

PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT: A STATUS REPORT ON THE CURRENT LITERATURE DOMAIN, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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While a prior version of this paper was presented at the AoM Conference (2007), I wish to share my findings and stimulate discussions in this e-conference forum. In the interest of brevity, I present here an overview of the paper, excerpts of the Academy paper and partial findings. The full paper is currently under revision for journal submission. I'd be happy to share more information, if you like. Look forward to feedback and suggestions!

ARTICLE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

In response to recent calls to expand person-environment fit (PEF) research (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), this paper presents a conceptual framework that captures the extant PEF research scope, thereby drawing attention to advances in the field and future research possibilities. This paper also presents a status report on PEF research, based on articles published between 1960-2007 in top management/applied psychology journals representative of the best work in PEF theory and methods, to highlight substantive and methodological trends in PEF research, including top publication outlets, research productivity, research emphases, typical sample demographics, study design, and measures. The conceptual framework and status report are intended to stimulate research on neglected fit conceptualizations and research questions.

PEF has been a central theoretical framework in understanding why people are attracted to, are selected by, and stay with organizations (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Schneider, 1987a, b). PEF - the compatibility, match, congruence, or interaction between the characteristics of individuals and those of the environments they interface with – is also associated with varied pre- and post-organizational individual, team, and organization criteria (see meta-analytic reviews by Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006; Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003). PEF research spans decades, and fit conceptualizations and applications continue to receive increasing attention (e.g., Arthur, et al., 2006; Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Schipp, 2006; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004). Yet, PEF research seems underdeveloped to encompass the gamut of fit relations, processes, and dimensions one can think of. It even lacks agreement on the definitions, boundaries, and “currencies” of fit, viz., values, KSAs, and so forth (e.g., Billsberry, Ambrosini, Moss-Jones, & Marsh, 2005; Kristof, 1996). Consequently, there are “fits about fit” (Schneider, 2001), with Judge and Ferris (1992) calling it an “elusive” construct, and Binning, LeBreton, and Adorno (2006) recently describing the field as “nomologically and psychologically myopic” (p. 368). While excellent substantive and measurement reviews of PEF research exist (e.g., Binning, et al., 2006; Edwards, 1991, 1993, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Ostroff & Judge, 2007; Walsh, Craik, & Price, 2000), few have provided quantitative summaries, or have critically examined and expanded the notion of fit beyond current conceptualizations. Most reviews only have considered and analyzed areas within which there is existing research and have not attempted to define or pay attention to other substantive research “possibilities” (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005; Ostroff & Judge, 2007). So, traditional notions of fit need to be re-examined and renewed to make theoretical and practical advances in this field.

Given the growing body of empirical PEF research, a framework to organize the existing research and guide future inquiry is needed. The focus of this paper is not on measurement issues, or even to provide a detailed review of findings, since, as cited earlier, good reviews already exist on the same. Rather, through an in-depth critical review of the best work, this paper attempts to define the conceptual space within which alternative operationalizations of fit could be developed, and provides a quantitative status report on PEF research trends. The general objectives of this paper are to – (1) propose a Facet-Process-Sphere framework of existing and unexplored types of fit, (2) organize and classify, within the proposed framework, empirical articles on person-person fit (PPF), person-job fit (PJF), person-group (PGF), person-organization fit (POF), and person-community fit (PCF)¹ published between 1960-2007 in top management/applied psychology outlets, and thereby (3) highlight areas of research concentration and gaps that need to be addressed, and offer recommendations to advance this line of research. The quantitative status report presented in this paper addresses trends in the fit literature with respect to – (1) where and when we have published most on PEF, (2) typical sample socio-demographics, (3) commonly used study designs and methodology, (4) research areas we have over- and under-explored, (5) the

¹ Person-vocation fit (PVF) is included in the proposed framework, but not in the status report since very good reviews on the topic already exist (e. g., Assouline & Meir, 1987; Tranberg, Slane, Ekeberg, 1993).

examination of fit as an IV, a DV, a mediator, or a moderator, and (7) prevalence of studies that simultaneously examine fit with multiple environments.

THE 'FACET-PROCESS-SPHERE' FRAMEWORK OF PEF

The Facet-Process-Sphere (FPS) framework of PEF (see Figure 1) represents the conceptual space of PEF relations, bringing to light the possibilities by which one can conceptualize the fit of a person *with(in)* different environmental spheres, *through* different PE linkage processes, *on* different facets of fit. The length, breadth, and height of the cube depicting environmental spheres, fit processes, and fit facets, respectively, are explained below. Binning, et al. (2006), and Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2006) describe innovative PEF frameworks, and Kristof-Brown, et al.'s (2005) review is perhaps one of the most comprehensive to date. Recently, Edwards and Schipp (2007) proposed a model similar to the FPS framework to capture the research domain, and also provided a comprehensive review of PEF outcomes and possible mediating mechanisms. While these works continue to stimulate new research ideas, the intent of this paper is to complement existing works by providing a more comprehensive framework and a status report that quantitatively captures the scope of the current PEF literature, with an additional focus on fit with the extra-organizational environment, which existing reviews have not considered. The model proposed in this paper is simple, and not only helps capture the current fit literature, but also visually suggests possibilities for future research.

Spheres: Since individuals are simultaneously nested in multiple systems in the work environment such as job, team, and organization as a whole (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2002), it is important to understand the fit of an individual within and across these multiple systems. Six different environmental *spheres* are included in the FPS framework – person, job, group, organization, vocation, and community. The *person* sphere refers to the any other individual the focal person interacts with or is influenced by, such as the supervisor, subordinate, mentor, protégé, leader, recruiter, peer, and so forth. The *job* sphere refers to an occupation localized in time and space, a position in an organization with its required tasks, duties, responsibilities, and characteristics. The *group* sphere refers to any group the focal person interacts with or is influenced by, such as the work-group, top management team, group of peers or subordinates, and so forth. The *organization* sphere refers to a company that an individual may work at, irrespective of industry, company size, or type (profit/not-for profit/public/private/etc.). It is a physical-social entity within which multiple people, groups, and jobs are embedded. The *vocation* sphere refers to the occupational aspects of one's career, or the 'line of business' they are in. It is the broader occupational area in which one's job is embedded. The *community* sphere refers to the geographical location that an individual lives and/or works in (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). According to Knez (2005, p. 208), a "place" has "physical, geographical, architectural, historical, religious, social, and psychological connotations and it is, in addition, located at several levels of a spatial scale; e. g. a neighborhood around Broadway, a part of a town (Manhattan), a town (New York), a nation (USA), a continent (North America)". For a holistic understanding of how a person fits all the spheres s/he comes in contact with, it is important to incorporate PCF under the blanket of PEF. Fit with the geographical location in which a person works could affect one's functioning within organizational boundaries. Just as how the degree of intra-organizational fit has implications for extra-organizational (non-work) life, so does extra-organizational fit have implications for intra-organizational life. Such spill-over effects from one environment to another, extensively documented in the work-family conflict literature (e. g., Kossek & Lambert, 2005), are considered a neglected area of PEF research (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006).

Processes: Processes refer to the *theoretical way* in which two entities fit each other, i. e., whether they a) share certain similar attributes, or b) fulfill each other's requirements. Both these aspects of fit, as explained earlier, are conceptualized as supplementary and complementary fit (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987), respectively. *Person-environment similarity* in the FPS framework, what we know of as "supplementary fit" in the literature, refers to attribute similarity between an individual and an environmental sphere. *Complementary fit* refers to the fit between an individual and an environmental sphere based on satisfaction or meeting of each other's requirements. Complementary fit has been further bifurcated into *Environmental Requirements Person-Attribute Fit* (previously known as demands-abilities fit) and *Person-Requirement Environment Attribute Fit* (previously known as needs-supplies fit). Another process of PEF- person by environment *interaction* (e. g., Magnussen & Endler, 1977) - captures individual and environmental characteristics as boundary conditions moderating each other in accounting for behavior and outcomes.

Facets: Facets of fit refer to the attributes on which one measures the fit between an individual and an environmental sphere. Three broad facet categories included in the FPS framework are - *capability facets*,

motivation facets, and *other facets*. *Capability facets* include all the cognitive and resource capabilities of an individual or environment. Within that category, the *KSAs/resources* facet refers to all the intellectual, physical and behavioral capabilities and resources of an entity or required by one from another. This facet is characteristic not just of individuals, but also of jobs, groups, organizations, and vocations (KSAs of an individual or a group comprise their human capital; jobs or vocations are defined by KSAs, either by way of their demands, or affordances through on-the-job experiences; an organization can have intellectual and physical capital, such as information and equipment, that characterize its capabilities and resources). The second category, *motivation facets* - attributes that influence motivational states of the person - includes *personality*, *human resources policies/practices/needs (HR)*, *job/task characteristics*, and *working/living conditions*. The *personality* facet is fairly broad, including all the intangible or deep-level attributes of a person or environment, such as personality, values, attitudes, goals, psychological needs, beliefs, interests, climate, and culture. The *HR* facet includes all HR related needs characteristic of an individual (e. g., need for leadership opportunities/ training/mentoring, compensation preferences) or HR attributes of a job, vocation, or organization (e. g. travel requirements, unconventional working hours, benefits plan). The *job/task characteristics* facet refers to all the task attributes of job, such as those described in Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback), and also other attributes such as job complexity, time required for job completion, and so forth. Although KSA and HR facets of environments are influenced by their personality facet, the latter is different from the former two in that it includes latent characteristics which could be manifested through different KSA or HR attributes (e. g., an organization that values group effort can manifest that value through team-based activities or a gain-sharing compensation system, which individuals may prefer differentially). The last under motivational facets, *working/ living conditions*, includes immediate workspace attributes of a job (e. g., ergonomics and hygiene, including heat, lighting, materials/equipment/animals to be handled), an organization (e. g., building structure, location, handicap access, parking), a community/geographical location (e. g., climatic conditions, educational and recreational facilities, housing), that influence how well a person fits within a specific environment. The *other facets* category includes person and environment attributes that are not directly related to capability or motivation, such as *demographic characteristics* of the focal individual or people in an environment (e. g., age, gender, ethnicity, tenure, socio-economic background, marital status, religion, number of children, sexual-orientation, and so forth). Within each environmental sphere, the fit relation can hinge on any of the above facets. This "facet-based" approach, like Gati's (1998) "aspects-based" approach to PVF, offers a more detailed and wider range of fit criteria.

The following pages describe the method of article/chapter selection and classification, and the tables used to capture the current state of the person-environment fit literature.

JOURNAL AND ARTICLE IDENTIFICATION AND CODING

For articles, both computer (e.g., PsycINFO, ABI/INFORM) and manual searches from reference lists and past reviews were used to gather empirical and non-empirical PEF articles² using appropriate search terms (e.g., *person-environment fit*, *person-person fit*, *person-job fit*, *person-group fit*, *person-organization fit*, *person-community-fit*, *person-vocation fit*, *person-situation interaction*, and the like)³. An article was classified as empirical if it reports original data and analyses, and as non-empirical if it presents theory or new concepts, reviews research methodology without original data (unlike Edwards, et al., 2006) or reviews articles meta-analytically or otherwise. Multiple decision rules were used for article inclusion and classification, such as – (1) presence of a "work-related artifact", so to speak, i.e., the sample should include employees, or fit should be studied in relation to an organizational sphere, or the IV, DV, mediator, and moderator in the study should be work-related, (2) excluded from the final list are non-academic and unpublished works (magazine articles, dissertations, presentations), studies examining only group/organization homogeneity or a group's fit with the organization, (3) studies with no specific environmental reference were categorized under "Person-Work Environment-Fit" (PWEF),

² The status report on PEF research presented at the Academy Meeting in Philadelphia was based on 300+ empirical and non-empirical articles from all journals that published PEF research.

³ A broad perspective of PEF is deliberately chosen in an attempt to integrate all PEF concepts advanced to date, including those that conceptualized and modeled fit as an interaction. Numerous studies in the OBHR literature have examined the interaction effects of a person's and another entity's characteristics on outcomes. However, only studies that base such interaction effects on PEF theory were chosen for classification.

and (4) studies combining multiple environmental spheres (e.g. Higgins & Judge, 2004) were categorized under “multiple spheres combined”⁴.

FINDINGS

(Please see tables)

DISCUSSION

A new understanding of PEF can help theoretical and empirical advances in this important research area. Despite four meta-analytical reviews and numerous studies published in the past four decades, PEF has certainly not been fully examined or appreciated. The FPS framework and new fit process terminology proposed in this paper attempt to go beyond current conceptualizations of PEF. The FPS framework allows researchers to capture the full range of different types of fit and provide a more precise PEF analysis. Using the FPS framework as a heuristic to measure the various types of fit (between persons and environments, on different facets, through different fit processes) will enable individuals to make better informed choices about the persons they work with, the job, group, organization, vocation, or even the community they work or live in. The model also has implications for recruitment, selection, and training of employees. Based on the facets in the FPS framework, a change in job, group, and organizational analyses incorporating all relevant facets may be necessary to enhance the validity and usefulness of recruitment, selection, and training systems. Organizational representatives can make recruitment, selection and training decisions for applicants or current employees based not just on PJF and POF, but also on other fit types (e.g., PCF) as depicted by the wide variety of combinations of spheres, processes, and facets in the FPS framework.

Summary of Recommendations for Future Research (these recommendations are based on a larger Findings section included in the Academy paper) : (1) non-empirical articles developing and clarifying fit theory, research, and practice to formulate appropriate and relevant research questions; (2) inclusion of non-U. S. samples to appreciate cross-cultural boundary conditions of fit-outcome relations; (3) research using unconventional methodologies – longitudinal, experimental, and case-study approaches – to complement and off-set the disadvantages of cross-sectional research; (4) a focus away from PP, PG, PO values or personality similarity, and PJ KSA ERPAF, to the blank cells or cells with low numbers in Tables 4 through 8; (5) research on extra-organizational aspects of fit; (6) research on fit as a DV or control variable, since fit has been typically examined as an IV; (7) research on the negative effects of fit, and the positive effects of misfit; (8) spill-over effects of one type of fit on another; (9) relative associations of different types of fit with criterion measures; (10) fit in relation to multi-level criteria.

While the FPS framework and review is not without limitations (e.g., use of only published works), this paper will definitely pave the way for future research to focus on the myriad possibilities by which fit can be conceptualized. Fit will be a more useful construct to OBHR research and practice if it is more precisely defined and is applied systematically and appropriately (Judge & Ferris, 2002). It is hoped that FPS framework and the status report we present in this paper will stimulate future research on neglected fit conceptualizations and research questions.

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⁴ Although PWEF and “multiple spheres combined” are not included in the FPS framework, they were included in the status report to represent research on all types of PEF that have been conceptualized and measured.

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Figure 1. The Facet-Process-Sphere Framework of PEF Research

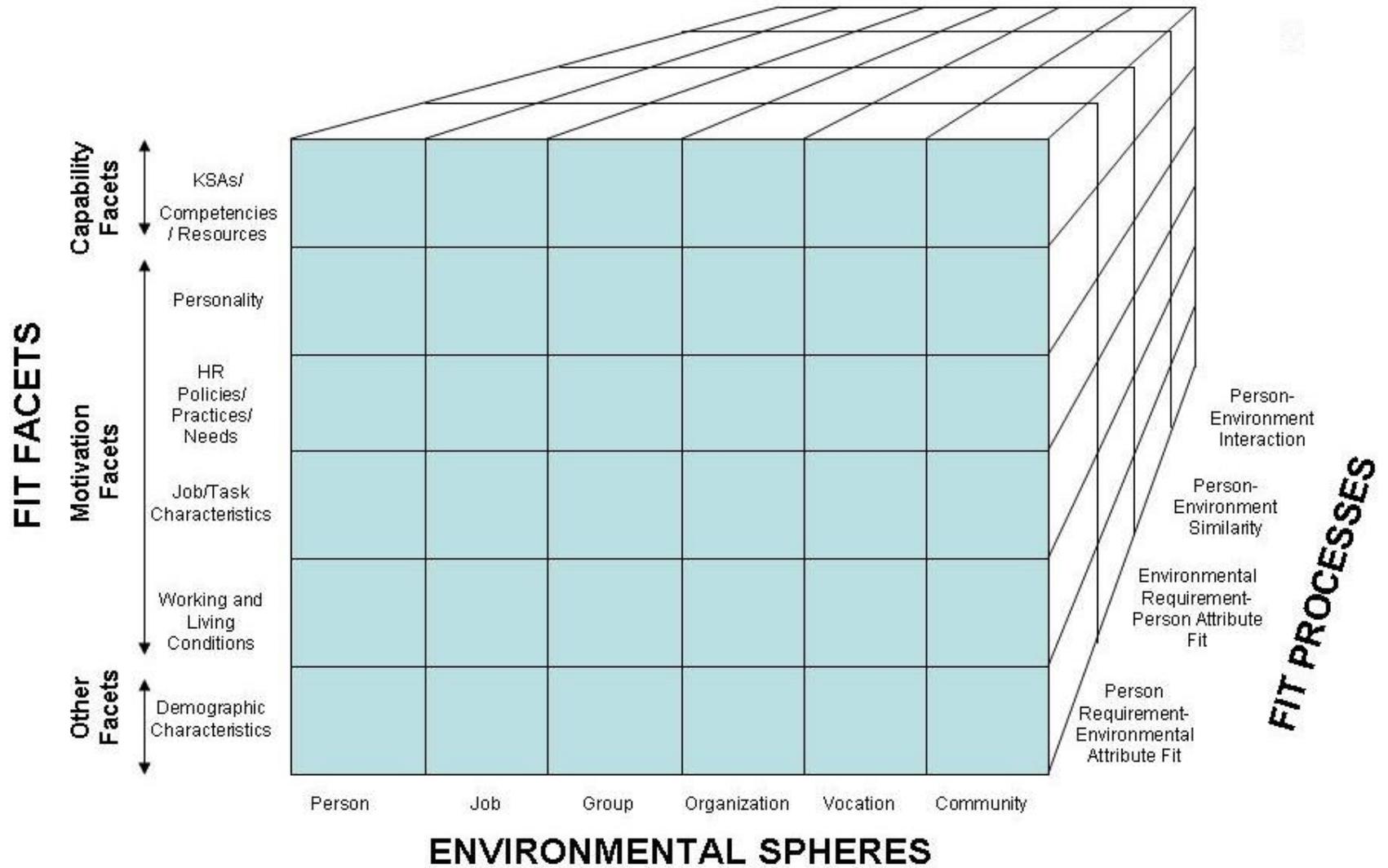


Table 1. Top Ten Outlets for Empirical and Non-Empirical Articles^a. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

Journal Name	No. of Empirical Papers	No. of Non-empirical Papers	Total
Journal of Applied Psychology	44	1	45
Journal of Vocational Behavior	26	2	28
Personnel Psychology	18	1	19
Academy of Management Journal	18	-	18
Journal of Organizational Behavior	15	1	16
Human Relations	10	2	12
Journal of Management	9	3	12
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	9	-	9
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes	9	-	9
Group and Organization Management	8	-	8

^a A list of all the 96 journals and books/series with the distribution of empirical and non-empirical articles/book chapters therein is available from the author. Articles on PVF were not included in the final count.

Table 2. Characteristics of Samples Used in Empirical Studies. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

Fit	No. of Papers /Chps	U.S. Sample	Non-U.S. Sample	% Non US	Only Student Sample^a	Only Non-Student Sample^b	Student and Non-Student Sample	Mean Sample Size	Median Sample Size
PPF	80	74	6	7.50	9	66	5	694	185
PJF	89	74	15	16.85	12	71	6	786	231
PGF	24	21	3	12.50	1	21	2	905	276
POF	98	72	26	26.53	12	83	3	2979	227
PCF	6	3	3	50.00	-	6	-	538	608
<i>PWEF</i>	8	6	2	25.00	1	7	-	443	375
<i>Mult. Spheres Combined</i>	9	7	2	22.22	1	8	-	642	334
Total Papers	314	257	57		36	262	16		

^a Student sample = full-time students

^b Non-student sample = full-time employees, interns, job applicants (unless qualified as students), part-time MBA students, recent graduates.

Table 3. Research Methodology Used in Empirical Studies. (Based on articles classified in the 2007 Academy of Management paper)

Fit	Cross-sectional Survey/Interview	Longitudinal Survey/Interview	Experimental	Other (Case study, Archival)
PPF	63	9	7	1
PJF	62	21	8	3
PGF	19	3	1	1
POF	71	19	11	-
PCF	4	2	-	-
<i>PWEF</i>	6	2	-	-
<i>Mult. Spheres Combined</i>	5	4	-	-
<i>Total Classifications</i>	230	60	27	5

Table 4. Overview of PPF Research Based on the FPS Framework^a. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

↓ PROCESS	FACET →		Job Characteristics	HR Practices/Policies	Demographics	Working and Living Conditions	<i>Global</i>	<i>Multiple</i>	Total
	KSA/ Competencies	Personality							
Similarity	1	56			28		2	3	90
PREAF		1						2	3
ERPAF									0
Interaction		2							2
<i>Global</i>									0
<i>Mult. Spheres Combined</i>									0
Total	1	59	0	0	28	0	2	5	95

^a. A “fit cell” is included in the framework for each sphere based on two criteria – (a) conceptual integrity, and (b) possible relation to a criterion variable. For some spheres, fit could not be conceptualized in a meaningful way for all processes and facets, and hence have “blacked out” cells in tables; blank cells denote fit types that need research attention.

Table 5. Overview of PJF Research Based on the FPS Framework. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

↓ PROCESS	FACET →		Job			HR		Working and Living Conditions		Total
	KSA/ Competencies	Personality	Characteristics	Practices/Policies	Demographics	Conditions	Global	Multiple		
Similarity	2	6							8	
PREAF	6	16	8	1		1	2	15	49	
ERPAF	19	2			1			2	24	
Interaction		8						1	9	
Global							3		3	
Mult. Spheres										
Combined							4	5	9	
Total	27	32	8	1	1	1	9	23	102	

Table 6. Overview of PGF Research Based on the FPS Framework. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

↓ PROCESS	FACET →		Job			HR		Working and Living Conditions		Total
	KSA/ Competencies	Personality	Characteristics	Practices/Policies	Demographics	Conditions	Global	Multiple		
Similarity		11			5		1		17	
PREAF		3					3		6	
ERPAF									0	
Interaction		1							1	
Global									0	
Mult. Spheres										
Combined								1	1	
Total	0	15	0	0	5	0	4	1	25	

Table 7. Overview of POF Research Based on the FPS Framework. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

↓ PROCESS	FACET →		Job			HR		Working and Living Conditions		Total
	KSA/ Competencies	Personality	Characteristics	Practices/Policies	Demographics	Global	Multiple			
Similarity		64			1			2	5	72
PREAF	0	9		3					4	16
ERPAF		1								1
Interaction		7								7
Global						1	1			2
Mult. Spheres										
Combined		5							4	9
Total	0	86	0	3	1	3	14	0	107	

Table 8. Overview of PCF Research Based on the FPS Framework. (From 2007 Academy of Management paper).

↓ PROCESS	FACET →		Job			HR		Working and Living Conditions		Total
	KSA/ Competencies	Personality	Characteristics	Practices/Policies	Demographics	Global	Multiple			
Similarity		3			1					4
PREAF										0
ERPAF										0
Interaction										0
Global										0
Mult. Spheres										
Combined									2	2
Total	0	3	0	0	1	0	2	0	6	

Table 9. Position of Fit in the Nomological Network. (Based on articles classified in the 2007 Academy of Management paper).

PEF	As IV	As DV	As Mediator	As Moderator	As Interaction^a
PPF	81	6	13	2	3
PJF	73	12	7	3	11
PGF	22	1	0	0	2
POF	82	25	9	4	9
PCF	5	2	1	1	0
<i>PWEF</i>	4	0	2	0	1
<i>Mult. Spheres Combined</i>	8	0	2	0	2
Total	275	46	34	10	28

a. Interaction in studies were those that – a) were explicitly based on a person x situation interactionist perspective, or b) stated a person-environment similarity, PREAF, or ERPAF process, used a person x situation statistical analysis, and did not explicitly state fit as an IV

Table 10. Studies Examining Fit with More than One Separate Environmental Sphere. (Based on articles classified in the 2007 Academy of Management paper).

Fit Combinations	No. of Studies
POF + PJF	16
POF + PPF	4
POF + PGF	1
POF + PCF	3
PPF + PJF	2
PPF + PGF	3
PPG + PGF + POF	3
POF + PJF + PCF	2
PPF + POF + PWEF	1
Total	35 (13%)