Journal of Vocational Behavior 90 (2015) 132–144

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Vocational Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jvb

Measuring work styles: Towards an understanding of the dynamic components of the theory of work adjustment☆

Piers H. Bayl-Smith *,[1], Barbara Griffin

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 May 2015
Received in revised form 7 August 2015
Accepted 13 August 2015
Available online 18 August 2015

Keywords:
P–E fit
Theory of work adjustment
Work styles
Reliability
Validity

ABSTRACT

Work styles are an important yet largely unexplored component of the theory of work adjustment (TWA), describing a dynamic component of how individuals maintain and adjust fit with their work environment. The active work style (AWS) scale is the first attempt to develop a specific self-report measure of work styles suitable for longitudinal research. Results from three studies support Dawis and Lofquist's (1984) proposed four factor structure, but these factors are related through a second-order factor describing a person's generalised level of work activity and effort across time. The AWS scale demonstrated good evidence for reliability and validity, and strong measurement invariance across time signifying its suitability for longitudinal research. In line with expectations, overall work style was positively related to conscientiousness and work engagement yet unrelated to stress. When controlling for these variables, AWS was positively related to demands–abilities fit, but not needs–supplies fit. Limitations and possibilities for future research are also discussed.

Person–environment (P–E) fit theories have been widely utilised in industrial and organisational psychology for over 100 years (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Contemporary research has applied this framework to examine a wide range of work domains including employee recruitment and selection (Carless, 2005), job attitudes (Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003), on-job behaviour and performance (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and job withdrawal and tenure (Donohue, 2006). Despite the prominence of P–E fit literature, one significant limitation has been the conception of fit as a static structure (Jansen & Shipp, 2013; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). P–E fit has predominantly viewed the person and the environment as relatively stable entities, the correspondence of which determines the level of fit and consequent outcomes (Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004). However, both environment and persons are increasingly recognised as being in constant transition. For example, technological change, mergers and acquisitions, and market globalisation have created organisational environments that are constantly in flux (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). Furthermore, over time individuals experience change in their cognitive processes (Bandura, 1999), abilities (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2008) and motivations (Kooij, Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008). Given the variability within the person and the environment, both need to continually enact maintenance and adjustment behaviours in order to conserve or achieve correspondence (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). P–E fit research has predominantly neglected these processes, focusing more on snapshot measurements of fit at particular instances of time (Kristof-Brown & Jansen, 2007).

The theory of work adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), by specifying both structural and dynamic components of P–E fit, provides an important framework through which to understand the processes of mutual adaptation and adjustment (Jansen & Shipp,

☆ Special thanks to Beryl Hesketh, Emeritus Professor, Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Western Sydney, for providing useful feedback regarding the items in the active work style scale.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia.
E-mail address: piers.bayl-smith@mq.edu.au (P.H. Bayl-Smith).

[1] Piers Bayl-Smith is currently receiving an APA scholarship.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.08.004
0001-8791/

2013). To describe the structural component of fit, Dawis and Lofquist (1984) suggest that satisfactory performance results from the correspondence between the abilities of the person and those demanded by the environment (demands–abilities fit), and that job satisfaction results from the correspondence between values supplied by the environment and those needed by the person (needs–supplies fit). Ultimately, tenure is seen as a consequence of reciprocal satisfaction. Understood as such, the structural component of TWA is not dissimilar from other general theories of P–E fit.

However, TWA is unique in that it differentiates this structural component of fit from dynamic processes, labelled as *style* variables, to explain how individuals and organisations are actively engaged in maintenance and adjustment behaviours to achieve ongoing fit (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Dawis, 2005). Here, adjustment behaviours aimed at decreasing misfit are further distinguished from work styles. In the presence of misfit, an individual may engage in adjustment behaviours to increase their fit by either acting upon the environment or acting upon themselves. Work styles on the other hand describe an individual's characteristic way of interacting with their work environment and operate to maintain and adjust fit. Whilst there has been some attention given to understanding proactive and reactive adjustment behaviours, albeit largely outside the P–E fit literature (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Pulakos et al., 2000), the work styles concept has been largely ignored in empirical research despite its being an integral part in such a key theory. The current paper highlights this lesser known aspect of TWA, providing a measure to allow ongoing research on variables that offer explanatory power for improving P–E fit over time. It is important to note that the environment likewise has style variables associated with maintaining and increasing fit, however the focus of this paper will be upon the behaviours and actions of the employee.

1. Work styles

Work styles were originally conceived as stable, trait-like attributes of the employee, developing in childhood through experimentation and reinforcement, crystallised in adulthood, and declining as a result of physiological change due to the ageing process (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). However, reflecting later developments in the field of personality (McCrae & Costa, 2008), work styles have more recently been conceived as being responsive to influences such as personal cognitions, social identities and environmental constraints (Hesketh, Griffin, Dawis, & Bayl-Smith, 2015).

Work styles are distinguished by four specific characteristics; celerity, pace, rhythm and endurance. Respectively these describe how quickly an employee typically initiates work behaviours, the usual levels of energy applied to work tasks, the characteristic patterns of effort, and the degree to which the employee will persevere in doing tasks (Dawis, 2005; Hesketh et al., 2015). Dawis and Lofquist (1984) describe work styles as an employee's skills and abilities (labelled as personality structure) in action. An individual therefore may be described as having both a structural component – their skills and abilities; as well as a dynamic component – their typical work style and adjustment behaviour. Consequently, even if an individual has a good fit with their environment structurally (i.e., they have the appropriate skills and abilities to meet the demands of their job), if the work style is inadequately expressed, there will be a decrease in actual fit and the requirements of the employer will not be satisfied. Alternatively, if fit is poor structurally, an employee may engage in a work style that maintains or even increases their actual fit to satisfy the requisites of the organisation. Work styles thus envisaged have a direct relationship with maintaining and adjusting fit, as well as moderating the relationship between fit and satisfaction (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Dawis, 2005).

As mentioned, there has been no research conducted upon work styles, apart from an early study by Lawson (1993) and a recent theoretical application of TWA to older workers (Hesketh et al., 2015). This in part might be resultant from a lack of a suitable measurement instrument (Dawis, 2005). It may also be due to the lack of longitudinal studies of changing P–E fit, which is clearly integral to any study of a dynamic model. This paper goes someway in addressing this deficit by first describing work style facets, as well as validating a short self-report scale suitable for longitudinal research.

"Celerity" is defined as the typical speed of responding to the environment or of initiating work behaviours (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Those who have high levels of celerity are thought to start job assignments early and respond quickly to work cues. The opposite may be described as one who routinely delays performing tasks and making decisions. Stated as such, celerity may share some conceptual links with time urgency or the facet of hurriedness (Landy, Rastegary, Thayer, & Colvin, 1991). Though unlike time urgency, celerity is more focused on the latency of response in the work environment, rather than generalised speed or hurriedness whilst completing tasks (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Furthermore, hurriedness may indicate a level of recklessness which is not necessarily implied by celeritous individuals. Celerity at low levels also bears some similarities with procrastination; though procrastination is often represented as avoidance behaviour not purposely planned (Van Eerde, 2003). Low celerity does not have this association; it merely indicates someone who does not typically start on work tasks straight away.

"Pace" refers to the habitual level of energy applied to work tasks (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). High levels of pace are marked by an appearance of busyness and constant engagement in work activities. However, pace is not merely effort — working hard towards a desired goal or performance level (Yeo & Neal, 2004) or doing one's best (De Cooman, De Gieter, Pepermans, Jegers, & Van Acker, 2009). Rather, pace is concerned more specifically with employee levels of activity and consumption of energy. Whilst someone who expends energy towards work tasks may describe their activity as hardworking, hardworking may also depict aspects of celerity, rhythm and endurance. Hence pace needs to be carefully distinguished from broader conceptions and measures of effort intensity (e.g., De Cooman et al., 2009).

"Rhythm" describes the typical pattern of exerted effort at work; ranging from steady to erratic (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Someone who has a steady rhythm typically functions at the same level of effort or intensity, regardless of whether that level of effort is high or low. In contrast, an unstable or erratic rhythm is characterised by an employee displaying a lack of regularity or pattern in their work efforts. To date, the concept of work rhythm has been relatively unexplored (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2005). Gold, Park, and Punnett (2006) discuss routinization, where tasks are described as routine when the work cycle varies little, and non-routine when employee