

A Motivational Model of P-E Fit: Exploring the Psychological Experience Underlying Antecedents of P-E Fit

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Abstract

It is commonly accepted that P-E fit leads to positive outcomes ranging from behavior to attitudes. As such, organisations are typically encouraged to attract, hire, and socialize individuals so as to create and develop P-E fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). Similarly, job seekers are advised to choose jobs and organisations where they think they will fit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997). Thus, fit is usually conceptualized as an exogenous variable that simply exists due to individual job choice or organizational human resource practices (e.g. recruitment, selection, and socialization). Unfortunately, this view of the antecedents of P-E fit is limited because it ignores the motivation and ability of individuals to manage fit based relationships. In a recent article, I called attention to the ability of individuals to change P-E fit in response to their affective experiences (Yu, 2009). This chapter expands on this idea by examining the motivational basis behind attempts to manage P-E fit. In other words, I ask the fundamental question: “*Why* do people want to fit?” To answer this question, I develop a model that first identifies several motivations that drive individuals to manipulate both self (P) and environment (E) in order to achieve P-E fit. I then proceed to review literature from both organisational behavior and psychology to show exactly how people respond to these motivations by changing fit relationships. Finally, I discuss factors of the organisational context that impact these relationships. This motivational model of P-E fit is illustrated in Figure 1. This chapter contributes to current understanding of the P-E fit phenomenon by (a) outlining the motivational implications behind P-E fit experiences; (b) highlighting human agency when it comes to understanding antecedents to P-E fit; and (c) facilitating investigations into the dynamic nature of fit, where fit changes in tandem with individuals’ organisational experience.

Fundamental Motivations to Fit

Key to understanding how people manage P-E fit is to first appreciate *why* they would want to. Behavior is determined by how one relates to his or her environment (Lewin, 1935; Pervin, 1981; 1989). Most individuals are aware of the importance of their relationship with their environment (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Pervin, 1981). Hence, the P-E fit relationship becomes the target of certain fundamental drives that impact overall well-being.

Consistency

Previous research has argued that individuals need to have consistency among aspects of the self such as attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Several theories in social psychology are based upon the desirability of consistency (Heider, 1968; Korman, 1970; Lecky, 1948; 1968). For

instance, cognitive dissonance theory argues that incompatibility between cognitions and behavior gives rise to a negative affective state. Actors in such situations are thus motivated to reduce this dissonance by engaging in some form of cognitive adjustment such as changing one's attitudes (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Festinger, 1957).

It is also commonly assumed that experiencing positive outcomes is consistent with having P-E fit (Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Thus, it is not unusual to have someone infer that he or she must fit the environment simply because a positive attitude or behavior is experienced (i.e. "I am happy with my job. Therefore I must fit!") (Yu, 2009). Therefore, the consistency motivation is relevant for understanding the antecedents of P-E fit because people will seek to manage P-E fit so that they can have consistency between P-E fit and other types of organisational experience like affective experience.

Hedonism

In contrast to a motivation to be consistent, the hedonistic motivation posits that individuals see P-E fit as a tool via which they can achieve positive affective states. This motivation is the cornerstone of many theories of self-regulation and stress. For instance, cybernetics or control theory argues that human behavior exists as part of a self-regulating system that is constantly involved in the detection and subsequent minimalization of misfit between aspects of the person (i.e. individual's desires) and his or her environment (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Edwards, 1992). Therefore, a hedonistic pursuit of positive states can cause people to alter aspects of both themselves and their environments, and hence the P-E fit relationship (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Uncertainty reduction

Past research has indicated that people are generally motivated to reduce uncertainty (Festinger, 1957; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). In fact, some seek to reduce uncertainty by (a) relying on biases and heuristics when making judgments of the self and the environment; and (b) engaging in proactive behaviors aimed at gathering more information to derive meaning and purpose (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Both of these strategies impact P-E fit. Biases and heuristics alter perceptions of P and E, while proactive behaviors can enact also change in the self (P) and the environment (E) (i.e. other people, one's job, and organisations) (Van Dyne, Cummings & Parks, 1995).

Control

People are also motivated to be in control of their situations. Some have even gone as far as to suggest that being in control over one's environment is a basic necessity of life (Adler, 1930). This motivation for control can manifest itself in attempts to alter aspects of one's job and/or organisational environment (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For instance, a film director negotiates for more job responsibility to ensure that she is in complete control of the entire shooting and production of the film. Control-based motivations could also be responsible for strivings to maintain beliefs of self-efficacy when it comes to one's job (Bandura, 1997). For example, job-directed proactive behaviors such as role expansion (Parker, Wall & Jackson, 1997) and job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) also satisfy the need for control by reinforcing self-efficacy (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Hence, a motivation for control can also impact P-E fit through efforts to change one's environment.

Belonging

Most individuals are also driven by a motivation to form and maintain strong and stable relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). People look to develop social bonds with those around them. Actions to embed oneself within the social environment have even proven to be essential for emotional and psychological well-being (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001). The motivation to belong impacts P-E fit because it causes people to seek to be around similar people. For instance, Edwards and Shipp (2007) argue that supplementary fit such as P-O fit and value congruence satisfies needs for affiliation and belonging. The motivation to belong also has been linked to greater use of egocentric heuristics to assume that one's social environment is similar to oneself (i.e. false consensus effect) (Robbins & Krueger, 2005), and attempts to establish more fitting relationships at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Therefore, people act to improve their P-E fit relationship as a result of their motivation to belong.

Fit Management Tactics

The five motivations discussed above give rise to a variety of tactics to manage P-E fit. These tactics have been identified from a wide range of literature in the organisational, social, and cognitive sciences. As illustrated in Figure 1, they can be driven by more than one motivation. Moreover, they also impact either or both person and environment components of P-E fit. Furthermore it should also be noted that these tactics are not mutually exclusive due to the fact that they vary in terms of specificity.

Information search

The motivations to be consistent and reduce uncertainty cause people to engage in certain types of information-seeking behavior. I define such behavior as any physical or cognitive activity that is directed toward the acquisition of information required to form a judgment. These behaviors need not be detailed or rational. In fact, they can range from the relatively labored process of job search to quick heuristic inferences. For instance, people rely on the informational qualities of affect to ensure that P-E fit status is consistent with affective experience (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Similarly, individuals are influenced by social information and the implications of their past behavior in order to reduce uncertainty about personal needs and desires (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Therefore, information search is a process that can influence judgments of both P and E components of P-E fit.

Job crafting

Job crafting is a process whereby individuals make physical or cognitive changes in the task or relational boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). It is a process that can be driven by motivations for hedonism, control, and belonging. For instance, a foreman dissatisfied by the lack of variety on his job may attempt to expand his supervisory role to include training new hires. Similarly, he can also meet his need for more control by acting as a representative for all foremen in his division so that he can be involved in more job-related decision making. Lastly, his motivation for belonging may lead him to develop closer social ties with his fellow co-workers. Hence, job crafting impacts P-E fit by allowing one to make changes in his or her job environment.

Proactive behavior

Proactive behavior refers to a broad class of anticipatory behaviors aimed at bringing about change to individuals themselves and their environments (Grant & Ashford, 2008). These behaviors are influenced by hedonistic, uncertain reduction, and control-based motivations. Individuals unhappy with certain aspects of their jobs engage in proactive voice in order to bring about change in their work environment and satisfy hedonistic goals (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Similarly, people also choose job tasks that fit their skills and abilities because they feel more confident and efficacious in performing these tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In all, proactive behavior causes P-E fit because people anticipate, plan, and act toward changing P-E fit as a means to achieve future goals.

Social projection

Social projection occurs when people think that others are similar to themselves (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). One engages in social projection when he or she imbues other members of the group or organisation with attributes (e.g. values, goals, preferences) that are similar his or hers. It can serve as an uncertainty reducing heuristic used when there is not enough information about one's social environment. Moreover, it can also be driven by a motivation to belong or liked by those around (Ames, 2004). Overall, it is a process that changes P-E fit by altering perceptions of the social environment to be more similar to aspects of the self.

Coping

Last, but not least, coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors that people employ to manage the demands of situations that are appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is thus a process that caters to hedonistic motivations. It is also a process that impacts P-E fit because it involves a variety of cognitive and behavioral responses that people use to change elements of the person and his or her environment in order to manage stressful situations (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Contextual Factors

For our current purposes, contextual factors refer to processes, events, and people that individuals have little control over. They are thus exogenous variables in the current model that either moderate relationships between motivations and tactics or tactics and P-E fit, or impact P-E fit directly. For instance, recruitment and selection moderate the link between an uncertainty reduction motivation and fit management by determining the amount of information that job seekers have about jobs and organisations. However, recruitment and selection also impact P-E fit directly by determining the attributes of people (P) that enter an organisation in the first place.

Conclusion

It is hoped that a comprehensive discussion of the motivations and their respective tactics taken to manage fit will help illuminate our understanding of the dynamic nature of fit that is subject to the individual psycho-social experience.

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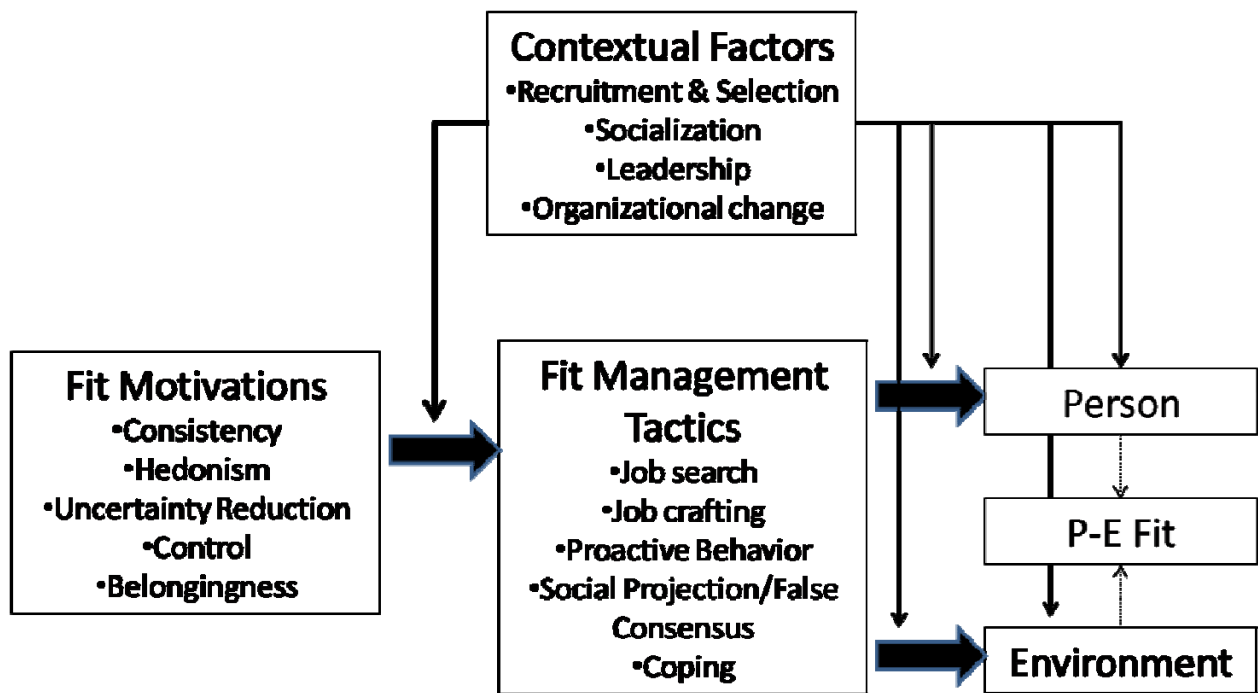


Figure 1. A Motivational Model of P-E Fit