



Understanding the antecedents of perceived fit at work in the United States, Russia, and China [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript reports a cross-cultural study examining four antecedents (average salary, past promotion, organizational constraints, and collectivistic values) of person–organization (P–O), demands–abilities (D–A), and needs–supplies (N–S) perceptions of fit. We draw on both the fundamental motivations framework and research on cross-cultural differences to outline antecedent–fit relationships that are universal and culture-specific. The universal antecedent–fit relationships include the associations between past promotion and D–A fit perceptions and organizational constraints and N–S fit perceptions. Two culture-specific antecedent–fit relationships were hypothesized. Salary was found to be more strongly related to N–S fit perceptions in Russia and China than in the U.S. Contrary to our predictions, however, the link between collectivistic values and P–O fit was stronger in the U.S. than in China. We conclude with implications for cross-cultural fit research and human resource management practices in multi-national organizations.

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Person–environment fit has been one of the most discussed topics in management research for almost 100 years (Lewin, 1935; Oh et al., 2013). Fit has been documented as an important factor in organizational processes including employee recruitment (Saks & Ashforth, 1997), selection (Kristof-Brown, 2000), and retention (Cable & Judge, 1996). Manifestations of fit stem from comparing internal aspects of the person such as values, personality, abilities, and needs to conceptually relevant elements of the external environment such as organizational culture or climate, organizational and job demands, and supplies. At the individual level many conceptualizations of fit have been classified into two categories: (1) rational (impersonal) fit such as person–organization fit (P–O), demands–abilities (D–A) and needs supplies (N–S) fit; and (2) relational fit such as person–supervisor (P–S) and person–group (P–G) fit (Oh et al., 2013).

Considerable attention has already been focused on various outcomes associated with different fit conceptualizations. For example, P–O fit has been shown to influence organization-focused outcomes such as organizational identification and turnover (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof-Brown, 2000). N–S fit was related to job- and

career-focused outcomes including job satisfaction and occupational commitment (Cable & DeRue, 2002). D–A fit was linked to job satisfaction and negatively associated with intentions to quit (Saks & Ashforth, 1997), whereas P–S and P–G fit were associated with contextual performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Studies examining the consequences of fit have been conducted in the United States (Cable & DeRue, 2002), China (Silverthorne, 2004), as well as cross-culturally (Oh et al., 2013).

In contrast to the outcomes of fit, conditions that are antecedent to fit perceptions have received much less attention and have predominantly been examined from the perspective of the job applicant rather than the employee. For example, Saks and Ashforth (1997) report that the number of formal job information sources and self-esteem were positively related to perceptions of D–A fit, and formal job information sources were positively related to perceptions of P–O fit. Kristof-Brown (2000) found that applicants using self-presentation strategies during the interview to increase the probability of being hired had lower levels of actual P–O fit than those who did not use such strategies. Cable and Judge (1996) suggest that perceived value congruence between job seekers and their subsequently chosen organizations positively affects their perceptions of P–O fit as employees and that those job applicants who place more emphasis on P–O fit during selection would experience greater P–O fit after organizational entry. Chen, Lee, and Yeh (2008) reported that applicant ingratiation to the interviewer has a positive effect on the interviewer's perceived similarity with the applicant, and that this similarity mediates the relationship between applicant

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ingratiation and the interviewer's judgment of the applicant's P–O. Antecedents of job incumbents rather than applicants are more scarce and have included various socialization tactics used by organization for newcomers (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Despite the progress that has been made, the extent research on fit antecedents is characterized by at least three significant limitations (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Yu, 2013). First, previous studies focused on the antecedents of fit for job applicants and have mostly ignored the antecedents of fit using job incumbents. This limits our understanding of fit processes because the literature clearly documents the importance of fit after hiring (Cable & Judge, 1996). Second, past research on the antecedents of fit has employed a piecemeal approach with studies typically focusing on the antecedents of a single rather than multiple dimensions of fit. This piecemeal approach is problematic because employees perceive multiple dimensions of fit simultaneously (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2013). Third, research on the antecedents of fit has been restricted to the Western cultures, with limited knowledge being available on how fit is manifest in the East (e.g., Chen et al., 2008). Given considerable cultural differences between the two contexts, it is essential to understand what influences fit in Eastern countries. In addition, from a practical standpoint, as business relations between West and East intensify, the understanding of both contexts will enhance business effectiveness (Lee & Ramaswami, 2013). Russia and China represent attractive study domains in the East as both countries are ambitious, fast-growing markets with a highly educated and talented workforce (Khanna, Palepu, & Sinha, 2005) and are thus attractive targets for foreign investments. Also, both Russian and Chinese cultures are very different from that of the U.S. and most of the Western cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

This study extends our understanding of fit by simultaneously examining the antecedents of each of the three dimensions of rational fit perceptions (P–O fit, D–A fit, and N–S fit). Drawing from the fundamental motivations framework advanced by Yu (2013), we develop and test theoretical arguments that posit past promotion, average salary, organizational constraints, and employee collectivistic values as antecedents of fit. We then test the resulting hypotheses in three independent samples, one from the U.S., one from Russia, and one from China. This approach allows us to better understand what factors influence what type of fit, and how cultural differences may alter the relations among different antecedents and different dimensions of fit. In the next sections we develop arguments that differentially relate a set of fit antecedents to three distinct dimensions of fit: P–O fit, D–A fit, and N–S fit. We first draw on the conceptual work of Yu (2013) to identify individual and organizational motivational factors as the antecedents of fit. We then specify a set of culturally invariant and culturally contingent hypotheses.

Similarities and differences in fit antecedents across cultures

Conceptualizations of fit

Person–environment (P–E) fit has been conceptualized in various ways. In its most general sense, P–E fit is defined as “the congruence, match, similarity, or correspondence between the person and the environment” (Edwards & Shipp, 2007, p. 211). Research further distinguishes among different types of fit which refer to congruence between certain aspects of the person (e.g., abilities, needs, values, etc.) and the corresponding aspects of the environment (e.g., demands, supplies, culture).

One key distinction in the fit literature is between supplementary and complementary fit (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Supplementary fit occurs when the person “supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals” in the environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p.

269), whereas complementary fit is present when a “weakness or need of the environment is offset by the strength of the individual, and vice versa (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 271). Complementary fit is further subdivided into demands–abilities fit and needs–supplies fit based on whether the requirements are imposed by the environment or the person, respectively (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Demands–abilities fit denotes congruence between an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities and job demands (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Needs–supplies fit refers to congruence between employees' needs and the supplies that emanate from their work (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Another conceptualization of fit was only recently proposed and distinguishes between rational fit and relational fit (Oh et al., 2013). Rational fit concerns impersonal aspects of work and includes person–organization fit, needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit. Relational fit concerns interpersonal aspects of work (i.e., other individuals at work) and includes person–person and person–group fit.

Although the above fit conceptualizations are plausible and are well accepted in the fit research, they are sometimes confounded and obscured (see Edwards & Shipp, 2007, for details). Examples of problems that arise from this conceptual confusion may include studies that refer to fit with the organization or job but do not specify whether this fit is supplementary or complementary (Cable & Judge, 1996) and studies that equate D–A fit to person–job fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002) but ignore the evidence that demands may exist at the group or organization levels.

Edwards and Shipp (2007) clarify this conceptual confusion by advancing a theoretical model that integrates and expands existing conceptualizations of fit by classifying them based on the level of environment and content dimensions. According to this model, supplementary fit, D–A fit and N–S fit are not limited to one level, but can rather exist at each of the five levels of environment, such as individual, job, group, organization and vocation. Furthermore, supplementary fit, D–A fit and N–S fit can correspond to three content dimensions (global, domain and facet) on which P and E are compared (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). The global dimension concerns the overall fit without regard to any dimensions of comparison (e.g., overall supplementary fit, overall N–S fit, and overall D–A fit). The domain dimension captures broad categories of fit (e.g., supplementary person–person fit, D–A fit between one's work experience and job demands, and N–S fit between social relationships and one's need for social relationships). The facet level is most specific and involves comparisons at particular levels of P and E (e.g., supplementary person–person fit on Big Five traits, D–A fit for specific tasks, and N–S fit between job characteristics [autonomy, task variety, task identity] and one's needs for these job characteristics).

To avoid confounding in regards to fit conceptualizations, Edwards and Shipp (2007) suggested that researchers should operationalize fit in such a way that supplementary fit and complementary fit remain distinct and a fit type would be defined by its treatment of the environment at the level it denotes. For example, P–O fit should be defined by treating the environment at the organizational level without restricting the environment to its individual members (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Similarly, fit between one's abilities and job demands should be defined by the characterization of the environment at the job level. The existing conceptualization of supplementary fit at the organization level (P–O fit) and D–A fit and N–S fit at the job level (Cable & DeRue, 2002) clearly distinguish between supplementary and complementary fit types and treat the environment at the appropriate level (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). In regards to the content dimensions, the most widely supported operationalization of P–O fit is at the domain level (P–O value fit) and the most widely supported operationalizations of N–S and D–A fit are at the global level (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Edwards & Shipp, 2007). These content dimensions were used in the present study.

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