

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Who cares about demands–abilities fit? Moderating effects of goal orientation on recruitment and organizational entry outcomes

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**Abstract**

The authors conduct three studies to systematically examine how avoiding and learning goal orientation (AGO and LGO) influence relationships between perceived demands-abilities (DA) fit and critical outcomes during three organizational entry stages. Study 1, a multi-level study using a series of mock job advertisements, shows that participant likelihood of applying for jobs for which they perceive higher DA fit increases when AGO is stronger. Study 2 finds a stronger positive relationship between perceived DA fit and internship satisfaction among interns with a stronger AGO. Study 3 finds a stronger positive relationship between perceived DA fit and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) among new organizational entrants with a stronger AGO. Implications and future research directions regarding the importance of goal orientation during job search and organizational entry are discussed.

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

Researchers continue to document the changing nature of work and need for greater employee adaptability and fluidity as job demands evolve (Baard, Rench, & Kozlowski, 2014; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005; Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999). Due to globalization, new technologies, and rapidly shifting product demands, organizations are organically designing systems of flexible jobs (Parker, 2014). Job seekers and employees thus anticipate and encounter changes to the initial scope and specificity of job demands, must continuously develop to meet these challenges, and often experience setbacks along the way (Kanfer, Frese, & Johnson, 2017).

Substantial research shows that dispositional *goal orientation*, defined as the underlying goals that individuals pursue in achievement settings (Dweck, 1986, 1999), influences how people approach, understand, and respond to situations rife with challenge and complexity (e.g., Ali, Ryan, Lyons, Ehrhart, & Wessel, 2016; Cellar et al., 2011; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Broadly studied in the work motivation literature (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005; Farr, Hofmann, & Ringenbach, 1993; Kanfer et al., 2017), goal orientation has been examined in training, feedback seeking,

performance management, and team contexts (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Brett & Atwater, 2001; Porter, 2005; Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997). This research has explored cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes, as we do in this article.

Although this prior work has been fruitful, scholars have only begun to consider goal orientation in other relevant achievement contexts such as job search and organizational entry (e.g., Ali et al., 2016; Tan, Au, Cooper-Thomas, & Aw, 2016). These contexts are fraught with rejection and failure risk, as well as uncertainty about anticipated or newly encountered job demands (e.g., Lopez-Kidwell, Grosser, Dineen, & Borgatti, 2013). Thus, it is particularly important to consider how job seekers and newly hired employees navigate these critical organizational entry stages. For example, some individuals may seek an immediate strong fit between their abilities and job demands (i.e., demands–abilities [DA] fit; Cable & DeRue, 2002). Others may be less concerned about potential DA misfit and may even believe overly strong fit stifles their growth potential. Scholars have shown that individuals emphasize DA fit differently (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002) and have called for more studies that examine fit boundary conditions (e.g., Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

We devise an agenda for studying the intersection of goal orientation and perceived DA fit (hereafter termed DA fit). First, we develop logic for why goal orientation is particularly relevant to DA fit rather than other fit types and for why certain goal orientation dimensions likely moderate DA fit effects. Second, we review goal orientation research and elaborate on how and why goal orientation explains reactions to challenging situations; that is, lower DA fit. Next, in three studies, we use this theoretical foundation to develop and test hypotheses regarding goal orientation as a moderator of relationships between DA fit and cognitive, affective, and behavioral organizational entry outcomes (job seeker application decisions, intern satisfaction, and new hire organizational citizenship behavior [OCB], respectively).

## 2 | GOAL ORIENTATION AND DA FIT

When employees or job seekers find that job demands are congruent with their abilities (DA fit), they are attracted to organizations, apply for employment, are satisfied with their affiliation, and tend to stay and perform well (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Scholars have identified other fit types, including person–organization (PO) and needs–supplies (NS) fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, we focus on the nexus of DA fit and goal orientation for the following reasons. First, relative to other fit types, fluctuating or suboptimal DA fit is particularly challenging because it evokes doubts about one's ability to perform. Second, as we discuss in more detail below, the goal orientation concept pertains to how individuals view abilities on which others might evaluate them, specifically in terms of whether these abilities can enable them to accomplish their goals. Goal orientation is not as relevant for how individuals view other lesser-evaluated personal characteristics such as their values or needs. For example, deficient PO or NS fit is not abilities-based and does not usually elicit a challenge frame; for example, people do not typically try to “achieve” certain values.

We propose that goal orientation is a robust individual difference that helps explain why people differ in how they emphasize DA fit information during various organizational entry stages. In her seminal research, Dweck (1986) conceptualized goal orientation as broad personal goals or preferences that individuals pursue in achievement settings. Researchers originally conceptualized goal orientation as two classes of underlying goals: (a) a *learning goal* to develop competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations, and (b) a *performance goal* to demonstrate competence and validate worth by seeking favorable judgments and avoiding negative judgments about one's competence. In the past 3 decades, significant research has found that learning and performance goals predict differential patterns of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses when individuals encounter challenging situations (da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Dierdorff, Surface, & Brown, 2010; Dweck, 1999; Payne et al., 2007).

Subsequent to the original two-dimension model, Vandewalle (1997) and Elliot and Church (1997) converged on a new three-dimension model. Both studies retained the original learning dimension (hereafter termed learning goal orientation, or LGO). However, both further partitioned the original performance dimension into two dimensions: (a) a *performance prove* (hereafter termed proving goal orientation, or PGO) focuses on demonstrating one's competence

and gaining favorable judgments from others; and (b) a *performance avoid* (hereafter termed avoiding goal orientation, or AGO) focuses on not demonstrating a lack of ability, and avoiding situations where negative ability judgments might occur.

In this research, we examine how AGO and LGO moderate DA fit effects. Specifically, scholars using the three-dimension model (e.g., Brett & Atwater, 2001; Elliot & Church, 1997; Vandewalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001) find that AGO, grounded in a fear of failure motive, is associated with less positive outcomes such as maladaptive disengagement when encountering challenges. LGO, grounded in a need for achievement motive, is associated with more positive outcomes such as adaptively responding and remaining productively engaged when encountering challenges. However, relationships involving PGO are inconsistent (Payne et al., 2007) because this dimension is grounded in both need for achievement and fear of failure motives (Elliot & Church, 1997). Therefore, we do not propose PGO moderation effects.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.1 | AGO and LGO as moderators of DA fit effects

A rich research tradition grounds our theoretical rationale for why AGO and LGO moderate DA fit effects (e.g., Cellar et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2007). First, we connect AGO and LGO to Dweck and colleagues' early work on *distinctive perceptual frameworks as to how individuals interpret and experience achievement situations* (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Specifically, AGO and LGO are associable with different mindsets (initially labeled *implicit theories* by Dweck) about personal attributes such as intelligence and interpersonal skills. LGO is associated with a growth mindset; personal attributes such as intelligence are perceived as malleable and capable of development with effort and persistence. In contrast, research shows that AGO is linked to a fixed mindset (e.g., Fortunato & Goldblatt, 2006; Vandewalle, 1997); personal attributes are perceived as relatively innate, stable, and less amenable to developmental enhancement.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for strong LGO individuals, holding a growth mindset could be beneficial, such that one perceives they have the potential to resolve lower DA fit through additional skill development effort. In contrast, with a fixed mindset, a lack of DA fit may be more alarming to strong AGO individuals because effort toward skill development is viewed as a less feasible solution.

Second, strong AGO and LGO individuals likely encounter lower DA fit with *different affective profiles*. For example, AGO has strong relationships with fear of failure (Elliot & Church, 1997), fear of negative evaluation (Vandewalle, 1997), test anxiety, and worrying about making mistakes (Papaioannou, Zourbanos, Krommidas, & Ampatzoglou, 2012). In contrast, this negative emotional profile is nearly nonexistent among stronger LGO individuals.

Third, research regarding *responses to challenging situations* such as anticipated or actual low task performance can be linked to AGO and LGO. For example, when faced with significant challenges, novel situations, or low performance, individuals with a stronger LGO more likely pursue adaptive response patterns such as increased effort, feedback seeking, and strategy adjustment. They persist and enjoy the challenge as it unfolds (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999; Dweck, 1999; Phillips & Gully, 1997; Whinghter, Cunningham, Wang, & Burnfield, 2008). Moreover, they value hard work (Vandewalle, 1997), persevere when attempting to understand difficult or complex concepts (Day, Radosevich, & Chasteen, 2003), and have greater general self-efficacy (Fortunato & Goldblatt, 2006; Heidemeier & Wiese, 2014) and job search self-efficacy (Ali et al., 2016). Thus, DA fit discrepancies are unlikely to deter them, such that they may more weakly connect DA fit to outcomes. In contrast, individuals with a stronger AGO exhibit either negative or non-significant relationships in many of these aforementioned studies. They feel threatened by challenging tasks or novel situations because there is a risk of failure that would reveal inadequate ability. Thus, when a potentially challenging event such as a lack of DA fit occurs, they more likely default to maladaptive response patterns of negative rumination, decreased task interest, and task withdrawal (e.g., Cron, Slocum, Vandewalle, & Fu, 2005).

Finally, when goal orientation is considered as a disposition, as we do in this research, it exhibits stronger effects in less structured or normative situations (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). For example, Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996) found that when fewer situational cues are present, individuals tend to adopt their dispositional goal orientation. This is consistent with broader situational strength arguments proposing stronger individual difference effects in less normative situations (e.g., Mischel, 1977).

The above research makes goal orientation applicable and thus conceptually relevant to DA fit reactions in organizational entry contexts. For example, job seekers may gauge whether their abilities are fixed or adaptable when deciding whether to apply for jobs. They may also anticipate failure due to a rejected job application or entry into a job in which their DA fit is low. Interns or newly hired employees may or may not view additional effort as a means to success if they lack DA fit. Individuals inevitably face challenges and experience failure during internships or the first few months on a job. Finally, early employment contexts can lack structure and norm clarity, which allow for greater impact of dispositional goal orientation.

We examine how DA fit interacts with both AGO and LGO in laboratory and field studies of job seekers, organizational interns, and newly hired employees. In Study 1, we posit that job seekers will base application decisions for mock web-based jobs on DA fit but that the strength of this relationship depends on their goal orientation. Specifically, we posit that stronger AGO job seekers rely more, and stronger LGO job seekers rely less, on DA fit when deciding whether to apply for jobs. In Study 2, we sample interns to identify whether goal orientation moderates relationships between DA fit and internship satisfaction. In Study 3, we extend this logic by investigating how AGO (LGO) might strengthen (weaken) the relationship between DA fit and OCB among new doctoral students during the first few months in their roles.

### 3 | STUDY 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Job search is inherently self-regulatory and goal oriented (Creed, King, Hood, & McKenzie, 2009; Wanberg, Zuh, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012) yet tends to be unstructured and situationally weak (Turban, Stevens, & Lee, 2009). Van Hooff and Noordzij (2009, p. 1581) note, "goal orientation is a promising construct for both science and practice in the field of job seeking." Thus, researchers have begun to investigate moderating effects of dispositional goal orientation on job search intentions, intensity, and persistence. For example, Ali et al. (2016) found that AGO moderated the effects of perceived incivility on job search self-efficacy, which in turn related to search intensity. da Motta Veiga and Turban (2014) found that the perceived stress–job search intensity relationship was stronger among those with stronger LGO. Others have investigated job search cognitions and the use of recruitment information (e.g., Breugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001; Dineen & Allen, 2013) but have not integrated goal orientation into this work.

It is appropriate to consider how job seeker goal orientation moderates DA fit information emphasis. DA fit consistently relates to job attraction and job applications (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) because of two critical job search cognitions: expectancies regarding possible (a) rejection from selection processes and (b) success if hired. For example, job seekers receive feedback about their viability for positions based on their applications. They might receive positive feedback, but they also become vulnerable to rejection.

When job seeker DA fit is lower, rejection probability increases. Stronger AGO individuals wish to avoid situations where they may confront negative evaluations or inferiority signals (Payne et al., 2007; Porath & Bateman, 2006; Vandewalle, 1997). Because of their fear of failure motive, they are averse to applying for such jobs. Ali et al. (2016, p. 336) note, "Such individuals, who are more concerned with guarding themselves against potential rejection rather than gaining success, are expected to approach the job search by adopting defensive cognitive strategies that serve to mitigate the likelihood of rejection."

Regarding potential job outcomes, DA fit evokes beliefs about potential success or failure. Goal orientation can explain job seeker reactions to these beliefs. That is, goal orientation explains whether one perceives ability or effort as a primary success path (Dweck, 1986). If an individual is concerned with avoiding negative judgments about performance deficiencies and holds a fixed mindset that low DA fit is immutable and that effort cannot rectify it, the prospect of accepting a job with lower DA fit will heighten failure concerns. As the anticipated DA fit challenge becomes greater, individuals will be more prone to withdraw from the situation by refraining from applying for the job if they have stronger AGO. These individuals will avoid the threatening challenge of trying to rectify lower DA fit (e.g., Whingther et al., 2008). Instead, they will seek situations with a stronger DA fit to enhance the likelihood of success in a new job.

By contrast, goal orientation research indicates that individuals with a stronger LGO maintain their self-concept by pursuing task mastery and securing personal development through incremental gains in knowledge and skill (e.g., Whitaker & Levy, 2012). First, they are less averse to negative feedback in terms of potential rejection (Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997). Thus, DA fit levels may not affect their application decisions as strongly. Second, because they perceive utility of effort, have self-efficacy resilience (Vandewalle et al., 2001), and a developmental goal focus (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999), they are also more likely to believe they can eventually attain success in a new job, even if initial DA fit is not high.

Finally, the challenge-embracing aspect of a stronger LGO suggests that such individuals perceive challenging tasks as opportunities to learn and develop their abilities and competencies, such that they feel less threatened (DeRue & Wellman, 2009) and more self-assured with new and difficult tasks (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). As such, individuals with a stronger LGO may treat a near-term lack of DA fit as a developmental opportunity and assess job opportunities more in terms of growth potential and less in terms of specific job demands. In fact, for increasingly challenging jobs, individuals may be more likely to apply if they have stronger LGO to satisfy their growth and development needs (e.g., Whinghter et al., 2008).

The relative importance of DA fit to individuals with a stronger AGO and LGO is consistent with information processing theories. Specifically, individuals have limited processing capacity and simplify search by focusing on personally relevant information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Information relevance likely corresponds with one's goal orientation. Job demands information is less personally relevant to individuals with a stronger LGO because they are confident they can acquire abilities on the job or succeed via effort. The relationship between DA fit and applications will be attenuated for these individuals. In contrast, individuals with a stronger AGO find DA fit information highly relevant, thus intensifying its impact on application decisions. Stated formally:

**Hypothesis 1:** AGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and job applications such that it is stronger when AGO is stronger.

**Hypothesis 2:** LGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and job applications such that it is weaker when LGO is stronger.

## 4 | STUDY 1 METHOD

### 4.1 | Participants and procedure

We used multilevel data from Dineen and Noe (2009) to test the hypotheses. Specifically, these authors assessed company-level application rates and objective applicant pool DA, PO, and NS fit for positions depicted in web advertisements. Manipulated variables included presentation order for job demands, values, and benefits information, and customized feedback for some participants regarding likely fit with the position characteristics. By contrast, we examined individual applications on a decision-by-decision basis as a function of cross-level interactions between individual AGO and perceived DA fit, and individual LGO and perceived DA fit with each of 20 positions that participants viewed. To minimize demand characteristics, and because message customization was outside our intended scope, we used the 175 participants who were not provided customized feedback.

Participants were upper-level undergraduate business students from a large Midwestern university; 53% were men; 87% indicated they would likely search for a fulltime job within a year. In Part 1, participants completed a questionnaire that assessed goal orientation. Four weeks later, in a computer laboratory, they viewed 20 recruitment advertisements appearing on a mock web-based job board. Each advertisement included sections that portrayed information about job demands and organizational values associated with the position. The job demands and values sections both presented four subdimensions. The subdimensions were presented in random order and manipulated to represent varying levels of job demands and values. For example, customer service abilities were highly desirable in one advertisement ("First and foremost, we consider customer and personal service skills to be a premium...") and less necessary

in another (“Although customer service is needed in other areas, your job will not involve interaction with customers”). After viewing each advertisement, participants indicated perceived DA and PO fit on a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Participants could apply for each of the 20 jobs by clicking on an “apply for this position” link at the bottom of each advertisement.

## 4.2 | Measures

### 4.2.1 | DA fit

Following each of the advertisements, perceived DA was assessed with two items (Saks & Ashforth, 1997, 2002; e.g., “To what extent do your knowledge, skills, and abilities match the requirements of this job?”; 1 = *very small extent*; 5 = *very large extent*;  $\alpha = .73$ ).

### 4.2.2 | Goal orientation

Work domain goal orientation was assessed using Vandewalle’s (1997) instrument and a five-point Likert response scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Respective example items and  $\alpha$  coefficients were: “I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I’ll learn new skills,” .87 (LGO); “I prefer to avoid situations at work where I might perform poorly,” .82 (AGO); and “I prefer to work on projects where I can prove my ability to others,” .74 (PGO).<sup>3</sup>

### 4.2.3 | Control variable

In this and subsequent studies, we used Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) and Becker’s (2005) guidelines to determine appropriate control variables. These guidelines call for theoretical and empirical linkages between potential controls and study variables, as well as reliable control variable measurement. Although goal orientation is less theoretically linked to PO fit compared to DA fit, people are sometimes evaluated based on their PO fit. Moreover, research strongly supports linkages between PO fit and job attraction and acceptance outcomes (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Thus, we controlled for perceived PO fit because it still might evoke challenge-oriented responses and likely relates to job application decisions. Perceived PO fit was assessed with two items (Saks & Ashforth, 1997, 2002; e.g., “To what extent are the values of this organization similar to your own values?”; 1 = *very small extent*; 5 = *very large extent*;  $\alpha = .84$ ).

### 4.2.4 | Application decisions

Application decisions were coded 1 if a participant clicked on the “apply for this position” hyperlink and 0 if they did not.

## 5 | STUDY 1 RESULTS

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations. We retained the PO fit control variable in the analysis given its correlation with application decisions (Becker, 2005). Because of the nested data structure, we conducted multilevel analyses using HLM 7 to test whether Level 2 variables (AGO and LGO) moderated the relationship between the Level 1 independent variable (DA fit) and Level 1 binary outcome (application decision). More specifically, multilevel analyses allowed us to examine whether variance in Level 1 DA fit–application decision slopes across individuals is attributable to particular person-level (Level 2) variables. First, we constructed an unconditional means model with a Bernoulli distribution (binary outcome) and maximum likelihood estimation to test whether study participants varied in their mean application probability. Specifically, the Level 2 residual variance component, or the remaining variance in the Level 1 outcome variable attributable to group (person) level effects, was .49 ( $p < .01$ ). This indicated significant variance in Level 1 application behavior attributable to person level effects.

**TABLE 1** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 1 variables

Variable	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) PGO	3.90 <sup>a</sup>	.70 <sup>a</sup>					
(2) AGO	2.49 <sup>a</sup>	.77 <sup>a</sup>	.27** <sup>a</sup>				
(3) LGO	4.33 <sup>a</sup>	.57 <sup>a</sup>	.06 <sup>a</sup>	-.39** <sup>a</sup>			
(4) PO fit	3.18	.97	.10**	.05**	.08**		
(5) DA fit	3.43	.85	.11**	.01	.10**	.57**	
(6) Application decision <sup>b</sup>	.26	.44	-.01	-.02	.01	.51**	.47**

Note:  $N = 3,486$  application decisions.

<sup>a</sup> $N = 175$  individuals.

<sup>b</sup>Coded as 1 = applied; 0 = did not apply.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Next, we used a slopes-as-outcomes approach to simultaneously model the cross-level moderation of participant AGO on the DA fit–application relationship as well as LGO on the DA fit–application relationship (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), constructing and testing these models:

$$\text{Level 1: } \eta_{ij} = \psi_{0j} + \psi_{1j}(\text{DA fit}_{ij}) + \psi_{2j}(\text{PO fit}_{ij}) \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Level 2: } \psi_{0j} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Mean DA fit}_j) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Mean PO fit}_j) \\ & + \gamma_{03}(\text{AGO}_j) + \gamma_{04}(\text{LGO}_j) + u_{0j} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$$\psi_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{AGO}_j) + \gamma_{12}(\text{LGO}_j) + u_{1j} \quad (3)$$

$$\psi_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j} \quad (4)$$

Here,  $\psi_{1j}$  and  $\psi_{2j}$  are fixed logistic regression coefficients for the DA fit main effect and PO fit control, which are parsed in equations (3) and (4) into Level 2 slope intercept ( $\gamma_{10}$ ,  $\gamma_{20}$ ), interaction ( $\gamma_{11}$ ,  $\gamma_{12}$ ), and slope residual ( $u_{1j}$ ,  $u_{2j}$ ) components. In equation (2),  $\gamma_{01}$  through  $\gamma_{04}$  are the coefficients for the Level 2 covariates and moderators, and  $u_{0j}$  is the Level 2 intercept residual. We grand mean centered all Level 2 covariates and moderators to facilitate plotting and interpretation. The Level 2 moderators (AGO and LGO) represented the conditional effects on the Level 1 intercept and DA fit slope, such that AGO and LGO predicted participant differences in (a) mean levels of applications and (b) the slope of the DA fit–application relationship.

In accordance with recommendations for modeling cross-level interactions (Bauer & Curran, 2005; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Hofmann & Gavin, 1998), we group-mean centered (i.e., person-mean centered, in our context) the Level 1 independent and control variable, such that increases (decreases) in DA or PO fit represented, for each participant, increases (decreases) in fit relative to the participant's mean (centered) value. For example, if a person indicated DA fit for a particular job advertisement that was 1 *SD* above their mean fit value, the value was 1 *SD* above that person's mean DA fit value across the 20 advertisements they viewed rather than 1 *SD* above the mean of all values collapsed across all participants.<sup>4</sup>

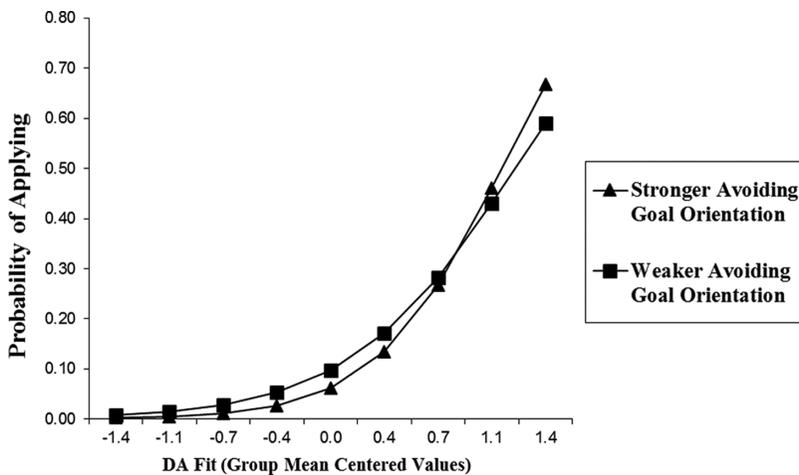
Table 2 shows the hierarchical linear modeling results. First, as expected, and consistent with prior research, DA ( $\gamma_{10} = 2.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and PO ( $\gamma_{20} = 2.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) fit show significant main effects on application decisions. Second, a conditional effect of AGO occurred on the Level 1 DA fit–application decision slope, such that the slope varied significantly across participants as a function of their AGO ( $\gamma_{11} = .38$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Figure 1 depicts the interaction effect, and reveals an interesting pattern that provides mixed support for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, although individuals with stronger and weaker AGO show different effects of DA fit on applications, the pattern varies at higher and lower participant fit

**TABLE 2** Study 1 hierarchical linear modeling—logit results

Fixed effects:	Dependent variable: Application decision			
	Coefficient	SE	t (df)	Odds ratio
<i>For Level 1 Intercept, <math>\psi_{0j}</math></i>				
Level 2 Intercept, $\gamma_{00}$	-2.47	.14	-17.35 (170)**	.08
DA Fit Mean, $\gamma_{01}$	1.02	.34	3.01 (170)**	2.78
PO Fit Mean, $\gamma_{02}$	.59	.38	1.58 (170)	1.81
AGO, $\gamma_{03}$	-.32	.19	-1.71 (170)	.73
LGO, $\gamma_{04}$	-.36	.25	-1.42 (170)	.70
<i>For DA Fit Slope, <math>\psi_{1j}</math></i>				
Level 2 Intercept, $\gamma_{10}$	2.14	.13	16.39 (172)**	8.52
AGO, $\gamma_{11}$	.38	.18	2.18 (172)*	1.47
LGO, $\gamma_{12}$	.20	.24	.82 (172)	1.22
<i>For PO Fit Slope, <math>\psi_{2j}</math></i>				
Level 2 Intercept, $\gamma_{20}$	2.22	.13	17.17 (174)**	9.18

Note:  $N = 3,486$  application decisions nested within 175 individuals.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .



**FIGURE 1** Moderating effect of avoiding goal orientation on the relationship between DA fit and job applications (Study 1). Stronger and weaker AGO were considered to be +1 and -1 SD from the mean. The group mean centered DA fit SD was 0.7, and the plot is shown from -2 SD to +2 SD from the mean to more clearly illustrate the result pattern.

levels, relative to baseline fit. That is, when participants' fit with a particular job advertisement is less than their mean level of fit across all 20 advertisements (Figure 1, from -2 SD to 0 SD below the mean), application probability increases as DA fit increases toward the participant mean but does so less sharply for individuals with a stronger AGO. Conversely, as DA fit moves from 0 to 2 SD above the participant's mean, its relationship with application probability increases more sharply for individuals with a stronger AGO, providing moderate support for Hypothesis 1. Thus, although the pattern does not fully support our hypothesis, it is still consistent with our theorizing. That is, stronger AGO individuals appear to be more wary of applying for jobs at lower DA fit levels, but become more likely than weaker AGO individuals to apply for a job when DA fit for that job is higher than their average DA fit across jobs. Finally, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. LGO had no conditional effect on the Level 1 relationship between DA fit and applications ( $\gamma_{12} = .20$ ; n.s.).

In addition to concluding that AGO moderates the DA fit–application decision relationship, we sought to compute the variance in this relationship that AGO explained. Specifically, we tested two nested models that allowed us to compare the residual (unexplained) variance in the DA fit–application slope,  $u_{1j}$ , before and after including the AGO moderator. Consistent with Hofmann, Griffin, and Gavin (2000), we first tested an intercepts as outcomes model that included DA fit as a Level 1 predictor of application decisions and PO fit as a Level 1 control. In addition, we included mean DA and PO fit covariates and AGO and LGO as Level 2 predictors of the Level 1 intercept, and included only a residual slope variance term for the DA fit slope,  $u_{1j}$  (i.e., we included no Level 2 predictors of the DA fit–application slope). The resulting, baseline residual variance term was .78. Second, we tested a slopes as outcomes model, identical except that we now also included AGO as a predictor of the between-participant DA fit–application slope. The residual variance term decreased to .66. According to Hofmann et al. (2000, p. 488), the variance that AGO explains in the DA fit–application relationship is given by  $(u_{1j} \text{ intercepts as outcomes} - u_{1j} \text{ slopes as outcomes})/u_{1j} \text{ intercepts as outcomes}$ , or  $(.78 - .66)/.78$ . Thus, including AGO at Level 2 explained 15% of the between-participant variance in the slope of the relationship between DA fit and application probability.

## 6 | STUDY 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Throughout the job search process, individuals are exposed to information that affects their application decisions. Study 1 showed that individuals with a stronger AGO tend to relate DA fit more extensively to these decisions. Conversely, LGO failed to moderate the DA fit–application relationship. Even though not as personally concerned about DA fit, LGO individuals may still realize that most companies emphasize DA fit during selection. Thus, even though they find it less personally relevant, stronger LGO individuals may still wisely apply for jobs based on DA fit and their awareness that higher fit could increase their hire probability.

Although LGO may not affect cognitions regarding DA fit, it may still moderate affective reactions to DA fit in actual employment contexts. In Study 2, we bridge job search and employment contexts by investigating intern satisfaction. Interns are employees but are also still job seekers. Both parties are evaluating one another for a potential longer-term employment relationship. Thus, interns face unique challenges navigating relatively novel, unstructured situations in which they must satisfy requisite job demands in a short time for full-time employment consideration.

Given this context, we believe the logic developed thus far extends to employee attitudes about DA fit. DA fit is strongly and consistently related with satisfaction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014), but we argue that goal orientation will moderate the extent to which DA fit is satisfying. Among individuals with stronger AGO, DA fit will relate more strongly to satisfaction because it fulfills the need to avoid demonstrating incompetence (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999). Poor performance and higher effort requirements due to lower DA fit are conditions that stronger AGO individuals wish to avoid; such conditions are likely to reduce their satisfaction. Moreover, individuals with a stronger AGO are less adaptable to novel, challenging situations and are skeptical that they can rectify poor performance via enhanced effort. Thus, they are less satisfied when concerned about possible negative repercussions from lower DA fit.

If, however, one's goal orientation pertains to developing, learning, growing, and achieving through enhanced effort rather than initially possessing particular abilities (LGO), then DA fit will relate less strongly to satisfaction. Specifically, individuals with a stronger LGO will still experience some affect from higher DA fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, stronger LGO individuals have a growth mindset and higher effort utility. This should increase their resiliency and thus decrease their concerns about DA misfit. Individuals with a stronger LGO are also more intrinsically motivated to complete difficult tasks and are open to new experiences (Payne et al., 2007; Vandewalle, 1997). Thus, they are not as threatened by higher workloads that might accompany lower DA fit and may even embrace this challenge (Whingter et al., 2008). They may perceive thwarted growth opportunities should DA fit be too high, which could suppress their satisfaction. The net effect of these forces should be an attenuated DA fit–satisfaction relationship among individuals with a stronger LGO.

**Hypothesis 3:** AGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and internship satisfaction such that it is stronger when AGO is stronger.

**Hypothesis 4:** LGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and internship satisfaction such that it is weaker when LGO is stronger.

## 7 | STUDY 2 METHOD

### 7.1 | Participants and procedure

The participants were 38 of 77 students in a Human Resources and Industrial Relations master's degree program (27% men) from a large northern U.S. university. They had engaged in summer internships between the first and second years of their program and had completed all relevant survey measures. Specifically, students were surveyed three times as part of a larger study. One month before their internship, positive affect was assessed as a control. During the 2-week period just before their internship, goal orientation was assessed. Six months later, internship satisfaction and perceived DA fit with the internship company were assessed, as well as perceived PO fit as a control.

### 7.2 | Measures

#### 7.2.1 | DA fit

We used Cable and DeRue's (2002) three-item scale. An example item was, "The match was very good between the demands of my internship and my personal skills" (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .77$ ).

#### 7.2.2 | Goal orientation

We used Vandewalle's (1997) instrument to assess work domain goal orientation (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Respective  $\alpha$ 's for LGO, AGO, and PGO were .83, .75, and .75.

#### 7.2.3 | Control variables

Whereas DA fit, and its interaction with goal orientation, likely relates to satisfaction, people are also likely to base their internship satisfaction on perceived PO fit. Thus, similar to in Study 1, there is sound theoretical and empirical basis for a relationship between PO fit and satisfaction (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). To control for perceived PO fit, we used Cable and DeRue's (2002) three-item scale. An example item was, "My personal values match this organization's values and culture" ( $\alpha = .97$ ). Second, prior theory and meta-analytic evidence suggests that positive affect is a dispositional correlate of satisfaction (e.g., Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000). Thus, we also assessed positive affect as a potential control using the five items from Thompson's (2007) short version of the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; e.g., "active," "inspired";  $\alpha = .80$ ).

#### 7.2.4 | Internship satisfaction

We assessed internship satisfaction using two items from Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) overall job satisfaction scale. An example item was, "I felt fairly well satisfied with my internship" (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

## 8 | STUDY 2 RESULTS

Table 3 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations. We retained the PO fit control variable in the analysis given its correlation with satisfaction but did not retain positive affect because it was uncorrelated with satisfaction, although interaction term significance levels were substantively similar with and without it (Becker, 2005).

**TABLE 3** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 2 variables

Variable	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Positive affect	4.81	.84						
(2) PO fit	5.53	1.41	-.10					
(3) DA fit	5.99	.94	-.09	.68**				
(4) PGO	5.47	.84	-.21	.05	-.06			
(5) AGO	3.36	1.02	-.20	-.21	-.23	.09		
(6) LGO	6.26	.60	.47**	-.11	-.07	.09	-.23	
(7) Internship satisfaction	6.04	.98	.09	.70**	.74**	.03	-.26	.12

Note:  $N = 38$ .

+ $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 4** Study 2 regression results<sup>a</sup>

	<i>Dependent variable: Satisfaction</i>			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Control variable</i>				
PO fit	.70**	.37*	.39**	.38**
<i>Independent variable</i>				
DA fit		.49**	.48**	.50**
<i>Moderator variables</i>				
AGO			-.02	-.14
LGO			.19+	.18+
<i>Interaction terms</i>				
DA fit × AGO				.27*
DA fit × LGO				-.04
$R^2$	.49	.63	.66	.72
$\Delta R^2$		.13**	.04	.06*

<sup>a</sup>Standardized beta coefficients for respective models shown.

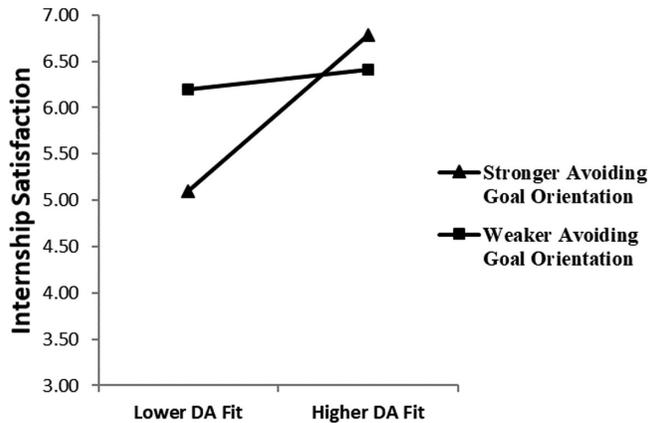
+ $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 4 shows the moderated regression results using standardized independent variables. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between DA fit and satisfaction is stronger when AGO is stronger (Model 4  $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ;  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. Simple slopes are positive for a stronger AGO ( $t = 4.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and nonsignificant for a weaker AGO.

For Hypothesis 4, we did not find support for the expected interaction of DA fit and LGO on satisfaction ( $\beta = -.04$ ; n.s.). However, although not hypothesized, LGO had a main effect on satisfaction, although only at the  $p < .08$  level (we interpret this effect given the smaller sample size;  $\beta = .19$ ; see Table 4, Model 3). This is consistent with prior work (e.g., Cellar et al., 2011; Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004) and indicates that LGO and DA fit might affect satisfaction independently rather than interactively.

## 9 | STUDY 3: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Study 3 extends the prior two studies by examining whether goal orientation moderates the relationship between DA fit and a key behavioral outcome: OCB directed toward the organization (OCBO).<sup>5</sup> Prior OCB research has mostly examined individual difference or affect-based antecedents (e.g., personality, positive affect, satisfaction; Organ &



**FIGURE 2** Moderating effect of avoiding goal orientation on the relationship between DA fit and internship satisfaction (Study 2)

Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). We build on this work by considering DA fit as a *resource* by which individuals believe they have sufficient capacity to engage in OCBO during early job tenure. That is, we propose that people will go “above and beyond” prescribed job duties only when they think they can adequately fulfill those duties first.

More broadly, we consider the drivers of OCBO performance by drawing on updates to classic performance theories. These theories emphasize that performance is a function of *ability* and *motivation* (Vroom, 1964) but also *opportunity* (e.g., Boxall & Purcell, 2003; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006; Peters & O’Connor, 1980). Specifically, we propose that individuals assess their *ability* to engage in OCBOs, are *motivated* to engage in them yet also must gauge whether *sufficient opportunity* exists to engage in them.

First, for purposes of this study, we assume that individuals have the ability to engage in OCBO. Second, Study 2 showed that DA fit relates to satisfaction, and AGO moderates this relationship. This provides an affective, motivational explanation for OCBO. However, we further propose that individuals cognitively appraise opportunities to engage in OCBO and that DA fit is central to these opportunity appraisals. With sufficient DA fit, individuals feel less constrained and more efficacious about their in-role task demands. Feeling less constrained by task demands, they sense greater opportunity to exhibit extra-role behaviors; that is, OCBO. For example, newly hired employees are more likely to volunteer for organizational community service efforts such as working at food banks or building new playgrounds when they believe their abilities sufficiently meet job demands or when they sufficiently understand and have made progress on tasks or projects. Consistent with this, DA fit (e.g., Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010; Chuang, Shen, & Judge, 2016) and job self-efficacy (e.g., Todd & Kent, 2006) positively, and role ambiguity negatively (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2000) relate to OCB.

We further posit that AGO and LGO moderate the degree to which DA fit relates to OCBO. Consistent with prior arguments, DA fit is relatively more (less) critical to individuals with a stronger AGO (LGO). Stronger AGO individuals are self-absorbed while striving to avoid poor performance, challenges, or possible failure from lower DA fit. Thus, as DA fit decreases, they are more prone toward maladaptive responses (Cron et al., 2005), which may include reduced OCBO. Conversely, as fit increases, these individuals are more willing to engage in OCBO. In other words, before engaging in OCBO, stronger AGO individuals must first ensure their abilities sufficiently satisfy job demands because they seek to avoid poor performance and believe performance derives from current fixed abilities rather than effort. For example, the newly hired employees in the above example are less likely to volunteer if they (a) perceive inadequate DA fit and (b) have a fear of failure motive that orients them toward avoiding a show of poor performance because of this lower fit.

By contrast, the literature suggests that stronger LGO individuals are more proactive and predisposed to engage in OCBO (e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Chien & Hung, 2008; Whitaker & Levy, 2012). For example, Chien and

Hung (2008) suggest that stronger LGO individuals take time to learn beyond their specific jobs, leading to more service behaviors. Bettencourt (2004) suggests that LGO motivates improvement not only in one's primary task duties but also in the broader working environment (see also, Farr et al., 1993). Because individuals with a stronger LGO are less preoccupied with concerns about poor performance, tend to be less competitive (Vandewalle, 1997), and are more willing to work for the greater good (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), they are also more likely to view OCB as part of their role breadth (McAllister, Morrison, Kamdar, & Turban, 2007). By extension, this research suggests that the DA fit-OCBO relationship will be weaker among these individuals. That is, among stronger LGO individuals, OCBO enactment will not depend on first believing they have the resources to sufficiently handle their task demands.

Broader self-regulatory evidence further supports this view. For example, scholars have found that AGO is negatively, and LGO is positively related to self-efficacy (e.g., Cellar et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2007). This implies that among stronger LGO individuals, DA fit matters less in decisions to engage in OCBO because these individuals believe they have the capacity to accomplish in-role demands regardless of current DA fit. Taken together, the above implies:

**Hypothesis 5:** AGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and OCBO such that it is stronger when AGO is stronger.

**Hypothesis 6:** LGO moderates the positive relationship between DA fit and OCBO such that it is weaker when LGO is stronger.

## 10 | STUDY 3 METHOD

### 10.1 | Participants and procedure

Participants (57% men) were part of a larger socialization study of newly accepted doctoral students who began in the fall semester at two large Midwestern U.S. universities. We obtained contact information via the universities' registrar offices. In addition to taking required courses, doctoral students are typically expected to fulfill certain in-role requirements. As such, we considered them as employees entering a new job. We administered two online surveys three months apart. All participants were included in a raffle for ten \$50 Amazon gift cards.

Specifically, on the first survey we assessed students' positive affect within two weeks of the start of the first semester as a control. After students submitted this survey, we prompted them to email us so we could contact them for the second survey. We distributed the second survey, which measured the remaining study variables, at the end of the first semester. To assure confidentiality and matched responses across surveys, we included five identifier questions on both surveys (e.g., "in what city did you attend high school?"). A total of 216 new doctoral students completed all relevant survey measures. We eliminated 25 participants who incorrectly completed check question items included in each survey to detect careless responding (e.g., "as a system check, please click 'slightly disagree' [i.e., '2<sup>nd</sup> button over'] for this question"; Meade & Craig, 2012), yielding a final sample of 191. The sample was richly diverse: 44% indicated an international high school education in response to a survey identifier question.

### 10.2 | Measures

#### 10.2.1 | DA fit

We used Cable and DeRue's (2002) scale again, with PhD program as the referent (e.g., "The match is very good between the demands of my PhD program and my personal skills"; 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### 10.2.2 | Goal orientation

We used Vandewalle's (1997) work domain goal orientation instrument again (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Respective  $\alpha$ s for LGO, AGO, and PGO were .87, .87, and .83.

**TABLE 5** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 3 variables

Variable	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Positive affect	5.50	.88								
(2) GPA	3.72	.29	.02							
(3) OCBI	4.72	1.01	.28**	.04						
(4) PO fit	5.31	1.15	.11	.01	.13+					
(5) DA fit	5.77	.93	.24**	.13+	.16*	.45**				
(6) PGO	4.83	1.21	.02	.17*	.02	.23**	.13+			
(7) AGO	3.35	1.21	-.14*	-.03	-.10	.14+	-.16*	.27**		
(8) LGO	5.94	.70	.41**	.12+	.31**	.26**	.46**	.28**	-.22**	
(9) OCBO	4.74	1.04	.35**	.14+	.63**	.35**	.29**	.17*	-.07	.33**

Note:  $N = 191$ .

+ $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

### 10.2.3 | Control variables

Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, we controlled for PO fit using Cable and DeRue's (2002) scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ) because meta-analysis has found that PO fit is related to contextual performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Second, we controlled for positive affect, which has also been found to relate to OCBs in meta-analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2000), using the five items from Thompson's (2007) short version measure ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Third, to isolate DA fit and goal orientation effects on OCBO, and because of its likely relationship with OCBO (e.g., Lee & Allen, 2002), we controlled for OCBI using Lee and Allen's (2002) eight-item measure ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Fourth, we controlled for anticipated first semester GPA as a proxy for cognitive ability. Along with DA fit, cognitive ability likely relates to individuals' OCBO capacity (Gonzalez-Mulé, Mount, & Oh, 2014), and studies have found that ability differentiates goal orientation effects on performance-related outcomes (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002).

### 10.2.4 | OCBO

We used Lee and Allen's (2002) eight-item measure. Participants reported how often they engaged in behaviors that helped their program, such as "Attend functions that are not required but that help the program image" using a seven-point scale (1 = *never*; 7 = *always*;  $\alpha = .87$ ).

## 11 | STUDY 3 RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and correlations appear in Table 5. We retained all proposed control variables, given their correlations with OCBO (Becker, 2005). Results of hierarchical regression analysis appear in Table 6. As shown in Model 4, Hypothesis 5 was supported ( $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ;  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Figure 3 illustrates the interaction between DA fit and AGO. Specifically, the slope of the DA fit–OCBO relationship is positive among individuals with a stronger AGO ( $t = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but nonsignificant among individuals with weaker AGO. Hypothesis 6 was not supported: the DA fit  $\times$  LGO interaction term was nonsignificant ( $\beta = .05$ ).

## 12 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

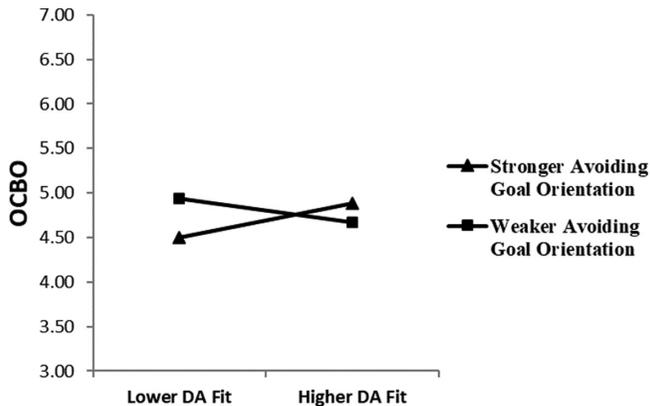
Job search and organizational entry are challenging, uncertain, and often involve rejection or failure. It is crucial that job seekers anticipate job demands and that newly hired employees adequately fulfill them. Yet individuals likely differ in the degree to which they associate DA fit with critical organizational entry outcomes. Our research makes

**TABLE 6** Study 3 regression results<sup>a</sup>

	<i>Dependent variable: OCBO</i>			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Control variables</i>				
Positive affect	.16**	.16**	.15**	.17**
GPA	.11*	.10 <sup>+</sup>	.10 <sup>+</sup>	.10 <sup>+</sup>
OCBI	.55**	.54**	.54**	.54**
PO fit	.25**	.23**	.24**	.25**
<i>Independent variable</i>				
DA fit		.05	.04	.03
<i>Moderator variables</i>				
AGO			-.01	-.05
LGO			.00	-.00
<i>Interaction terms</i>				
DA fit × AGO				.14*
DA fit × LGO				.05
R <sup>2</sup>	.50	.51	.51	.52
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.00	.00	.02*

<sup>a</sup>Standardized beta coefficients for respective models shown.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**FIGURE 3** Moderating effect of avoiding goal orientation on the relationship between DA fit and OCBO (Study 3)

important contributions by (a) integrating DA fit and goal orientation in job search and early employment contexts, and (b) examining cognitive, affective, and extra-role behavioral manifestations of DA fit and goal orientation. We find highly consistent AGO results. Specifically, among job seekers, interns, and newly hired employees with a stronger AGO, we find a stronger relationship between DA fit and key organizational entry outcomes. However, contrary to our predictions, we find no evidence across these studies that LGO moderates DA fit–outcome relationships.

Goal orientation theory provides a rich explanation for the AGO moderation findings (Button et al., 1996; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005; Dweck, 1986; Vandewalle, 1997). Theorists explain how goal orientation relates to fixed versus growth mindsets. Individuals believe that success depends on either increased effort or specific current abilities. They view challenges as either opportunities or threats and have different affective reactions to challenges such as lower DA fit. Finally, goal orientation effects are strongest in less structured situations. Goal orientation is thus highly relevant to

how individuals perceive and react to DA fit during job search and organizational entry. For example, individuals are likely to attend to fit information that corresponds with their predominant goal orientation, because it is more personally relevant (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Individuals with a stronger AGO may emphasize job demands information in their job search decision making because they have a fear of failure motive, fear negative evaluations, worry about making mistakes, have lower job search self-efficacy, and do not believe they can adapt to new demands or succeed through enhanced effort (e.g., Ali et al., 2016; Elliot & Church, 1997; Papaioannou et al., 2012; Payne et al., 2007; Vandewalle, 1997). They must possess the exact required skill repertoire once on the job; lower DA fit during early job tenure is deeply challenging and may inhibit satisfaction and proclivity to enact OCBOs.

Study 1 shows that when DA fit with a particular job is lower than average intraindividual fit across a series of viewed job advertisements, those with a stronger AGO show a weaker relationship between DA fit and applications (see Figure 1). That is, application probability increases only slightly as DA fit increases toward, but remains below average individual fit levels. As DA fit increases *beyond* average fit, individuals with a stronger AGO become relatively *more likely* to apply. Overall, AGO explains a nontrivial 15% of the variance in the DA fit–application decision relationship across individuals.

Because they wish to avoid situations where ability deficiencies may be exposed (Vandewalle, 1997), individuals with a stronger AGO may fear (a) having their applications rejected or (b) the challenge associated with lower DA fit as they begin a new job. Thus, they apply when they feel secure that DA fit will be high. By contrast, it is surprising that LGO does not attenuate the DA fit–application relationship. Rather, it appears that individuals apply based on DA fit regardless of their LGO. Perhaps stronger LGO individuals anticipate or believe that companies will ultimately select based on DA fit. Thus, despite personal indifference about DA fit they logically recognize its importance for hiring decisions. Although we did not find an LGO moderation effect, the AGO effect we did find provides initial insight into why certain individuals emphasize DA fit information and contributes to our understanding of the nomological network of individual factors that influence job search processes.

Building on these results, we examined interns in Study 2. DA fit discrepancies are likely to be particularly salient to interns, because they signify potential failure during a crucial job tryout period. Interns have only a set time to demonstrate their abilities, or to avoid a show of low abilities. We find a similar pattern of results. Among individuals with a weaker AGO, DA fit does not affect satisfaction as much, perhaps because they are less likely to be concerned about receiving full time offers and therefore less concerned about avoiding poor performance. However, among individuals with a stronger AGO for whom the fear of failure motive is stronger (Elliot & Church, 1997), DA fit relates more strongly with satisfaction. That is, they likely feel more assured of avoiding failure when DA fit is higher.

In addition, similar to Study 1, LGO does not moderate the DA fit–satisfaction relationship. Rather, LGO (at the  $p < .08$  level), DA fit, and PO fit each have independent main effects on satisfaction (see Table 4). This suggests that individuals with a stronger LGO are at least partly satisfied regardless of DA or PO fit. For example, with their need for achievement grounding (Elliot & Church, 1997), they may view temporary internships as opportunities to develop and challenge themselves, regardless of fit. We can reasonably surmise that individuals with a stronger LGO derive satisfaction from the experience, rather than from merely fitting required job demands. They might think, “It’s OK if I don’t end up working here. This has been a fantastic opportunity to learn new skills.”

The Study 3 results complement Studies 1 and 2. Because stronger AGO individuals focus on avoiding poor performance, it might seem counterintuitive for them to engage in extra-role behavior. However, results indicate that when new employees perceive higher DA fit, they engage in more OCBOs if they have a stronger AGO. There are at least two explanations for this. First, Study 2 showed that DA fit relates more strongly to satisfaction among individuals with a stronger AGO. In turn, satisfaction consistently relates to OCB (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2000). Second, individuals with a stronger AGO believe they will succeed only via sufficient ability. Additional effort will not help. Thus, only when they perceive sufficient ability via high DA fit do they believe they can successfully accomplish in-role tasks. This may reduce inhibitions toward engaging in OCBOs.

Similar to Studies 1 and 2, we find that LGO does not attenuate DA fit–OCBO effects. The lack of LGO results across studies is unexpected but explainable for at least three reasons. First, goal orientation theory asserts that LGO and

AGO are not mere opposites (Payne et al., 2007). When AGO exacerbates effects, LGO may not always attenuate similar effects. For example, when individuals have a weaker LGO and are therefore less likely to seek improvement or mastery, it does not necessarily mean they worry about appearing incompetent in a new job. Ali et al. (2016) found that incivility interacted with AGO to predict job search self-efficacy, but it did not interact with LGO. Correspondingly, we find that DA fit interacts with AGO but not LGO. Second, it might also be that stronger LGO individuals attend to other information such as fit with the values of the organization, even if they do not necessarily deemphasize DA fit information during organizational entry as we proposed. For example, because stronger LGO individuals consider growth and development important and find such information personally relevant, they may focus on discerning whether a potential employer's culture will allow them to achieve their goals. Finally, researchers have begun to adapt AGO and LGO scales specifically to job search contexts (Ali et al., 2016). Our studies used Vandewalle's (1997) original work domain measures. Thus, it is possible that our results underestimated LGO (and AGO) effects.

Although not specifically hypothesized, two additional overarching patterns are noteworthy. First, following our general logic, there are consistent differences in how AGO and LGO correlate with DA fit (see Tables 1, 3, and 5). Specifically, in Studies 1 and 3, LGO positively correlates with DA fit, and AGO does not. In both studies, these correlation coefficients are significantly different (Lee & Preacher, 2013). A similar pattern materializes in Study 2, although the coefficients, and difference between coefficients, are not statistically significant. Overall, individuals with a stronger LGO appear to perceive higher DA fit than individuals with a stronger AGO. The meaning of "fit" may be greatly restricted among individuals with a stronger AGO. By contrast, individuals with a stronger LGO may more loosely construe fit. Perhaps they are more open about what it means to fit because they believe they can grow and adjust as required.

Second, the results show stronger goal orientation effects when DA fit is lower versus higher. Specifically, although we find consistent AGO moderation effects, one could also conceptualize DA fit as moderating AGO–outcome relationships. For example, when DA fit is lower in Study 1, individuals with a stronger AGO are relatively less likely than those with a weaker AGO to apply for jobs (see Figure 1). However, when DA fit is higher, they become *more* likely to apply than individuals with a weaker AGO. In Study 2, if we replot Figure 2 such that AGO is the independent variable and DA fit the moderator, there is a significant negative relationship between AGO and satisfaction when DA fit is lower ( $t = -2.33, p < .05$ ) but a nonsignificant relationship when DA fit is higher. If we replot Figure 3 from Study 3, the AGO–OCBO relationship is significant and negative when DA fit is lower ( $t = -2.20, p < .05$ ), and nonsignificant when DA fit is higher. For example, when individuals with a stronger AGO perceive lower DA fit, OCBO is minimized.<sup>6</sup>

These additional observations imply that individuals with a stronger AGO are more sensitive to lower DA fit than to higher DA fit. This is consistent with our earlier theorizing. Specifically, for these individuals, lower DA fit is especially grim because success requires extant ability, and effort will not bridge the ability gap. They are avoidant and self-protective rather than mastery- and improvement-minded. Although they desire good performance, they fear failure and are relatively more intent on avoiding a poor showing than on making a good showing (Elliot & Church, 1997; Vandewalle, 1997). Correspondingly, they react more strongly to lower DA fit than to higher DA fit. This is also more broadly consistent with classic gain–loss theories, which propose greater attention to losses than gains (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

Taken together, our studies provide evidence that AGO moderates the effects of DA fit during multiple organizational entry stages. Thus, they integrate person–environment fit and goal orientation theories, and explicate goal orientation as an important fit boundary condition. Although only the AGO moderation results materialized, the overall result pattern was highly consistent across studies and supports conceptual linkages between job demands and goal orientation during organizational entry.

## 12.1 | Study limitations and future research directions

This research has some notable strengths. We observed coherent results in laboratory and field samples across a natural progression of contexts relevant to organizational entry. In Studies 1 and 2, we collected different measures at

different times, reducing common method concerns. For example, in Studies 1 and 2 we assessed AGO and LGO several weeks prior to other variables. Study 1 used multilevel modeling, which more realistically allowed participants to view multiple job opportunities. The diverse Study 3 sample enhances generalizability. Overall, we believe our results, particularly for AGO, are compelling because they are similar across different types of study participants and organizational entry contexts.

Despite these strengths, some limitations that can potentially provide insights into future research merit discussion. First, our theory and fit measures did not fully account for potentially overqualified job seekers, interns, or new entrants. For example, it is uncertain whether an overqualified individual would rate DA fit low or high on our scales. On one hand, they are overly capable of fulfilling job demands and thus may believe they are a good fit. However, they may not perceive strong alignment between their abilities and demands, and thus may perceive lower fit. Reduced DA fit construct validity could in turn make it more difficult to detect significant relationships (e.g., involving the LGO moderator). Although we were unable to detect overqualification in our samples, we suspect it was rare. Specifically, Study 1 job seekers were undergraduate students rather than seasoned employees, Study 2 interns were hired from a reputable HR master's program by firms that tend to provide challenging work, and PhD students (Study 3) are not typically overqualified for such work 3 months into their tenure.

Second, we conceptualized but did not assess individual cognitions, such as the extent to which individual devote more attention to DA fit information depending on their goal orientation. We conceptualized perceived opportunities and constraints in Study 3 but did not explicitly measure these intervening mechanisms. Third, the Study 1 recruitment advertisements did not portray actual recognizable organizations. It is possible the results are limited to lesser-known organizations that lack reputation capital. In addition, Study 1 student participants were not engaged in actual job searches. Fourth, except for positive affect, we assessed all Study 3 variables on the same survey. This included OCBO, which, like satisfaction in Study 2, was self-rated. However, whereas self-rated OCBO risks overreporting, other-rated OCBO risks underreporting. For example, OCBOs may occur when others cannot observe them (e.g., Allen, Barnard, Rush, & Russell, 2000; Organ & Konovsky, 1989; Spector & Che, 2014). We do not believe common method variance involving the dependent and interacting Study 3 variables was a significant problem for two reasons. First, we found a significant interaction that corroborates with prior study results. Second, the results of a common method variance test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) revealed that a method factor explained only 11% of the total variance (see also, Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). Regardless, researchers should replicate the Study 3 results using separate measurement occasions and sources.

This research provides a foundation for other future investigations. First, scholars might study goal orientation and fit later in the employment relationship; for example, examining whether goal orientation attenuates or exacerbates relationships between fit and turnover intentions. Second, scholars might study goal orientation and fit in specific contexts such as mergers and acquisitions or expatriate assignments where norms and expectations are often unclear. Third, it would be interesting to study these relationships among different types of job seekers (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012). For example, the goal orientations of employed job seekers might direct their searches because they can be more selective. If they have stronger AGO, however, they may be trying to escape a job situation with lower DA fit (e.g., Zimmerman, Boswell, Shipp, Dunford, & Boudreau, 2012). This might limit their choices.

Fourth, we focused on dispositional goal orientation, but future work might integrate situational goal orientation as a way to help job seekers or new entrants navigate the early employment period. For example, by encouraging situational LGO or discouraging AGO, companies (career counselors) might focus employees (job seekers) less intensely on DA fit and instead free them to develop or otherwise exert more effort rather than giving up when DA fit is lower (van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). This may be especially critical because many organizations can no longer guarantee stable job demands to their employees but instead need them to adapt and deal with consistent DA misfit. Fifth, future work should more closely examine the goal orientation–OCBO relationship. For example, although we find that DA fit relates to OCBO among those with a stronger AGO, perhaps some individuals will engage in OCBO when they perceive DA fit deficiencies. For example, they may enact OCBOs to compensate for lower DA fit. Using other-reported OCBO in concert with self-reports might bolster this work further.

## 12.2 | Implications for practice

Given increasingly common protean careers, individuals may be less concerned about specific DA fit and may desire stretch assignments in which they can learn and grow (e.g., Dizenzo & Greenhaus, 2011). For example, our results suggest that individuals with a weaker AGO do not link DA fit as strongly to job applications, satisfaction, or enactment of OCBOs during early job tenure. The attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) theory predicts that individuals will emphasize fit information, and will evade or leave situations in which they do not fit (Schneider, 1987). However, our results indicate that some individuals are more prone to believe they already fit or can develop stronger fit. For example, Simmering, Colquitt, Noe, and Porter (2003) found that misfit can spawn development, a notion contrary to the ASA. Companies should be aware of this and perhaps less strictly emphasize DA fit in recruitment advertising, although this approach might decrease objective applicant pool DA fit (Dineen & Noe, 2009).

Job seekers should be aware that their goal orientation might affect the information they emphasize or de-emphasize during their job searches. For example, a cognitive resource perspective (e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989) suggests that if they overemphasize DA fit during their job search, they may overlook other information and discover once they commence employment that they have lower fit in other domains (e.g., with company values). To help job seekers recognize these tendencies, campus recruitment offices or organizations might provide job seekers or incumbents opportunities to self-assess their goal orientation, similar to commonly used personality, conflict resolution, and leadership style assessments (e.g., Butler, 2014; Dweck, 2006; SHRM, 2015). They might further adapt goal orientation assessments to specific job search or early entry contexts (e.g., Ali et al., 2016).

Next, the Study 3 results suggest that individuals with higher DA fit perceptions engage in more OCBO when they have a stronger AGO. Organizations might consider ways to encourage accurate fit perceptions during early employment. For example, if employees are underestimating their fit, organizations might highlight ways in which new employees' abilities are contributing to the organization. On the other hand, if employee fit is objectively lower, organizations might help them recognize this, encourage them to develop a growth mindset, and provide a clear path to increase fit, whether through training, mentoring, or practice opportunities.

Finally, in combination, the results imply that effects at earlier organizational entry stages might affect outcomes at subsequent stages. For example, if job seekers with a stronger AGO base their job applications on DA fit, they will likely fit with the required job demands in their new organization. In turn, these employees are more likely to be satisfied and engage in OCBO because of higher DA fit. This highlights potential incremental effects and the criticality of providing adequate and accurate information during recruitment, so that job seekers can make well-informed decisions. We hope practitioners and future researchers will build on these and other implications to better understand goal orientation effects during organizational entry.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Connecting this to our research, we propose that when performance information is explicit or definitive it should be easier to predict whether stronger PGO individuals will engage in adaptive responses (i.e., need for achievement motive more active) or maladaptive responses (i.e., fear of failure motive more active). For example, when feedback explicitly indicates a high success likelihood and need for achievement remains active, stronger PGO individuals should remain engaged and respond adaptively. However, when feedback explicitly indicates high failure likelihood or inferiority to others, such that the fear of failure motive is more active, they should disengage and respond maladaptively. Yet, PGO results are still largely nonexistent across goal orientation studies featuring explicitly self-diagnostic and comparative performance information, such as low exam scores or clear negative or positive performance feedback (e.g., Brett & Atwater, 1999; Cron et al., 2005; Dahling & Ruppel, 2016; Vandewalle et al. 2001). In our context, perceived DA fit, while challenging, is often anticipatory, nondefinitive, and less overtly diagnostic, compared to more unambiguous evaluations such as test scores. Thus, it is even more difficult to predict PGO reactions to this less explicit information, given that effects are unclear even when feedback is explicit. For

example, stronger PGO job seekers may perceive lower DA fit when considering job applications. However, because this does not definitively assess performance and job seekers do not typically gauge it in relation to known standards or other job seekers, it is unclear whether PGO seekers will refrain from applying or continue to apply.

- <sup>2</sup> Because evidence for goal orientation–mindset relationships can sometimes be rather modest (Payne et al., 2007), we consider such relationships only in combination with the additional research reviewed in this section.
- <sup>3</sup> Although our theory development and hypotheses tests focus on AGO and LGO, PGO was also assessed in all three of the studies included in this article. Thus, for comprehensiveness, we incorporate it in the correlation matrices for utilization in future goal orientation research such as literature reviews and meta-analyses. We also reran analyses in all three studies, including a DA fit  $\times$  PGO interaction term. As expected, none of these interactions were significant (Study 1:  $\gamma_{12} = .07$ ; Study 2:  $\beta = .07$ ; Study 3:  $\beta = -.07$ ).
- <sup>4</sup> For group-mean centering, Hofmann and Gavin (1998) drew on Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) to advise “re-introducing the mean” as a Level 2 covariate to account for baseline levels of a group-centered Level 1 variable and to disaggregate within- and between-person effects of this variable (see also Curran & Bauer, 2011). In accordance with this, we formally tested whether adding the participant-level mean DA and PO fit terms significantly improved model fit. Although the default (PQL) estimation method in HLM 7 does not yield model comparison statistics, a Laplace estimation method yields a deviance statistic that allows such comparisons. Using this statistic for models with and without these terms, the  $\chi^2$  difference ( $df = 2$ ) was 26.21 ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, we retained participant DA and PO fit means as Level 2 covariates, as shown in equation (2). Hofmann and Gavin (1998) further proposed including group (i.e., participant) level interaction terms as covariates when using group-mean centering to test cross-level interactions, to separate the between-group slope from the pooled within-group slope. In our context, the between-participant interaction terms were Mean DA fit  $\times$  AGO and Mean DA fit  $\times$  LGO. However, adding these terms did not significantly improve model fit,  $\chi^2$  difference (2) = 4.94, n.s., so we retained the model with the between-participant mean terms but not the between-participant interaction terms.
- <sup>5</sup> In the interest of parsimony and for the following reasons, we focus on OCBO and not organizational citizenship behavior toward individuals (OCBI). First, DA fit ostensibly helps organizations via job performance. OCBO similarly helps organizations, making organizations a common referent. Second, OCBO is consistent with the Study 1 and 2 outcome variables: each outcome yields greater benefits to organizations than to any individual persons within organizations. Third, Lee and Allen (2002) suggest that job situation characteristics more likely influence OCBO than OCBI. Although we do not focus on OCBI, we controlled for it in Study 3. We also analyzed it as a dependent variable (controlling for OCBO) and found no significant results.
- <sup>6</sup> Because of space constraints, we do not include these plots. However, the four estimated means for each plot are as follows. For Study 2: strong AGO/high DA fit = 6.81; strong AGO/low DA fit = 5.13; weak AGO, high DA fit = 6.39; weak AGO, low DA fit = 6.12. For Study 3: strong AGO/high DA fit = 4.89; strong AGO/low DA fit = 4.50; weak AGO, high DA fit = 4.67; weak AGO, low DA fit = 4.93.

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