniority.

Centralization. Centralization refers to the extent to which power is concentrated in an organization (Price, 1977). Organizations with a high degree of centralization are thought to produce high amounts of turnover because most people want to have the power to make decisions concerning their work situation (Price, 1977). In general, organizations that are less centralized have a greater amount of participative decision making. Evidence suggests that participative decision making is positively related to job satisfaction, although the form of the participation may moderate this relationship (Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988). Nonetheless, the degree of centralization provides evidence to applicants about the organization's culture and values and is therefore thought to influence applicant attraction. Specifically, because most applicants want to make decisions concerning their work, we expect that applicants will be more attracted to decentralized firms.

Organization size. Evidence is mixed concerning whether organization size influences employees' job attitudes and behaviors, although unit size may be more important than organization size (Berger & Cummings, 1979; Porter & Lawler, 1965). For example, Green, Blank, and Liden (1983) found that branch size was negatively related to organization commitment and job satisfaction for employees located at branch offices of a large bank. Organizational size may influence job attitudes and behaviors by influencing communication systems, information-processing systems, and group cohesion (Berger & Cummings, 1979; Mobley, 1982). Organization size is often associated with other perceptions of organizational characteristics (e.g., bureaucracy or number of hierarchical levels) and is likely to influence perceptions of the organization's culture. In addition, because organization size is such a salient characteristic of organizations, we expect it will influence applicant perceptions of and attraction to the organization. We hypothesize that applicants expect to be less satisfied in larger organizations and therefore will be less attracted to such organizations.

Geographical dispersion. Geographical dispersion refers to the extent to which the organization has plants and offices located throughout the country or within a smaller geographic radius. Because evidence suggests that more employees are turning down relocation offers (Grossman & Magnus, 1988), we expected that the expectation of having to relocate would negatively influence applicant attraction to organizations. On a more pragmatic level, we investigated written comments made by subjects in an earlier study and noted that the possibility of relocation to undesirable locations was viewed as a negative attribute. Therefore, we expected that applicants would be less attracted to organizations that might require them to relocate than to organizations in which the likelihood of relocation is minimal.
Interactionist Perspective

In general, we expect that applicants will be more attracted to firms that (a) reward performance based on merit rather than seniority, (b) are decentralized, (c) are smaller, and (d) are less geographically dispersed. However, on the basis of the logic of the interactionist perspective, we expect that individual characteristics will moderate the influence of these organizational characteristics on attraction to firms. Although there are many possible individual characteristics that might moderate the influence of organizational characteristics on attraction, the individual characteristics chosen should meet these criteria: (a) They should influence individuals' reactions to environmental cues, both as applicants in the job search process and as employees; and (b) they should be related to employees' work behaviors and attitudes. Both self-esteem (SE) and need for achievement (nAch) meet these criteria. Self-esteem affects the way individuals think, feel, and behave and influences how environment characteristics influence individuals (Brockner, 1988). In addition, need for achievement influences reactions to the environment and has been shown to influence individuals' preferences for reward systems (Bretz et al., 1989). Therefore, we investigated whether self-esteem and need for achievement moderate the relationship between reward structure, centralization, and organization size with applicant attraction to the firm. We did not investigate possible moderating effects with geographical dispersion because we did not expect geographical dispersion to influence applicant's expectations of working conditions in the organization.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem (SE) refers to how favorably individuals evaluate themselves (Brockner, 1988). Although self-esteem is an important personality characteristic in the organizational behavior literature, little research has investigated how self-esteem influences the job search process (Ellis & Taylor, 1983). However, one study found that self-esteem was related to aspects of the job search process, such as applicants' use of job sources, interview evaluations from recruiters, number of job offers received, acceptance of a position, and intended tenure (Ellis & Taylor, 1983). In addition to influencing the job search process, self-esteem also may influence how applicants react to organizational characteristics. The behavioral plasticity hypothesis posits that low SE individuals are more susceptible to environmental and social cues than are high self-esteem individuals (Brockner, 1988; Campbell, 1990). Furthermore, evidence suggests that high rather than low SE individuals are more likely to choose occupations that are perceived to be congruent with their needs and abilities (Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1966, 1967). Such results are consistent with the behavioral plasticity hypothesis because low SE individuals' occupational choices are more influenced by external factors, whereas high SE individuals' choices are more influenced by internal factors such as needs and abilities.

The behavioral plasticity hypothesis suggests that because low SE individuals are more susceptible to environmental cues, such individuals will be more influenced by organizational characteristics than their high SE counterparts. Therefore, we hypothesize that, in general, organizational characteristics will be more strongly related to applicant attraction for low versus high SE individuals. In addition, we expect that self-esteem will influence how individuals react to the specific organizational characteristics. Because high SE individuals have a more favorable evaluation of themselves and are more confident in their abilities, we expect that high SE individuals will be more attracted to firms that are decentralized and that reward individual performance. Such firms are expected to be more attractive to high than low SE individuals because they will allow individuals to participate in decisions that affect their workplace and to obtain rewards based on individual ability. It is difficult to predict, however, how self-esteem moderates the relationship between organization size and attraction. On the one hand, low SE individuals may be more attracted to larger organizations because they feel it will be easier to hide in a larger organization. Conversely, high SE individuals may be more attracted to smaller organizations because they feel they can have more of an impact in a smaller firm. On the other hand, high SE individuals may be more attracted to larger organizations because there is more challenge in larger organizations and more hierarchical levels through which to move. Therefore, we make no directional hypothesis for how self-esteem moderates the relationship between organization size and attraction.

Need for Achievement

Individuals with a high need for achievement (nAch) tend to prefer moderately challenging tasks, have a strong need for performance feedback, and prefer situations in which they can take personal responsibility for performance results and outcomes and in which they can try new ways of doing things (McClelland, 1965, 1985). Miller and Droge (1986) found that high nAch chief executive officers (CEOs) were more likely to centralize power and formalize policies and procedures than low nAch CEOs because of the desire to receive credit for and to monitor and control corporate performance. Furthermore, high nAch individuals prefer outcome-oriented cultures (O'Reilly et al., 1991) and situations in which individuals attain success through their own efforts and abilities rather than through chance (Miner, 1980). Because certain organizational characteristics are more likely to result in such situations, we expect need for achievement to interact with organizational characteristics to influence applicant attraction.

Specifically, we expect that because high nAch individuals prefer situations in which they are personally responsible for their outcomes, they will be more attracted to organizations that base rewards on performance rather than on seniority. In addition, high nAch individuals desire personal responsibility and tend to be more innovative (i.e., they like to try new ways of doing things). Decentralized organizations are likely to provide more opportunities for individuals to participate in and be responsible for decision making and therefore provide more opportunities to try new approaches. Thus, we expect that high nAch individuals will be more attracted to decentralized organizations than will low nAch individuals. Finally, we expect that organization size will influence expectations concerning job challenge and perceived opportunities to be responsible for performance and to receive personal feedback. Although these are
important factors to high nAch individuals, it is unclear how size will influence them. For example, large organizations may be perceived to provide moderate levels of challenge but fewer opportunities to take personal responsibility for outcomes and to receive performance feedback. Analogously, small organizations may be perceived as providing less challenge but more opportunities for responsibility and feedback. Therefore, we offer no specific, directional hypothesis for the moderating effects of need for achievement on the relationship between organization size and attraction, although we investigate such relationships.

In summary, we extended earlier research by investigating the main effects of the organizational characteristics of reward structure, centralization, size and geographical dispersion on applicant attraction to the organization. We hypothesize that, in general, attraction will be highest to organizations that (a) reward individual performance, (b) are decentralized, (c) are smaller, and (d) are less geographically dispersed. However, we expect that self-esteem and need for achievement will moderate the effects of these organizational characteristics. Specifically, we hypothesize that high SE individuals will be more attracted to organizations that reward individual performance and are decentralized than will their low SE counterparts. Furthermore, on the basis of the behavioral plasticity hypothesis, we expect that organizational characteristics will be stronger predictors of attraction for low than for high SE individuals. Finally, we hypothesize that high nAch individuals will be more attracted to organizations that are decentralized and reward individual performance than will low nAch individuals.

Method

Procedure

Data were collected from students in management classes as in-class exercises at two points in time. One exercise asked students to read a description of an organization and indicate their attraction to the organization. The descriptions, in the form of scenarios, included the manipulations of organizational characteristics. The other class exercise was completed at a different time and asked the students to complete a brief attitude questionnaire that included demographic items, the Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ; Steers & Braunstein, 1976), the Individual Growth Need Strength Scale from the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1974), and Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale. We used only the demographic items, the need for achievement scale from the MNQ, and the self-esteem scale for this study. Students were told that the attitude questionnaire was typical of what was used by organizations to measure employees’ attitudes and job perceptions and was given to students to provide them with insight into how employees who respond to a typical attitude questionnaire might feel.

The scenario questionnaire, which described the organization, was completed by 358 students, and 560 students completed the attitude questionnaire. The data used for this study are from students who completed both the attitude and scenario questionnaires (N = 284). We conducted t tests to determine whether the subjects included in the study were different from subjects not included. These tests used a study inclusion variable as the independent variable (included vs. not included in study) and self-esteem, need for achievement, and organization attraction as the dependent variables. None of the t tests was significant, suggesting that the subjects included in the study were similar to those not included.

Subjects

All subjects (N = 284) were enrolled in upper-level management classes. Most of the students were either juniors (42%) or seniors (43%), although there were a few graduate students (13%) and sophomores (3%). (Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.) The majority of the students were White (88%) men (52%). The students were 23 years old on average.

Experimental Design

The experimental design was a 3 x 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design. There were three levels of organization size (small, medium, or large), two levels of reward structure (merit pay or seniority-based pay), two levels of centralization (centralized or decentralized), and two levels of geographical dispersion (sites geographically dispersed or centrally located). In all, 24 separate descriptions were written to be randomly distributed to subjects.

Independent Variables

Reward structure. In the merit pay condition, subjects were told, “This firm rewards individuals for their individual performance. . . . The reward system is structured such that pay raises are determined solely based on individual performance. . . . Promotion decisions are based on individual skill and performance in the current position.” In the seniority-based condition, subjects were told, “This firm rewards employees for seniority. . . . Employees receive annual pay raises that are a fixed percentage depending upon the employee's current position. . . . Promotion decisions are based on seniority and fit.”

Centralization. In the decentralized condition, subjects were told, “The person who would be your direct supervisor will make the decision about whether to hire you after consulting with the department members. The organization is structured so that decisions are made within each department; headquarters sets general policies and then allows each department wide latitude in decision making.” In the centralized condition, subjects were told, “The person who would be your direct supervisor will forward a recommendation about whether to hire you to corporate headquarters where the final decision is made. The organization is structured so that decisions are made at company headquarters; headquarters sets general policies which prescribe departmental decision making.”

Organization size. The organization was described as either a “large-sized company with over 50,000 employees,” a “moderately sized company with between five and six thousand employees,” or a “relatively small-sized company with only several hundred employees.”

Geographical dispersion. In the geographically dispersed condition, subjects were told, “This firm has offices and plants located throughout the country.” In the centrally located condition, subjects read, “Most of this firm’s offices and plants are located within a 60-mile radius.” In addition, in both conditions, subjects read that they would “be assigned to corporate headquarters for approximately 3 years before being transferred to another site” to emphasize that subjects in the dispersed organization would be asked to relocate.

The following is an example of one of the 24 descriptions, specifically the merit pay, decentralized, large-sized, geographically dispersed organization.

You heard about the company at the college placement office and signed up for an interview. This is a large sized company with over 50,000 employees. You interviewed with a representative from the personnel department who was very informative. Two weeks after the interview you received an invitation to make a site visit which you accepted. The site visit provided further information about the company and the job. It was made clear to you that this firm
rewards individuals for their individual performance. You found out on your site visit that the reward system is structured such that pay raises are determined solely based on individual performance. In addition, promotion decisions are based on individual skill and performance in the current position. You learned that this firm has offices and plants located throughout the country. As a new employee you expect to be assigned to corporate headquarters for approximately 3 years before being transferred to another site. You are waiting to hear whether you will be offered a job. The person who would be your direct supervisor will make the decision about whether to hire you after consulting with the department members. The organization is structured so that decisions are made within each department; headquarters sets general policies and then allows each department wide latitude in decision making.

**Pilot Testing of Independent Variables**

A pilot study was conducted to determine whether the organization characteristics manipulations produced the intended effects. One hundred and thirty business students read a scenario and then answered a series of questions concerning the scenario. Results indicated that all manipulations worked as intended. Subjects who read the individual performance manipulation were more likely to indicate that people in this company are rewarded for individual performance ($M = 4.7$ vs. 2.3, for seniority based), $F(1, 106) = 259.49, p < .01$, and less likely to indicate that seniority is rewarded by this company ($M = 2.3$ vs. 4.7), $F(1, 106) = 250.13, p < .01$. Subjects who read the centralized description were less likely to indicate that the people in this company are involved in decisions affecting their unit ($M = 2.5$ vs. 4.1), $F(1, 106) = 83.81, p < .01$. The size manipulation worked such that the large-sized company was rated larger than the moderate-size company, which in turn was rated larger than the small-sized companies ($M = 4.4, 3.1$, and 2.3, respectively), $F(2, 106) = 61.84, p < .01$. Finally, subjects in the geographically dispersed condition were more likely to expect to relocate to another city if they worked for this company ($M = 4.3$ vs. 3.2), $F(1, 106) = 37.10, p < .01$, than subjects in the centrally located condition.

**Personality Characteristics**

**Self-esteem.** We measured global self-esteem by using eight items (7-point scale; $a = .80$) adapted from Rosenberg (1965). The mean for our sample was 45.7. Although Rosenberg (1965) did not provide comparable data, we checked earlier studies that used items from Rosenberg (1965; e.g., Gould, 1979; Ivanecivich, 1979; Schmitt, Coyle, Rausing, & White, 1979) to compare our mean level of self-esteem with results from prior research. Although it is somewhat difficult to compare our results with other studies, because studies have used different numbers of items and different response scales, our mean appears to be slightly higher than was found in earlier research.

**Need for achievement.** Subjects indicated their agreement (on 7-point scales) with five items ($a = .56$) adapted from Steers and Brantstein (1976). Although the reliability was slightly below the .60 criteria discussed by Nunnally (1967), we retained this scale, realizing that the low internal consistency reduces the power to detect true relationships. Steers and Brantstein reported a mean of 4.3 for a sample of 96 management students. Our mean was 5.6, somewhat higher.

**Dependent Variable**

Applicant attraction to the organization was measured (on 7-point scales) with five items ($a = .95$) measuring the extent to which subjects would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company, were interested in pursuing their application with the company, would like to work for the company, would accept a job offer, and were no longer interested in the company except as a last resort (reversed).

**Analyses and Results**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among the variables. As expected, given the random assignment of subjects to conditions, the organizational characteristics are uncorrelated with each other. In a similar fashion, the organizational characteristics are uncorrelated with the personality characteristics, except for the negative correlation between need for achievement and centralization ($r = -.14$). Finally, the personality characteristics are uncorrelated with organization attractiveness, and need for achievement and self-esteem are moderately correlated ($r = .38$).

**Organizational Characteristics**

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that reward structure and centralization influenced attraction to the organization. Specifically, subjects were more attracted to the organization that rewarded performance based on merit rather than on seniority ($M = 26.6$ and 21.4, respectively), $F(1, 260) = 43.85, p < .01$. Furthermore, subjects were more attracted to the decentralized rather than the centralized organization ($M = 25.5$ and 23.0, respectively), $F(1, 260) = 11.329, p < .01$. There were no main effects for size or geographical dispersion and no significant interactions.

**Interactionist Perspective**

To investigate whether need for achievement and self-esteem moderated the effects of organizational characteristics on attraction to the organization, we conducted hierarchical moderated regression analyses. For these analyses the organizational characteristics were dummy-coded with one vector, except for size, which used two dummy-coded vectors for the three levels of size. For size, the medium-sized organization was coded with all zeros and was used as the comparison group.

The first step in the analyses entered the organization characteristics, and the second step entered the personality characteristics. The third step entered the interaction terms for the Self-Esteem $\times$ Organization Characteristics interactions, and the fourth step entered the Need for Achievement $\times$ Organization Characteristics interaction terms (see Table 2). The change in $R^2$ associated with the set of interaction terms provides an overall test of whether the specific personality characteristic moderates the effects of organizational characteristics on attraction. For cross-products with only one interaction term (e.g., Self-Esteem $\times$ Centralization, Need for Achievement $\times$ Reward, etc.), the significance test of the regression coefficient tests the specific interaction effect (Pedhazur, 1982). For cross products with two interaction terms (e.g., the size interactions), the interaction effect was tested by determining whether the two cross-product terms accounted for incremental variance in attraction. To investigate the form of significant interaction effects, we plotted the slopes for high and low values (+1 standard deviation from the mean) of the personality characteristics for each organizational condition.
The results (see Table 2) show that for some Personality × Organizational Attributes interactions, there are significant moderator effects. These results suggest that for specific Personality × Organizational Attributes combinations there is support for an interactionist perspective. (Although moderator effects are symmetrical, such that we can describe personality as moderating the effects of organizational characteristics on attraction or organization characteristics as moderating the effects of personality characteristics on attraction, for theoretical reasons we chose to describe our results in terms of the measured personality characteristics moderating the effects of the manipulated organizational characteristics on attraction.) The set of variables entered in the third step, the interaction terms for Self-Esteem × Organization Characteristics, accounted for an additional 4% of the variance after the organizational and personality characteristics were in the equation. The fourth step of the regression analyses, which added the Need for Achievement × Organizational Characteristics interaction terms, accounted for an additional 5% of the variance above the personality and organizational characteristics and the Self-Esteem × Organizational Characteristics interaction terms.

As indicated by the significant regression coefficient in the full model, self-esteem moderated the effects of centralization (β = .32). As shown in Figure 1a, low SE individuals were more attracted to the decentralized organization than were high self-esteem individuals, although self-esteem did not influence attraction in the centralized condition. In addition, the Self-Esteem × Organization Size interaction terms accounted for a significant amount of variance in attraction ($R^2$ change = .02). $F(2, 270) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, but the only significant contrast was for the large-sized versus the medium-sized organizations (β = −.64). As shown in Figure 1b, the slope for the low SE individuals was positive, such that they were more attracted to large than medium organizations, whereas the slope for high SE individuals was negative, indicating they were less attracted to large than medium organizations.

On the basis of the behavioral plasticity hypothesis, we predicted that low SE individuals would be more influenced by organizational characteristics than would high SE individuals. To investigate this hypothesis, we used the median and split the sample into low and high SE subsamples (ns = 149 and 135, respectively) and for each of these subsamples conducted a regression analysis that included all variables in the full equation except for self-esteem and the Self-Esteem × Organizational Characteristics interaction terms (i.e., organizational characteristics, need for achievement, and the Need for Achievement × Organizational Characteristics interaction terms). As predicted by the behavioral plasticity hypothesis, organizational characteristics explained more variance in attraction for low SE subjects than for high SE subjects ($R^2 = .318$ and .179, respectively).

Turning to the need for achievement interactions, the significant regression coefficient associated with the Need for Achievement × Reward interaction term (β = .57; see Table 2)
indicates that need for achievement moderated the influence of reward structure on attraction. As shown in Figure 2a, the high nAch group was more strongly attracted to the firm when pay was based on merit than was the low nAch group, although there were no differences in attraction in the seniority-based reward structure. The Need for Achievement × Organization Size cross-product terms accounted for an additional 3% of variance in attraction, \( F(2, 266) = 6.37, p \leq .05 \); both the small versus medium (\( \beta = .80 \)) and large versus medium (\( \beta = .91 \)) contrasts were significant. For both low and high nAch individuals, the relationship between organization size and attraction was curvilinear; however, as shown in Figure 2b, the curvilinear relationships were opposite in direction. Specifically, low nAch individuals were more attracted to the medium than the small organizations, whereas high nAch individuals were less attracted to the medium than the small organizations. In addition, low nAch individuals were less attracted to large versus medium organizations, whereas the high nAch individuals were more attracted to large than medium organizations.

**Discussion**

The results provide some support for the hypothesis that individual characteristics moderate the influence of organizational characteristics on attraction to firms. Although subjects were, in general, more attracted to firms that were decentralized (vs. centralized) and reward pay based on performance (vs. tenure-based), self-esteem moderated the influences of centralization, and need for achievement moderated the influences of reward structure on attraction. In addition, both self-esteem and need for achievement moderated the relationship between organization size and attraction to firms. Taken in sum, such results support Schneider's (1987) proposition that different types of people are attracted to different organizations. Furthermore, our results support findings that individual differences are related to subjects' preferences for certain organizational policies (Strand, Levine, & Montgomery, 1981) and job and organizational attributes (Zedeck, 1977).

The results support the behavioral plasticity hypothesis in that organizational characteristics accounted for more variance in attraction for low SE individuals, suggesting that environmental cues were more important influences for this group. Opposite of what was expected, however, was that low SE individuals were more attracted to decentralized organizations than were high SE individuals, although there were no differences for centralized organizations. One interpretation of this unexpected finding is that because low SE individuals have less...
confidence in their ability, the opportunity to share decision-making responsibility with other organizational members was more attractive to them because they would not be solely accountable for decisions. In addition, low SE individuals were more attracted to large organizations, whereas high SE individuals were less attracted to large organizations. Once again, low SE individuals may have perceived large organizations as providing more opportunities to diffuse responsibility. In summary, low SE individuals were more attracted to both large and decentralized organizations than were high SE individuals, perhaps because such organizations are perceived to provide fewer opportunities for sole responsibility for decisions. It is clear that further research is needed to replicate these findings and to determine whether shared responsibility is more attractive to low than high SE individuals.

As expected, high nAch individuals, who prefer responsibility for performance outcomes, were more attracted to a reward-for-performance environment than were low nAch individuals. In addition, need for achievement moderated the effects of size on attraction such that low nAch individuals were most attracted to the medium-sized organizations and less attracted to small and large organizations, whereas high nAch individuals were least attracted to medium-sized organizations and more attracted to small and large organizations. One explanation for such findings is that high nAch individuals perceived small organizations as providing more opportunities to be responsible for outcomes and to receive feedback. Conversely, large organizations may have been perceived as providing more challenges and were, therefore, attractive to high nAch individuals. It is clear that such interpretations are speculative; further research is necessary to replicate this finding and to investigate what aspects of small and large organizations, as compared with medium-sized organizations, were attractive to high nAch individuals. Finally, as indicated by the significant negative regression coefficient in the full model, high nAch individuals tended to have less attraction to organizations.

This study extends results from Bretz et al. (1989), who also found that organizational choice was influenced by the match between personality characteristics and organizational characteristics. However, Bretz et al. used only the reward system to describe the organizations and suggested that future research provide enhanced descriptions of organizations (i.e., more than just a description of the reward system). An important question for researchers investigating influences of person–environment fit on attraction to organizations is what aspects of organizations should be used to describe the organization and what characteristics of individuals will test the congruence hypothesis (Chatman, 1989). We chose to describe organizations in terms of reward systems, centralization of decision making, and organization size because these characteristics were thought to influence perceptions of the culture, values, and norms of the organization. On the individual side, we measured self-esteem and need for achievement because both variables have been shown to influence work-related perceptions and behaviors (Brockner, 1988; McClelland, 1985) and therefore were expected to influence how organizational characteristics would influence attraction to firms. Although our results indicate that the congruence between these individual and organizational characteristics was an important influence on attraction to the organization, future research should investigate influences of additional individual and organizational characteristics.

The design of this study has certain limitations. The use of written scenarios to describe organizations leads to incomplete descriptions of the organization, although such descriptions are not that dissimilar from written materials such as recruitment brochures. For example, we did not provide information about salary, although salary is known to be an important influence on organizational attractiveness that becomes more important with greater variability in the labor market (Rynes, Schwab, & Heneman, 1983). We did not provide salary information because we wanted to keep salary constant and examine the effects of other organizational characteristics. Nonetheless, the exclusion of salary information led to incomplete descriptions of the organization. Therefore, future research might extend our study and investigate whether including salary information in the organizational description influences our results and whether certain personality characteristics moderate the influences of salary on organization attractiveness. In addition, applicants indicated their attraction to organizations rather than to actual job decisions. Attraction to organizations is a component of the job decision process, however, because applicants will pursue jobs only with organizations perceived to be attractive. Because subjects were college students who indicated their attraction to an organization based on a written scenario, questions of generalizability should be raised. However, because the population of interest is college students who are searching for jobs, the use of upper-level college students, who themselves will be searching for jobs in the near future, seemed appropriate. Nonetheless, the finding that subjects found merit pay systems more attractive than seniority systems may be because, as new employees, students do not have much seniority and would therefore prefer other reward systems. Finally, the low internal consistency of the need for achievement scale may have limited power to detect other interactions but does not detract from the interactions found.

We chose to investigate attraction to organizations by using a between-subjects rather than a within-subjects design because of concerns that exposing subjects to 24 organizational descriptions might make the organizational characteristics manipulations transparent and might result in demand characteristics or socially desirable responses. However, one limitation of between-subjects designs is that such designs do not allow assessment of the relative attractiveness of organization characteristics for a single individual and therefore do not assess the relative nature of person–organization fit. Furthermore, perhaps in part because subjects assessed only one organizational description rather than several descriptions as would be the case for within-subjects designs, the average level of attraction to organizations was relatively high (M = 24.18, or almost an average rating of 5 on a 7-point scale). Subjects did find some organizational descriptions more attractive than others, however, depending on their personality characteristics, suggesting that the ceiling effects caused by the high level of attractiveness may be minor. Nonetheless, future research might replicate our study by using a within-subjects design.

The generalizability of our results may be influenced by the extent to which the manipulation of organization characteris-
tics reflects how individuals actually obtain information and the type of information they obtain about organizations. For example, we manipulated organizational characteristics and randomly assigned subjects to conditions. In the job search process, however, applicants do not randomly assign themselves to particular types of organizational conditions; therefore, the random assignment of subjects to organizational conditions may not represent how individuals make decisions about organizations. Nonetheless, to the extent applicants with certain personality characteristics are more interested in organizations with certain characteristics, our results reflect how applicants make decisions about organizations. Furthermore, we attempted to create realistic descriptions by describing organizations with characteristics that reflect organizations that actually recruit at the placement center at this university, and the reward structure manipulation was similar to a manipulation used in earlier research (Bretz et al., 1989). Nonetheless, the generalizability of our results may be limited to the extent that the organizational characteristics manipulations do not reflect all the information applicants may obtain about organizations. Furthermore, although the manipulation checks indicated that the organizational manipulations had the intended effects, most subjects had limited work experience and may not have totally understood how these manipulations would actually influence working conditions. In addition, the exact wording of our organizational characteristics manipulations may have confounds built into the description. For example, a person may prefer a decentralized organization but have misgivings about the direct supervisor making the “decision about whether to hire you after consulting with the department members.” Therefore, future researchers should extend our study by using different manipulations for the organizational characteristics, subjects with more work experience, and additional personality characteristics.

To the extent our results generalize to applicants with little or no work experience, managers interested in the recruitment process should pay close attention to the information communicated to prospective applicants in recruitment advertisements and brochures. For example, our results suggest that, although individual differences may moderate this effect, applicants will be more attracted to firms when company recruitment brochures stress that individual performance is rewarded and employees make decisions concerning their work. Although some research has investigated influences of recruitment advertisement (Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Mason & Belt, 1986), little is known about how information communicated in recruitment brochures influences attraction to firms and subsequent job pursuit intentions. Nonetheless, in a laboratory study, Schoerber and Rosen (1989) found that students reacted negatively to company brochures that included an employment-at-will section. They suggested that individuals high in need for security may react most negatively to employment-at-will statements and urged future researchers to investigate characteristics of job seekers that moderate influences of statements in company brochures.

In addition, researchers interested in the recruitment process should heed calls in the literature (Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, 1982) and continue to investigate how organizational characteristics influence applicants’ decision-making processes. Our results suggest that organizational characteristics influence attraction to firms, although this influence is partially dependent on the specific individual attribute that moderated the specific organizational characteristic. Future research should extend our findings to field settings and investigate whether organization characteristics influence applicants’ actual decisions to interview with an organization, to go on a site visit, or to accept a job offer. We expect that organizational characteristics will be more important influences on earlier decisions in the recruitment process, such as decisions to interview with an organization, because applicants have little information about job attributes and therefore base their decisions on perceptions of salient organizational attributes. It is clear, however, that the results from this study suggest that researchers adopt an interactionist perspective and continue to investigate individual difference variables that influence how organizational characteristics influence applicants’ attraction to and decisions about organizations. In their review of the recruitment literature, Wanous and Colella (1989) found only two studies that investigated how perceptions of person-organization fit influence job choice decisions (Keon et al. 1982; Tom, 1971). Future research might follow Pervin’s (1989) recommendation and investigate how individuals’ goals and perceptions of the rewards available in the environment influence job choice decisions.

References


re design projects (Tech. Rep. No. 4), New Haven, CT: Yale University, Department of Administrative Sciences.


Received October 18, 1991
Revision received August 25, 1992
Accepted August 25, 1992