

Person–Environment Fit: A Review of Its Basic Tenets

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Abstract

This review addresses the three basic principles of person–environment fit theory: (a) The person and the environment together predict human behavior better than each of them does separately; (b) outcomes are most optimal when personal attributes (e.g., needs, values) and environmental attributes (e.g., supplies, values) are compatible, irrespective of whether these attributes are rated as low, medium, or high; and (c) the direction of misfit between the person and the environment does not matter. My review of person–job and person–organization fit research that used polynomial regression to establish fit effects provides mixed support for the explanatory power of fit. Individuals report most optimal outcomes when there is fit on attributes they rate as highest, and they report lowest outcomes when the environment offers less than they need or desire. Linking these findings to individuals’ abilities and opportunities to adapt, I reconsider fit theory and outline options for future research and practice.



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INTRODUCTION

Finding or having a fitting job matters. People exert substantial time and effort in seeking a suitable job, that is, a job that matches their qualifications, fulfills their specific needs, and meets their goals and values. In a similar vein, organizations spend substantial effort on selecting applicants who fit the job and on socializing newcomers so as to create fit with the organizational environment.

Person–environment fit (hereafter fit) is generally defined as the compatibility between individuals and their environment. Influential fit theories have been developed in the domains of health and stress (Edwards & Cooper 1990), work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist 1984), vocational choice (Holland 1985), and organizational culture (Schneider 1987). A search using relevant terms of the fit literature in the Scopus abstract and citation database learns that, since the launch of these theories, the number of studies about fit has rapidly increased. Specifically, fit-related terms were in the titles, abstracts, or keywords of 33 publications until the year 1990, in 101 publications until the year 2000, and in 1,083 publications until April 2017. This increase exemplifies the fact that fit research has conquered a central place in organizational psychology.

In a world where people have the freedom to choose their goals, activities, and relationships, they may regularly ask themselves whether their environment (opportunities, demands, social context) offers what they wish for. The reality, however, is that a perfect fit seldom exists, as people make suboptimal choices and individuals and their environments change over time. In particular, the current economy and related changes in organizations force employees into situations that they may not have desired at first, which may cause an increase in misfits at work (Vogel et al. 2016). These developments give rise to the questions of whether and when suboptimal fit harms individual well-being and functioning.

In this article, I provide a review of extant fit research with these broad questions in mind. Although fit has been shown to relate to important outcomes (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al. 2005), the study of fit has been criticized for its ambiguous conceptualizations and measures. Importantly, these ambiguities have hindered the testing of the basic tenets of fit theory.

Fit theories are built on three basic principles. First, fit theories (e.g., Schneider 1987) claim that fit is a more powerful predictor of individual outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction) than either of its components (the person and the environment) alone. Second, fit theory proposes that outcomes are most optimal when personal attributes (e.g., needs, abilities, values) and environmental attributes (e.g., supplies, demands, values) are compatible regardless of the level of these attributes. That is, individuals with low, medium, and high attributes are expected to respond similarly to situations of fit. Third, fit theories postulate that discrepancies between personal and environmental attributes (misfits) reduce positive outcomes irrespective of the direction of the discrepancies. That is, individuals with low, medium, and high attributes are assumed to respond similarly negatively to comparable levels of experienced deficiency (the environment offers less than the individual needs) and excess (the environment offers more than the individual needs). Moreover, as discrepancies are largest for employees who rate extremely high or low on an attribute but receive the opposite from their environment, fit theory in fact claims that individuals who experience a surplus of work attributes that they try to avoid suffer as much as individuals who experience a lack of work attributes that they try to attain.

In this review, I discuss how research has progressed in finding empirical support for these basic principles of fit theory. First, I show that the fit measures used in fit research vary greatly, impact the fit–outcome relationship differently, and are mostly inadequate to test fit theory. Then, I focus on research that uses a more adequate technique to establish fit effects. The findings of these latter studies allow me to review the basic tenets of fit theory.

PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT

Fit theory assumes that people have an innate need to fit their environments and to seek out environments that match their own characteristics. Individuals strive to fit because they generally prefer consistency, wish to exert control over their life and to reduce uncertainty, have a need to belong, and want happiness and life satisfaction (Yu 2013). Self-consistency theory (Lecky 1968), the theory of social comparison (Festinger 1954), balanced state theory (Heider 1958), self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988), and the similarity attraction hypothesis (Byrne et al. 1986) all argue that people seek validation of their opinions and want to maximize the consistency among aspects of the self, such as attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Additionally, individuals strive for certainty and predictability, which can be achieved if their own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors converge with those of others (e.g., Hogg 2000). Fit allows individuals to better understand the behaviors of others and facilitates interpersonal interactions (Edwards & Cable 2009). Finally, people have a fundamental need to belong (e.g., Deci & Ryan 2000), and because of this need, they compare themselves with other people in the social environment. A feeling of belonging is most likely when individuals perceive that they share their characteristics with others (e.g., Hogg & Terry 2000).

The organizational psychology literature refers to fit as the degree to which individual and organizational attributes are compatible (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Fit can take two forms: Individual and environmental attributes are similar (e.g., individual values match with those of the organization) or individual attributes are complemented by the organizational environment (e.g., individual skills are complemented by those of other team members) and vice versa. The fit literature conceptualizes these two forms of compatibility as supplementary and complementary fit, respectively (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005).

In a work context, fit includes a wide range of fit concepts, such as person-vocation fit (the congruence between individual vocational interests and vocational characteristics), person-job fit (fit between individual abilities and needs and the demands and supplies of the job), person-organization fit (fit between individual and organizational values), person-team fit (fit between individual attributes and those of the work group), and person-supervisor fit (fit between individual attributes and those of the supervisor). Person-vocation and person-job fit are considered complementary types of fit because they relate to attributes such as preferences, needs, and abilities that are complemented by environmental supplies and demands or vice versa. Person-organization fit, person-team fit, and person-supervisor fit are generally conceived of as supplementary fits concerning attributes such as personalities, values, and goals.

COMPLEMENTARY FITS

The fit theories that have dominated research on complementary fit are Holland's (1985) model of vocational personality types, the theory of work adjustment (TWA) (Dawis & Lofquist 1984), and fit models of stress (Edwards & Cooper 1990).

Person-Vocation Fit

The theory of vocational personality types (Holland 1985) argues that individuals are drawn to work environments in which they can express their interests. This theory distinguishes six personality profiles of individuals and jobs: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC).

Person-vocation fit research has shown a mixed pattern of relationships between fit and individual outcomes such as satisfaction and performance. Early meta-analytic work (Tranberg et al. 1993) revealed that the overall fit-satisfaction relationship was nonsignificant. Analyses for each

vocational personality type showed that fit was moderately related to satisfaction for the social personality type but that this relationship did not exist for the realistic personality type. These findings suggest that fit matters for some but not all vocational personality types. A similar conclusion was reached in a meta-analysis by Tsabari and colleagues (2005). The overall correlation between person–vocation fit and satisfaction was, again, nonsignificant, although small but significant correlations were found in this case for the enterprising and conventional personality types. Finally, a longitudinal study (Wille et al. 2014) found that, although individuals’ interests and occupation scores remained relatively stable across a period of 15 years, person–vocation fit and job satisfaction were unrelated.

While person–vocation fit seems less important for job satisfaction, it does relate moderately positively to task performance and organizational citizenship behavior and negatively to counter-productive work behavior (Nye et al. 2017, Van Iddekinge et al. 2011). Individuals who have a genuine interest in their profession are engaged in their tasks and are willing to help others who perform similar tasks. There may be several reasons why only small person–vocation fit effects have been found. First, person–vocation fit research is hampered by theoretical, methodological, and measurement issues. Holland’s theory conceptualizes persons and environments with a restricted set of broad personality constructs (e.g., Sackett & Lievens 2008). These constructs may only weakly cover important task components of specific jobs. For example, a social personality type may work in a social type of job but may primarily perform conventional tasks. Furthermore, researchers have used different methods to establish person–vocation fit. Some researchers have measured fit by focusing on individuals’ main interest, whereas other researchers included more personality variables to compare the person with the vocation. Generally, fit studies in the vocational domain lack the robust methodologies that are necessary for testing fit effects and that have been employed in other domains.

A second reason for the relatively small vocation fit effects may relate to processes of adaptation. When employees perceive a lack of fit, they may craft the job to improve fit by, for example, changing the tasks they do, the roles they have, their relationships with others, or the way in which they organize their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001). This job crafting, in turn, may promote job satisfaction but may, at the same time, undermine employee performance as assessed by the organization.

Person–Job Fit

The study of person–job fit, including needs–supplies fit and demands–ability fit, is largely built on the TWA and theories related to stress. The TWA posits that a satisfying job is the result of individual and organizational adjustments intended to create correspondence between individual and environmental attributes. TWA researchers (e.g., Rounds et al. 1987) have emphasized that person–job fit can be established only if individual and environmental attributes are commensurate, that is, when they belong to similar conceptual domains, are logically related to and interdependent on one another, and are measured with similar rating scales.

As stress and burnout are prominent negative outcomes of work, researchers have extensively studied the determinants of these negative outcomes (e.g., Cooper et al. 2001). Stress and burnout have been thought to result from a given situation, the characteristics of an individual, or the interaction between these factors (e.g., Longua et al. 2009). The person–job fit literature (e.g., French et al. 1982) views stress and strain as the outcomes of a discrepancy between individual and job characteristics.

Person–job fit research has typically been focused on job attributes such as demands and workload, job insecurity, (lack of) promotion opportunities, role ambiguity, (lack of) supervisor support,

and autonomy. Several studies have provided evidence that needs–supplies and demands–abilities misfits cause strain (Hecht & Allen 2005, Yang et al. 2008a). Furthermore, while both of these fits relate to job attitudes (satisfaction, commitment, and intentions to quit), needs–supplies fit has the greatest impact on job attitudes (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Demand–abilities fit seems relatively more important for performance and less important for job attitudes and strain because employees may tend to overestimate their abilities and demands–abilities fit as to preserve their self-esteem (Cable & DeRue 2002), and their personality characteristics (e.g., optimism, locus of control, self-efficacy) may mitigate the mental consequences of misfit (Park et al. 2012).

SUPPLEMENTARY FITS

Theories on supplementary fit—including person–organization fit, person–team fit, and person–supervisor fit—are rooted in evolutionary approaches to human behavior (e.g., Tooby & Cosmides 1989) and cognitive theories developed in social psychology (e.g., Byrne et al. 1986, Hogg & Terry 2000). Both theoretical perspectives postulate that humans have a strong tendency to assess their similarities with others. Evolutionary scholars provided evidence that similarity assessments are universal and automatic (e.g., Krupp et al. 2008) and concluded that people are hardwired to establish a fit with social environments. In addition, individuals prefer to collaborate with others if the relationship is based on reciprocity (Fehr & Fischbacher 2003). Reciprocity is more likely to emerge when the interaction partners are similar to each other than when they are dissimilar (Lusk et al. 1998). Finally, feelings of similarity promote perspective taking (imagining others' feelings), expectations of cooperativeness from others, and the division of rewards (e.g., De Waal & Davis 2003).

Social-psychological research on social categorization and the similarity attraction hypothesis supports the notion that people seek similarity with others. People categorize their social world into similar and dissimilar individuals (e.g., Hogg & Terry 2000), and they are attracted to others who hold similar attitudes and opinions (Byrne et al. 1986, Shaikh & Kanekar 1994). All in all, the human tendency to value similarity is functional because it sustains cooperation, social relationships, certainty, consistency, and control (Yu 2013).

Person–Organization Fit

One theory in organizational psychology that has dominated research on supplementary fit is the attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider et al. 1998). As opposed to fit theories that focus on individuals and their fit with the environment, ASA theory focuses on organizations as defined by the characteristics of the people in them. The ASA framework theorizes that people are attracted to, selected by, and stay in organizations that match their personal attributes. Consequently, people within an organization will be relatively homogeneous with regard to their needs, values, and personalities, which, in turn, define organizational structures, processes, and culture.

Although some homogeneity of personalities in organizations has indeed been found (Bradley-Geist & Landis 2012, Giberson et al. 2005, King et al. 2017, Ployhart et al. 2006, Schaubroeck et al. 1998), no studies have found direct evidence for the ASA cycle because researchers used between-person designs rather than a within-person design following individuals and their decisions (applying for or accepting a job, leaving the organization) through all stages of the ASA process. Fit research investigating each of the stages separately showed reasonable fit effects on organizational attraction (e.g., Dineen et al. 2002), selection (Chuang & Sackett 2005), and attrition (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). However, fit had a relatively weak relationship with actual job choice decisions, job offers, and turnover (Kristof-Brown & Guay 2011), which indicate that also other factors than fit (e.g., financial, economic reasons) affect these types of decisions.

Person–organization fit is generally established by comparing personal values with those of the organization. Personal values are “abstract beliefs about desirable, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives” (Vecchione et al. 2016, p. 111). Values are central to individuals’ self-concepts, are relatively stable across situations and over time, and direct attitudes and behavior. At the organizational level, values are the basic assumptions that are central to an organization’s culture (Schein 2004). Value fit was found to be relatively strongly related to job attitudes, less strongly related to contextual performance, and only marginally related to overall and task performance and actual turnover (Arthur et al. 2006, Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). The weak relationships between value fit and performance and actual turnover tend to be mediated by job attitudes (Arthur et al. 2006).

Person–Team Fit

Person–team fit refers to the match between the person and their immediate coworkers in terms of demographics, values, goals, personality, and skills. Studies examining surface-level attributes such as demographics in teams are inspired by theories of social categorization (e.g., Chatman & Flynn 2001) and literatures on team diversity (e.g., Joshi & Knight 2015). These studies investigated team-level outcomes (e.g., team processes, coherence, and functioning) rather than individual-level outcomes. Studies examining deep-level attributes such as goals and values are rooted in fit theory and mainly focus on predicting individual-level (Seong & Kristof-Brown 2012) and occasionally team-level outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al. 2014). In these studies, personal attributes (e.g., goals, personality) are compared with the attributes of other team members (Kristof-Brown & Stevens 2001). Person–team fit was found to be moderately related to coworker satisfaction, job attitudes, and organizational citizenship behaviors and somewhat more weakly related to task performance (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Other factors than person–team fit (e.g., capacities, work conditions) may affect individual task performance more strongly.

Person–Supervisor Fit

Person–supervisor fit refers to the match between employees’ characteristics and those of their supervisor. Supervisors are important for employees because they can provide rewards and career opportunities. Moreover, supervisors transmit organizational values to the daily work environment (Schein 2004) and thus shape their employees’ environmental experiences through their own values and actions.

According to the similarity attraction hypothesis, similarity with the supervisor fosters feelings of inclusion and certainty, high leader–member exchange, and trust in the supervisor (Van Vianen et al. 2011). Because supervisors tend to fit with the values of the organization (e.g., Giberson et al. 2005), similarity with the supervisor may promote work behaviors that concur with the values and goals of the organization (Sluss et al. 2012), which will result in positive performance and reward.

Although person–supervisor fit and person–organization fit are associated, these fits are conceptually distinct. Person–supervisor fit concerns a comparison process on individual-level attributes, whereas person–organization fit concerns a comparison process on organization-level attributes. Moreover, person–supervisor fit primarily impacts employees’ attitudes toward the proximal work context, whereas person–organization fit impacts employees’ attitudes toward the distal organizational context (Van Vianen et al. 2011). Supervisor fit was found to relate most strongly to supervisor and job satisfaction and less strongly to organizational commitment and performance (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005).

Overview of Fit Findings

Taken together, fit research seems to support the contentions that individuals strive toward fit and that fit is associated with positive individual outcomes. Fit relates most strongly to attitudinal outcomes (e.g., satisfaction) and less strongly to behavioral outcomes (e.g., performance, turnover, job choice). Furthermore, the strength of the fit–outcome relationship varies by fit domain. Person–job fit relates most strongly to job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and occupational commitment; person–organization fit relates most strongly to organizational commitment, organizational identification, and perceived support; person–team fit relates particularly strongly to attitudes toward peers; and person–supervisor fit relates most strongly to attitudes regarding the supervisor (Van Vianen et al. 2016).

Importantly, meta-analytical work (Hoffman & Woehr 2006, Kristof-Brown et al. 2005, Verquer et al. 2003) has revealed that there are large differences in effect sizes among fit studies. Part of the variation in effect sizes relates to differences in content and focus of the fit studies, but the largest part is due to differences in operationalization of the fit construct.

FIT OPERATIONALIZATIONS

Researchers use different operationalizations to examine fit. Some conceptualize fit as a personal experience or feeling and measure perceived fit (“There is a good fit between what my job offers me and what I am looking for in a job”; e.g., Cable & DeRue 2002, p. 879) or perceived discrepancy (“Rate your own life right now in terms of your life approaching what you want”; e.g., Lance et al. 1995, p. 76), whereas other researchers measure personal and environmental attributes and calculate the discrepancy between them.

Perceived Fit

Perceived fit reflects a psychological construct in an individual’s mind and concerns a holistic type of fit assessment. Perceived fit is the most proximal and strongest predictor of employees’ decisions and behaviors (e.g., Kristof-Brown & Billsberry 2013). However, measures of perceived fit have been criticized for being a weak conceptualization of fit theory. First, as perceived fit exists in one’s mind, we do not know which, if any, personal and environmental attributes individuals process and how they combine beliefs about themselves and their environment into perceptions of fit. Second, the correlations between perceived fit and job attitudes are so high that fit researchers have questioned the distinctiveness of these concepts (Edwards et al. 2006). Perceived fit may be less likely to originate in a cognitive comparison between personal and environmental attributes but may rather reflect a direct affective response of satisfaction (Edwards et al. 2006). Finally, a measure of perceived fit does not necessarily correspond negatively to a measure of perceived discrepancy or misfit (Edwards et al. 2006). Apparently, perceived fit and misfit represent different concepts and cognitive processes. For example, individuals’ reflections on their fit may trigger thoughts about attributes they want to approach, whereas their reflections on misfit may elicit thoughts about attributes they want to avoid. Thus, perceived fit may relate to other attributes than perceived misfit.

Calculated Fit

Calculated fit measures aim to establish the discrepancy between personal and environmental attributes: The lower is the discrepancy, the higher is the fit. Researchers calculate a fit index by comparing individuals’ personal attributes with a commensurate set of environmental attributes derived from individuals themselves (subjective fit) or from other sources (objective fit). The fit

index may be based on the algebraic, absolute, or quadratic difference between a single personal attribute and a single environmental attribute or on the correlation between a set of personal and environmental attributes (a profile similarity index).

Although calculated fit measures seem to reflect the comparison processes proposed in fit theories, these measures have been criticized for their methodological and statistical inadequacy. In essence, discrepancy measures are unreliable, conceal the direction of person–environment discrepancies, ignore the direct effects of personal and environmental attributes, and do not allow a test of theoretical assumptions. In addition, a profile similarity fit index obscures important information about the underlying personal and environmental attributes and reduces a multidimensional phenomenon to a single index (Edwards 1994).

Perceived and calculated fit measures each have their shortcomings (e.g., Edwards 1994). Moreover, these measures are only moderately related (Edwards et al. 2006, Kristof-Brown & Guay 2011) and are differently associated with outcomes (Arthur et al. 2006, Hoffman & Woehr 2006, Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Consequently, different and inappropriate conclusions about fit effects may be drawn from the studies using these measures. Most importantly, fit measures are often inadequate for testing fit theory.

TESTING THE BASIC TENETS OF FIT THEORY

Fit theory is rooted in Lewin's (1951) notion that behavior (B) is a function of the person (P) and the environment (E), expressed as $B = f(P, E)$. Fit theory proposes that the fit between the person and the environment rather than the person and the environment separately predicts human behavior. This proposition reflects the first and most essential assumption of fit theory (proposition 1).

At its core, fit theory postulates that individuals differ in personal attributes and seek environments that best match their unique levels of personal attributes. According to fit theory, individuals who have, for example, a high need for structure will prefer jobs that offer a large amount of structure, whereas individuals who have a medium or low need for structure will prefer jobs with a medium or low level of structure, respectively. Each of these individuals will be optimally satisfied if the job meets their high, medium, or low levels of personal attributes. Thus, a second basic assumption of fit theory is that outcomes are most optimal when there is fit, regardless of whether this fit concerns high, medium, or low levels of personal attributes (proposition 2).

In addition, fit theory proposes that individual outcomes are most optimal if the person and the environment are congruent and that outcomes decrease as the discrepancy between the person and the environment increases (Harrison 2007). Moreover, larger discrepancies are more detrimental for individual outcomes than smaller ones, and the direction of the discrepancy, whether it is positive or negative, does not matter. Because larger discrepancies between individual and environmental attributes (misfits) are more detrimental than smaller ones, extreme levels of personal attributes and opposite levels of environmental attributes will cause the most negative outcomes. For example, individuals rating extremely high on a specific attribute (e.g., high need for structure) in an environment that lacks this attribute (e.g., a low-structured job), or the reverse, individuals rating extremely low on a specific attribute working in an environment that favors this attribute, will suffer similarly from these misfits. Therefore, a third basic assumption of fit theory is that deficiency (environmental attributes are less than personal attributes) and excess (environmental attributes are greater than personal attributes) are similarly harmful for individuals at extreme levels (proposition 3). This proposition is interesting as it claims that not getting what one greatly desires is as detrimental as getting what one detests.

The three basic tenets of fit theory and possible alternative propositions regarding fit and misfit effects can be adequately tested by means of polynomial regression and surface plot analyses.

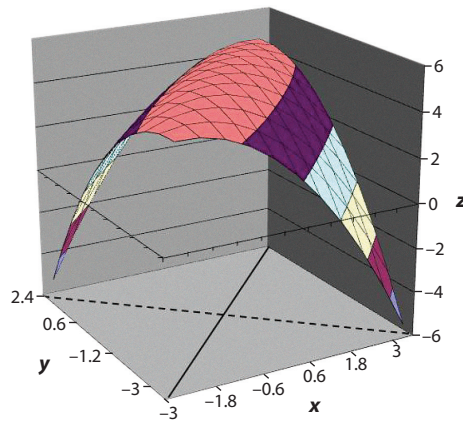


Figure 1

Surface plot of polynomial regression analysis demonstrating a fit–outcome relationship. The x axis displays the levels of a personal attribute (P), the y axis displays the levels of an environmental attribute (E), and the z axis displays the outcome (e.g., job satisfaction). Derived from <http://public.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/faculty/edwardsj/>.

Polynomial Regression and Surface Plot Analysis

The fit concept requires a fit measure that reflects the discrepancy between the person and the environment. Because of the methodological problems discussed above, discrepancy measures are inadequate to test fit theory. These methodological problems can be overcome by the use of polynomial regression and surface plot analysis.¹ The equation for a polynomial regression is

$$Z = b_0 + b_1P + b_2E + b_3P^2 + b_4PE + b_5E^2,$$

where P represents the personal attribute (e.g., need for structure), E the commensurate environmental attribute (e.g., structure in the job), and Z the individual outcome (e.g., job satisfaction). This regression equation enables researchers to explore the precise relationships among the person, the environment, and the outcomes. In addition, a surface plot of the relationships and the statistical estimates of the precise form of this plot further facilitate the testing of possible fit effects.

Figure 1 shows the three-dimensional surface plot of a perfect fit effect. The x axis displays the levels of a personal attribute (P), the y axis displays the levels of an environmental attribute (E), and the z axis displays the outcome (e.g., job satisfaction). The solid line on the bottom of this figure (the $P = E$ line) runs between two points representing optimal fit: the point where P and E are both high (3) and the point where P and E are both low (−3). The dotted line on the bottom (the $P = -E$ line) runs between two points representing misfit: the point where P is high (3) and E is low (−3) and the point where P is low (−3) and E is high (3). The outcome Z is maximized along the fit ($P = E$) line and decreases to the extent that E falls short of P (the right side of the figure) or E exceeds P (left side). Fit theory is supported when the surface plot meets the following conditions. First, the response surface should be curved downward or upward along the misfit line (the dotted line on the bottom). That is, the surface should be concave (a reverse U shape) or convex

¹ It should be noted that polynomial regression is not without limitations. First, because many terms are entered into the regression equation, this regression requires relatively large samples. Second, the terms in the regression equation are conceptually related, which may cause multicollinearity. Third, when multiple fit dimensions and, thus, a larger number of significance tests are involved, the chance of Type 1 errors may increase.

(a U shape), depending on the proposed positive or negative fit–outcome relationship. Second, the first principle axis of the surface, which is the line along which the surface’s upward curvature is greatest, should be parallel with the congruence ($P = E$) line. Third, the slope along the $P = E$ fit line should be flat, whereas the slope along the $P = -E$ fit line should be curved. Finally, the endpoints of the $P = -E$ fit line should have the lowest (or highest, depending on the direction of the fit–outcome relationship) level of the outcome variable (e.g., Edwards & Cable 2009).

A REVIEW OF FIT RESEARCH USING POLYNOMIAL REGRESSION

Since the first seminal publications on polynomial regression in fit research (e.g., Edwards 1994), more researchers have been using this regression technique to estimate fit effects. The first meta-analysis (Yang et al. 2008b) of these studies found minimal support for the relationship between fit and employee attitudes and no support for a relationship between fit and employee performance. Notably, however, this meta-analysis included a relatively small number of studies and a mixture of fit domains (person–person fit, person–team fit, person–supervisor fit, person–job fit) and outcomes, which makes it difficult to determine what may have caused these modest findings. More importantly, this meta-analysis did not address the precise functional form of relationships, as shown (if available) in the surface plot analysis (see **Figure 1**) of the studies involved. Although surface plots of fit studies cannot be tested meta-analytically, they can be reviewed using the basic tenets of fit theory as a guideline.

In this article, I provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of fit studies (published between 1995 and April 2017) that tested the functional forms of fit–outcome relationships. I focus my review on studies concerning person–job fit, specifically needs–supplies fit, and person–organization fit because the number of studies in these domains outweighs those in other domains. Moreover, this focus allows me to combine and discuss the findings of studies that are relatively comparable with regard to the fit attributes and outcomes that were examined. To this end, I conducted a literature search of published papers through PsycINFO, ERIC, Business Source Premier, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. This resulted in a final set of 42 published studies, 23 person–job fit studies, and 19 person–organization fit² studies that included commensurate person and environment measures and information on polynomial regression or surface plot analyses. Most of these studies concern employee (same-source) measures of personal and environmental attributes at one point in time.

Proposition 1: The Incremental Value of Testing Fit–Outcome Relationships

Important theories in organizational psychology argue that personal and environmental factors each affect employee well-being, motivation, and functioning. With regard to personal factors, research has demonstrated that personality traits (e.g., big five traits, positive and negative affectivity, locus of control) impact employee job satisfaction (e.g., Judge et al. 2002), subjective well-being (e.g., Steel et al. 2008), and performance (e.g., Judge & Bono 2001). Additionally, significant relationships were found between employee’s value orientations and job attitudes (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al. 2007). With regard to environmental factors, the job demands–resources (JD-R) perspective (Bakker et al. 2014) proposes that job demands (physical, social, or organizational

²One study on work values (Rani & Samuel 2016) was published as a person–organization fit study, but the organizational attribute was operationalized as “the extent to which your organization provides you with. . . .” For this reason and to be consistent in categorizing comparable attributes (see Taris & Feij 2001), I included this study as a person–job fit study.

aspects of the job) and job resources (e.g., job control, task variety, feedback, opportunities for development, autonomy, and a supportive environment) are associated with stress-related and motivation-related outcomes, respectively. Meta-analytic research has provided substantial support for the JD-R model (e.g., Crawford et al. 2010). These lines of research clearly indicate that personal and environmental attributes influence individual outcomes irrespective of how individuals score on personal attributes or how they perceive the work environment, respectively. In other words, some personal and work attributes are beneficial or detrimental to all employees, regardless of whether there is fit between these attributes.

Fit studies using polynomial regression provide estimates of the associations among the person (P), the environment (E), and the outcome (the linear model) and the extent to which the quadratic and interaction terms of the polynomial regression equation (P^2 , E^2 , $P \times E$) explain additional variance in the outcome (the nonlinear model). The quadratic and interaction terms being nonsignificant could mean that main person and environment rather than fit effects apply.

Person–job fit findings. Two out of 23 person–job fit studies found only main person– and job–outcome relationships. These studies did not find relationships between innovation fit and outcomes (Choi & Price 2005) or between creativity fit and outcomes (Livingstone et al. 1997). Nine studies showed inconsistent fit–outcome relationships depending on the specific fit attribute or type of outcome. For example, Dahm et al. (2015) examined relationships between (actual and preferred) time allocation fit across work activities and outcomes such as work satisfaction and psychological and physical well-being. Fit effects on satisfaction and physical well-being were found for some work activities but not for others. In a similar vein, Edwards (1996) found fit effects of supplies–values (S–V) fit on satisfaction but not tension. Tension was primarily influenced by supplies rather than S–V fit.

However, about half of the person–job fit studies showed significant nonlinear associations between fit attributes and outcomes; these results point to an incremental value of testing nonlinearity and fit. Additionally, these studies found that job attributes were associated with outcomes relatively more often than were personal attributes. Moreover, the associations between job attributes and outcomes were generally stronger than those between personal attributes and outcomes. For example, Lambert et al. (2012) showed that received leader behaviors (consideration and initiating structure) were associated with employees’ work-related attitudes (i.e., trust in the supervisor, job satisfaction, and affective commitment) more strongly than were needed leader behaviors. Altogether, although job attributes in particular tend to be associated with outcomes, person–job fit studies have shown that the nonlinear combination of personal and job attributes can explain additional variance in outcomes.

Person–organization fit findings. The majority of the estimated fit–outcome relationships in person–organization fit studies showed significant linear relationships between organizational attributes and outcomes. In about half of these instances, significant linear relationships were also found between personal attributes and outcomes, but organizational attributes were generally more strongly related to outcomes than were personal attributes.

Three of the 19 studies reported only main personal and organizational effects, thus rejecting nonlinearity of the relationships between fit attributes and outcomes. However, 11 studies found partial support for nonlinearity. For example, Ostroff et al. (2005) found that culture fit related to job satisfaction and commitment but not to turnover intentions for three out of four cultural dimensions.

Six studies found full support for nonlinear relationships, explaining additional variance in outcomes above and beyond the direct relationships of personal and organizational attributes

with outcomes. Notably, five studies included personal and organizational values derived from the competing values model (Cameron & Quinn 1999) encompassing the culture dimensions: human relations (e.g., team oriented, sharing information), open systems (e.g., flexibility, innovation), rational goal (e.g., excellence; a good reputation), and internal process (e.g., initiative, results focus). Two of these studies (Kalliath et al. 1999, Van Vuuren et al. 2007) did not reveal any fit–outcome relationships, whereas the other three studies (Meyer et al. 2010, Newton & Mazur 2016, Ostroff et al. 2005) found inconsistent relationships for the different value dimensions. Evidence of fit relationships for the rational goal dimension (i.e., goal attainment and competitiveness) was found in only one study (Meyer et al. 2010). The other four studies found that the strongest relationships were between the organizational component of the rational goal dimension and outcomes.

All in all, nonlinear relationships between person–organization fit attributes and outcomes emerged for about half of the estimated fit–outcome relationships. Because the outcome variables in many of the person–organization fit studies concern job attitudes such as commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, nonlinearity of the person–organization fit–outcome relationship seems to depend primarily on the specific content of person–organization fit attributes. Some organizational values, such as human relations values, humanity values, and relationships values, are positively related to job attitudes irrespective of employees’ own values (e.g., Finegan 2000, Meyer et al. 2010, Newton & Mazur 2016, Yu 2012).

The person–job and person–organization fit studies together show the incremental value of testing nonlinear relationships. However, nonlinearity does not necessarily reflect fit effects, as I show in the following sections addressing propositions 2 and 3.

Proposition 2: Optimal Fit Outcomes at All Levels of Personal Attributes

Fit theory posits that fit is associated with positive outcomes regardless of whether the attributes of the person and the environment are low, medium, or high in absolute terms. However, it is possible that fit on extreme (low or high) personal attributes may result in higher outcomes than fit on neutral attributes because extreme scores reflect the strength of one’s needs and values. Schuh et al. (2017) found that ideal value congruence (i.e., beliefs about behaviors and end states that both employees and organizations see as desirable) and counterideal value congruence (beliefs about behaviors and end states that both employees and organizations see as undesirable) were related to employees’ trust in the organization. Furthermore, they found that ideal and counterideal value congruencies were less strongly related to trust when employees attached medium importance to a (counter)ideal value than when they attached high or low importance to a (counter)ideal value. These results suggest that fit on personal attributes of extremely low or high importance have the most impact on outcomes.

However, literatures on personal identity, job choice, and approach avoidance orientations challenge the view that fit on extreme (high and low) personal attributes would result in similar optimal positive outcomes. Literature on personal identity argues that personal identity is formed by values that are at the core of an individual’s self (Hitlin 2003). Individuals protect the integrity of the self by self-affirmation, that is, through reflecting on positive and central aspects of the self (Schmeichel & Vohs 2009). Research demonstrating the positive effects of self-affirmation induced self-affirmation by asking study participants to rank order a list of values and to write about the importance of their top-ranked values. Consequently, participants were actually invited to reflect on values they rated as highest and not on those they rated as lowest or opposed to their values. This may mean that personal identity and self-affirmation tend to concern strong ideal rather than counterideal values.

Research on job choice (De Goede et al. 2013) has shown that job seekers indeed tend to focus on ideals. When searching for a job, individuals may try to assess whether they will fit a future job

and organization based on the information in the vacancy advertisement or on an organization's website. By nature, individuals are motivated to approach the positive and avoid the negative (Elliot 2006). Thus, while reflecting on a possible job, one would expect individuals to consider both the features of the job that they find attractive and want to attain and those that they find aversive and want to avoid. Balancing the fits on attractive and unattractive job attributes would ultimately lead to a decision either to apply for the job or not. However, job seekers do not weigh the job information regarding attractive and unattractive job features equally. Instead, they tend to narrow their focus to information about attributes they wish to attain and to focus to a lesser extent on information about attributes they wish to avoid. This one-sided focus may also apply to individuals' fit assessment once they have arrived on the job. When assessing their fit, they may primarily weigh the presence of attractive attributes rather than the presence of unattractive attributes. Fit on attractive attributes would then lead to higher individual outcomes than fit on unattractive attributes.

A within-person longitudinal study on the reciprocal relationships between fit and work affect supports this idea (Gabriel et al. 2014). In this study, fit perceptions were primarily associated with approach-based positive affect rather than avoidance-based negative affect, and the researchers concluded that "the experience of fitting may be more similar to the experience of striving for a desired (i.e., approach-based) goal than the experience of avoiding an undesired goal" (Gabriel et al. 2014, p. 412).

The approach–avoidance distinction seems highly relevant to the dynamics of fit. Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky 1979) and regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997) may shed further light on how individuals' fit outcomes are affected by their approach and avoidance orientations. Prospect theory concerns people's responses to losses and gains and proposes that individuals experience losses more strongly than gains. Regulatory focus theory concerns people's motivational orientations and argues that individuals may focus primarily on either the presence or absence of positive outcomes or desired end states (promotion focus)—reflecting an approach motivation—or the presence or absence of negative outcomes or undesired end states (prevention focus)—reflecting an avoidance motivation.

Combining prospect theory with regulatory focus theory, Idson and colleagues (2000) distinguish two types of accomplishments: gain and nonloss. Gain refers to the positive outcomes that individuals want to attain, whereas nonloss refers to the negative outcomes that individuals want to avoid. In terms of fit (see **Table 1**), gain concerns the fit that individuals experience when they encounter attributes they prefer in their work, i.e., when there is fit on high personal attributes (e.g., an individual with a high need for structure in a high-structure job). Nonloss concerns the fit that individuals experience when the attributes they dislike are absent at work, i.e., when there is fit on low personal attributes (e.g., an individual with a low need for structure in a low-structure job).

According to Idson et al. (2000), a gain should provide more pleasure than a nonloss because a gain reflects success in attaining a maximum goal, which generates cheerfulness-related emotions.

Table 1 Fit and misfit on high and low personal attributes in terms of loss and gain

Personal attributes	Fit	Misfit
Low	Nonloss	Loss Excess
High	Gain	Nongain Deficiency

Adapted from Idson et al. (2000).

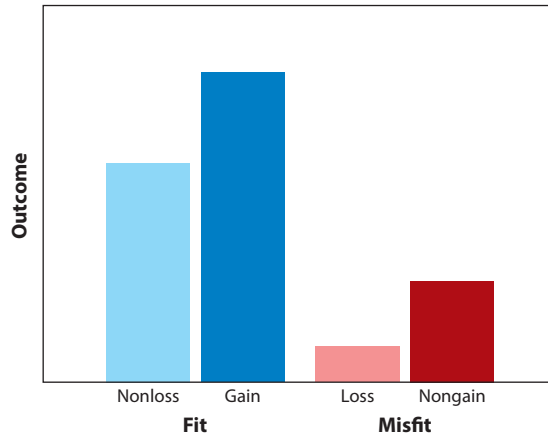


Figure 2

Proposed outcomes of different fits and misfits.

Attaining a highly wished-for goal yields a sense of accomplishment, which in itself contributes to feelings of mastery, competence, and self-worth (Edwards & Rothbard 1999). However, a nonloss reflects realization of a minimal goal, which generates quiescence-related emotions (Idson et al. 2000). In terms of fit, this would mean that fit on high personal attributes is proposed to result in higher job attitudes than fit on low personal attributes, consistent with the results of De Goede et al.'s (2013) study on job choice.

Altogether, fit theory posits positive outcomes of fit irrespective of whether personal attributes are extremely high or extremely low, whereas prospect and regulatory focus theories suggest that fit on high personal attributes (gain) results in more positive outcomes than fit on low personal attributes (nonloss) (see **Figure 2**).

Person–job fit findings. A nonsignificant slope and curve of the fit line in **Figure 1** indicates that outcomes are similar at different levels of personal and corresponding job or organizational attributes, supporting the proposition that outcomes are most optimal when there is fit, regardless of the level of personal attributes. Although several person–job fit studies have shown positive fit outcomes at all levels of personal attributes, many studies found significant slopes of the fit lines, indicating that most optimal outcomes occur when personal and environmental attributes are both high. For example, examining the effects of polychronicity fit, Slocombe & Bluedorn (1999) found that individuals' willingness to exert effort was highest when both the person and the job were high on polychronicity, whereas their intention to stay was most optimal when there was fit (irrespective of an individual's level of polychronicity). In most of the studies that found significant slopes of the fit lines, higher positive outcomes were attained when personal and environmental attributes were both high than when they were both low. Only very few studies (e.g., Edwards 1996, Hecht & Allen 2005) found positive outcomes at both extreme (high and low) levels of personal attributes. Thus, outcomes tend to be high when there is fit, particularly when individuals experience fit on high personal needs. These findings provide partial support for fit theory and prospect and regulatory focus theories. Most likely, the fit level at which outcomes are most optimal will depend on the specific attribute under study.

Person–organization fit findings. In most studies, higher positive outcomes were attained when personal and environmental attributes were both high than when they were both low. A study from

Edwards & Cable (2009), for example, found that individuals rated the trust they placed in their organization and the communication among employees as highest if their strong personal values were met. A smaller number of person–organization fit studies showed positive outcomes at all levels of personal and organizational attributes (e.g., Van Vianen 2000). These findings indicate that the organizational environment should particularly fit individuals' highest-rated values. Furthermore, these findings provide support for prospect and regulatory focus theories, which argue that gain (fit on high personal attributes) results in more positive outcomes than nonloss (fit on low personal attributes).

Together, the person–job and person–organization fit studies show the importance of fit at high levels of personal attributes and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the importance of fit at all levels.

Proposition 3: Deficiency and Excess Are Similarly Harmful

Fit theory proposes that positive and negative discrepancies between personal and environmental attributes impact outcomes equally negatively. A positive discrepancy or deficiency occurs when personal attributes are greater than environmental attributes, whereas a negative discrepancy or excess occurs when personal attributes are less than environmental attributes.

Prospect and regulatory focus theories (Higgins 1997, Kahneman & Tversky 1979) may help to explain how individuals will respond to different types of misfits, i.e., deficiency versus excess. Based on these theories, two types of failure in achieving preferred outcomes can be distinguished (Idson et al. 2000): nongain and loss. Nongain refers to failure to attain positive outcomes, whereas loss refers to failure to avoid negative outcomes. In terms of misfit (see **Table 1**), nongain concerns the misfit individuals experience when the attributes they prefer are absent in the work environment (e.g., an individual with a high need for structure in a low-structure job), i.e., misfit because of deficiency. Loss concerns the misfit individuals experience when they encounter environmental attributes they dislike (e.g., an individual with a low need for structure in a high-structure job), i.e., misfit because of excess.

Idson et al. (2000) hypothesized that a loss would be more harmful than a nongain because loss reflects failure to avoid a minimal outcome, which generates agitation-related emotions, whereas nongain reflects failure to attain a maximal outcome, which generates dejection-related emotions. In terms of fit, this would mean that misfit on low personal attributes (excess) will result in lower outcomes (e.g., job attitudes) than misfit on high personal attributes (see **Figure 2**).

Altogether, fit theory posits negative outcomes of misfit irrespective of whether personal attributes are higher (deficiency) or lower (excess) than environmental attributes, whereas prospect and regulatory focus theories suggest that excess results in lower outcomes than deficiency. According to fit theory, outcomes will be lowest at the two extreme points of the misfit line, thus when misfit is largest, i.e., when the personal attribute is extremely high and the environmental attribute is extremely low or when the personal attribute is extremely low and the environmental attribute is extremely high (**Figure 1, left and right corners**). Furthermore, fit theory proposes a significant curve of the misfit line. This means that (a) a positive outcome increases to the extent that an environmental attribute increases toward a personal attribute, and (b) a positive outcome decreases to the extent that an environmental attribute exceeds a personal attribute. According to prospect and regulatory focus theories, outcomes will be lowest when the personal attribute is extremely low and the environmental attribute is extremely high (extreme excess).

Person–job fit findings. Fit theory is largely supported when outcomes are lowest at extreme levels of misfit, increase with decreasing deficiency of job attributes, and decrease with increasing excess of job attributes (see **Figure 1**). Many of the nonlinear person–job fit–outcome relationships

show these indicators of person–job fit relationships. For example, Jansen & Kristof-Brown (2005) examined how fit between individual and work group hurriedness was related to job satisfaction. They found that job satisfaction was lowest at extreme levels (personal and job attributes are opposite), increased when work group hurriedness increased toward individual hurriedness, and decreased to the extent that work group hurriedness exceeded individual hurriedness.

However, some studies showed that misfit on high personal attributes (deficiency or nongain) was more detrimental than misfit on low personal attributes (excess or loss). For example, leader member exchange was found to be lowest when the leader did not fulfill employees' high work values (Marstand et al. 2017). In addition, several studies showed that positive outcomes continued to increase (after the point of fit) when organizational attributes exceeded individual attributes and eventually leveled off or decreased at extreme excess. Lambert et al. (2012), for example, revealed that leader consideration continued to be positively associated with employee attitudes and organizational citizenship behaviors when this leader behavior exceeded employee needs, but trust in the leader slightly declined at extreme excess. Thus, excess of organizational attributes can lead to better outcomes than fit, except when excess is extreme. All in all, some person–job fit research provides support for the assumption that deficiency and excess are similarly harmful. However, in contrast to the predictions of prospect and regulatory focus theories, research also reveals that deficiency can be worse than excess, particularly at higher levels of misfit, and that excess can be more beneficial than fit.

Person–organization fit findings. Several person–organization fit studies (e.g., Vogel et al. 2016) showed that (a) outcomes were most negative at extreme levels of misfit, (b) positive outcomes increased with decreasing deficiency, and (c) positive outcomes increased with decreasing excess. However, other person–organization fit studies reported that outcomes were most negative at high levels of personal attributes and low levels of organizational attributes, reflecting extreme deficiency or nongain. For example, Finegan (2000) found that affective commitment was lowest for employees who strongly valued development, initiative, creativity and openness but did not experience these values in the organization. Furthermore, excess was less harmful than deficiency except at an extreme level. A few studies showed that excess was beneficial, such as when organizational self-transcendence values surpass employees' self-transcendence values (Schuh et al. 2017). Finally, a few studies (e.g., Cha et al. 2014) found that misfit at extreme levels did not lead to negative outcomes as long as the personal or organizational attribute (e.g., prosocial identity) was high. Cha et al.'s study even showed that person–organization fit can be detrimental: employees showed lowest organizational citizenship behaviors to their colleagues when their low prosocial identity matched with the low prosocial values of the organization.

Altogether, some person–organization fit research confirms that deficiency and excess are similarly harmful, supporting fit theory. However, in contrast to the predictions of prospect and regulatory focus theories, person–organization fit research also indicates that deficiency can be worse than excess, particularly at higher levels of misfit.

Summary of Findings

This review of person–job and person–organization fit studies that used polynomial regression and surface plot analyses reveals other and more complicated relationships than the symmetrical relationships that fit theory proposes. First, although there is evidence for the incremental value of fit (proposition 1), organizational attributes are also independently associated with individual outcomes and to a greater extent than personal attributes. Furthermore, the incremental value of fit seems to depend on the specific content of personal and environmental attributes. Second, optimal

outcomes at all levels of fit (proposition 2) do occur—more often in person–job than in person–organization fit research—but outcomes are optimal particularly when individuals experience fit on high personal attributes. Fit at higher levels of an attribute is generally superior to fit at lower levels. Thus, our findings show support for prospect and regulatory focus theories proposing that gain (i.e., fit on high personal attributes) results in more optimal outcomes than nonloss (i.e., fit on low personal attributes). The findings regarding person–job fit also provide support for fit theory and indicate that the fit level at which optimal outcomes occur depends on the specific content of the fit attribute. The findings regarding person–organization fit show more support for optimal fit outcomes at high rather than at all levels of personal attributes.

Third, deficiency and excess misfit can be equally harmful (proposition 3), but the fit studies included in this review reveal that deficiency tends to be more harmful than excess. Moreover, depending on the fit attribute under study, excess can be as beneficial as fit. These findings partly support fit theory, but do not support prospect and regulatory focus theories proposing that loss (i.e., excess misfit on low personal attributes) results in more harmful outcomes than nongain (i.e., deficiency misfit on high personal attributes).

Note that the fit studies involved in this review are based on self-reports, which seems an appropriate choice when measuring attitudes as the outcome variable (e.g., Goffin & Gellatly 2001). However, my review findings may not generalize to studies that use multiple source measures. Additionally, as I focused on person–job and person–organization fits, the findings may not generalize to other fit domains (e.g., person–supervisor fit).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This review is inspired by the question of how important (mis)fit is for the functioning and well-being of individuals in volatile work environments. I have addressed seminal theories and research showing that humans have a strong tendency to strive for fit with the environment. In reality, however, optimal fit seldom exists, cannot be realized, and may even undermine the human capacity to learn, develop, and adapt, as discrepancies tend to motivate people to move (e.g., Bandura 1991).

The general fit literature has shown that fit, particularly perceived fit, has a greater impact on job attitudes than on job performance when fit concerns one's needs and social environment (organization, team, supervisor). The reverse is true for vocational and demand–abilities fit: These fits are weakly related to job attitudes but moderately related to performance. These findings suggest that individuals have relatively more difficulties with adapting affectively to environments that do not meet their needs and values than to misfits regarding their vocational interests and abilities. Vocational interests are established with broad personality categories that, given the changes in jobs, may apply to a large variety of jobs. For example, the jobs of an information technology specialist and a nurse may both contain social and technical work activities.

Vocational fit theory seems no longer adequate for today's labor market. Moreover, the state of the art of vocational fit research lags behind analytical approaches recently used in other research domains. The vocational field is in great need of new theoretical approaches, new research questions, and new methodologies (see the first research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). Future theory development and research in the vocational domain could focus on the inherent tension between people's wish to fit and their natural capacity to adapt. Individuals may craft their job so as to attain a better fit or may overestimate their abilities (Cable & DeRue 2002). Future vocational fit research could, for instance, study the conditions under which vocational fit would promote or hinder individual performance and career development (see the second research theme/question in the sidebar).

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The following are research themes and questions:

1. Vocational fit theory and research require new approaches to create a better link to current labor market developments and new methodologies.
2. Does fit relate to performance? What are the possible moderators of this relationship?
3. Which personal and environmental attributes are meaningful to unique individuals rather than universally shared?
4. Which personal and environmental attributes are relevant for fit perceptions?
5. Future fit research requires a careful selection of fit attributes and outcomes, and theory to connect both.
6. To what extent and under what conditions do individuals use environmental or personal attributes as a reference to establish their fit?
7. When focusing on organizational values to establish fit effects, researchers could incorporate values that are central to specific firms rather than derived from general frameworks of organizational cultures.
8. When focusing on individual values to establish fit effects, researchers could incorporate values that individuals consider most important to them.
9. Future research could use an intraindividual approach in which individuals report their main interests, needs, and values or those of the environment.
10. How do individuals adapt to environments that do not meet their needs and values and to misfits regarding their vocational interests and abilities?
11. Which environmental and individual factors mitigate experienced misfits?

The following are suggestions for practice:

1. Recruiters could assess the fit between applicants' values and those that are central to their organization.
2. Recruiters could assess the values that applicants consider most important to them and compare these values with those of the organization.
3. Recruiters could assess the fit between applicants' task and role preferences and the (time allocation of) specific activities in the job.
4. Recruiters could assess applicants' fit regarding hurriedness and (leader-initiated) structure in the job.
5. Recruiters could assess whether applicants tend to respond proactively to misfits.
6. Organizations could offer employees freedom to craft their job.
7. Organizations could assess the adaptability of applicants' minds.
8. Organizations could create an organizational culture that promotes incremental views among employees and leaders.

The findings of person–job and person–organization fit studies that used polynomial regression and surface plot analyses showed that fit can add to explaining differences in individual outcomes above and beyond personal and job or organizational factors and is typically preferable to misfit, but the functional forms of fit relationships found by these studies did not always support the basic tenets of fit theory. Altogether, this review points to several voids in fit theory and research that warrant further investigation. Important directions for future research are the formation and content of fit perceptions and adaptation to and buffers of misfits.

Formation and Content of Fit Perceptions

Fit research has treated fit perceptions as an independent variable predicting individual outcomes. However, we lack fundamental knowledge on how fit perceptions are formed and what they

encompass. In 2008, Jeffrey Edwards concluded that fit theories tend to ignore the possibility that some constructs are more relevant to fit judgments than others (Edwards 2008). Almost 10 years later, I arrive at a similar conclusion: More work has to be done on the personal and environmental attributes relevant for fit perceptions (see the third research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). When forming fit perceptions, people may not make the precise comparison between personal and environmental attributes, as described by fit theory. As this review has shown, exact congruence between personal and environmental attributes is not always needed for attaining positive outcomes, and incongruence does not always result in negative outcomes. In addition, not all studies found fit–outcome relationships, which illustrates that researchers were only modestly successful in selecting relevant fit constructs.

Fit perceptions may encompass a large set of possible personal and environmental attributes. Corroborating JD-R theory, some studies involved in this review showed that perceptions of environmental attributes were more likely than fit to be related to outcomes. Apparently, these studies included environmental attributes that all individuals seem to appreciate, irrespective of personal needs and values. Deficiency misfit on these attributes was generally detrimental, whereas excess misfit resulted in even higher outcomes than fit. These effects were found for person–job fit attributes such as support (Irving & Montes 2005), leader consideration (Lambert et al. 2012), relationships at work (Yang et al. 2008a), intrinsic growth needs (Krumm et al. 2013), interesting and challenging work, access to information and training, salary and benefits (Marstand et al. 2017), and security (Edwards & Rothbard 1999), and for person–organization fit attributes such as self-transcendence values (Ertürk 2012, Schuh et al. 2017) and ethical values (Herrbach & Mignonac 2007).

According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 2000), individuals will thrive in organizations that fulfill the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Similarly, individuals feel attached to organizations that adhere to values such as consideration, fairness, and integrity (e.g., Finegan 2000). As most individuals share these fundamental needs and values, they experience fit when the work environment fulfills these needs and values.

Fit theory is built on the notion that people vary in their needs and values and that environments should therefore match these varying attributes. However, fit perceptions likely concern two different types of attributes: attributes that are generally desirable and those that are uniquely desirable by only some individuals. To date, the content dimensions used to test fit theory have been based neither on theoretical notions about significant individual variances in personal attributes nor on knowledge about job resources and organizational values that typically benefit all individuals (e.g., JD-R and self-determination theory). These generally desirable attributes are obviously less relevant to fit research. Instead of treating fit as a general concept that includes diverse content dimensions, fit theory could specify the attributes that are meaningful to unique individuals rather than universally shared (see the fourth research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice).

The findings of this review provide a hint to the types of attributes that seem relevant for measuring fit. Fit–outcome relationships were found for person–job fit attributes such as task and role preferences and perceptions (Edwards 1996, Takase et al. 2006) and time allocation to work activities (Dahm et al. 2015). Thus, although person–vocation fit does not greatly affect job attitudes, fit with concrete work roles and activities does. Therefore, in practice, recruiters could assess the fit between applicants’ task and role preferences and the (time allocation of) specific activities in the job (see the first suggestion for practice in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). Furthermore, person–job fit appears relevant for attributes such as hurriedness, extrinsic work needs, career advancement, and leader initiating structure. Misfits on these attributes are detrimental for job attitudes and well-being because they can thwart other

basic needs, such as competence and security needs. Therefore, recruiters could assess applicants' fit regarding hurriedness and (leader-initiated) structure in the job (see the second suggestion for practice in the sidebar).

The findings of person–organization fit studies in this review are ambiguous with regard to the relevance of specific value attributes. The two studies (Ertürk 2012, Schuh et al. 2017) that incorporated values derived from Schwartz's (1992) model on basic human values revealed inconsistent results, which is probably due to the different outcomes that were examined in these studies. Thus, fit effects depend not only on the content of the fit attribute but also on the type of outcome. Other fit studies did not use theoretical models of individual values but instead focused on organizational values. Some of these studies were based on the competing values model of organizational cultures (e.g., Cameron & Quinn 1999), while other studies selected organizational values that were central to specific firms (De Haas & Van Eerde 2015, Ife 2014, Spanjol et al. 2015). Only these latter studies found significant fit–outcome relationships. Finally, despite differences in fit attributes and outcomes, the majority of person–organization fit studies showed that fit on high personal values resulted in highest individual outcomes, whereas fit on low personal values were often as detrimental as misfits.

Altogether, these person–organization fit results suggest three implications for future research and practice. First, future research and organizational practice will require a careful selection of fit attributes and outcomes, and theory to connect both (see the fifth research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). Moreover, as we know little about the formation of fit perceptions, more research could examine fit perceptions (instead of job attitudes) as the focal outcome. It would be interesting to investigate the process underlying people's fit perceptions, including the question of whether individuals use environmental or personal attributes as a reference to establish their fit (see the sixth research theme/question in the sidebar). This reference may, in turn, depend on the goal of fit assessment. For example, individuals may focus on their own values as the main source for fit assessment when searching for a job, whereas they may mainly use the organization's (dominant) values as a reference once they are employed (Van Vianen et al. 2013). Second, if researchers and practitioners focus on organizational values to measure fit, they could incorporate values that are central to specific firms rather than derived from general frameworks of organizational cultures (see research theme/question 7 and suggestion for practice 3). Third, fit researchers and practitioners focusing on individual values could pay specific attention to the values that individuals consider most important to them (see research theme/question 8 and suggestion for practice 4).

One study included in this review measured individuals' most important values to establish fit (Vogel et al. 2016). The researchers first asked participants to rate a set of eight personal and organizational values (on a Likert scale) and then to rank order the values on importance (from 1 to 8). The values that received the highest ratings in the first step were not always the ones ranked as highest in the second step. This could be because individuals may rate multiple values similarly high. Therefore, the forced rank ordering was necessary to determine the individual's most important values. Apparently, value importance is not necessarily captured by a high rating of personal values. Person–organization fit studies have operationalized personal values in terms of preferences (e.g., De Haas & Van Eerde 2015) or importance (e.g., Edwards & Cable 2009). For theoretical and practical reasons, I recommend researchers and practitioners to operationalize personal values as value importance and to use different methods to assess value importance.

In addition, fit researchers mostly employ an interindividual approach, assessing individuals on a similar set of fit attributes. However, the set of attributes may not incorporate the needs and values that matter. Future research could use an intraindividual approach in which individuals report their main interests, needs, and values or those of the environment (see the ninth research

theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). The content of the fit measure will then vary among study participants, which will enhance the ecological validity of fit research.

Adaptation to and Buffers of Misfits

When experiencing misfit, individuals will try to adapt to it. Future research could examine how individuals adapt to different types of misfits (see the tenth research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). Adaptation may include the typical regulatory strategies uncovered by research on self-regulation and coping, such as thoughts or actions to change the self or the situation (e.g., Larsen & Prizmic 2004). An individual's adaptation strategy will depend on the specific content of the misfit perception, the opportunities to repair the misfit, and environmental and individual factors that mitigate the experienced misfit. Regarding the content of misfits, this review has shown that some misfits are more detrimental for a person's well-being or functioning than others. Demands–abilities and vocational misfits seem relatively easier to cope with than needs–supplies misfits. Additionally, misfit—particularly deficiency misfit—on strong personal values has a greater impact on one's well-being than misfit on values that are relatively less strongly held. Apparently, misfits with regard to one's most fundamental needs and values are difficult to deal with. These misfits may motivate individuals to leave the job rather than trying to cognitively or actually change the self or the environment. This may occur particularly when there are no opportunities to change the environment by, for example, crafting the content of one's job.

Future research could explore which environmental and individual factors may mitigate experienced misfits (see the eleventh research theme/question in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice). Some environments are more restrictive than others with regard to employees' options for crafting the job. For example, employees have less room for job crafting in organizations where jobs are more formalized (i.e., where rules and procedures prescribe behaviors). Notably, the relationship between person–job fit and job attitudes was found to be weaker in cultures high on power distance because individuals in these cultures tend to value conformity more than individual autonomy (Lee & Antonakis 2012, Oh et al. 2014). However, even within individualistic cultural contexts such as Western societies, organizations differ in formalization and hierarchy. Employees who—against their will—experience job formalization and hierarchy will pursue leaving the job when any effort at job crafting is undermined. In less formalized contexts, misfit tends to induce proactive behaviors to create better-fitting work experiences (Yu & Davis 2016). Thus, to enhance employees' fit while also retaining sufficient diversity in the workforce, organizations could offer employees a certain freedom to craft their jobs (see the fifth suggestion for practice in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice) and select applicants who are capable of proactively coping with misfits (Vogel et al. 2016).

Indeed, also individual factors may alleviate experienced misfits. Although some individuals may require a high level of fit to feel well, others can endure lower levels of fit. Individual characteristics that mitigate misfits are, for example, core self-evaluations and self-theory (incremental or entity). Employees with higher core self-evaluations (a combination of high self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control and low neuroticism) react more strongly to fits and misfits than employees with low core self-evaluations (De Haas & Van Eerde 2015). That is, employees who have a positive self-image report more positive job attitudes when experiencing fit but also stronger negative job attitudes when experiencing misfit than employees who have a less positive self-image. Employees with high core self-evaluations may perceive misfit as a threat to their self-image, which may trigger adaptation responses such as efforts to change the work environment or to find another

job. Employees with low core self-evaluations, on the other hand, may blame themselves for the misfit and thus may try to cognitively diminish its existence.

In addition, individuals holding an incremental person theory (who believe that personal characteristics and abilities are malleable) seek feedback to a greater extent when experiencing demands–abilities misfit than individuals holding an entity person theory (who believe that personal characteristics and abilities are fixed) (Devloo et al. 2011). Seeking feedback may help individuals to better cope with misfit by putting effort into learning or adjusting to the job demands. In practice, organizations could assess whether applicants tend to respond proactively to misfits (see the sixth suggestion for practice in the sidebar titled Suggestions for Research and Practice), select applicants with adaptable minds (see the seventh suggestion for practice in the sidebar), and create an organizational culture that promotes incremental views among employees and leaders (see the eighth suggestion for practice in the sidebar).

CONCLUSION

Fit research has provided mixed support for the basic tenets of fit theory. Although individuals appreciate experiencing fit and are hardwired to seek it, optimal fit is not always possible or needed. Individuals flourish particularly when experiencing fit on attributes they find important and suffer most when these attributes are not afforded in the work environment. There is a clear need to reconsider fit theory by investigating relevant fit constructs, the formation of fit perceptions, and the boundary conditions of fit and misfit effects.

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