

Person-Job Fit, Job Engagement and Job Satisfaction

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Summary

This paper examines how the degree of fit or misfit between a person's motivational preferences and specific job features is differently related to job satisfaction and engagement. Person-job fit on the examined features showed different relationships with job satisfaction and engagement, implying that interventions focusing on employee well-being should be geared towards specific outcomes.

Objectives

Engagement and job satisfaction are often used alongside each other or even interchangeably in research and practical applications. Although feelings of engagement share much variance with job satisfaction (e.g. Newman & Harrison, 2008), the two constructs can be placed in different quadrants of the affective circumplex (Remington, Fabrigar, & Vissar, 2000). While engagement emphasises the activated side of positive affect, satisfaction refers more to a passive (low activated) positive state.

This difference between the constructs suggests that they will have partly different behavioural consequences and derive from partly different job attributes. Building on the extensive literature on job design (e.g., Parker & Wall, 1998) and more recent studies of the work environment as a source of low or high engagement (e.g. Harter & Schmidt, 2008), this paper will examine how the degree of fit or misfit between a person's motivational preferences and specific job features is differently related to job satisfaction and engagement.

Method

840 employees from several organisations completed an online questionnaire that measured 38 job features, extended from Warr's (2007) "vitamin" model. Respondents were asked to which extent (from nine options) they would want each feature in their ideal job, and about the extent to which each feature was present in their job (as perceived by the respondents). A six-item scale assessed job engagement through being energised and absorbed by one's work based on conceptualizations by Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2006). A single item measured overall job satisfaction: "Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?", with seven response options from *extremely dissatisfied* to *extremely satisfied*.

Analytic Procedures

Multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted separately for each of the 38 job features to examine two types of misfit (or fit) in relation to engagement and job satisfaction:

algebraic (wanting more) and absolute (wanting more or wanting less) misfit. To assess the impact of algebraic misfit or fit between actual and wanted job features (AJF and WJF), the actual job feature was entered in step 1 of the regression analyses, followed by the preferred job feature in step 2. Entering WJF alone at this stage of an analysis is equivalent to entering the difference between WJF and AJF. Absolute misfit or fit was computed by entering the actual job feature in step 1 and the absolute difference ($|\text{preferred} - \text{actual}|$) in step 2. To explore the relationships with fit further, additional hierarchical multiple regression procedures were applied, identifying nonlinear relationships and quadratic polynomial regression effects (Edwards, 2007).

Results and Discussion

Job satisfaction and job engagement were intercorrelated 0.56. All the perceived job features were themselves significantly related to job engagement and job satisfaction, but adding want-actual misfit levels significantly increased predictive power for many but not all of them.

Misfit effects were found to vary between different job features and outcomes. *Algebraic* misfit effects were in many cases more significant for job engagement than for job satisfaction, as feelings of engagement were linked to wanting more of a feature. On the other hand, significant *absolute* misfit effects were more often found for satisfaction than for engagement, as dissatisfaction more often arose from wanting less rather than more of a feature. For example, *algebraic* misfit on managerial responsibility, high work standards and quantity of social contact was only related to job engagement but not to job satisfaction. For job satisfaction in comparison, *absolute* misfit effects were found for quantity of social contact, financial focus, internal competition and challenging goals, which did not emerge for job engagement.

Results of the polynomial regressions were plotted as three-dimensional surfaces (Edwards, 2007) which illustrated principal fit patterns. For example, when comparing misfit patterns for quantity of social contact, where algebraic misfit was only significant for job engagement and absolute misfit was only found for job satisfaction, the surfaces reflected these findings as follows (figure 1 and 2): job satisfaction (figure 1) was highest when wanted and actual amount of this feature were high, and it was lowest when individuals wanted more or less of this feature than was present. Job engagement (figure 2) by contrast was highest when both wanted and actual amount were the highest and it was still relatively high when individuals wanted more than they had. People felt generally less job engaged, however, when the wanted amount was low, independently of actual amount. These patterns also mirror the positive relationships that were observed for the preferred job features and job engagement which ranged up to $r = 0.37$ (overall average $r: 0.24$), but were considerably lower for job satisfaction.

The widespread impact of misfit on both outcomes indicates the practical value of attending to value-related discrepancy over and above job features themselves. However, the same discrepancy between wanted and actual levels predicted different satisfaction and engagement outcomes for several job features, pointing to the need for models of person-job misfit to be more complex than the traditional perspective. More adequate accounts are likely to reflect the more activated nature of states like job engagement compared to job satisfaction with a general implication that different forms of worker well-being and their associated misfit patterns require separate explanatory models.

Figure 1: Fit patterns plotted for quantity of social contact and job satisfaction

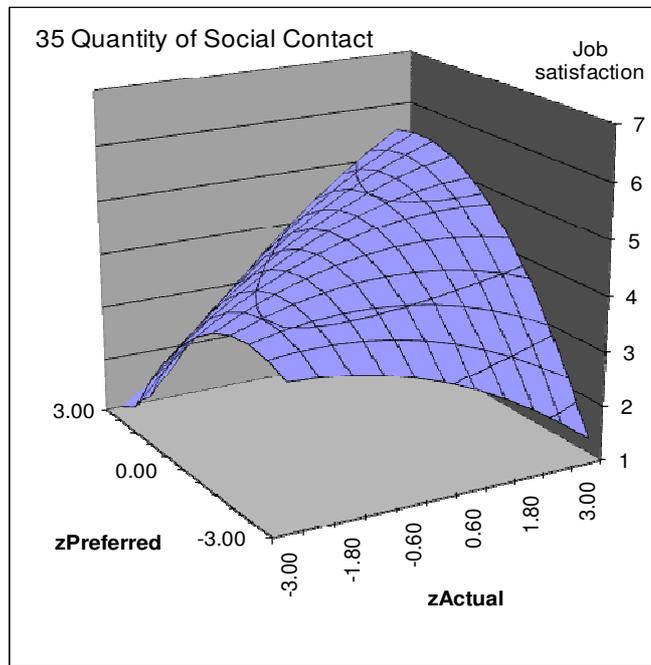
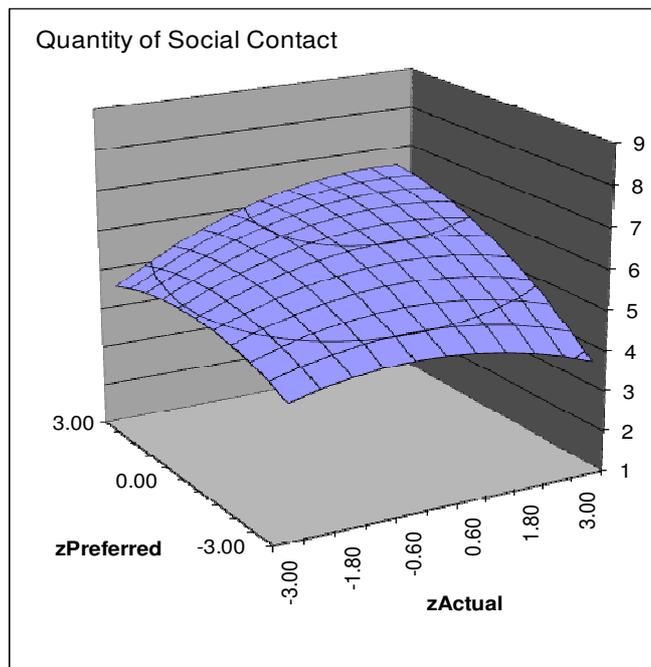


Figure 2: Fit patterns plotted for quantity of social contact and job engagement



Conclusions and Practical Implications

The results show that perfect fit (absolute fit) between motivational preferences and job features may not always be desirable as job engagement is more activated, and hence probably more linked to challenges, than job satisfaction. Implications are that interventions focusing on employee well-being and motivation need to be geared towards specific outcomes. This is particularly relevant in that job satisfaction and engagement are likely to lead to different work behaviours. To encourage engagement rather than merely having satisfied employees, employers should provide challenge, for example, high work standards, demanding goals, managerial responsibility and opportunities for innovation. Other applications where motivational mis(fit) should also be considered are induction programmes for newcomers ('onboarding') by ensuring that newcomers feel engaged and are likely to stay with the organisation, and selection by matching candidates' motivational preferences against the actual job features (rated by job incumbents and line-managers).

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