



Explaining the effects of perceived person-supervisor fit and person-organization fit on organizational commitment in the U.S. and Japan[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The majority of research simultaneously examining multiple person–environment fit dimensions employs additive rather than interactive fit models. Although additive models allow researchers to compare the relative salience of fit dimensions, such models fail to capture the complex interdependencies of fit. Using employee samples from the U.S. and Japan, this study examines interdependence between perceived person-supervisor (P-S) fit and person-organization (P-O) fit and their associations with affective organizational commitment. Perceived P-S fit and affective organizational commitment are found to be related both directly and indirectly (through perceived P-O fit) in Japan but only indirectly in the U.S. In both countries, perceived P-O fit positively translates into affective organizational commitment through collectivistic values. The association between perceived P-S fit and affective organizational commitment was stronger in Japan than in the U.S., whereas the strength of the link between perceived P-O fit and affective organizational commitment did not differ across the two countries.

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1. Introduction

For more than a decade, the importance of fit at work has been on radars of academicians and practitioners (Hill, 2013; Oh et al., 2014; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Fit is identified by comparing internal aspects of the person, such as values, personality, goals, and abilities to conceptually relevant elements of the external environment, such as organizational or supervisor's values, personality, goals, and job demands (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Oh et al., 2014). A fundamental assumption of fit theory is that good fit leads to positive work outcomes and poor fit results in negative work outcomes. Indeed, research evidence is consistent in showing that fit at work is associated with increased job satisfaction, performance, organizational citizenship, organizational and occupational commitment, and reduced turnover (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Fit benefits at work make fit an attractive pursuit for both individuals and organizations. As Caplan (1987) noted, “organizations and their members have a fundamental stake in how well characteristics of the person and the environment of the organization fit one another” (p. 248). Organizations make every effort to hire and retain employees with high levels of fit. Likewise, employees strive for congruence with the organizational environment. Collectively, research and industry evidence point to a great importance of fit in the workplace and, consequently, the need to better understand fit–outcome relationships.

Although existing fit studies have unquestionably enriched our understanding of fit, several issues remain outstanding. Scholars have long noted that “individuals are simultaneously nested” and interact in multiple layers in the work environment, suggesting a co-existence of multiple dimensions of fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002, p. 985). Fit studies that employ multiple fit dimensions are not new (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Oh et al., 2014). However, the majority of those studies employ an additive approach that assumes that fit dimensions are independent predictors of work outcomes and overall fit can be represented as an “algebraic amalgamation of its various dimensions” (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006, p. 197). While this approach may be appropriate for comparing the relative salience of different fit dimensions, it fails to account for interdependence among these same dimensions (Oh et al., 2014). The interdependence of different environmental levels (e.g., individual, group, and organization) suggests the need for “an integrative view of PE [person–environment] fit and casting different types of fit as elements of a broader theoretical model” (Edwards & Shipp, 2007, p. 231). Although different manifestations of fit interdependencies may exist, one such manifestation involves models in which a fit dimension mediates the link between another fit dimension and outcomes (Edwards & Shipp, 2007).

Multi-dimensional fit research has generally combined P-O fit with D-A or N-S fit; only a handful of studies have simultaneously examined P-S fit and P-O fit (e.g., Oh et al., 2014; van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011). Perceived P-S and P-O fit are broadly referred to as congruence or similarities between the characteristics of an individual and the supervisor (P-S fit) or an individual and the organization (P-O fit). Because value-based congruence has become the most accepted way

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of operationalizing P-S fit and P-O fit (Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, & Sutton, 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), I adopt this operationalization in the present study.

The importance of a co-examination of P-S fit and P-O fit is reflected in organizational practice and fit theory. As Hill (2013) acknowledges, both P-S and P-O are emerging as two interdependent types of fit in today's workplace, primarily because it is no longer sufficient to hire based on job fit alone; there must also be fit with the organization and others who work in it. For example, in a case study that describes hiring in elite professional service firms, Rivera (2012) emphasizes the importance of "cultural matching" between candidates, evaluators and firms. Similarly, fit researchers admit that simultaneous consideration of P-O fit and P-S fit is "particularly intriguing to study since organizational cultures and leaders seem fairly tied to each other" (van Vianen et al., 2011, p. 908).

Although van Vianen et al. (2011) attempt to test the interaction between P-S fit and P-O fit, they fail to empirically support that interaction and their final conclusions are based on the additive approach. One potential explanation for their non-significant finding may relate to the non-multiplicative nature of the interdependence between perceived P-S fit and P-S fit. Employees view supervisors as representatives of the organization and supervisors' behaviors are therefore expected to reflect organizational culture (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). This suggests that unless P-S fit contributes to P-O fit, it may not relate to positive work outcomes. In other words, P-O fit may serve as a mediator, rather than a moderator, with the effect of perceived P-S fit on work outcomes occurring *through* perceived P-O fit. This type of interdependence between P-S and P-O fit relationship needs to be further examined.

Although perceived P-S fit and P-O fit are associated with a number of positive outcomes, organizational commitment is deemed to be among of the most critical ones (van Vianen et al., 2011). The most frequently studied dimension of organizational commitment is affective commitment, defined as emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The examination of both P-S and P-O fit is particularly important in the context of organizational commitment because, from an additive perspective, both employee-supervisor and employee-organization value congruence are thought to contribute to the formation of emotional ties with the organization (van Vianen et al., 2011). However, the explanatory mechanisms that link P-S fit and P-O fit to organizational commitment remain unexplored (van Vianen et al., 2011). To date, the study by van Vianen et al. (2011) is the only study I am aware of that addresses the mechanisms (quality of the leader-member exchange and supervisor commitment) that account for the relationship between P-S fit and organizational commitment. The mechanisms that may account for the relationships between P-O fit and organizational commitment have not yet been examined.

To address the above limitations in fit research, this study examines the relationships between perceived P-S fit and P-O fit and affective organizational commitment, and explains *why* these relationships occur. Specifically, this study tests a theoretical model in which perceived P-O fit mediates the link between perceived P-S fit and affective organizational commitment. Perceptions of P-O fit are critical for enhancing cohesiveness in the organization (Cable & DeRue, 2002), and, therefore, in this model, perceived P-O fit influences organizational commitment by means of strengthening employees' sense of collectivism.

To assess the cross-cultural robustness of the proposed relationships, I test the model using employee samples from the U.S. ($n = 300$) and Japan ($n = 300$). The U.S. and Japan are particularly fruitful vantage points from which to gain an understanding of the proposed relationships. First, these countries are two major world powers which "together account for over 30% of world domestic product, for a significant portion of international trade in goods and services, and for a major portion of international investment" (Cooper, 2014, p. 1). Second, the cultural differences between the two countries—differences that are

reflected in their respective organizational environments (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)—may potentially influence fit-outcome relationships. This cross-cultural examination of the proposed relationships contributes to the generalizability of the study results and extends the fit and organizational commitment literatures.

2. Theoretical development

2.1. Perceived P-S fit, perceived P-O fit and affective organizational commitment

The direct associations between P-S fit, P-O fit and organizational commitment have been addressed in previous research (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). Theoretical arguments that underlie the link between P-S fit and organizational commitment build on the leader-member exchange (LMX; e.g., van Vianen et al., 2011) and perceptual similarities frameworks (Wexley & Pulakos, 1983). According to LMX theory, shared values serve as "a precursor of leader-member exchange quality" (Ashkanasy & O'Connor, 1997, p. 648). Similarly, the perceptual similarity framework suggests that when employees perceive congruence with supervisors, they better understand and are able to more accurately predict supervisor goals and expectations (Colbert, 2004). This results in greater performance and overall positive experience in the organization, thus making attachment to and involvement with the organization more likely. The relationship between P-O fit and organizational commitment can be explained by the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework, according to which, individuals are assumed to prefer organizations that match their own characteristics, with value congruence being one of the most critical considerations (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). This is because value alignment makes the resolution of work-related challenges easier and improves organizational adjustment (Schneider et al., 1995), thereby creating stronger bonds between the employee and the organization.

Hypothesis 1. Perceived person-supervisor fit will be positively related to affective organizational commitment in a) the U.S. and b) Japan.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived person-organization fit will be positively related to affective organizational commitment in a) the U.S. and b) Japan.

2.2. Mediating role of perceived P-O fit

Although the above relationships between perceived P-S fit and P-O fit and organizational commitment are important, they reflect an additive approach (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006, p. 197). This study augments this approach by hypothesizing a mediating relationship in which perceived P-O fit transmits the relationship between perceived P-S fit and organizational commitment. To the extent that employees perceive a high degree of value fit with their supervisors, the degree of fit with organizational values will also increase. By interacting with employees on a daily basis, enacting formal and informal organizational procedures and serving as an administrator of organizational rewards, the supervisor acts as "an agent of the organization" (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002, p. 339). Supervisors "strongly embody the organization's character" and are therefore highly identified with the organization in the eyes of employees (Eisenberger et al., 2002, p. 566). Van Vianen et al. (2011) note that the perceived match with one's supervisor functions as the baseline for one's perceived similarity with the organization. Based on the above, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3. Perceived person-supervisor fit will be positively related to perceived person-organization fit in a) the U.S. and b) Japan.

I further argue that perceived P-O fit will mediate the link between perceived P-S fit and affective organizational commitment. That is, perceived P-S fit will positively influence organizational commitment through the enhancement of perceived P-O fit. One of the supervisor's

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