

Managing the Fit Process

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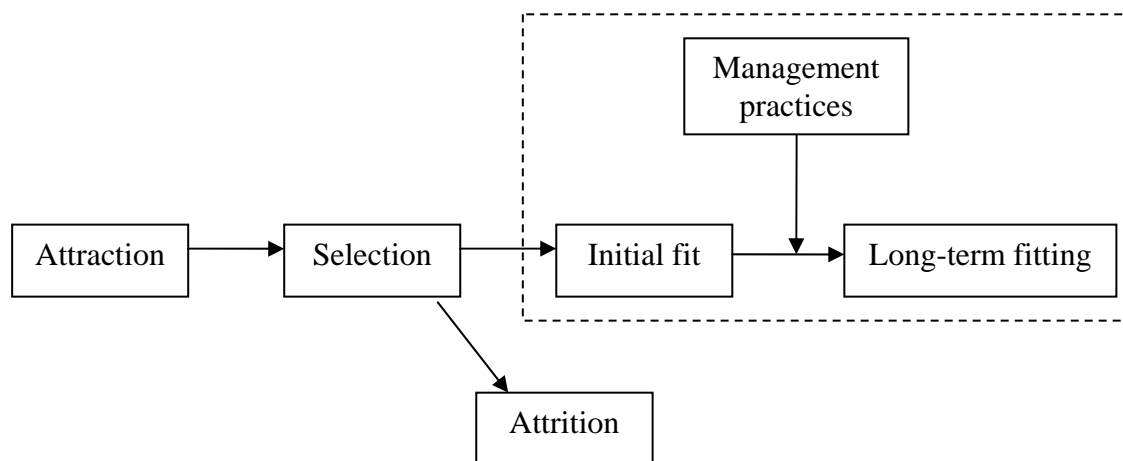
Fit research to date has mainly focused on consequences of P-E fit, and on processes and relationships on the individual level. The research in this area clearly shows that fit can be beneficial for both individuals and organizations through enhancing positive attitudes and increasing individual performance (e.g. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005). A much-used framework in the area of fit is the ASA model, which describes achieving fit as a process of attraction, selection, and attrition (Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995). Individuals are more likely to be attracted to and selected into firms that fit them and after that employees for whom the fit turns out to be less than expected are more likely to leave the organization (Schneider et al., 1995). But what happens with the people who do stay within the organization longer? Or in other words, what happens after some initial fit in the selection and socialization phase is achieved?

The employment relationship is typically a long-lasting relationship, in which fit plays a role not only during entry, but also during later phases. However, fit does not necessarily remain the same throughout the employment relationship of an individual and it seems reasonable to assume that for many employees different forms of fit can change over time based on changes in the individuals themselves, their jobs and/or the wider organizational context. If fit is not static and can change over time, firms may specifically attempt to enhance it. In this chapter, we propose to take a contextual approach and focus on how firms can actively achieve, enhance or maintain fit not only for new employees but also for those who are already there. In doing so, we explicitly extend the fit field which mainly focuses on the individual level to include the organizational level.

From the organizational perspective of how firms may be able to achieve and maintain good fit during the employment relationship, the conceptualization of fit explicitly needs to take the dynamic and changeable nature of fit over time into account. Here we will thus focus on the fit process, and build on the initial ideas that have been developed about dynamic fit (e.g. Caldwell, Herold & Fedor, 2004; DeRue & Morgeson, 2007; Shipp, 2006; Shipp & Jansen, 2009) and person-environment *fitting* (Wingreen & Blanton, 2007). We distinguish between the initial fit that is achieved after selection and socialization and the long-term process of fitting that occurs throughout the employment relationship. We focus mostly on the latter and start to outline how organizations can affect this process of fitting and what this implies. For example, we ask what does it mean for employees to fit well in an organization in the long run and which management practices affect this long term dynamic fit process. Taking a dynamic perspective also brings in questions on how fit and misfit relate over time and whether firms should focus on maximal or optimal fit. If employees need to meet today's but also tomorrow's demands, optimal fit may not always be the same as a maximal fit, for example. In a changing environment, an optimal fit could be a changeable or flexible fit instead of a maximal fit. In the literature to date however, fit is often seen as a steady state with more being better. Only little literature focuses on the dynamics of fit and how organizations can affect these dynamics. We aim to contribute to this stream of work.

In a broad contextual approach to fit, many factors related to the individual, job, organization, and broader context can be identified that potentially affect fit. These not only include management practices, but also, for example, professional and societal norms and values, the labour market, etc. While such factors can all have an important influence on fit, the main focus of this chapter is on those factors that can be influenced by the organizations, in other words on how management practices can affect the fit process. We propose that HRM and leadership form powerful management practices an organization can actively use to manage the fit process. Figure 1 reflects our focus.

FIGURE 1



We review what is already known about how HRM and leadership affect fit and then theoretically build on and extend this basis. Although the research is limited, what is available suggests that HRM and leadership can indeed influence fit. Bretz and Judge (1994) for example find that human resource systems including rewards, promotion opportunities, internal mobility, and work-family policies, relate to PO fit. Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, and Paauwe (in press) find that a set of high performance HR practices including selection, training, job design, participation, teamwork, and rewards are positively related to both PO and PJ fit. These studies suggest that firms can use sets of HR practices to enhance fit in organizations. Research also suggests leadership can influence fit as, for example, charismatic leadership was found to enhance value congruence between the leader and the follower (Brown & Treviño, 2006, 2009). There is however still much unknown about how and why management practices impact fit. We aim to contribute to theorising on how HRM and leadership can affect fit.

In what way **could** HRM and leadership be used to manage fit? Bamberger and Meshoulam (2000) distinguish three main human resource subsystems that combined form an effective overall system for managing employees: (1) people flow, including staffing, employee mobility, training, and job security (2) appraisal and rewards, including performance appraisal, compensation, and benefits, and (3) employment relations, including job design and participation. We propose ways in which these subsystems can also be used to manage fit. For example, in the people flow system, selection, training, development, and promotion can be used to create a match of employee competencies and values with organizational demands and values and adjust or maintain this fit over time. The appraisal and rewards subsystem can be used by organizations to provide incentives for employees to show behaviours and to

achieve results that are desired by the firm. Thus, appraisal and rewards systems can help achieving value and goal congruence, and changing and maintaining value and goal congruence over time. In the employment relations subsystem, practices such as participation and job autonomy could be implemented in order to increase job responsibility. This increased job responsibility could increase employees' commitment with the job and organization, which could increase their feeling of fit.

Another area in HRM research that is relevant for fit is acknowledging the importance of context, such as the type of work or tasks employees do (often related to type of organizations). For example, value congruence is likely to be very relevant for employees in service jobs who represent what the organization stands for towards outside customers. Value congruence seems especially relevant in this context as tasks are less concrete (as compared to production) and output tends to be less measurable, which means that other forms of control are less easily implemented. The type of work affects which management practices are available, and this thus also seems likely to have an impact on fit.

Signalling is another area of HRM research relevant for fit. Management practices such as HRM and leadership communicate important organizational goals, values and desired behaviours to the employee (Rousseau, 1995). These practices have a signalling function from the organization to employees and such signals can be interpreted differently by individual employees (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004). The more practices send a clear and coherent message, the better employees can evaluate their fit, which is expected to lead to higher fit, and can help maintain and enhance fit over time.

Both HR practices and leader behaviour communicate goals and desired behaviours to employees. Line managers perform many HRM practices related tasks, for example they tend to be involved in selection, appraisal, identification of training needs and HR planning. In many firms, the role of the line in implementing HR tasks is increasing and the HR practices that are experienced by employees will, to a growing extent, be delivered by line managers with direct supervisory responsibility (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Supervisors thus act as agents of the organization in managing and evaluating employees (Rhoades Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Therefore, the behaviour of leaders is also important for achieving fit and several leadership styles seem particularly relevant for enhancing fit. In theories of transformational and charismatic leadership, for example, values play an important role (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Leaders on both higher and lower levels in the organization can be involved in managing fit, by developing and communicating values on higher levels, and executing values and practices on lower levels.

In sum, in this chapter we focus on the process of fitting over time. We take an organizational perspective on the on-going fit process after achieving initial fit, and aim to contribute to theorizing on how management practices can contribute to achieve and maintain fit over time.

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