

## **Person–Environment Fit as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Organizational Justice and Work Outcomes**

Mervywn Williamson  
*University of KwaZulu-Natal*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper develops a fit model of organizational justice. The model proposes that employees' perceptions of person-environment fit mediate the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes in a South African organizational context. Implications for theory and research are discussed.

### **PAPER**

#### **Introduction**

The issue of organizational justice or fair treatment in the workplace has received increasing scholarly inquiry in recent years. It has been widely accepted that organizational justice affects a variety of work outcomes e.g. job satisfaction, citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, job performance, intentions to leave, etc. (see meta- analyses: Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Cohen- Charash & Spector, 2001). Research studies examining mediators of these organizational justice-work outcome relations have largely been ignored. This paper attempts to fill this vacuum by developing a model that presents an untested explanation for organizational justice effects. More specifically, this paper explores the role of person environment (P-E) fit as a possible mediating variable in organizational justice - work outcome relations.

#### **Organizational justice and work outcomes**

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace (Greenberg, 1987). Researchers distinguish between, *distributive justice*, employees' perceptions of decision outcomes e.g. promotion, pay (Adams, 1965); *procedural justice*, employees' perceptions of the procedures used to arrive at the decision outcomes (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975); and *interactional justice*, employees' perceptions of how procedures are enacted by people in positions of authority e.g. managers or supervisors (Bies & Moag, 1986). More recently, however, two new dimensions emerged which were previously combined with interactional justice: *interpersonal justice*, employees' perceptions of the extent through which they are treated with dignity and respect by persons (e.g. managers) when enacting procedures; and *informational justice*, employees' perceptions of the extent to which they are offered adequate and honest explanations by managers or supervisors during the enactment of procedures. Distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice, together form the four- dimensional perspective of organizational justice which receives rigorous empirical support (Colquitt, 2001). Research has shown that when individual employees' feel unfairly

treated by their organizations, they respond both affectively (e.g. with lower commitment) and behaviorally (e.g. with increased turnover, theft, decreased citizenship behavior) (Colquitt et al., 2001 for reviews).

### **Person–environment fit and work outcomes**

The concept of *person-environment (P-E) fit* has emerged as a popular concept in industrial/ organizational psychology in recent years. Essentially, *P-E fit* refers to the congruence or match between an individual employee and various aspects of his or her work environment (Cable & Parsons, 2001; O' Reilly et al., 1991). Congruence can occur between the individual employee and his/ her job, known as *person-job (P-J) fit*; between an individual and his/ her organisation's values, goals, mission, etc., known as *person-organization (P-O) fit*; between an individual employee and his/ her work group, known as *person-group (P-G) fit*; between an individual employee and his/ her supervisor, known as *person-supervisor (P-S) fit* and between an individual employee and his/ her vocation, known as *person-vocation (P-V) fit*. P-E Fit or various facets like P-J or P-O fit have been shown to be associated with various attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employees e.g. job satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, commitment, etc. (see meta- analyses: Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Verquer, Beehr & Wagner, 2003). Research in the area of P-E fit has historically been associated with recruitment and selection of new employees and the early stages of the socialization of newcomers. There has now been a shift in focus to investigating "fit" issues among existing employees (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Lauver & Kristof- Brown, 2001). This paper focuses on perceived fit rather than actual fit. Although perceived fit requires subjective assessments of individuals about the P-E fit gap, it was found to be better predictors of work outcomes than actual fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). For the purposes of this study, four facets of fit are included in the model, P-J fit, P-O fit, P-G fit and P-S fit.

### **Organizational justice and person–environment fit**

There appears to be no published research known to the researcher that specifically examined the relationship between organizational justice and P-E fit. This observation is rather surprising considering the fact that both these concepts have been shown to have links to various attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in employees (see meta-analyses, Hoffman & Woer, 2006; Colquitt et al., 2001). In a related study, Caldwell, Herold & Fedor (2004) examined individuals' perceptions of changes in P-E fit in relation to organizational changes. The results support the hypothesis that under conditions of organizational change, change process fairness and management support for the change will be positively related to perceived changes in both P-J fit and P-O fit. In Takeuchi, Takeuchi & Toshima's (2004) study, they argue that HRM practices like selection, compensation, training, etc. can influence employees' assessment of their degree of "fit" with their organizations. There can be no doubt that the perceived fairness of the way these HRM practices and policies are implemented may impact employees' perception of their P-E fit. Using Lind & Tyler's (1988) group- value model, it can be further reasoned that employees receiving fair treatment from authorities provides them with information about their status within their groups, thus improving their perceptions of "fit" with their groups and organizations. Consequently, the following proposition has been developed to guide further study in this area.

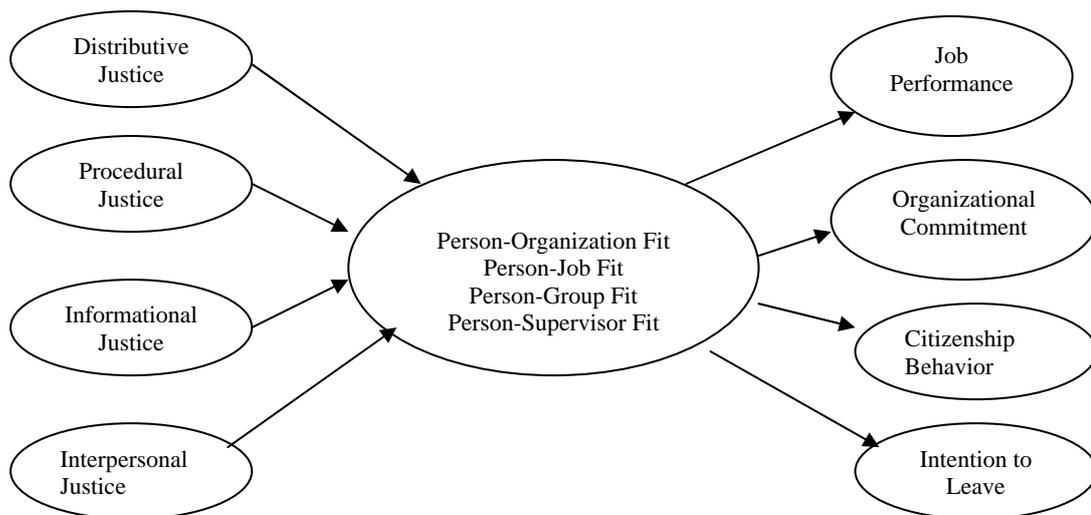
**Proposition 1.** A positive relationship exists between organization justice perceptions and P-E fit perceptions. More specifically, the dimensions of distributive, procedural, informational and interactional justice are positively related to P-J, P-O, P-G and P-S perceptions.

### Person–environment fit as mediator

Figure 1 depicts P-E fit perceptions as a mediating variable in the organizational-justice work outcomes relationships. The extant literature reveals that both organizational justice and P-E fit affects the various work outcomes of job performance, organizational commitment, citizenship behaviors and intention to leave. It can also be argued that organizational justice may show a relationship with P-E fit. Consequently, it may be deemed reasonable if P-E fit is considered as a mediator in the organizational justice – work outcomes relations.

**Proposition 2.** The relationship between organizational justice perceptions and work outcomes will be positively mediated by P-E fit as perceived by employees.

Figure 1. A Proposed Model of the Mediating Role of Person-Environment Fit in the Relationship between Organizational Justice and Work Outcomes.



### Conclusion

This paper contributes to the literature by presenting a plausible theoretical mechanism that may underlie organizational justice-work outcome relationships. The discussion highlights the crucial role that P-E fit perceptions can play in organizations. Discovering ways of effectively managing “fit” both with newcomers and existing employees will benefit both the individual employee and organizations alike. Moreover, managers should first attempt to develop a reasonable level of “fit” between employees and their work environment, otherwise, fairness practices may prove to have limited impact. This may be particularly useful in an African organizational context where justice issues are becoming more salient.

## References

- Adams, J.S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. L. In Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267 – 299). New York: Academic Press.
- Bies, R.J., & Moag, J.F. (1986). Interactional justice: Communication criteria of fairness. In R.J. Lewicki, B.H. Sheppard, & M.H. Bazerman (Eds.), *Research on Negotiations in Organizations* (Vol. 1, pp. 43 – 55). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Cable, D.M., & DeRue, D.S. (2002). The convergent and discriminant validity of subjective fit perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 875 – 884.
- Cable, D.M., & Parsons, C.K. (2001). Socialization tactics and person- organization fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 54, 1 – 23.
- Caldwell, S.D., Herold, D.M., & Fedor, D.B. (2004). Toward an understanding of the relationships among organizational change, individual differences, and changes in person- environment fit: A cross-level study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 868 – 882.
- Cohen- Charash, Y., & Spector, P.E. (2001). The role of justice in organizations: A meta- analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86, 278 – 321.
- Colquitt, J.A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 386 – 400.
- Colquitt, J.A., Conlon, D.E., Wesson, M.J., Porter, C.O., & Ng, K.Y. (2001). Justice in the millennium: A meta- analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 425 – 445.
- Greenberg, J. (1987). A taxonomy of organizational justice theories. *Academy of Management Review*, 12, 9 – 22.
- Hoffman, B.J. & Woehr, D.J. (2006). A quantitative review of the relationship between person- organization fit and behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68, 389 – 399.
- Kristof- Brown, A.C., Zimmerman, R.D., & Johnson, E.C. (2005). Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta- analysis of person- job, person- organization, person- group, and person- supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58, 281 – 342.
- Lauver, K.J., & Kristof- Brown, A.L. (2001). Distinguishing between employees' perceptions of person- job and person- organization fit. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59, 454 – 470.
- Leventhal, G.S. (1980). What should be done with equity theory? New approaches to the study of fairness in social relationships. In K. Gergen, M.Greenberg, & R. Willis (Eds.), *Social Exchange: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 27 – 55). New York: Springer- Verlag.
- Lind, E.A., & Tyler, T.R. (1988). *The Social Psychology of Procedural Justice*. New York: Plenum.
- O' Reilly, C.A., Chatman, J.A., & Caldwell, D.F. (1991). People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person- organization fit. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34, 487 – 516.
- Takeuchi, N., Takeuchi, T., & Toshima, Y. (2004). Psychological processes of employees' perceptions of HRM practices and their behavioral outcomes: Assessing a mediating role of person- environment fit and work commitment in Japanese organizations. Paper submitted to the Asia Academy of Management (AAOM) Fourth Conference, Held in Shanghai, China, 16 – 19 December 2004.

Thibaut, J., & Walker, L. (1975). *Procedural Justice: A Psychological Analysis*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Verquer, M.L., Beehr, T.A., & Wagner, S.H. (2003). A meta- analysis of relations between person-organization fit and work attitudes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63, 473 – 489.