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Does it Take More Than Ideals? How Counter-Ideal Value Congruence Shapes Employees' Trust in the Organization

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Abstract Research on value congruence rests on the assumption that values denote desirable behaviors and ideals that employees and organizations strive to approach. In the present study, we develop and test the argument that a more complete understanding of value congruence can be achieved by considering a second type of congruence based on employees' and organizations' counter-ideal values (i.e., what both seek to avoid). We examined this proposition in a time-lagged study of 672 employees from various occupational and organizational backgrounds. We used difference scores as well as polynomial regression and response surface analyses to test our hypotheses. Consistent with our hypotheses, results reveal that counter-ideal value congruence has unique relations to employees' trust in the organization that go beyond the effects of ideal value congruence. We discuss theoretical and practical implications of this expanded perspective on value congruence.

Keywords Counter-ideal values · Ideal values · Person-environment fit · P-E fit · Value congruence

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Introduction

Values play a central role in the functioning of modern organizations. Engrained in mission statements and embedded in organizational cultures, they specify what organizations want to become, how organizational members should act, and in what way resources should be allocated (Cascio 2012). As such, the issue of how organizational values affect employees has attracted considerable attention from scholars and practitioners alike. A central argument of organizational value research is, however, that organizational values represent only one side of the coin. Indeed, numerous studies have revealed that it is the congruence (or absence of congruence) between perceived organizational and employees' values that shapes employees' reactions at work. This line of research consistently shows that when employees' and organizational values match, employees are more committed to their organization, engage more strongly in ethical behaviors, and are less likely to leave the organization (for meta-analyses, see Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Verquer et al. 2003). Such positive effects are often posited to be due to the higher trust in the organization that employees have when personal and organizational value match (Edwards and Cable 2009).

Interestingly, existing value congruence research has only focused on one particular definition of values: Values are desirable behaviors and ideals that employees and organizations want to approach (Schwartz 1992). We will refer to this form of values as "ideal values." However, it is common that people do not only recognize what they want but also what they do not want (Carver and Scheier 1998). Indeed, the distinction between approach and avoidance is one of the oldest and most fundamental insights in behavioral research and has shaped influential theoretical accounts including Higgins' (1997) regulatory

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focus model, Lewin's (1951) field theory, and Gray's (1994) differentiation between approach and avoidance systems. Moreover, this distinction has contributed to a deeper understanding of key aspects of organizational life such as leadership effectiveness (Neubert et al. 2008), the design of effective contracts (Weber and Mayer 2011), and employee performance (Wallace et al. 2009). Surprisingly, organizational value research has only recently begun to explore the notion of two forces (Graf et al. 2011; Van Quaquebeke et al. 2010) but has not yet done so with regard to person-organization value congruence.

We believe that the very notion of approach and avoidance can also provide important insights into the dynamics of person-organization value congruence. In practice, for instance, some organizations have already begun to develop somewhat more unusual value guidelines that also note what the respective organization seeks to avoid. For example, Heraeus, a multi-national technology corporation, uses counter-ideal values to determine what the company should not do, such as not contributing to the development of weapons (Van Dick and Rinnert 2011). Relatedly, Google, an internet company, states in its organizational philosophy, "We never manipulate rankings to put our partners higher in our search results, and no one can buy better PageRank," often summarized as "Don't do evil" (Google 2015). Finally, Whole Foods Market, a food retailer, specifies in its value statements what it does not want to be by noting, "We are buying agents for our customers and not the selling agents for the manufacturers" (Whole Foods Market 2015). Together with statements focusing on ideal values, these counter-ideals help employees to develop a more complete and more refined picture of what their organization stands for. They thus allow for a clearer understanding of whether personal and organizational principles are congruent.

Based on these theoretical and practical considerations, in this study we develop and test the hypothesis that value congruence effects may go beyond the established notion of ideal value congruence (i.e., a match of what employees and organizations want to approach). Specifically, we argue that a second, complementary form of value congruence exists based on employees' and organizations' counter-ideal values, that is, stable beliefs that certain behaviors and end-states are undesirable and should thus be avoided (Van Quaquebeke et al. 2014). Building on and extending recent research, we predict that both forms of value congruence shape employees' trust in the organization. Our theoretical model is illustrated in Fig. 1.

Notably, we chose trust in the organization as the central outcome for this study for three main reasons. First, trust plays a crucial role for the effective functioning and success of organizations (Dirks and Ferrin 2001; Mayer et al. 1995). Indeed, it functions as "social glue," fosters employee cooperation and performance, and reduces the cost of control and monitoring (Colquitt et al. 2013; Robinson 1996). Organizations with low levels of trust tend to show reduced employee loyalty, tend to be less competitive, and have lower profitability than organizations where trust is high (Atkins 2014). As a consequence, trust has become a core variable in organizational research and attracts strong interest from researchers and practitioners alike (Robbins and Judge 2012). Second, recent research has pointed to trust as a central yet underexplored outcome of (ideal) value congruence (Edwards and Cable 2009). Examining various outcomes of value congruence, this study found that the effects of value congruence on trust were substantially larger and more consistent than those on all other variables. Indeed, having shared values implies that person and organization have common goals and a common understanding of what is right and wrong, which fosters a sense of mutual trust (Sitkin and Roth 1993). Edwards and Cable (2009) hence concluded that trust "should play a more prominent role in value congruence research" (p. 672) and called for additional research on the relationship between value congruence and trust. Our study heeds this call. Finally, over the past years, levels of trust in organizations have been low and factors that may help reestablish employees' trust are in demand (for research-based recommendations on how to enhance employees' trust in the organization, see Hitch 2012 and Starnes et al. 2010). For example, a recent survey found that less than half (i.e., 42 %) of employees have high levels of trust in their organization (Atkins 2014). To effectively address this phenomenon, it seems to be important to yield a deeper understanding of the factors that foster or hinder the development of trust.

Overall, we believe that the notion of counter-ideal values can advance our understanding of values and value congruence in several important ways. From a theoretical standpoint, it offers a way for a long overdue (re)integration of two surprisingly unmoored streams of the literature, i.e., value and motivation research. As such, it can contribute to a more complete understanding of value congruence effects, allow for more accurate predictions of favorable employee outcomes, and offer new theory-driven avenues for future value congruence research. From a practical standpoint, the proposed two-force perspective on value congruence may point to a more refined approach for organizations to explore and explicate their ideal and counter-ideal values. Indeed, understanding their counter-ideal values may help organizations to more effectively shape their relationships with current and future employees.

Organizational and Personal Values

In general, values are a fundamental force that guides thinking, feelings, and behavior (Rokeach 1973). They provide abstract ideals, such as power, altruism, or

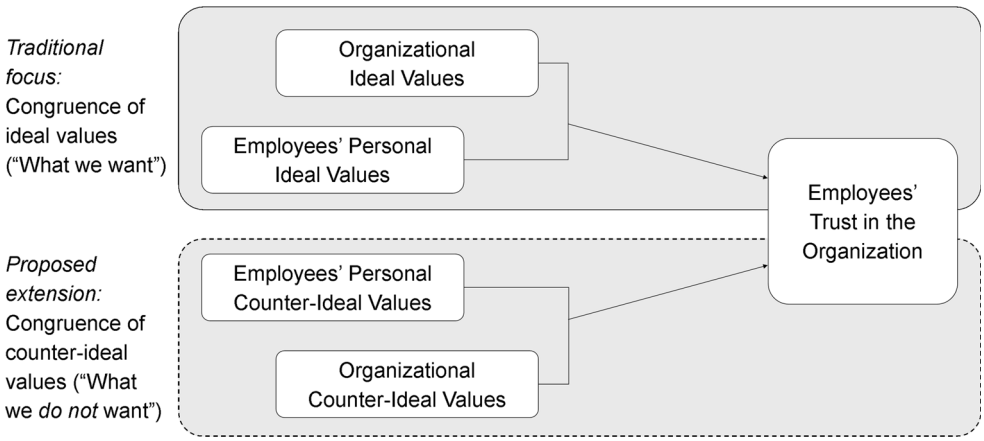


Fig. 1 An extended model of value congruence effects

security, which individuals seek to approach and against which they evaluate themselves and their environment. Situations that promote people's values trigger positive reactions; conversely, people react negatively to situations that challenge their values (Schwartz 1992). Deeper insight into these dynamics is offered by the notion of value congruence, which takes into account that people do not act in isolation but are embedded in larger social contexts, such as organizations. In this paper, we focus on value congruence between organizations and employees, which is the most established form of value congruence in organizational settings (e.g., compared to person-supervisor value congruence; Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Person-organization value congruence is the extent to which personal and organizational values are similar (Kristof 1996).

Various studies have examined the effects of person-organization value congruence. For example, O'Reilly III et al. (1991) found that employees had higher commitment to the organization and lower intentions to quit when personal and organizational values were aligned. In a similar vein, Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001) showed that value congruence was related to job satisfaction and employees' extra-role efforts (Leung and Chaturvedi 2011; Ostroff et al. 2005). More recently, and as noted earlier, Edwards and Cable (2009) found congruence effects particularly on employees' trust in the organization. These studies thus suggest that value congruence is associated with important employee outcomes. Moreover, this research has shown that congruence effects are largely based on the similarity between employees' values and their *perception* of organizational values (Edwards and Cable 2009; Leung and Chaturvedi 2011; Van Vianen et al. 2004). This finding is consistent with the idea that people react only to those (in-)congruencies that they are subjectively aware of (French et al. 1982). In the present study, we follow this lead and, in line with the majority of studies on value congruence, focus on employees' perception of their own and organizational value congruence.

Although existing studies have provided important insights into the dynamics of value congruence, they have largely been pursued with an *approach* motivational lens suggesting that employees and organizations strive toward certain ideals. This approach is in line with the notion that values are essentially a motivational force and that "the primary content aspect of a value is the type of goal or motivational concern that it expresses" (Schwartz 1992, p. 4). However, the literature on values and value congruence has largely ignored a second motivational source, namely *avoidance*. This is surprising as it is widely accepted that people's reactions are not only guided by motivations that pull them toward desired goals but also by motivations that drive them away from undesired outcomes (Lavine 2001). In fact, it is a key insight of the attitudes literature that people can even have contradictory feelings toward a subject or idea by having positive and negative sentiments toward it at the same time (Conner and Armitage 2008). Numerous studies have shown that considering positive and negative attitudes in tandem allows for much clearer predictions of people's actual behaviors than the often used unidimensional attitudes measures (Maio and Haddock 2009). In fact, negative sentiments can explain why the link between people's (positive) attitudes and behaviors is often low—for example, why people avoid a medical screening even though they endorse this medical procedure (Dormandy et al. 2006) or why they do not vote for a presidential candidate even though they said that they would (Lavine 2001). As Cacioppo et al. (1997, p. 3) noted, this line of research suggests that "distinguishable motivational systems underlie assessments of the positive and negative significance of a stimulus. […] As such, attitudes can be represented more completely within a bivariate space." Given the strong ties between values and motivational dynamics and following the lead of attitude as well as self-regulation research, we believe that adopting such a dual-force perspective based on approach and avoidance

can also provide important insights into the dynamics of values and value congruence.

Approach and Avoidance Orientation

A theory, which distinguishes between dynamics of approach and avoidance, is regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997, 1998; see also Carver and Scheier 1998). The theory is one of the most prominent accounts in the domain of human motivation and a large body of research has provided support for its propositions (Lanaj et al. 2012). Regulatory focus theory suggests that two motivational systems shape people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The first system is based on a promotion focus and focuses on the achievement of desired end-states. This system is sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes and uses people's goals and ideals to energize and guide behavior. Specifically, it is based on an approach motivation and helps people to achieve and attain desired end-states. In contrast, the second system draws on a prevention focus and concentrates on the avoidance of undesired end-states. It is sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes and strives to increase the distance from undesired effects. Specifically, it uses an avoidance motivation and helps people to stay away from undesired end-states.

Regulatory focus theory posits that both the approach and avoidance systems are relatively distinct and operate simultaneously. Indeed, empirical studies typically find relatively low correlations between promotion and prevention foci and between approach and avoidance goals, respectively (Beck and Schmidt, 2013). In line with these findings and building on the distinction between approach and avoidance, attitudinal research has shown that people's positive and negative attitudes toward an object are correlated but relatively distinct (with correlations of about $-.40$ to $-.50$ albeit some studies find weaker links (Armitage and Conner 2000)). For example, Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) found that employees can simultaneously identify and disidentify with their organization and that the resulting experience of ambivalence is quite common in organizational settings. Importantly, attitudinal studies have largely used parallel scales to assess positive and negative sentiments, e.g., by asking how favorable people see a specific object and by additionally asking how unfavorable they see this object (Conner and Armitage 2008). Prima facie, it is interesting that the correlations between positive and negative sentiments are not higher. However, this finding may not be entirely surprising as it reflects the common experience that most objects do not only have advantages (which evoke an approach orientation and positive responses) but also disadvantages (which trigger an avoidance orientation and negative responses; Cacioppo et al. 1997).

From Approach and Avoidance to Ideal and Counter-Ideal Values

We believe that the distinction between approach and avoidance also holds important insights for the understanding of values. Based on regulatory focus theory's notion that positive and negative end-states both guide people's behaviors and given the findings of attitudinal research, it appears possible that two types of values exist. First, employees and organizations should have ideal values—that is, beliefs about behaviors and end-states that employees and organizations see as desirable. Employees and organizations strive to act in line and to attain these outcomes (Schwartz 1992). These values function in line with an approach motivation and are consistent with the traditional view of values. Second, employees and organizations should have counter-ideal values—that is, ideas and outcomes that employees and organizations perceive negatively. These values represent an avoidance motivation and help people and organizations to stay clear of undesired consequences.

Given that approach and avoidance are related but relatively distinct forces, we expect that ideal and counter-ideal values form related but relatively unique value systems. Ideal values and their respective counter-ideal values should be negatively correlated; however, they provide complementary and non-redundant insights. For example, not actively striving for a certain value (e.g., power) is not the same as actively avoiding this value. As a corollary, not avoiding a specific value is not the same as actively pursuing it. It thus seems that knowing about what a person wants to approach does not provide a full understanding of what the person wants to avoid and vice versa. The assumption of two parallel value systems, however, can redress this shortcoming. Moreover, this assumption can account for the fact that a person can be ambivalent toward certain values. For example, a person may be attracted by some aspects of a certain value such as altruism (e.g., the idea that altruism may reduce poverty) but be deterred by other aspects (e.g., the argument that altruistic behaviors may reduce people's motivation to work hard).

Importantly, we do not propose that counter-ideal values replace the established notion of (ideal) values. Rather we propose that both value types exist side by side and that both hold important and complementary pieces of information. In fact, we assume that many characteristics of counter-ideal values are comparable to those of ideal values. For example, we would expect that the relationships between different counter-ideal values follow a similar

circumplex order as the links between different ideal values with some counter-ideal values being more similar to each other and other counter-ideal values being more dissimilar.

Ideal and Counter-Ideal Paths of Value Congruence

Based on the notions of ideal and counter-ideal values, we expect two routes of value congruence between employees and the organization. The first route builds on employees' and organizational ideal values. This route is consistent with the established view on value congruence and uses an approach-oriented lens to analyze congruence effects. The second route is based on employees' and organizations' counter-ideal values and draws on an avoidance-oriented view. We posit that both routes shape employees' trust in the organization.

An approach-oriented perspective suggests that when personal and organizational ideals are congruent, it follows that person and organization share a common understanding of what is right and that employees see the organization's principles as desirable (Edwards and Cable 2009; Malbasic et al. 2014). Based on these perceptions, employees are likely to develop positive expectations about the organization's intentions and behaviors and are willing to accept a certain degree of vulnerability toward it (Rousseau et al. 1998). Indeed, a willingness to be vulnerable is a core element of trust in another party and is often rooted in perceptions of similarity (Mayer et al. 1995; Sitkin and Roth 1993). Moreover, value congruence implies that employees and the organization are bound together by shared ideals and objectives. This should give rise to expectations that the organization will be benevolent toward the employee because employee and organization work toward the same goal (Hosmer 1995; Salamon and Robinson 2008). In contrast, if organizational and personal values are misaligned, employees and organization seek to approach different ideals. This is likely to foster tension and conflict and thus will interfere with the development of mutual trust (Jehn et al. 1999).

Accordingly, counter-ideal values can provide information that is not captured by personal and organizational ideals alone and may thus have an additional, unique effect on employees' perception of congruence. Specifically, counter-ideal value congruence should occur when employees and organization share a common understanding of what is undesirable and wrong (Shao et al. 2011). Congruence in counter-ideals thus implies that employees and the organization are bound together by a common definition of what they oppose and seek to avoid (Van Quaquebeke et al. 2014). Thus, personal and organizational counter-ideals offer a second route for employees to assess their alignment or misalignment with the organization and similarity in counter-ideals should strengthen employees' perceptions of the organization as a trustworthy and dependable partner (Mayer et al. 1995; Sitkin and Roth 1993). Congruence in counter-ideals reduces the potential of suspicion and conflict as employees and organization strive to avoid the same undesired behaviors and end-states. Because employees and organization seek to steer away from the same negative outcomes, employees are likely to expect that the organization will not intentionally harm them (Hosmer 1995). This expectation should reinforce a willingness to be vulnerable toward the organization and thus foster a sense of trust.

We expect that considering ideal value congruence and counter-ideal value congruence in tandem will allow employees to more precisely determine their alignment or misalignment with the organization. For example, in an organization that ascribes low importance to change-related values, its counter-ideal values will help to clarify whether the organization simply holds a neutral stance toward new ideas or whether it actively seeks to avoid new approaches. This is crucial as not approaching a certain ideal value does not imply that this value should be actively avoided. Similarly, a non-profit organization may follow a vision that heavily draws on benevolence aspects, yet only the organization's counter-ideal values can signal whether power strategies are seen as undesired or in fact are not minded.

In summary, we expect that considering ideal and counter-ideal value congruence helps employees to achieve a more complete and more refined understanding of the organization and its intentions. Perceiving similarity not only in ideals but additionally in counter-ideals should foster their willingness to be vulnerable toward the organization and, accordingly, increase employees' trust in the organization. We predict

Hypothesis 1 Congruence between personal and organizational ideal values is positively and uniquely related to employees' trust in the organization, such that congruence in ideal values predicts trust even when congruence in counter-ideal values is controlled for.

Hypothesis 2 Congruence between personal and organizational counter-ideal values is positively and uniquely related to employees' trust in the organization, such that congruence in counter-ideal values predicts trust even when congruence in ideal values is controlled for.

Method

Participants and Procedures

We tested our hypotheses in a large, heterogeneous sample of employees. We recruited the sample through WiSo-

Panel, an academic online data collection service in Germany that allows academic researchers to advertise their studies to potential participants. Recent research suggests that this and similar services (e.g., Study response in the United States) are reliable data collection methods (Judge et al. 2006; Resick et al. 2013). A random sample of 6,219 employees was invited to take part in this study. To reduce the influence of common method variance, we separated the independent and dependent variables by point in time (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Specifically, at Time 1, employees provided ratings of organizational and personal ideal and counter-ideal values along sixteen value dimensions. Three weeks later, at Time 2, they completed the measure on trust in the organization.

Ratings of Value Congruence and Trust

We selected a three-week lag as shorter intervals may not sufficiently reduce effects that can artificially increase associations between variables (e.g., memory effects; Podsakoff et al. 2012). Longer intervals involve the risk of stronger respondent attrition. Three-week lags seem to effectively balance these countervailing influences. We received responses from 705 employees at Time 1 and 672 employees provided complete data at both time points. Fifty-six percent (374 people) of these 672 employees were women, average age was 45.6 years (SD = 10.5), and average work experience equaled 23.6 years (SD = 11.5). Participants worked across nearly 20 sectors (the most common were healthcare [16 %], manufacturing [14 %], public administration [11 %], and retail/commerce [11 %]), in a wide range of job types (e.g., technical, managerial, service, and operational positions), and on different organizational levels (i.e., executives or senior manager [9 %], middle managers [11 %], first-line supervisors [14 %], non-supervisory employees [66 %]).

Measures

We adopted all scales from previous research. English items were translated into German by a bilingual researcher. Another bilingual researcher translated them back into English. A comparison of the original and back-translated items indicated translation equivalence.

Value Congruence

To assess value congruence, we used Brown and Treviño's (2009) value survey, which has been specifically developed for research in organizational settings. The survey is based on Schwartz's (1992) model on human values, which has been validated in more than 400 samples from over 80 countries and is considered indicative of universal values (Brown and Treviño 2009; Cable and Edwards 2004). Scales based on Schwartz's value model have repeatedly been used in recent research examining work-related values (Brown and Treviño 2009; Cable and Edwards 2004; van Vianen et al. 2004). The value survey taps four principal value dimensions: openness to change, conservation, self-transcendence, and self-enhancement. Sample items are as follows: "Ambition—having high aspirations," "Success—achieving, accomplishing" (self-enhancement), "Tradition—preserving customs," "Conformity—following the rules, fitting in" (conservation), "Altruism—caring, assisting others," "Equality—ensuring equal opportunity for all" (self-transcendence), "Experimentation—trying new things," and "Variety—welcoming novelty and change" (openness to change). Self-enhancement is measured with three items; the other scales consist of five items each. We examined Schwartz's (1992) model to explore whether the Brown and Treviño (2009) self-enhancement scale might omit important aspects of this dimension. As a result, we included two additional items, tapping the dimensions of power and resources ("dominance—influencing others" and "resources—being prosperous"). As a result, all value dimensions were assessed with five items each.

To measure personal and organizational ideal values and counter-ideal values, each respondent evaluated the value items in four ways. This method of using the same items for personal and organizational values is a prerequisite for examining value congruence, which requires comparisons of commensurate dimensions (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). To assess organizational ideal values, respondents rated each item in response to the question, "How important is it in your organization to strive for this?" (1 = "not important at all" to 5 = "extremely important"). To measure personal ideal values, respondents were asked: "How important is it to you to strive for this?" These questions directly reflect the definition of human values and follow previous value congruence research that operationalized values as the importance of desirable end-states that people seek to approach (Cable and Edwards 2004). For instance, to measure personal and organizational values, Cable and Edwards (2004) asked participants: "How important is this to you?" and "How important is this at your organization?" Moreover, we adopted the term "strive" in our questions from established scales tapping people's approach motivation (Elliot and Church 1997; Lockwood et al. 2002). To assess organizational counter-ideal values, we asked: "How important is it in your organization to avoid this?" Finally, to measure respondents' counter-ideal values, we asked: "How important is it to you to avoid this?" This formulation directly reflects the conceptualization of counter-ideal values as end-states that people

seek to avoid and is in line with the respective motivational literature (Carver and Scheier 1998; Higgins 1997).

The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of all 16 value dimensions (2× (organization/employee) 4× (principal value dimensions) 2× (ideal/counter-ideal)) was good (average: .87, min: .75, max: .97). Moreover, a confirmatory factor analysis of the 16-factor measurement model yielded fit indices within an acceptable range ($\chi^2/df = 2.40$; CFI = .92; RMSEA = .05). We compared these indices with those of plausible alternative models. Results showed that the measurement model had a better fit with the data than the eight-factor model combining commensurate ideal values and counter-ideal values on the same factor (e.g., personal ideal values openness and personal counter-ideal values openness; $\chi^2/df = 5.35$; CFI = .74; RMSEA = .08; $\Delta\chi^2 = 8632.83$, $p < .001$). The 16-factor model also fit the data better than the eight-factor model combining commensurate personal (counter-)ideal values and organizational (counter-) ideal values on the same factor (e.g., personal ideal values openness and organizational ideal values openness; $\chi^2/df = 4.99$; CFI = .77; RMSEA = .08; $\Delta\chi^2 = 7629.37$, $p < .001$). Finally, the measurement showed a better fit than the four-factor model that combined the organizational and personal ideal and counter-ideal values for each value dimension on the same factor ($\chi^2/df = 6.84$; CFI = .65; RMSEA = .09; $\Delta\chi^2 = 13033.50$, $p < .001$).

Trust in the Organization

Consistent with Edwards and Cable (2009), we measured this variable with the seven-item scale by Robinson (1996). Example items are "I am not sure I fully trust my organization." (reverse coded) and "In general, I believe my organization's motives and intentions are good." ($\alpha = .92$). The items were rated on five-point scales, ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree.

Analyses

In extant research, two operationalizations of value congruence have been widely applied: One operationalization based on absolute differences between personal and organizational variables (e.g., Leung and Chaturvedi 2011) and a second one based on polynomial regression analyses (e.g., Cable and Edwards 2004). While difference scores have been criticized as conceptually ambiguous because of blending information from different sources (Edwards and Parry 1993), polynomial regression has engendered criticism due to its "perversely low" statistical power for revealing the proposed response surfaces (Judge 2008, p. 4). In view of this ongoing debate, we conducted our analyses based on both congruence measures.

To compute tests based on difference scores, we first calculated the absolute difference between the personal and organizational value dimensions and between the personal and organizational counter-ideal value dimensions, respectively. We obtained two scores for each of the four value dimensions—one representing ideal values and one representing counter-ideal value congruence. We then estimated four regression equations, modeling the ideal- and counter-ideal scores as predictors for employees' trust in the organization. We used hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, we entered the difference scores for the ideal value dimensions and, in step 2, the difference scores for the counter-ideal value dimension. This allowed us to examine whether counter-ideal value congruence had unique relationships with trust when ideal value congruence is controlled for.

Similarly, for the polynomial regression analyses, we modeled the effects of both value congruence types simultaneously. The regression equation was

$$\begin{aligned} Y = {} & b_{Y0} + b_{Y1}\text{OrgIV} + b_{Y2}\text{IndIV} + b_{Y3}\text{OrgIV}^2 \\ & + b_{Y4}\text{OrgIVIndIV} + b_{Y5}\text{IndIV}^2 + b_{Y6}\text{OrgCV} \\ & + b_{Y7}\text{IndCV} + b_{Y8}\text{OrgCV}^2 + b_{Y9}\text{OrgCVIndCV} \\ & + b_{10}\text{IndCV}^2 + e_Y \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

OrgIV and IndIV represent the scale-centered measures of organizational and individual ideal values; OrgCV and IndCV represent the scale-centered counter-ideal values of the organization and the individual employee. Following Cable and Edwards (2004), we used the results of Eq. 1 to calculate block variables. This approach tests whether personal and organizational values have a joint relationship with the dependent variable. A block variable is a weighted linear composite of regression coefficients multiplied with the respective predictor. For example, the block variable for the ideal values equals $b_{Y1}\text{OrgIV} + b_{Y2}\text{IndIV} + b_{Y3}\text{OrgIV}^2 + b_{Y4}\text{OrgIVIndIV} + b_{Y5}\text{IndIV}^2$ and the block variable for counter-ideal values is $b_{Y1}\text{OrgCV} + b_{Y2}\text{IndCV} + b_{Y3}\text{OrgCV}^2 + b_{Y4}\text{OrgCVIndCV} + b_{Y5}\text{IndCV}^2$. The block variables then replace the ten quadratic terms in Eq. 1 and the equation is re-estimated. The resulting regression coefficients of the block variables indicate whether the joint effects of personal and organizational ideal values and the joint effects of personal and organizational counter-ideal values, respectively, relate to the outcome (cf. Cable and Edwards 2004; Edwards and Cable 2009). As for the difference scores, we used hierarchical regression analysis and entered the block variable representing the ideal values in step 1 and the block variable representing the counter-ideal values in step 2. This allowed us to examine whether counter-ideal value congruence had unique relationships with trust.

Results

We report descriptive statistics in Table 1. In line with the argument that ideal and counter-ideal values are related but relatively unique, the correlations between both value types were quite small. They averaged −.22 for ideal and counter-ideal values of the individual and −.33 for ideal value and counter-ideal values of the organization. Below we first report the results based on difference scores followed by the results based on polynomial regression.

Analyses Based on Difference Scores

Hypothesis 1 predicted that congruence between personal and organizational ideal values would relate to trust in the organization. As shown in the first column of Table 2, the absolute difference between personal and organizational ideals related significantly to trust for all four value dimensions ($\beta = -.36$ to $-.17$). The negative sign of the coefficients indicates that the larger the difference between personal and organizational ideals, the lower employees' trust in the organization. Moreover, as also shown in Table 2 and consistent with Hypothesis 2's prediction that counter-ideal value congruence would additionally predict employees' trust, the absolute difference between personal and organizational counter-ideals related significantly to trust for three of the four value dimensions—with the sole exception being conservation values ($\beta = -.19$ to $-.05$). These effects were robust even though we controlled for the traditional notion of ideal value congruence (that is, both ideal and counter-ideal value congruence had been entered into the same hierarchical regression equation). For each of the value dimensions, the amount of explained variance in employee trust increased between 11 and 16 % (see Table 2). These results indicate that counter-ideal value congruence robustly related to trust in the organization beyond the influence of ideal value congruence.

Analyses Based on Polynomial Regression and Response Surfaces

To validate these findings and additionally inspect their specific shape, we examined the results of the polynomial regression analyses. As shown in the second column of Table 2 and consistent with Hypothesis 1, the joint relationships of personal and organizational ideals with trust were significant for all four value dimensions ($\beta = .24$ to .29). The positive sign of the coefficients reveals that these joint relationships of organizational and personal values related positively to employee trust. Moreover, and in line with Hypothesis 2, the joint relationships of personal and organizational counter-ideals with trust were also positive and significant for all four value dimensions ($\beta = .15$ to .27). More specifically, adding counter-ideal value congruence to the regression explained a significant amount of incremental variance. The amount of explained variance in employee trust increased between 16 and 26 %. Again, as the hierarchical regression equation included all indicators of ideal and counter-ideal values, these results indicate that counter-ideal values predicted trust beyond the influence of ideal values.

To examine these effects in greater detail, we used response surface methodology (Edwards and Parry 1993). The results of a polynomial regression equation (i.e., of Eq. 1) can be characterized by two lines of reference: (a) the congruence line, along which organizational and personal values are equal (i.e., $X = Y$) and (b) the incongruence line, along which organizational and personal values differ. The central criterion for a congruence effect is a downward curvature along the incongruence line (Cable and Edwards 2004; Kristof-Brown and Stevens 2001). This inverted U-shape indicates that trust in the organization increases when personal and organizational (counter-)ideal values are similar and decreases when personal and organizational values diverge (Edwards and Parry 1993). The form along the congruence line provides additional insights. It indicates whether potential congruence effects are stronger or weaker when person and organization regard a certain value dimension as very important, neutral, or rather unimportant.

Figures 2 and 3 present the graphs for ideal and counter-ideal values, respectively. Table 3 shows the related numerical indicators. As can be seen on the left-hand side of Fig. 2, for the link between ideal values and trust in the organization, the surface of three of the four value dimensions follows an inverted U-shape along the incongruence line (openness to change, self-enhancement, and conservation). This indicates that trust in the organization increases as personal and organizational values become more similar. The numerical indicators in Table 3 show that this downward curvature was statistically significant for self-enhancement values (curvature = −.76; $p < .001$) and for conservation values (curvature = −.29; $p < .05$). In contrast, the surface charts and statistical tests did not show an inverted U-shape for self-transcendence values. For this dimension, organizations with high self-transcendence values received more trust from employees than organizations with low self-transcendence values, irrespective of employees' self-transcendence values.

For counter-ideal values, as can be seen on the left-hand side of Fig. 3, the surfaces of all four value dimensions followed a downward curvature along the incongruence line. This was more pronounced for openness and self-enhancement values and less pronounced for self-transcendence and conservation values. This shape indicates

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	M	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1. Org. openness to change ideal values	3.31	0.97	.91																
2. Org. conservation ideal values	3.69	0.69	.76	.02															
3. Org. self-enhancement ideal values	3.44	0.74	.75	.55***	.27***														
4. Org. self-transcendence ideal values	3.82	0.94	.92	.54***	.16***	.34***													
5. Org. openness to change counter-ideal values	2.35	1.05	.93	−.42***	.06	−.18***	−.37***												
6. Org. conservation counter-ideal values	2.02	0.95	.92	.04	−.21***	−.06	−.05	.40****											
7. Org. self-enhancement counter-ideal values	2.08	0.87	.85	−.17***	−.02	−.23***	−.13***	.56***	.56***										
8. Org. self-transcendence counter-ideal-values	2.06	1.05	.96	−.25***	−.04	−.08*	−.44***	.61***	.52***	.55***									
9. Ind. openness to change ideal values	3.77	0.76	.86	.50***	.14***	.40***	.20***	−.12**	−.08*	−.10**	−.10**								
10. Ind. conservation ideal values	3.53	0.78	.83	.27***	.55***	.35***	.36***	−.13***	−.09*	−.09*	−.13***	.08*							
11. Ind. self-enhancement ideal values	3.52	0.73	.78	.37***	.25***	.61***	.22***	−.05	−.07	−.12**	−.06	.49***	.35***						
12. Ind. self-transcendence ideal values	4.23	0.63	.85	.18***	.25***	.22***	.47***	−.11**	−.12**	−.07	−.17***	.27***	.35***	.20***					
13. Ind. openness to change counter-ideal values	2.07	0.98	.91	.06	.11**	.16***	.07	.29***	.39***	.37***	.28***	−.19***	.24***	.13***	−.06				
14. Ind. conservation counter-ideal values	2.37	1.01	.92	.02	−.06	.03	−.02	.32***	.50***	.43***	.34***	.01	−.19***	−.03	−.06	.57***			
15. Ind. self-enhancement counter-ideal values	2.19	0.87	.85	.01	−.02	−.07	−.04	.40***	.53***	.58***	.39***	−.13***	−.02	−.25***	−.04	.49***	.50***		
16. Ind. self-transcendence counter-ideal values	1.77	0.98	.97	.03	.06	.04	−.06	.39***	.58***	.46***	.46***	−.14***	.08*	.02	−.26***	.54***	.53***	.59***	
17. Trust in the organization	3.47	0.97	.92	.39***	.02	.21***	.49***	−.36***	−.10*	−.17***	−.39***	.08*	.20***	.13***	.13***	−.02	−.10**	−.08*	−.07

$n = 672$. *Org* organizational, *Ind* individual

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Two-tailed

that trust in the organization increases as personal and organizational counter-ideal values become more similar. In line with this visual impression, the numerical indicators in Table 3 show that this downward curvature was statistically significant for openness values (curvature = −.11; $p < .05$) and for self-enhancement values (curvature = −.23; $p < .05$) but not for the other two value dimensions (self-transcendence and conservation).

An important and interesting aspect of the surfaces can be seen on the right-hand side panels of Figs. 2 and 3: for most of the ideal and for all of the counter-ideal values, the shape along the congruence line followed a slight upward curvature (i.e., a U-shape). As can be seen on the right-hand side panels of Fig. 2 (especially for conservation values—Panel d), trust in the organization was higher when personal and organizational ideal values were congruent on a low level (i.e., where $X = Y = -2.0$) or high level (i.e., where $X = Y = 2.0$) than when they were aligned on a medium level (i.e., where $X = Y = 0$). Similarly, as can be seen on the right-hand side panels of Figs. 3, trust in the organization was higher when personal and organizational *counter-ideal values* were congruent on a low level (i.e., $X = Y = -2.0$) or high level (i.e., $X = Y = 2.0$) than when they were aligned on a medium level (i.e., $X = Y = 0$). These results indicate that ideal and counter-ideal value congruences are particularly important and relate to high levels of trust when employees and organizations attach low or high importance to a (counter-)ideal value. In contrast, when employees ascribe a medium level of importance to an ideal or counter-ideal value, value congruence with the organization is not as strongly related to trust. In other words, congruence in employees' and organizations' ideal values and counter-ideal values, respectively, is particularly important when there is strong valence attached to a value, i.e., when value importance is low or high (but not mid-range).

Another interesting aspect of the surfaces can be seen on the left-hand side of Figs. 2 and 3: for some value dimensions, employees' trust in the organization was the highest when organizational values slightly exceeded personal values. For example, for ideal openness values (Fig. 2a), trust reached its highest point slightly shifted to the right of the graph (i.e., right of y = 0). This means that trust was the highest when the organization ascribed somewhat higher importance to openness to experience values than the employee. For other values, for example, for ideal conservation values (Fig. 2d), the opposite was true. Here, trust reached its highest point slightly to the left of the graph (i.e., left of y = 0). This means that trust in the organization was highest when employees ascribed somewhat higher importance to conservation than the organization. As can be seen in Table 3, for almost all ideal and counter-ideal values, the ridge of the surface (where trust is maximized) was somewhat shifted and did not completely follow the congruence line (i.e., the intercept of the first principal axis differed from 0).

Discussion

The study of person-environment fit and value congruence is one of the oldest and most fundamental fields in organizational behavior research (Edwards 2008). However, extant research has examined value congruence solely with regard to the desirable behaviors and end-states that employees and organizations strive to approach. In this paper, we developed and tested the notion that important insights into value congruence can be gained when we additionally consider employees' and organizations' motivation to avoid undesirable behaviors and outcomes.

Consistent with this reasoning, the present results indicate that a more complete understanding of value congruence can be gained from noting individuals' and organizations' counter-ideal values next to the established concept of ideal values. Our analyses show only moderate relations between organizational ideal and counter-ideal values and denote that they can be empirically distinguished. More importantly, by bringing counter-ideal values to the study of person-organization fit, the present study underscores the relevance of this novel concept. Specifically, our findings suggest that the joint effects of personal and organizational counter-ideal values constitute a second form of congruence that to date has gone largely unnoticed. Across different analyses, based on difference scores and polynomial regression, we found that congruence effects of counter-ideal values allowed for more precise predictions of employees' trust in the organization for at least some value dimensions (i.e., openness to change and self-enhancement). These effects were robust even when we controlled for the traditional notion of ideal value congruence. On average, the amount of explained variance in employee trust increased by 17 % when we added counter-ideal value congruence to the regression equations (i.e., after controlling for ideal value congruence). This is a substantial amount, especially when we consider that value congruence effects influence virtually every employee in every organization.

From a theoretical perspective, a central contribution of this paper is its integration of value congruence theory with fundamental insights from motivation theory. Specifically, although it has widely been recognized that values have a close link to motivation (Schwartz 1992), the value congruence literature has largely overlooked the role of avoidance and the existence of counter-ideals. We believe that the differentiation between approach and

Table 2 Hypotheses tests based on difference score and polynomial regression analyses

	Analysis 1: Coefficients based on difference scores	Analysis 2: Coefficients based on polynomial regression
IV: Openness to change		
Ideal values	−.29***	.29***
Counter-ideal values	−.18***	.27***
R^2	.16***	.23***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values	.03***	.05***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values in %[a]	16 %	23 %
IV: Self-enhancement		
Ideal values	−.22***	.24***
Counter-ideal values	−.10*	.17***
R^2	.07***	.11***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values	.01***	.03***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values in %[a]	11 %	25 %
IV: Self-transcendence		
Ideal values	−.36***	.38***
Counter-ideal values	−.19***	.26***
R^2	.23***	.31***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values	.03***	.05***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values in %[a]	11%	16 %
IV: Conservation		
Ideal values	−.17***	.25***
Counter-ideal values	−.05	.15***
R^2	.04***	.09***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values	.00[b]	.02***
ΔR^2 counter-ideal values in %[a]	9 %	26 %

$n = 672$. Standardized coefficients are reported

[a] Increase in explained variance after adding counter-ideal value congruence to the regression equation

[b] The reported regression weight of .00 is due to rounding. The exact weight is .003

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Two-tailed

avoidance motivations can be very beneficial to advance our understanding of value congruence and allow for deriving and testing various additional hypotheses. For example, based on motivation theories' notion that approach and avoidance do not only function simultaneously but that situational cues also may trigger a tendency toward the one or the other system (Higgins 1998), we may speculate that organizational factors such as leadership styles, culture, tasks, or reward systems may tilt employees' orientation toward approach or avoidance which, in turn, may affect the relative impact of ideal and counter-ideal value congruence on employee outcomes. For example, leadership behaviors that emphasize gains, aspirations, and personal development have been found to temporarily shift employees' focus toward approach tendencies (Neubert et al. 2008), which may bolster the influence of ideal value congruence; meanwhile, the relevance of counter-ideal value congruence may be enhanced by leadership behaviors that focus on security, duties, and loss avoidance.

The differentiation between approach and avoidance motivations may moreover provide a basis to systematically integrate value congruence theory and models of personality. For example, whereas some personality traits seem to lean toward approach tendencies (e.g., extraversion), others tend to point toward avoidance (e.g., neuroticism; Lanaj et al. 2012). One may thus hypothesize that based on their level of extraversion and neuroticism, the impact of ideal value congruence may be stronger for some individuals, whereas counter-ideal value congruence may be more crucial for others. In view of these examples, we believe that the two-force perspective on value congruence can offer novel and exciting avenues for future research.

Another noteworthy finding of the present study relates to the surfaces along the congruence line, which followed an upward curvature (the shape of a U) for most of the ideal

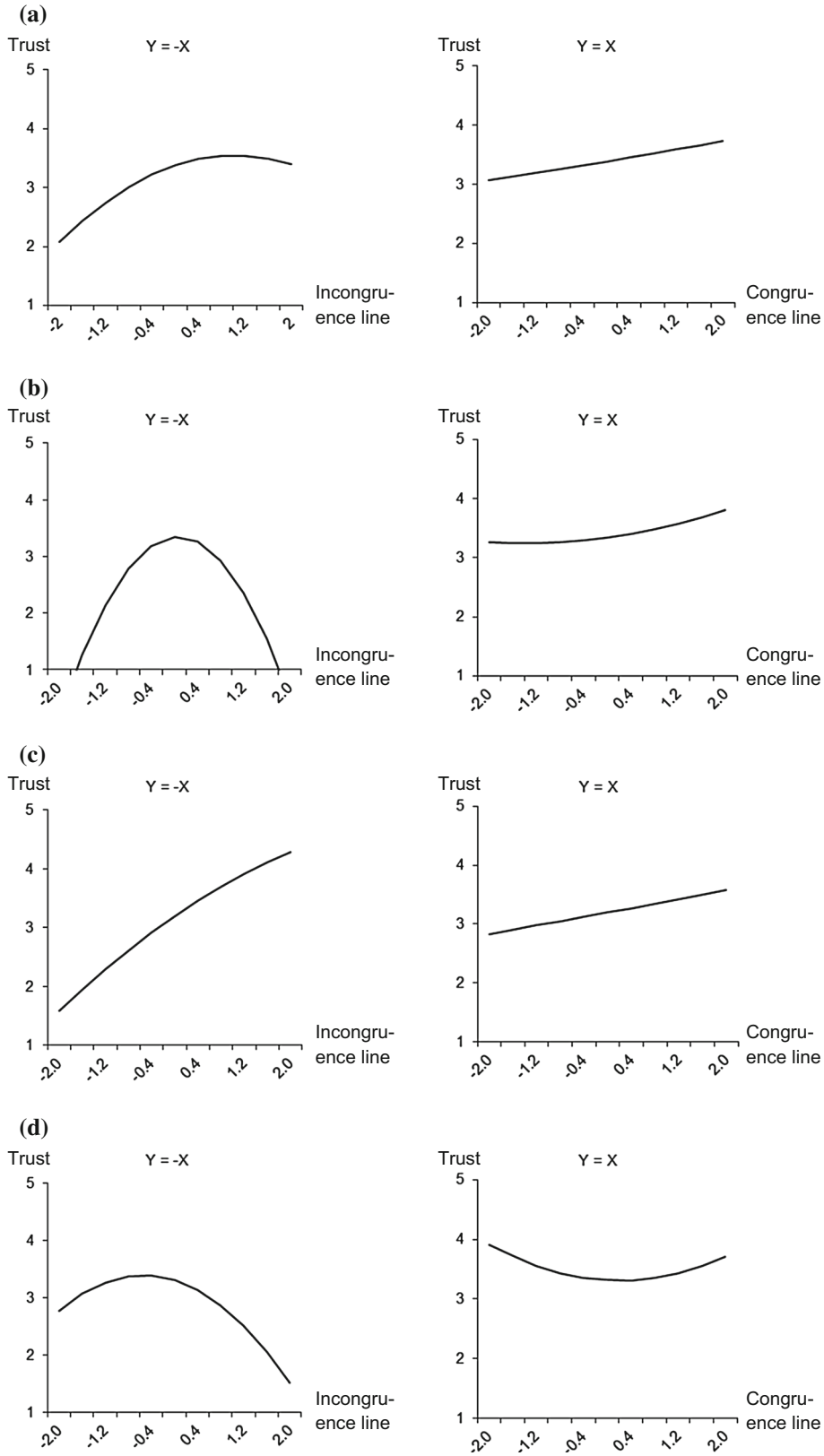


Fig. 2 Ideal value congruence: Shape of the response surfaces along the incongruence ($Y = -X$) and congruence ($Y = X$) lines. **a** Linking ideal openness values to trust in the organization. **b** Linking ideal self-enhancement values to trust in the organization. **c** Linking ideal self-transcendence values to trust in the organization. **d** Linking ideal conservation values to trust in the organization

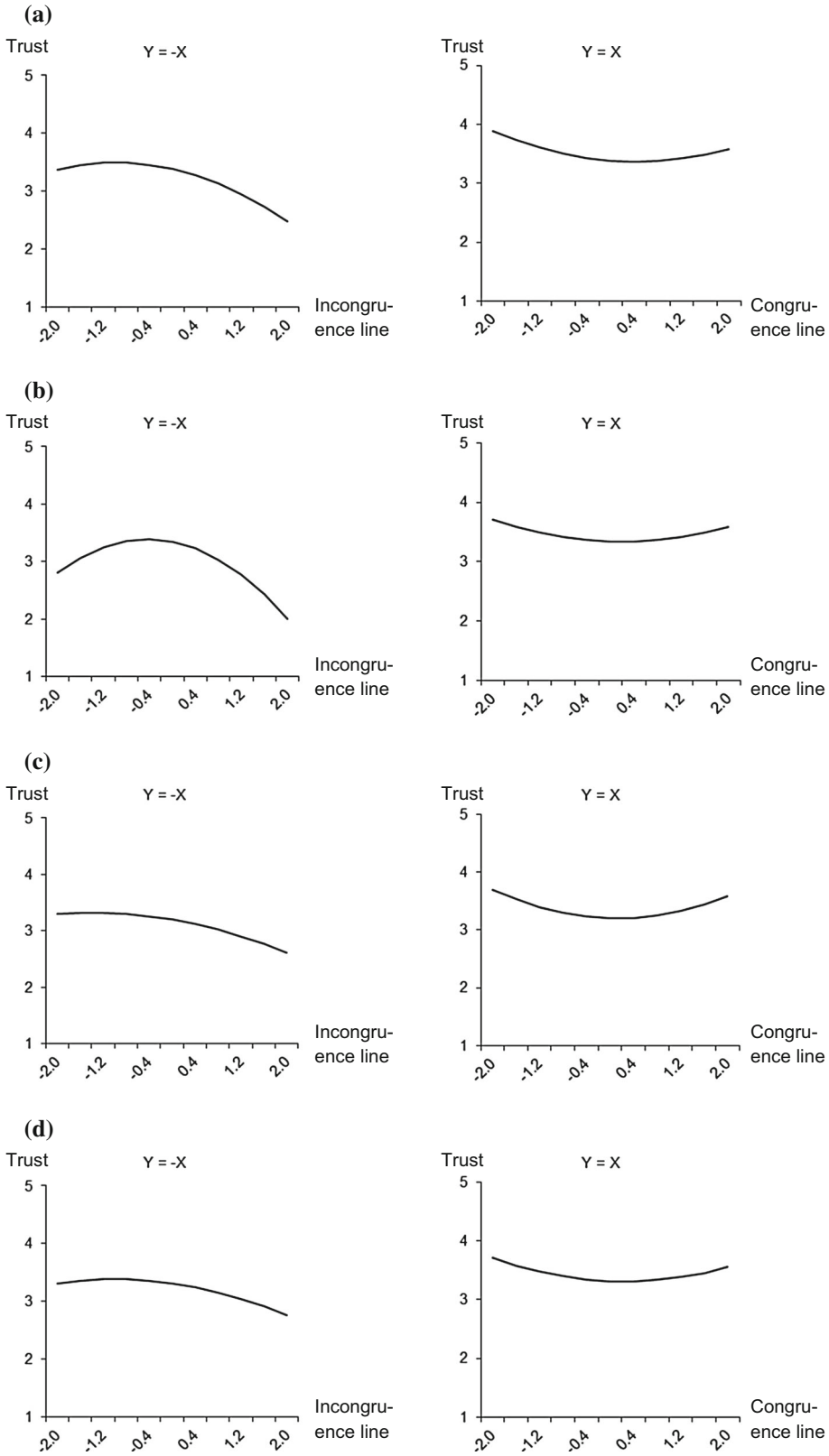


Fig. 3 Counter-ideal value congruence: Shape of the response surfaces along the incongruence ($Y = -X$) and congruence ($Y = X$) lines. **a** Linking counter-ideal openness values to trust in the organization. **b** Linking counter-ideal self-enhancement values to trust in the organization. **c** Linking counter-ideal self-transcendence values to trust in the organization. **d** Linking counter-ideal conservation values to trust in the organization

and for all of the counter-ideal values. This suggests that ideal and counter-ideal values congruence support employee trust in the organization especially when employees and organizations ascribe either high or low importance to a certain value dimension—as opposed to moderate importance. Interestingly, response surfaces of

Table 3 Response surface analyses along the incongruence line and congruence line

	Incongruence line ($X = -Y$)		Congruence line ($X = Y$)		First principal axis[a]	
	Slope	Curvature	Slope	Curvature	Intercept	Slope
Trust in the organization						
Ideal values						
Openness to change	0.33*	−0.16*	0.17**	0.00	−1.51*	1.06
Self-enhancement	0.09	−0.76***	0.14	0.05	−0.27	1.34
Self-transcendence	0.68***	−0.07	0.19	0.00	−9.83*	4.14*
Conservation	−0.32	−0.29*	0.05	0.12	1.23	1.78
Counter-ideal values						
Openness to change	−0.22**	−0.11*	−0.08	0.09	3.12*	1.88
Self-enhancement	−0.20	−0.23*	−0.03	0.08	1.19*	1.51
Self-transcendence	−0.17*	−0.06	−0.03	0.11**	2.76*	1.52
Conservation	−0.14	−0.07	−0.04	0.08	3.59*	2.31

$n = 672$

[a] Significance tests based on 95 % confidence intervals (CIs) using 1000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. If an intercept is significant, it means that it significantly differs from 0. If a slope is significant, it means that it significantly differs from 1

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Two-tailed

prior congruence studies showed similar extremity effects (e.g., Meyer et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2012), albeit they have never been predicted nor discussed. We believe that this convergence between studies may point toward an important insight for congruence theory. One explanation for these findings may be offered by social-cognitive accounts. These propose that especially extreme views foster information processing and behaviors based on these beliefs, whereas moderate beliefs should less strongly translate into cognition and action (Conner and Armitage 2008). Extending this reasoning, we may speculate that these processes may underlie and foster an extremity effect of value congruence. Exploring this possibility can be another fruitful area for future research.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the congruence effects on some ideal and counter-ideal values were stronger than on others. Existing value congruence theory, however, does not predict or explain such differential effects (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). We may speculate that contextual factors, especially organizations' identity, may play an important role. Certain values are more closely related to the identity of a specific organization than others (Schein 2010), and such core values may be particularly relevant for assessing the similarity with a specific organization. For example, in a non-profit organization that strives to reduce poverty and hunger, the dimension of self-transcendence may be very salient. In contrast, other values, such as openness to change, may be less relevant for determining value congruence. We believe that developing and testing theory on such differential effects can be another promising avenue for future research.

Practical Implications

Given the predominant notion of values as ideal end-states, counter-ideal values and their implications for practice may be new ground for many organizations. As the results of the present study suggest, organizations that consider counter-ideal value congruence in tandem with the established concept of ideal value congruence may benefit in terms of heightened employee trust, a key factor for employees' and organizational performance (Atkins 2014; Dirks and Ferrin 2001). It thus seems advisable for organizations to explore and explicate their counter-ideal values. An effective process may involve in-depth interviews of the organization's most representative employees, validated through focus groups with other organizational members and, potentially, external partners (i.e., customers and suppliers; Van Quaquebeke et al. 2014). Building on this knowledge, organizations can draw on multiple options to translate their counter-ideal values into day-to-day practice: For example, it appears advisable to add the identified counter-ideal values to the organization's mission statement and guidelines, as prior research indicates that employees respond to those congruencies of which they are subjectively aware (Leung and Chaturvedi 2011). This implies that clearly stating organizational counter-ideal values can be an important way to elicit positive employee reactions to congruence. To enhance the awareness of and adherence to organizations' counter-ideal values, corporate stories and legends may be conjured that capture the organization's active distancing from its counter-ideal values. Moreover, organizations should ensure that leaders act as

attractive role models along both ideal and counter-ideal values. Similarly, it seems advisable that compensation and benefit schemes are not only aligned with what the organization strives for but also with what it seeks to avoid.

Because value congruence also plays a key role in selection and socialization (Sekiguchi and Huber 2011), organizations may benefit from reviewing these procedures as well. Specifically, organizations may evaluate the personal fit of prospective recruits against both the organization's ideal and counter-ideal values. Moreover, recruiting processes should enable applicants to gain a clear understanding of the organization's ideal and counter-ideal values, which will foster an informed self-selection decision. Although value guidelines, compensation systems, and selection processes have been identified as central factors for value congruence effects (Cascio 2012), we would like to point out that further research is needed to examine how exactly the notion of counter-ideal values may advance these practices. Nonetheless, based on the present results, it seems legitimate to suggest that organizations and employees may benefit from procedures that promote counter-ideal value congruence.

Limitations

Like any research, our study also bears several opportunities for extension and improvement in the future. First, we used a lagged rather than experimental or longitudinal design to test our model. This restricts the extent to which we can make causal inferences. Although our hypotheses are anchored in prior theory and research and follow the notion that values—as general, trans-situational convictions—guide individuals' reactions (Schwartz 1992), future studies should examine the causal flow implied in our model.

Second, we examined the consequences of employees' subjective perceptions of organizational and personal values and did not measure objective congruence. As noted earlier, this approach follows value congruence theory's premise that people can respond to congruencies only if they know that these exist (French et al. 1982). Indeed, prior research suggests that congruencies between personal values and organizational values measured from other sources often have little bearing on employee reactions—and if they do, they are generally mediated through employees' congruence perceptions (Leung and Chaturvedi 2011). Accordingly, value congruence research has largely focused on the consequences of value congruence as perceived by the employee as we did in the present study (Edwards and Cable 2009; Leung and Chaturvedi 2011; Van Vianen et al. 2004). However, it would be interesting to experimentally explore whether manipulations of value congruence—e.g., by assessing participants' ideal and counter-ideal values and then presenting them with congruent or incongruent organizational mission statements—would support or undermine their trust.

Conclusion

In this study, we developed and tested the idea that person-organization value congruence is not only based on ideal values but that counter-ideal values also matter. Results of a time-lagged study using difference scores and polynomial regression supported this notion. We believe that this two-force perspective offers new and exciting insights for both research and practice, and we hope that this work will contribute to a more complete and more refined understanding of values and value congruence effects.

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