

The Role of Affectivity in Perceptions of Person-Environment Fit

Doruk Uysal Irak and Janet Mantler
Carleton University

Over the last two decades there has been an “affective revolution” in organizational psychology (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003) that has focused on the role of the dispositional aspect of affect. Affectivity has an influence on several attitudinal variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit, and burnout (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; George, 1992; George & Jones, 1996). For example, people who are high in negative affectivity have a negativistic cognitive style and, as a result, these people are more likely focus on negative aspects of themselves and their environments (Watson, 2000), which leads, in turn, to more negative attitudes compared to people who are low in negative affectivity. Conversely, people who are high in positive affectivity are more positive toward their environments and this leads, in turn, to more positive outcomes in measures of attitudinal variables (Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988), such as a greater tendency to enjoy their jobs (Watson & Slack, 1993). Although several studies highlight the role of affectivity in employee behaviour, the dispositional aspect of affect has not been examined with regard to person-environment fit. Indeed, it is likely that positive and negative affectivity influence the manner in which people perceive their fit with their work environment, which potentially has a great effect on their attitudes and work behaviour.

Dispositional Affect: Positive and Negative Affectivity

Affect is a phenomenological state that is expressed in terms of emotions (Watson, 2000). There is a distinction between state (situational) affect, which refers to the experience of emotions like happy or sad and concerns emotions one is feeling at any specific moment, and trait (dispositional) affect, which is a stable personality dimension that refers to the experience of certain affective states over time and across situations (George, 1992; Watson, 2000). In this paper, the focus will be on trait affect, also known as affectivity, including both positive and negative dispositional affect.

People high in negative affectivity commonly experience negative mood states such as anxiety, depression, and guilt. These people also tend to focus on negative aspects of the environment with their negativistic cognitive styles and tend to report dissatisfaction and stress in their lives (Watson, 2000). Conversely, people who are high in positive affectivity are more likely to experience positive emotions, view themselves as active, and have a high sense of well-being (George, 1992; Watson, 2000). These people tend to focus on more positive aspects of the environment and they view themselves and the environment in more positive ways (Watson, 2000; Watson et.al., 1988).

Several studies have shown significant differences in employees’ work attitudes in terms of positive and negative affectivity (e.g., Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995; Brief, Burke, George, Robinson, & Webster, 1988; Chen & Spector, 1991; Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986; Watson, Pennebaker, & Folger, 1986). Brief *et. al.* (1988) reported that there is an association between negative affectivity and decreased job satisfaction, increased stress at workplace, and increased life stress. Negative affectivity is also positively related to absenteeism (Chen & Spector, 1991). In a study of subjective well-being, Benyamini and

Roziner (2008) found that negative affectivity was related to greater levels of depression and lower life satisfaction and, conversely, that positive affectivity was related to lower levels of depression and to greater life satisfaction. Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, and Chermont (2003) argued that affectivity has an impact on various psychological processes that can shape employee's evaluations about their workplace. For example, negative affectivity is related to experiencing more distress (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Tellegen, 1985; Watson & Clark, 1984), which is possibly because negative affectivity increases one's vulnerability to negative stimuli (Larsen & Katelaar, 1991). Positive affectivity is also related to greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions (Cropanzano et al., 1993; Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin 1998). Overall, there is evidence that positive affectivity is related to more positive work attitudes and outcomes and negative affectivity is related to more negative work outcomes and attitudes indicating that affectivity is a crucial variable to consider when exploring how work affects individuals.

The relation between affectivity and person-environment fit

Given the association between affectivity and work-related attitudes, it would be plausible that negative and positive affectivity should also be related to employees' person-environment fit perceptions. Although this association has not been examined before, there is theoretical justification for this association as there is a well-established connection between personality and an individual's judgements and cognitive processes (e.g., Judge & Larsen, 2001; Levin & Stokes, 1989). Watson and Clark (1984) stated that regardless of the situation, people who are high in negative affectivity report distress or dissatisfaction more often than others. Necowitz and Roznowski (1994) stated that people who are higher in negative affectivity tend to report more dissatisfaction with their work environment and use more negative terms to define their work activities compared to people who are lower in negative affectivity. Because people who are higher in negativity are more likely focus on negative job experiences and people who are higher in positive affectivity tend to focus on positive job experiences (Judge & Larsen, 2001), the two groups should have different judgments about the same work environment. Indeed, various theoretical approaches also support the idea that personality influences evaluations of environments.

One of the approaches used to explain differences between individuals' responses to their environments is Gray's (1971, 1981, 1987) work on the behavioural activation system (BAS) and behavioural inhibition system (BIS), which relate directly to negative or positive affectivity. This theory posits that two systems control individuals' actions when there are stimuli indicative of rewards or punishment. Thus, people who are high in positive affectivity have stronger sensitivity to stimuli indicative of rewards whereas people who are high in negative affectivity have stronger sensitivity to stimuli indicative of punishment. Following the Behavioral Activation System, people who are high in positive affectivity are motivated by pleasure or rewards, thus they have a strong tendency to seek rewards. Conversely, the Behavioral Inhibition System proposes that being high in negativity motivates people to avoid punishment and they have tendency to inhibit their behaviours. If it is the case that affectivity predisposes people to different levels of sensitivity to reward and punishment stimuli, then it could also be that affectivity could produce similar sensitivity to job contexts and strongly influence how individuals respond to the same work environment.

Another model arguing that affectivity has an impact on individuals' responses to their environment was proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) with their Affective Events Theory (AET), in which they propose that affectivity, in addition to cognitive processes, predicts reactions at work. In this model, it is argued that state affect mediates the impact of

affective disposition on attitudes. Hence, through this channel, affective dispositions have an influence on employee's evaluations regarding their jobs. According to the Affective Events Theory, affect can be both an antecedent and a consequence in the workplace. Discrete events such as positive feedback or success in a task can positively increase specific emotions, such as momentary positive emotions such as joy or happiness. Hence, affective experiences lead to affective components of attitudes such as job satisfaction. Although this theory is used to explain the relation between affectivity and job attitudes like job satisfaction, it is an important approach as it highlights how the dispositional aspect of affect can alter people's evaluations of their environments.

Judge and Larsen (2001) also propose a model that focuses on how affectivity influences individuals' responses and judgments. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, any event in the environment has an impact on the person, but depending on the characteristics of the person, emotional responses to the same event will differ. This theory states that affectivity can be influenced by any event in the environment, which, in turn, could also act as a mediator, influencing the response of an individual. Judge and Larsen (2001) concluded that there could be individual differences in perceptions of specific work conditions, and that people react differently to the same stimulus depending on their personality.

According to each of these three theories, in specific situations people's sensitivity to particular aspects in their environment depends on their personality. Affectivity has an impact on emotions and these emotions shape individuals' responses to their environments. Therefore, people who are high in positive affectivity and negative affectivity will be expected to have sensitivity to different situations, and to process and respond to these situations in different ways. Following these three theories, the characteristics of an organization or a job can be treated as a stimulus that creates sensitivity in the environment and activates employees' affectivity, which people who are high in negative affectivity and positive affectivity would perceive, process, and evaluate in different ways.

In general, research examining the association between affectivity and employee attitudes has primarily focused on the direct influence of affectivity on individual outcomes such as job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and stress (Brief et al. 1988; Iverson et al., 1998). However, according to Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (Judge & Larsen, 2001), any stimulus in the environment can activate individuals' emotional response system and that this response tendency could change their response to the environment. According to this theory, the relation between affectivity and any outcome needs to be evaluated by taking account the characteristics of the environment. Positive or negative perceptions of fit with one's environment could act as a stimulus to activate individuals' affective systems and result in different behaviours among employees. Thus, person-environment fit might help explain the association between affectivity and individual outcomes by mediating this relation.

Despite the considerable amount of research on person-environment fit, our research is the first to investigate the possibility that perceptions about person-environment fit play a mediating role in the above-mentioned relation. We found (Uysal Irak, 2010) that positive and negative affectivity had an influence on one's perceptions of fit with the environment. The study was conducted with 383 employed adults, recruited through snowball sampling and the Study Response Research Project. Details about this project are available at <http://studyresponse.syr.edu/studyresponse/researcherinformation.htm>.

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of fit with their organization and with their jobs; positive and negative affectivity levels were measured using the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and the BIS-BAS scale (Carver & White, 1984). We found significant differences for the perceptions of organizational and job fit between employees who were high or low in negative and positive affectivity, such that people who were higher in positive affectivity reported greater person-organization fit and person-job fit significantly relative to people who were lower in positive affectivity, and similarly, people who were lower in negative affectivity reported greater person-organization fit and person-job fit relative to people who were higher in negative affectivity. Moreover, people who had stronger sensitivity to stimuli indicative of rewards (BAS) reported greater fit with their organization and job compared to people who had stronger sensitivity to stimuli indicative of punishment (BIS). Thus, perceptions about fit with one's environment were highly influenced by one's personality.

In addition, perceptions of person-environment fit (organization and job) had an influence on the association of affectivity and individual personal and work-related outcomes. Consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (Judge & Larsen, 2001), person-environment fit partially mediated the effect of affectivity on job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and perceived stress. In essence, people with higher positive affectivity were more likely to report better fit with their jobs and organizations and this sense of good fit was associated with more job and life satisfaction and less stress. Therefore, when examining issues of person-environment fit, we need to take into account how personal disposition affects self-report because it is likely that person-environment fit may be partially an artefact of personal disposition and not simply an objective assessment of fit.

References

- Barsade, S.G., Brief, A. P., & Spataro, S.E. (2003). The affective revolution in organizational behavior: The emergence of a paradigm. In J. Greenberg (Ed.), *Organizational behavior: The state of science* (2nd ed., pp.3-51). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Benyamini, R., & Roziner, I. (2008). The predictive validity of optimism and affectivity in a longitudinal study of older adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 44(4), 853-864.
- Brief, A. P., Burke, M. J., George, J.M., Robinson, B. S., & Webster, J. (1988). Should negative affectivity remain an unmeasured variable in the study of job stress? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73, 193-198.
- Brief, A.P., Butcher, A. N., & Roberson, L. (1995). Cookies, disposition, and job attitudes: The effects of positive mood-inducing events and negative affectivity on job satisfaction in a field experiment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 62(1), 55-62.
- Carver, C.S. , & White, T. L. (1984). Behavioral inhibition, Behavioral activation, and affective responses to impending reward and punishment: The BIS/BAS scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(2), 319-333.
- Chen, P. Y., & Spector, P. E. (1991). Negative affectivity as the underlying cause of correlations between stressors and strains. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(3), 398-407.

- Connolly, J.J., & Viswesvaran, C. (2000). The role of affectivity in job satisfaction: a meta-analysis. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 29, 265- 281.
- Costa, P.T., & McCrae, R.R. (1980). Influence of extraversion and neuroticism on subjective well-being: Happy and unhappy people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38(4), 668-678.
- Cropanzano, R., James, K., & Konovsky, M.A. (1993). Dispositional affectivity as a predictor of work attitudes and job performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14(6), 595-606.
- Dawis, R.V., & Lofquist, L.H. (1984). *A psychological theory of work adjustment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gray, J.A. (1971). *The psychology of fear and stress*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Gray, J.A. (1981). A critique of Eysenck's theory of personality. In H.J. Eysenck (Ed.), *A model for personality* (pp.246-276). New York: Springer.
- Gray, J.A. (1987). Perspectives on anxiety and impulsivity: A commentary. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 21, 493-509.
- George, J.M. (1992). The role of personality in organizational life: Issues and evidence. *Journal of Management*, 18(2), 185-213.
- George, J.M., & Jones, G. R. (1996). The experience of work and turnover intentions: Interactive effects of value attainment, job satisfaction, and positive mood. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(3), 318-325.
- Iverson, R. D., Olekalns, M., & Erwin, P.J. (1998). Affectivity, organizational stressors, and absenteeism: A causal model of burnout and its consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 52(1), 1-23.
- Judge, T. A., Larsen, R. J. (2001). Dispositional affect and job satisfaction: A review and theoretical extension. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86(1), 67-98.
- Larsen, R.J., & Katelaar, T. (1991). Personality and susceptibility to positive and negative emotional states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(1), 132-140.
- Levin, I., & Stokes, J.P. (1989). Dispositional approach to job satisfaction: Role of negative affectivity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74, 752-758.
- Necowitz, L.B., & Roznowski, M. (1994). Negative affectivity and job satisfaction: Cognitive processes underlying the relationship and effects on employee behaviors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(3), 270-294.
- Staw, B.M., Bell, N.E., & Clausen, J.A. (1986). The dispositional approach to job attitudes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31(1), 56-77.
- Tellegen, A. (1985). Structures of mood and personality and their relevance to assessing anxiety with an emphasis on self-report. In A.H. Tuma & J.D. Maser (Eds.), *Anxiety and the anxiety disorder* (pp.681-706). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Thoresen, C.J., Kaplan, S.E., Barsky, A.P., Warren.C.R., & Chermont, K., (2003). The affective underpinnings of job perceptions and attitudes: A met-analytic review and integration. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(6), 914-945.

Uysal Irak,D. (2010). The role of affectivity in an expanded model of person-environment fit. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Carleton University, Ottawa.

Watson, D. (2000). Mood and temperament. New York: The Guilford Press.

Watson, D., & Clark, L.A. (1984).Negative affectivity: The disposition to experience aversive emotional states. *Psychological Bulletin*, 96, 465-490.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A., & Carey, G. (1988). Positive and negative affectivity and their relation to anxiety and depressive disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 97, 346-353.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The Panas scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063-1070.

Watson, D., Pennebaker, J.W., & Folger, R. (1987). Beyond negative affectivity: Measuring stress and satisfaction in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 8(2), 141-157.

Watson, D., & Slack, A.K. (1993). General factors of affective temperament and their relation to job satisfaction over time. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 54, 181-202.

Weiss, H.M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory: A theoretical discussion of the structure, causes, and consequences of affective experience at work. In B.M.Staw & L.L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior: An annual series of analytical essays and critical reviews*, Vol.18. (pp. 1-74). US: Elsevier Science.