

A New Direction in Person-Organization Fit: Person-Goal Fit

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The number of different operationalizations of fit has increased over time, becoming more narrow and specific over time. Person-environment fit has been divided into person-vocation fit, person-organization (PO) fit, person-group fit, person-job fit, as well as person-supervisor fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). In this chapter we propose person-goal fit, or the extent to which an individual's disposition aligns with externally set or assigned goals. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce person-goal fit and propose it as a new direction for research in the PO fit domain.

PO fit is defined as the similarity between an individual and an organization. The basis on which that similarity is assessed varies and can include individuals' interests, beliefs, and needs (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2004) although most research focuses on personality, values, and/or goals (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). PO fit has also been defined as "the compatibility between people and organizations" (Kristof, 1996, p. 3). This compatibility has been conceptualized in two ways: supplementary fit and complementary fit (Kristof, 1996; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). *Supplementary fit* exists when both the person and the organization have similar or matching characteristics (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). The notion of supplementary fit borrows from the value congruence literature (Kristof, 1996), which states that individuals are more attracted to organizations that have similar values to themselves (Cable & Edwards, 2004). *Complementary fit* exists when the person contributes characteristics on which the organization is deficient (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). One operationalization of complementary PO fit is derived from needs-supplies perspective and is described as the "match between individual preferences or needs and organizational systems and structures" (Kristof, 1996; p. 5). Although supplementary and complementary fit are interrelated, both conceptualizations of fit have been shown to have independent, positive effects on organizational outcomes such as identification with the organization, job satisfaction, and intention to stay (Cable & Edwards, 2004).

In this chapter, we introduce the concept of person-goal fit. The idea of goal congruence is not new. Several researchers have shown that similarity between individual and organizational goals, individual and group goals, as well as individual and supervisor goals is highly desirable and leads to favorable outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and intentions to stay, (Judge, Kristof-Brown, & Darnold, 2005; Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Witt, 1998). However, person-goal fit, as discussed in this chapter, is different from previous conceptualizations. Traditionally goal congruence has been conceptualized as the fit, specifically the alignment, of an individual's goal with a supervisor's, group's, or organization's goal. In other words, this type of fit assesses whether both entities are working toward the same or congruent goal.

We define *person-goal fit* as the match between the type of goal an individual prefers based on his/her disposition or individual differences and the goal assigned to him/her. Person-goal fit is about the match between an individual's personality and the way the goal is framed. It is

different from previous conceptualizations of PO fit based on goals (or goal congruence) as it is not a match between the content of an individual's goal and the content of another person's or entity's goal. Similar to goal congruence, but different from other conceptualizations of fit, person-goal fit is conceptualized as having the potential to change every time an individual is given a new goal. Thus, one could assess person-goal fit for every goal assigned. We do not expect this type of fit to be temporally stable unless supervisors are aware of one's dispositional preferences and consistently frame assigned goals to align with these preferences. Person-goal fit is significantly narrower than other conceptualizations of PO fit. It focuses on the fit between an individual's personality trait or pattern of multiple traits and a goal assigned to them rather than the fit between a person and an organization or the fit between two different people. It is also important to note that individuals do not perceive their "supervisors as isomorphic representations of the organization" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 316), supporting the differentiation of person-goal fit from PO fit.

Achievement goal researchers have proposed that goals can be described on two dimensions: mastery-performance and approach-avoidance, creating a 2x2 typology of goals: (1) mastery-approach, (2) mastery-avoid, (3) performance-approach, and (4) performance-avoid (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Goals can have a self-referent (mastery) or other referent (performance), and they can be oriented on demonstrating competence (approach) or avoiding failure (avoidance). Research supports these distinctions with differential relationships to various outcomes (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Murayama, 2008).

One dispositional characteristic that is particularly relevant to assessing a match with assigned goals is goal orientation. Goal orientation refers to one's dispositional goal preferences (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007) that explain variations in individual's behavior (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Goal orientation can also be aligned with the 2x2 conceptualization of achievement goals (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Individuals with a strong mastery goal orientation are focused on learning as much as they can about a task for the sole sake of learning, whereas individuals with a strong performance goal orientation are focused on doing well on a task in order to ensure that they are judged favorably by others (Payne et al., 2007). Individuals with a strong approach goal orientation are oriented towards demonstrating competence, whereas individuals with a strong avoid goal orientation are oriented towards avoiding a demonstration of a lack competence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). While these four types of goal orientation are not mutually exclusive, meaning that individuals can be high on more than one type of goal orientation, it has been shown that the majority of people display a marked preference for one type of orientation over the other three (Van Yperen, 2006).

Several researchers have examined the match between an individual's trait goal orientation and an assigned goal and yielded mixed results (Bell, Kozlowski, & Dobbins, 2001; Jagacinski, Madden, & Reider, 2001; Sansone, Sachau, & Weir, 1989). In fact, there are competing hypotheses within this body of research. Some researchers propose that similarity between trait goal orientation and situationally induced state goals (supplementary fit) will maximize individual and organizational outcomes (Farr, Hoffman, & Ringenbach, 1993; Jagacinski et al., 2001; Pintrich, 2000), whereas others propose that a mismatch between goal orientation and assigned goals (complementary fit) will lead to high level of desired outcomes (Bell et al., 2001; Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau, & Larouche, 1995; Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1993; Newman, 1998).

Results from studies examining person-goal fit have been mixed. Supplementary fit has been associated with increased motivation (Sansone et al., 1989) and performance (Bell et al., 2001; Jagacinski et al., 2001). Complementary fit has been associated with increases in help seeking behavior (Newman, 1998), metacognition, self-efficacy and decreases in negative affectivity (Bell et al., 2001). Thus the mixed results may be explained by the dependent variable examined. In other words, the type of fit (supplementary vs. complementary) that is most beneficial may depend on the outcome of interest. Correspondingly, we propose that the type of person-goal fit that is most beneficial will depend on the outcome being examined.

Supplementary person-goal fit will exist when the goal assigned aligns with the dispositional goal orientation of the individual. Perfect supplementary fit will occur when assigned goals and individual goal orientations match on both the learning versus performance dimension as well as the approach versus avoid dimension, with fit decreasing as misalignment occurs on one or both of the orientations. For example, the lowest amount of supplementary person-goal fit would be expected to occur when individuals who prefer goals with a learning-approach focus, are assigned goals with a performance-avoid focus. When an individual who prefers to aim to achieve competence on a task relative to his/her own previous performance (learning-approach goal orientation) is encouraged to avoid doing worse than everyone else on the task (performance-avoid goal), s/he is likely to be frustrated, and experience a decrease in satisfaction, motivation, and goal commitment.

There are several arguments that support the desirability of person-goal fit. First, individuals reject assigned goals that do not fit with their disposition and instead adopt goals that are consistent (Farr, Hofmann, & Rigenbach, 1993). When an individual rejects the goal given him or her, there is no guarantee that s/he will adopt a goal that would result in similar results for organization. This assignment of undesirable goals could be avoided by simply framing the goal to align with the individual's most preferred goal orientation. Second, Bell et al. (2001) propose that giving an individual a goal that does not fit with his or her trait goal orientation "may cause ambiguity and make it difficult for a person to determine what goals he or she should be pursuing - individual or contextual" (pp. 8-9). This ambiguity could lead to confusion, as well as dissatisfaction and lowered goal commitment. Therefore, we propose that supplementary person-goal fit will be more strongly related to goal commitment, task satisfaction, and task motivation than will complementary person-goal fit.

On the other hand, complementary fit will exist when individual goal orientation and the framing of the assigned goal do not align. This could happen when there is not a match on either the mastery-performance dimension, the approach-avoid dimension, or both. In essence, for person-goal fit, anything that is not supplementary fit will be complementary fit. The main argument for this conceptualization of person-goal fit is that being exposed to more than one type of goal allows an individual to be more flexible and to adapt to any situation presented to him/her at work (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). It is also likely that assigning individuals goals that are dissimilar to their dispositional goal orientation, may prompt them to search for new or different strategies for task completion. For example, a person with an inclination towards performance-approach goal who is assigned a mastery-approach goal, may still be inclined to strive to perform as well as others, but he/she may also work towards learning as much about the task as possible. This could lead to both high striving on the task due to the performance goal, as well as the discovery of a new way to complete the task in the future, due to the mastery goal. Therefore, we propose that complementary person-goal fit will be more strongly related to creativity, strategy search, and performance than will supplementary person-goal fit.

In conclusion, the chapter introduces the concept of person-goal fit and proposes that it as a new direction for PO fit research. While person-goal fit is much narrower than other types of fit, we believe that it may prove to have important influences on several outcomes that are important to organizations such as goal commitment, satisfaction, motivation, creativity, strategizing, and performance.

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