



Does work engagement increase person–job fit? The role of job crafting and job insecurity[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the expanded model of person–environment fit and job crafting theory, this study investigates the underlying processes of the relationship between work engagement and changes in person–job fit. A two-wave longitudinal study was conducted among 246 Chinese employees of a high technology company. As hypothesized, the results show that work engagement is positively related to changes in demands–abilities fit through changes in physical job crafting and positively related to changes in needs–supplies fit through changes in relational job crafting. As predicted, the positive relationship between work engagement and changes in relational job crafting (however, not changes in physical job crafting) is strengthened under conditions of high (vs. low) job insecurity. Our findings indicate that engaged employees craft their work in physical and relational ways, which creates a better person–job fit. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Organizations are under intense competitive pressures to survive and progress in an ever-changing world of work. More than ever, organizations need their employees to be energetic, dedicated, and fully engaged in their work because the quality of human resources is of vital importance to the success of organizations, especially in uncertain working contexts. Work engagement has been shown to be positively associated with individual and organizational performance (for a review, see Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Employee work engagement has recently received considerable attention from organizational behavior scholars and practitioners (e.g., Albrecht, 2010; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010).

Kahn (1990) was one of the first to theorize on the subject of work engagement. He described engaged employees who focus their physical, cognitive, and emotional energy on the pursuit of role-related goals. There are several definitions of engagement (see Albrecht, 2010; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008), however, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) proposed the following, frequently used definition of work engagement: an active, positive work-related state that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Whereas scholars have taken different perspectives on engagement, “there is a growing consensus that engagement can be defined in terms of high levels of energy and high levels of involvement in work” (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011, p. 22).

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Previous studies have suggested that organizations might foster employee work engagement by creating resourceful and challenging work environments (e.g., Rich et al., 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Employees are not merely passive recipients of their work environments; they tend to take active actions, build valued resources, and create their preferred workplace (Bakker, 2010). Recently, Bakker et al. (2011) recommended that person–environment fit such as needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit should be considered in future research on work engagement to ascertain whether engaged (vs. non-engaged) employees are more inclined to improve their person–environment fit. We intend to conduct a longitudinal field study among Chinese workers.

When proposing the expanded person–environment fit model, Yu (2009) argued that a positive work-based affect could elicit more changes in person–environment fit, including person–job (P–J) fit. Work engagement, as a positive and high-arousal affective state, might help employees achieve a better P–J fit (Bakker et al., 2011). Past research has shown that engaged employees are inclined to increase their job resources (e.g., actively asking for feedback from their supervisor and colleagues) and job demands (e.g., taking the initiative to start a new project) to create a more challenging work environment (e.g., Bakker, 2011; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012, 2013). The process in which employees actively shape their jobs is referred to as job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Researchers have suggested that high uncertainty and flux in the workplace could actually offer more opportunities for employees to craft their own jobs (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). We expect job crafting to play a mediating role, explaining the reason that work engagement leads to changes in P–J fit, especially under conditions of high uncertainty (i.e., job insecurity).

This study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways. First, we test whether work engagement, as a positive work affect, leads to changes in P–J fit by using a longitudinal study design. Our study enriches the existing work engagement literature by addressing P–J fit as an outcome (Bakker et al., 2011), which adds to our knowledge of individual-level antecedents to P–J fit perceptions (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Yu, 2009). Second, by further combing Yu's (2009) expanded model of person–environment fit and job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), we investigate the mechanisms and conditions by which work engagement affects employees' changes in perceptions of P–J fit, including needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit. This might enhance our understanding of the reason engaged employees could achieve a better P–J fit, especially under conditions of high job insecurity.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Work engagement and P–J fit

Work engagement is an affective–motivational, work-related state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor refers to high levels of energy, mental endurance, and perseverance at work. Dedication is characterized by a high involvement in one's work and a sense of significance, inspiration, pride, and challenge, whereas absorption indicates that one is fully concentrating and happily engrossed in one's work. Scholars taking Schaufeli and his colleagues' approach to conceptualizing engagement appear to place more emphasis on the positive valence of engagement. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) suggested that employees with high work engagement will find their work interesting, meaningful, and energizing and will experience positive affects, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm. Macey and Schneider (2008) argued that as in satisfaction, work engagement also has positive valence; however, "it is the sense of energy and enthusiasm in engagement that makes the construct different" (p. 24). Work engagement could hence be viewed as the activated state of positive work-related affect with raised motivation (e.g., Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Given that our research model is based on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build (B&B) theory of positive emotion and Yu's (2009) expanded model of positive affect and person–environment fit, we selected the positive approach of engagement of Schaufeli and his colleagues.

According to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build (B&B) theory, positive affective states share the ability to broaden momentary thought–action repertoires of individuals, which build enduring personal resources in people, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to psychological and social resources. Work engagement, as a positive motivational–affective state, could broaden employees' thought–action repertoires and help build or increase personal and job resources (e.g., Bakker, 2011; Tims et al., 2012, 2013). It is interesting and relevant to combine these insights with Yu's (2009) expanded model of person–environment fit. He argued that a positive work-based affect could help an individual achieve a better fit, including person–job (P–J) fit. P–J fit focuses on the match between personal characteristics and job characteristics, which can be differentiated into demands–abilities (D–A) fit and needs–supplies (N–S) fit. D–A job fit perceptions refer primarily to judgments of congruence between the demands of a job and an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities, whereas N–S job fit perceptions are concerned with the congruence between an employee's needs or wants and supplies he or she receives from a job (e.g., Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000). To the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical study testing Yu's (2009) expanded model of person–environment fit.

Bakker (2010) suggested that engaged employees could create their own great place to work and increase their P–J fit perceptions as a consequence. Engaged employees might learn to increase the variety of skills or talents used at work to meet job requirements more effectively; engaged employees might be inclined to seek feedback from their supervisors or colleagues to perform better, which might eventually achieve results in higher psychological and financial rewards (e.g., esteem, salary, and promotions).

In line with these arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Work engagement is positively related to changes in person–job fit, including needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit.

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