



Core self-evaluations as a mediator of the relationship between person–environment fit and job satisfaction among laboratory technicians



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mediating effect of core self-evaluations on the relationship between person–environment fit and job satisfaction among professional laboratory technicians. One hundred and ninety-seven professional laboratory technicians (158 females and 39 males) from both France and Belgium completed a person–organization fit scale; a person–job fit scale, a core self-evaluation scale and a job satisfaction scale. Correlational results indicated that job satisfaction was positively associated with person–organization fit, person–job fit and core self-evaluations. The results using structural equation modeling showed that core self-evaluations partially mediated the relationship between person–environment fit and job satisfaction. The significance and limitations of the results are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Job satisfaction can be defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one's job (Locke, 1969). This construct has a long-standing tradition in organizational research. As pointed out by Peng and Mao (2015), job satisfaction is of major concern whenever outcome variables such as work engagement or positive emotional experience at the workplace are considered. It constitutes an indirect measure of employee well-being in the line of thought of positive psychology. It has garnered considerable interest in both its situational and dispositional antecedents (Judge & Larsen, 2001; Wu & Griffin, 2012).

The concept of person–environment (P–E) fit is also an important concept in organizational behavior theory and has given rise to many publications (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). P–E fit is broadly defined as “the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when the characteristics are well matched” (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 281). In recent years, much research has been conducted to understand better the different components of this general construct (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Hinkle & Choi, 2009). Among the different conceptualizations of P–E fit, the distinction between person–organization fit (P–O fit) and person–job fit (P–J fit) seems to be the most commonly investigated (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In a meta-analysis conducted by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), P–

O fit and P–J fit were found to be strongly associated with job satisfaction (.44 and .56, respectively). As pointed out by Gabriel, Diefendorff, Chandler, Moran, and Greguras (2014), much research has theorized about the relationship between fit and outcome variables, arguing for the causal precedence of fit perception. In other words, job satisfaction is thought to be the result of individual's fit perception but the reciprocal relationship could be envisaged (Jansen & Shipp, 2013; Yu, 2009). A longitudinal methodology is required to obtain relevant results. A recent study was conducted in a longitudinal follow-up of administrative assistant employees (Gabriel et al., 2014). There was more support for the idea that fit perceptions precede work affect than for the idea that work affect precedes fit perceptions. These authors concluded: “Taken together, the most consistent causal direction was from perceived fit to subsequent affect/job satisfaction, suggesting that fit perceptions may be more of an antecedent of affect/job satisfaction than an outcome” (Gabriel et al., 2014, p. 412). In accordance with these results, we propose that job satisfaction can be considered an outcome variable.

Much research has also been carried out on understanding the personality factors associated with job satisfaction (Staw & Cohen-Charash, 2005). The Five Factors Model is the most popular and widely investigated personality taxonomy and has thus provided many results. These indicate that neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness display appreciable correlations with job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). Furthermore, as a set, the Big Five traits have a multiple correlation of .41 with job satisfaction. The results concerning the links between core self-evaluations (CSE) and job satisfaction are more convincing. In fact, early research on CSE was closely related to the literature on job satisfaction (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Preliminary

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studies were encouraging with a “true score” total effect of .48 of CSE on job satisfaction when both constructs were self-reported by employees from different countries and different sectors (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Each component of CSE (e.g., self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy and neuroticism) was also identified as closely associated with job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001). An overall corrected correlation of .37 was calculated between the CSE global score and job satisfaction after combining them into a single composite measure. Research on this topic has long been dominated by a dispositional approach, considering personality a stable personal characteristic, independent of context (Staw & Cohen-Charash, 2005). In this perspective, personality is considered a stable antecedent variable that influences outcome variables such as job satisfaction. Recent research suggests that the dispositional approach tends to be replaced by a contextual approach, considering personality a dynamic. Judge and Larsen (2001) first proposed a process model of job satisfaction. They outlined how personality variables both moderate and mediate the relationship between environmental stimuli and affective responses such as job satisfaction. More recently, Wu and Griffin (2012) asserted that personality theorists are paying increasing attention to the way that traits change over time through interaction with life experiences. Using longitudinal methodology, they observed that CSE scores could change over time even if there was a high degree of stability (test–retest variability of CSE was .63), suggesting the potential for context to influence CSE. Furthermore, the mediator effect of CSE between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction was recently explored by Sun, Wang, and Kong (2014). We thus propose that CSE can be considered a mediator variable between P–E fit and job satisfaction.

In addition, various researches suggest that job characteristics account for a substantial proportion of the variance of job satisfaction. More precisely, empirical researches using Karasek's model (Karasek, 1979) confirmed that high demand and low control (or low decision latitude) work environments are regularly associated with lower job satisfaction (see Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010 for a review). Therefore, it seems important to integrate situational variables in our model and take into account this possible source of variability.

Finally, job satisfaction can also be influenced by the nature of the job. Recently, various researches suggested that situational factors could restrict the behavioral expression of various individual differences. In particular, the concept of situational strength is the subject of several recent studies (Dalal et al., 2015). In their daily activities, laboratory technicians (LTs) are exposed to various biological risks, such as viruses, parasites, fungi, rickettsia, bacterial microorganisms, or genetically modified organisms (Coelho & García Díez, 2015). As a matter of fact, LTs are working in demanding conditions and great importance is given to the procedures (Pedersen, Andersen, Zebis, Sjogaard, & Andersen, 2013). Their tasks involve great responsibility, as they can be involved in medical diagnosis (Aust, Rugulies, Skakon, Scherzer, & Jensen, 2007). Because our goal is to understand the effect of P–E fit and CSE on job satisfaction, we decided to test the relationships on a very homogeneous sample exposed to a similar level of situational strength. Moreover, while data concerning the environmental risks for LTs are well documented in recent studies, information concerning the psychological factors is scarce. In response to this lack, we propose to examine the mediation model cited above in a homogenous and specific sample of LTs.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedure and participants

Participants took part in the study via an online web survey (e.g., LimeSurvey), which was announced via the University of Dijon e-mail lists and professional network. They were informed that participation was completely anonymous and voluntary. All participants provided their consent by clicking on the button “I agree to take part in

this survey”. Thus, they could stop the survey at any time. Only complete respondent data were collected. The final sample represented 198 laboratory technicians; however 1 questionnaire was not included in the analyses due to extreme scores for several questionnaires. Of these participants, 158 were female and 39 were male. On average, they were 31.8 years old ($SD = 9.62$) and had worked in their current jobs for 7.1 years ($SD = 8.76$). The study took place within a French-speaking population; 139 were French (70.6%) and 58 were Belgian (29.4%). Of these respondents, 105 were public sector employees (53.3%) and 92 were private sector employees (46.7%). Most of them were employed under a permanent contract (73.1%) leaving 36.9% under a temporary contract.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Control variables

2.2.1.1. Demographics. Information regarding the participant's age, seniority, gender (1 = male, 2 = female), type of contract (1 = permanent, 2 = temporary), country (1 = France, 2 = Belgium) and sector (1 = public, 2 = private) was collected as it may be correlated with the variables of interest in the study.

2.2.1.2. Job variables. Job characteristics as job demands and job decision latitude were measured as they are known to be correlated with the variables of interest. The French version of Job Content Questionnaire (Guignon, Niedhammer, & Sandret, 2008) based on Karasek's model (1979), was used. It was a 26-item questionnaire with three subscales, but only job demands (9 items) and job decision latitude (9 items) subscales were taken. Responses were ranged from “1” (never) to “4” (often). The internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha was .80 and .76 for job demands and job decision latitude subscales, respectively.

2.2.2. Person–organization fit scale

Items were derived from Cable and DeRue's person–organization fit scale (2002). It contained 3 items on a 5-point rating scale from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree): “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values”, “My personal values match my organization's values and culture”, and “My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life”. This scale measures the extent to which the values of an organization match a participant's values in general. Scores were the sum of these three items. Despite the small number of items, the person–organization fit scale had a good internal consistency in our study ($\alpha = .84$).

2.2.3. Person–job fit scale

The person–job fit scale used was also derived from the initial scale developed by Cable and DeRue (2002). This was a 3-item self-report measure of participants' compatibility between their characteristics and those of their job on a 5-point rating scale from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree). This scale measures the extent to which the abilities of a participant match the demands of a job and participants were asked to respond to the items in general. The items included “The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills”, “My abilities and training are a good fit with the requirements of my job”, and “My personal abilities and education provide a good match with the demands that my job places on me”. Scores were the sum of these three items. Despite the small number of items, a good internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = .81$).

2.2.4. Core self-evaluations scale

The core self-evaluations (CSE) scale developed by Judge et al. (1997) consisted of 12 items on a 5-point rating scale from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree). Example items included “I am

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