

Opposites Fit: Evidence for a Complementarity Effect of Regulatory Focus in Dyadic Interactions

Vanessa K. Bohns, Kirstin C. Appelt, & E. Tory Higgins
Columbia University

Overview

Do opposites attract, or do birds of a feather flock together? According to previous research, it depends. In most cases, similarity in behavior and attitudes has been shown to lead to greater liking and comfort in interpersonal interactions (Byrne, 1971; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Yet some studies have found that on certain dimensions complementarity may actually lead to more positive interactions (Tiedens, 2003; Walster & Walster, 1963).

In two separate studies, we find evidence for a complementarity effect of regulatory focus in dyadic interactions. We interpret these results through the lens of regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 2000). In dyadic interactions where separate roles are clearly defined (like those presented here), being paired with someone of the opposite regulatory focus allows tasks to be divided up in such a way that both partners can maintain regulatory fit (i.e., the promotion person can take on the eager tasks, and the prevention person can take on the vigilant tasks).

Regulatory Focus Theory & Regulatory Fit

Regulatory Focus. The individual difference measures used in these studies are those described by regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory differentiates between two primary motivational orientations: promotion and prevention. These orientations can be chronic (and thus measured as personality variables) or situationally manipulated as states.

A person in a **promotion focus**:

- Is concerned with nurturance needs
- Is sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes
- Prefers to use “eager” strategic means

A person in a **prevention focus**:

- Is concerned with security needs
- Is sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes
- Prefers to use “vigilant” strategic means

Regulatory Fit. When someone performs a task using their preferred strategic means (vigilant means for prevention; eager means for promotion), they experience regulatory fit. Regulatory fit has been shown to increase enjoyment of a task, motivation, and performance (Higgins, 2000).

Study 1 Methods

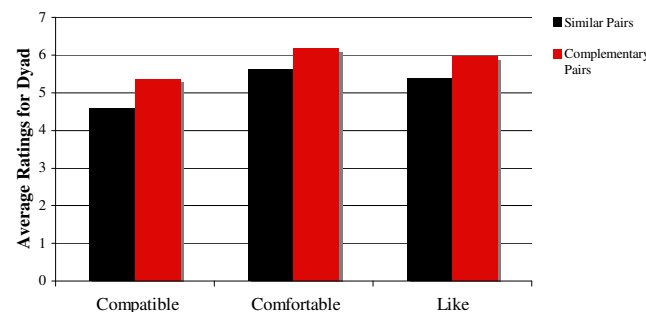
Study 1 used a mock interview paradigm that randomly paired each participant with a partner whose regulatory focus was either different from or the same as their own.

- Ps were administered the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ, Grant & Higgins, 2003), a measure of chronic promotion or prevention focus
- They were then randomly assigned to the role of “interviewer” or “candidate” and engaged in a mock interview where the interviewer asked the candidate questions standard interview questions
- Finally, they rated their partner on a number of dimensions, including how compatible they thought they were with their partner, how comfortable they felt with their partner, and how much they liked their partner

Study 1 Results

Average ratings of compatibility, comfort, and liking for complementary dyads (promotion-prevention pairs) were significantly more positive than those for similar dyads (promotion-promotion and prevention-prevention pairs).

Ratings of Compatibility, Comfort, & Liking



Compatibility $F(1, 38) = 4.241, p = .046$; Comfort $F(1, 38) = 4.162, p = .048$; Liking $F(1, 38) = 3.533, p = .068$

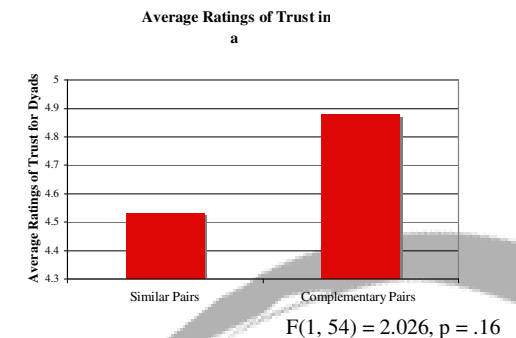
Study 2 Methods

Study 2 is a conceptual replication of the effect found in Study 1 using a negotiations paradigm.

- Participants were randomly paired with a negotiation partner of the same or opposite regulatory focus (as measured by the RFQ)
- They then engaged in a standard negotiation simulation (the Synertech-Dosagen case)
- Finally, participants were asked a series of questions about the negotiation that included a question about how much they trusted their negotiation partner

Study 2 Results

Average ratings of trust were greater for complementary negotiation pairs than similar pairs.



References

- Byrne, D. (1971). The attraction paradigm. New York: Academic Press.
- Chartrand, T. & Bargh, J. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception-behavior link and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 893-910.
- Grant, H., & Higgins, E. T. (2003). Optimism, promotion pride, and prevention pride as predictors of quality of life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 1521-1532.
- Higgins, E.T. (1997) Beyond pleasure and pain. *American Psychologist*, 52, 1280-1300.
- Higgins, E.T. (2000). Making a good decision: Value from fit. *American Psychologist*, 55, 1217-1230.
- Tiedens, L. & Fragale, A. (2003). Power Moves: Complementarity in dominant and submissive nonverbal behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 558-568.
- Walster, E. & Walster, B. (1963). Effect of Expecting to be Liked on Choice of Associates. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, 67, 402-4.