Person–Environment Fit: Theoretical Perspectives, Conceptualizations, and Outcomes FREE

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.377
Published online: 20 June 2022

Summary

The idea of person–environment (PE) fit builds upon interactional psychology, which suggests that the interplay between personal and environmental attributes is the primary driver of human behavior. The "environment" in PE fit research can take many different forms, with organizational environments being one of the most important settings with which people may fit or misfit. Henceforth, PE fit is defined as the compatibility that occurs when individuals match the characteristics of the work environment they inhabit. The notion that individuals with personal needs, values, goals, abilities, and personalities and organizational environments with distinctive demands, supplies, values, and cultures are differentially compatible and that "fitting in" is an evolving process that triggers behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses has been well accepted since PE fit was introduced as an independent theory in the mid-1970s. Presently, the PE fit idea has established itself as a firm research framework and has surfaced in many different literatures, ranging from applied and vocational psychology to human resource management, resulting in a plethora of theories that cover many different views on, and various conceptualizations of, PE fit. From an individual (i.e., employee) perspective, fit theories suggest that fit is a sought-after and rewarding experience in and of itself, especially when multiple types of fit (e.g., fit with the job and with the organization) co-occur. However, from a team, organizational, and societal perspective, the advantages of high levels of fit must be weighed against its potential costs, including favoritism, conformity, and homogeneity, which may eventually result in organizational inertia and the reproduction of inequality.

Keywords: person–organization fit, person–group fit, person–job fit, misfit, selection, socialization, work adjustment

Subjects: Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior

The Person–Environment (PE) Fit Idea

The PE fit idea essentially combines and extends two different lines of scholarship that have largely developed independently of one another—i.e., an environmental perspective that emphasizes the unique role social and work environments (e.g., ingroup status, organizational culture, job design) play in shaping individual behavior and a differential, person-centered perspective that proclaims that differences in areas like personality, intelligence, work motivation, or emotions explain differences in individual behavior. Building on situationist and contingency theories, contemporary models of PE fit integrate these two different research traditions into an interactional perspective (Ekehammar, 1974; Endler & Magnussen, 1976; Sells, 1963) in which the importance of a supplementary (i.e., similarity) or complementary (i.e., fulfillment) match between environmental and personal characteristics is emphasized.

The fundamental idea behind fit is that, by nature of their attributes, some individuals are better suited for certain environments than for others. The adequacy of fit between a person and an environment can affect the person's motivation, behavior, and overall mental and physical health; that is, if the match between person and environment is suitable, the individual's functioning within the organization is facilitated, but if the match is unsuitable, the individual may suffer from maladjustment, which typically creates tension on both the P side (manifesting as job stress, dissatisfaction) and tension on the E side (manifesting as absenteeism, reduced performance) of the PE fit equation. From a fit perspective, the interplay between individuals and environments unfolds according to the principles of reciprocal determinism, implying that "people are both producers and products of social systems" (Bandura, 1997, p. 6; Frese et al., 2007). That is, people are considered to operate as interactive agents within their environment, often co-creating the environment through interpersonal relationships with others (see Schneider, 1987), while at the same time their personal attributes are also molded by the (social) environment in which they are embedded (see Denissen et al., 2014).

The term *person–environment fit* was first coined by French and colleagues in 1974 (French et al., 1974) and rests on Kurt Lewin's (Lewin, 1951) saying that behavior is a function of a person and the environment, with both entities bringing relevant attributes into the mix. Lewin summarized his view in a heuristic formula, $B = f(P, E)$, in which he postulated that the person (P) and environment (E) variables involved in the equation represent specific, unique personal (e.g., work values, abilities) and environmental (e.g., culture, work demands) characteristics. Lewin's idea that the person and the environment combine to form an interactive system speaks directly to the main idea in Gestalt psychology that "the whole is other than the sum of its parts" (Koffka, 1935). Fit theory then further expanded on this general idea by specifying the form of the interaction (or sum of parts) and outcomes thereof.

The "environment" in PE fit research can take many different forms (see Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Vogel & Feldman, 2009), with organizational environments being one of the many settings with which people may fit or misfit. The term *PE fit* refers to one's fit with the various dimensions (e.g., job, work group, organizational culture) of the organizational environment, which have important, independent effects on work outcomes (see Kristof-Brown et al., 2002). The need to achieve a good PE fit is underscored by the fact that the organizational environment can be central to one's identity, with individuals' being increasingly defined by the nature of the work they do and the industry settings they (seek to) join (Ikiugu, 2005). Indeed, research indicates that finding an environment with job and organizational conditions that match individual abilities, values, and interests is a sought-after (Yu, 2014) and rewarding (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009) experience. By contrast, not fitting in has been shown to result in dissatisfaction (Wheeler et al., 2007), job stress (Pithers & Soden, 1999), and poor health outcomes (Ng & Allen, 2018; Williamson & Perumal, 2021). Qualitative research by Follmer and colleagues (2018) showed that reactions to experiences of misfit are multifaceted and involve a mixture of resolution, relief-seeking, and resignation strategies, implying that organizational exit is not individuals' only, or even primary, response to misfit. They go on to propose that "fit is not merely a matter of finding where one belongs during the organizational entry process but rather a complex sequence of adjusting cognitions and behaviors to maintain person–environment compatibility" (Follmer et al., 2018, p. 44). As a result, the responsibility for

developing and maintaining fit, in addition to addressing misfit, falls upon the individual and the organizational environment and requires the alignment of various human resource management functions (e.g., recruitment and selection, onboarding, training and development, strategic planning of human resources) across the various stages of the staffing and employment process (see Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006).

Theoretical Perspectives on the Development of PE Fit

How does PE fit emerge? Theories of fit (Chatman, 1989; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997; Schneider, 1987; Wanous, 1980) underscore that PE fit is established mainly through a combination of selection, socialization, and adjustment efforts, which should be seen as complementary processes (Arieli et al., 2016; Chatman, 1991; De Cooman et al., 2009). During the early phases of the employment process, fit prematurely develops through a fit-based attraction and selection process, with organizations deliberately favoring particular "types" of individuals over others, and vice versa. Next, and following the recruitment and selection process, socialization efforts further help to improve and cement preestablished fit. Finally, work adjustment and self-regulation processes help individuals to cope with temporal fluctuations in post-entry fit (for an overview, see Vleugels et al., 2022).

Selection Processes

Various foundational models of PE fit (e.g., Chatman, 1989; Holland, 1997; Schneider, 1987) have underscored that selection processes are among the most dominant forces in shaping fit. The key feature that these theories have in common is the assumption that employees do not end up randomly in organizational settings or specific jobs. Instead, it is proposed that individuals naturally gravitate to organizational environments that match their abilities, needs, personalities and values (see Cable & Judge, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Wilk et al., 1995). For example, Holland's (1985, 1997) vocational theory emphasizes the match between peoples' interests and those of others in a vocation and suggests that people select themselves into an occupational environment that is compatible with their own abilities and personality. Likewise, Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework calls upon the notion of fit to explain why people are attracted to, selected by, and either leave or remain in organizations. Other theories, like Chatman's (1989) model of person–organization fit, position organizational selection as a process that works on individual and organizational values and suggest that organizations will deliberately recruit and hire people whose values match those of the organization. Interestingly, these theories also assume that the dominant features of the environment are dependent on the typical characteristics of its members. Holland (1997), for instance, operationalized occupational environments as the distribution of personality types in the occupation and suggested that both people and occupations have "personalities," which he characterized with the RIASEC typology (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional personality types; see Holland, 1985). Fit, then, is determined by measures assessing the similarity between an individual's personality and the personality of a given vocational environment. Like Holland's (1997) RIASEC typology, Schneider's (1987) ASA framework builds on the proposition that environments are functions of the people in them and proposes that similar people tend to gather

together in the same work environment. Finally, Chatman's (1989) model of person–organization fit conceptualizes organization values in terms of crystallization, or the degree to which values are shared by organizational members. Thus, and with the features of "the environment" supposedly reflecting the people in them, fit-based selection is often about interpersonal similarity rather than a more objective person–environment match. The underlying idea here is that individuals, regardless of being on the applicant or recruiter side, naturally feel more attracted to, and tend to identify with, similar others (Byrne, 1971) because a greater degree of similarity in sociodemographic background, attitudes, and other fundamental attributes (e.g., skills, competencies, values, opinions, or goals) nurtures a feeling of common identity and enhances people's self-identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). This process has been found to bias decision-making regarding recruitment and personnel selection toward recruiting and selecting "similar" individuals (see Herriot, 2002; Petersen & Dietz, 2005).

Socialization Processes

Selection models of PE fit are imperfect in that they are unable to explain the occurrence of misfit during later stages of the employment cycle. Indeed, if selection processes were to work flawlessly and organizational environments were indeed identical to the people within them, then PE fit could be expected to be high and stable for each organizational member from the moment they join the organization. However, research (e.g., Vleugels et al., 2019) has indicated that stability in fit is the exception rather than the norm. Consequently, socialization, work adjustment, and ongoing self-regulation are needed to further develop, maintain, and/or re-establish fit when changes in fit occur (Vleugels et al., 2022).

Because selection is unlikely to ensure a perfect fit between newcomers and all aspects of their work environment, Chatman (1989) proposed that socialization, by increasing newcomers' knowledge of the organization's work processes and its values and goals, works in concert with initial selection to improve organizational fit during the early phases of the employment cycle. Socialization research indicates that the first 90 days after organizational entry are, generally speaking, most turbulent for newcomers (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013), and those who experience the most vigorous socialization during this time typically fit their organizational environment better than those who do not (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Chatman, 1991). Socialization is the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and job-related skills and knowledge needed to perform a job and to participate as an organizational member (Cable & Parsons, 2001). The goal of socialization efforts is to stimulate learning and knowledge acquisition about various aspects of the work environment, including performance standards, the prevailing social climate, and the organization's culture (Chao et al., 1994). One of the key features of socialization is that it reduces the initial discrepancy between perceptions of fit and actual fit, which implies that through socialization, employees develop a more realistic understanding of their fit with the organizational environment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004). Furthermore, socialization has been shown to influence job and organizational fit in beneficial ways by affecting outcomes at both the job level (e.g., task mastery, role clarity, and role orientation; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks et al., 2007) and the organization level (e.g., a better understanding of organizational values; Cooper-Thomas et

al., 2004; De Cooman et al., 2009). Successful socialization not only extends the outcomes of, but also hinges on, effective selection processes. For example, research indicates that recruits whose values, when they enter, match those of the firm more closely—implying better selection—also adjust to it more quickly in response to socialization (Chatman, 1991).

Work Adjustment and Self-Regulation Processes

Quantitative studies (e.g., Follmer et al., 2018; Jansen & Shipp, 2019) have indicated that individuals need to put in conscious effort to maintain their fit at acceptable levels over time. Consequently, the need to adjust fit does not end after the initial socialization phase (see Ashforth et al., 2017). Instead, "fitting in" is an ongoing, dynamic adjustment process by which individuals and organizations achieve and maintain better correspondence with one another over time (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; French et al., 1974; Harrison, 1978). According to the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), the term *correspondence* denotes "a harmonious relationship between individual and environment, suitability of the individual to the environment and of the environment to the individual, consonance or agreement between individual and environment, and a reciprocal and complementary relationship between the individual and environment" (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, p. 54). Clearly, the correspondence between person and environment often involves a fragile and temporary balance—a balance that is threatened as soon as either the person or the environment changes over time (see Jansen & Shipp, 2019). When the balance changes, incongruity can develop and may be accompanied by feelings of incompatibility and dissatisfaction. To restore balance, employees and organizations will engage in adaptive behaviors, called "work adjustment," and these behaviors are aimed at maintaining, re-establishing, or improving fit over time (for an overview, see Vleugels et al., 2022). French et al. (1974) and Harrison (1978) described change strategies that resolve objective discrepancies between P and E as "coping" behaviors. In the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), a further distinction is made between proactive adjustment behaviors (originally termed "activeness") when correspondence is improved by acting to change the environment (e.g., job change negotiation; Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018) and more reactive adjustment behaviors (called "reactiveness") when employees adjust by changing aspects of themselves in an attempt to increase levels of fit (e.g., skill development; Lee, 2015). From the perspective of the theory of work adjustment, both (pro)active and reactive adjustment behaviors can be successful strategies for increasing person–environment correspondence. Interestingly, research suggests that personal (i.e., reactive) and environmental (i.e., proactive) change initiatives tend to be only weakly correlated (Ashforth & Saks, 1995), which indicates that both strategies operate relatively independently of one another and can be adopted simultaneously in order to achieve better fit (Ostroff, 2012). Furthermore, and objective changes to person or environment aside, lack of correspondence can also prompt behavior directed at changing perceptions of P and E, especially when discorrespondence in this regard elicits strong affective responses in the individual (Yu, 2009)—labeled "defense behaviors" (French et al., 1974; Harrison, 1978). Such defense behaviors may also take the form of relief-seeking strategies, such as putting up a facade of conformity (Doblhofer et al., 2019) or surface-level behavioral changes (see Follmer et al., 2018), which are meant to generate a more favorable fit experience overall (Vleugels et al., 2022). However, because fit experiences seem to be colored by one's momentary work experiences and therefore

tend to fluctuate over time (Vleugels et al., 2018), unlike coping behaviors, defense behaviors may only bring temporary relief from misfit and arguably do not provide a long-term solution to a lack of work adjustment. Finally, fit experiences can also be managed short-term through self-regulatory processes and behaviors (Vleugels et al., 2022). For instance, Yu (2009, 2013) proposed that affective self-regulation is one of the driving forces behind short-term changes in fit, either because people seek to maintain consistency between experienced affect and fit (affective-consistency perspective), or because they see fit as a tool to be managed in search of well-being (hedonistic perspective). While the research on self-regulation and fit is still in its infancy, the available evidence tentatively suggests that individuals are indeed apt to satisfy hedonistic and well-being needs by situationally manipulating their fit experiences over time.

Diversity in Conceptualizations of PE Fit

Although PE fit, in general terms, refers to the compatibility between a person and a work environment (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), there are many different perspectives on, and definitions of, what it means to be "compatible" with the organizational environment. In this regard, it is relevant to differentiate between several types of fit (and measurement thereof), the attributes whereupon the fit is being considered, and the level of the environment with which one can fit (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Ostroff, 2012).

Type and Measurement of PE Fit

What PE fit means and how it affects outcomes mainly depend on the particular type of fit that is considered. Here, the differentiation between supplementary and complementary forms of fit, originally proposed by Muchinsky and Monahan (1987), has grown to become the dominant typology of fit in the literature (see also Cable & Edwards, 2004). Supplementary fit occurs when a person and a work setting possess similar characteristics, which is the case when an employer hires people with characteristics (e.g., personalities, skills, expertise) that replicate those already widely present in the organization. The notion of supplementary fit, often conceptualized as value or goal congruence between employees and organizations (see Chatman, 1991), is based on the idea that people have an innate human tendency to seek similarity (Byrne, 1971). By contrast, complementary fit occurs when one entity (either the person or the work setting) provides something that the other wants or needs. Complementary fit thus builds on the idea of need fulfillment (Ostroff, 2012), which for instance occurs when an employee has domain-specific skills, knowledge, or expertise that a work group or an organization seeks or, conversely, when an organization offers the type of resources (e.g., job autonomy or sufficient work challenge) or rewards (e.g., pay or career support) that a person requires or desires. In PE fit research, complementary fit is typically conceptualized in terms of demands–abilities fit and needs–supplies fit (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof, 1996; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987).

Lewin originally believed that only what is contained within the psychological reality (i.e., everything that an individual perceives and believes to be true), can affect behavior (Lewin, 1936). This interpretivist view of PE fit as a perceptual, gestalt construct conflicts with more (post)positivist views of PE fit, where fit represents the interaction between personal and environmental attributes (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). Proponents of the positivist tradition depart from a theoretical deconstruction of the concept of PE fit and look at the exact combination of, and interaction between, separately measured personal and environmental features. Here, fit is determined in an indirect (also referred to as atomistic) way by calculating the exact level of correspondence between commensurate measures of the person and the environment (Edwards et al., 2006), for instance through the use of polynomial regression and response surface analysis (see Edwards & Van Harrison, 1993; Kim et al., 2017), with lower discrepancies between P and E attributes denoting a better fit between person and environment. From a measurement perspective, one can also speak of "calculated fit," because the level of fit is mathematically established, yet the obtained fit score may or may not align with individuals' internal feeling of fit (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). Conversely, perceived fit is based on an interpretivist view and incorporates a holistic, self-perceived interpretation of the level of congruence between a person and a work environment (Kristof, 1996). Thus, perceived fit reflects a psychological approach to fit and focuses on whether fit exists in an individual's own mind. As such, perceived fit directly captures the extent to which someone perceives fit with a specific organization or job at a particular moment in time. Empirical evidence points toward a modest relationship between perceived and calculated fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011), yet consensus exists that both types of fit tap into different psychological processes and represent a different approach to PE fit (Edwards et al., 2006; Ostroff, 2012). Although calculated fit is, at least in theory, a more unadulterated measure of fit, perceived fit tends to be more strongly related to individual outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Nevertheless, both measures are considered to have merit (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). Because of its atomistic nature, calculated fit provides a fairly objective and exact comparison of P and E attributes, which may be particularly relevant in a recruitment and selection context or for training and development purposes. By contrast, perceived fit, being more proximally related to employees' cognitions, emotions, and affect (Edwards et al., 2006; Ostroff, 2012), may be especially relevant post-hire as a predictor of relevant work attitudes (e.g., commitment) and behaviors (e.g., turnover).

Intuitively, the meaning, importance, and relevance of fit can perhaps best be understood in its absence—when people are forced to confront low fit, misalignment, or, even worse, misfit (see Harrison, 1978). Most authors argue that misfit exists in the absence of perceived fit or whenever commensurate personal and environmental attributes are misaligned (see Chi et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Vogel et al., 2020), suggesting that fit and misfit exist on a continuum. However, other authors (e.g., Talbot & Billsberry, 2010; Vleugels et al., 2019) postulated that misfit must be seen as an independent construct that is qualitatively different from, and more harmful than, a lack of fit. For example, Vleugels et al. (2019, p. 620) described misfits as people who "actively value different things from the organization, and these two sets of values are antagonistic in ways that matter to the people who feel like a misfit." While empirical research has yet to validate whether lack of fit and misfit indeed represent two distinct constructs, past studies (Deng et al., 2016;

Follmer et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2016; Williamson & Perumal, 2021) have firmly established that misfit is a condition of impairment that gives way to various detrimental outcomes, including withdrawal behaviors, physical illness, and severe psychological stress.

Attributes of PE Fit

There are various personal and environmental attributes upon which fit can be established. From an employee perspective, and depending on the type of fit, personal attributes may refer to abilities, goals, needs, personality, skills, and/or values (see Chuang et al., 2016). Similarly, from an organizational perspective, environmental attributes may refer to culture, demands, goals, supplies, or values (see Beasley et al., 2012). Various types of fit can thus be placed on a continuum depending on the attributes they take into account ranging from a global level (without reference to any specific attribute of comparison, such as job), a domain level (referring to broad attributes, such as personality), to a facet level (referring to specific attributes within broader areas, such as extraversion or openness to experience; Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Due to their broad, holistic nature, fit on dimensions at a global level may be more relevant whenever individuals need to make general assessments of fit that tap into a wide array of dimensions that are perceived as personally meaningful to the individual—for instance, in a job or career choice context. By contrast, fit on dimensions at a domain and facet level are more relevant in a calculated fit context whenever precise predictions based on more narrowly defined P and E attributes are apposite—for instance in a recruitment and selection context.

Another potential distinction to be made here is whether fit is measured based on human or nonhuman attributes. Human attributes may refer to, for example, enacted personal work values, affective states and emotions, or interpersonal communication styles, while the nonhuman category could refer to espoused company values (i.e., the values that appear in an organization's value statement), organizational processes and procedures, or pay structures. While human attributes are most relevant to interpersonal forms of fit (e.g., person–supervisor fit, person–group fit), nonhuman attributes can hold particular relevance in a job or organizational fit context (see Huang et al., 2005; Puccio et al., 2000).

Levels of PE Fit

Scholars agree that both supplementary and complementary forms of fit become apparent and can develop at different hierarchical levels of the environment (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Vogel & Feldman, 2009), such as the vocation (i.e., person–vocation fit), organization (i.e., person–organization fit), work unit (i.e., person–group fit), job (i.e., person–job fit), or individual (i.e., person–supervisor or person–person fit) level. Research also suggests that people can combine the different forms of fit in an overarching, multidimensional sense of fit, implying that, methodologically, PE fit can be approached as a formative construct—i.e., a weighted sum of different types of fit at various hierarchical levels (Darrow & Behrend, 2017; Follmer et al., 2018; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002). At the same time, however, research also indicates that individuals can differentiate between the various forms of fit and can isolate fit at different levels of the environment (see Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable &

Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Billsberry, 2010). Edwards and Billsberry (2010), for instance, showed that individuals are more likely to think about fit in a unidimensional as opposed to a multidimensional way, meaning that employees (even after having completed an initial socialization phase with the organization) develop fit assessments at various levels of the work environment, each of which separately influences individuals' attitudes and behaviors. The broad implication of these studies is that people seem to be capable of thinking about fit in both a decompartmentalized and a multidimensional way; put differently, it is possible that employees experience fit on one particular level (e.g., job) of the environment while fitting poorly on other levels (e.g., work group, organization). At the same time, people possess the ability to think about fit in compensatory (i.e., interactive) ways, such that areas of fit can compensate for areas of misfit, and vice versa (Follmer et al., 2018; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Resick et al., 2007; Sekiguchi & Huber, 2011). The salience of each of these different levels of fit depends on a multitude of factors, such as individual personality (Resick et al., 2007), the particular phase of the employment relationship (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006), and/or prior work experience (Backhaus, 2003; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Yu, 2009). In addition, higher hierarchical levels of fit (e.g., vocational fit) have been found to influence lower hierarchical levels of fit (e.g., organizational fit and job fit), suggesting that the quality of fit at higher hierarchical levels sets boundaries to the degree of fit that can be achieved at lower levels (Vogel & Feldman, 2009).

Outcomes of PE Fit

One of the basic tenets of PE fit theory is that PE fit will result in positive outcomes. Although meta-analytical work (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer et al., 2003) reveals large differences in effect sizes among fit studies, empirical findings to date support this argument. Fit has many beneficial consequences, especially for individuals' attitudes, cognitions, and well-being, including lower intention to leave the organization and higher job satisfaction, commitment, and trust (Arthur et al., 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). In addition, fit has strong links with behaviors, including more decisive and faster job choice, higher performance, and lower turnover. However, regarding work performance, fit is a slightly stronger predictor of contextual performance (i.e., activities that contribute to an organization's social and psychological core, such as helping coworkers) compared to task performance (i.e., activities that contribute to an organization's technical core; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). On the whole, fit research shows that the relationship between PE fit and behavioral outcomes is mediated by the much stronger relationship between fit and work attitudes (see Arthur et al., 2006), implying that work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment) are the most proximal outcomes of fit, while behavioral effects (e.g., performance, turnover) are more distal.

Besides its attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, which are equally relevant from an individual and organizational point of view, fit also has an impact on short-term (e.g., stress) and long-term (e.g., subjective career success) well-being. In addition to the confirmed relationship between fit and well-being from the hedonistic perspective (i.e., pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, such as via belongingness and need fulfillment), fit is also related to well-being from an eudamonic perspective (i.e., meaning, competence, and self-realization, see Baumeister et al.,

2013) because it enriches people's lives through self-actualization, personal growth, and development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fredrickson, 2001; Gregory et al., 2010; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Kahn, 1992). Career researchers discovered that PE fit has important implications for individuals' subjective and objective career success, such as their salary level, experienced job content plateau, and career progression (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Jiang, 2016; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Conversely, the absence of PE fit has been found to elicit stress and discomfort (Caplan, 1983). Although Follmer et al. (2018) proposed that misfit may be associated with eustress (i.e., the positive role of stress linked to challenge and motivation, which may be beneficial in the short term but detrimental if chronic), most theoretical and empirical evidence proposes that "not fitting in" is a psychologically demanding and destructive condition that leads individuals to mentally disconnect, lose self-confidence, and withdraw from their working environments (Schneider, 1987; Vogel et al., 2016; Wheeler et al., 2007, Williamson & Perumal, 2021). When individuals become deprived of fit, they report all sorts of severe psychological reactions, including alienation, depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and anxiety (Cooper-Thomas & Wright, 2013; Deng et al., 2016; Kilroy et al., 2017), which may even result in hospitalization (Williamson & Perumal, 2021). Moreover, research indicates that perceived fit, which is prone to influence by emotion and affect, generally has a stronger relationship with work outcomes than calculated fit has (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), meaning that the strength of the relationship between fit and outcomes partly depends on how fit is measured. Likewise, stronger relationships between fit and outcomes are found when both reside at the same level of the environment (e.g., person–job fit and job satisfaction or person–organization fit and organizational commitment), compared to when fit and outcomes reside at different levels of the environment (e.g., person–job fit and organizational commitment; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Rather than being seen as an antecedent of something else, fit can also be considered a valuable outcome in its own right. Indeed, employees have been found to care greatly about their fit. For example, Yu (2013) suggested that people selectively look for environments in which they expect to find fit and see fit as a tool to be managed in the pursuit of satisfying other needs (Judge & Cable, 1997; Schneider, 1987; Yu, 2014). Post-hire, and as an organizational member, employees indeed actively try to develop, maintain, and re-establish an adequate level of fit—for example, by engaging in job-crafting behaviors (see Kooij et al., 2017; Tims et al., 2016). Setting these behaviors means that someone proactively alters tasks, relationships, and perceptions of their job in order to craft a job that better fits their personal needs and abilities and therefore satisfies them, engages them, and makes them excel (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Last, and although the majority of evidence confirms that both people and organizations are highly concerned with attaining and preserving optimal levels of fit, anecdotal evidence also suggests that more fit is not always better, nor is it always desirable. Indeed, a review on calculated forms of fit by van Vianen (2018) revealed that deficiency misfit (e.g., receiving less support or salary than preferred or needed) tends to be more detrimental compared to excess misfit (e.g., receiving more support or salary than preferred or needed), particularly at higher levels of misfit. Moreover, excess misfit may occasionally be even more beneficial than fit. Corroborating the job demands resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), van Vianen (2018) found that attributes that are strongly linked to

either eudaemonic or hedonistic well-being (e.g., support, interesting and challenging work, salary and benefits, security and ethical values) seem to be generically appreciated, irrespective of (an exact match with) idiosyncratic needs and values.

Exploring the Relationship Between PE Fit and Outcomes

Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms

In line with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes like job satisfaction and organizational commitment and cognitions like trust and leader–member exchange have repeatedly been found to mediate behavioral manifestations of fit like turnover and performance (see Arthur et al., 2006; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). Other mediating mechanisms between fit and behavior (mainly performance) operate through communication about, and understanding of, organizational goals (Edwards & Shipp, 2007), fulfillment of needs (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009), and narrowing skill gaps (Lee, 2015). In their qualitative study, Williamson and Perumal (2021) took a broad approach on outcomes and explained that employees' level of client service, which is a positive indicator of performance, and deviant behavior, which is a negative indicator of performance, are affected by (mis)fit. They explained these links through the theory of ego depletion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) and the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), because they confirmed mediations through loss/gain of morale, self-confidence, and energy. However, while people generally benefit from PE fit, both individual differences and situational factors (above and beyond the way in which fit is measured; see the discussion on measurement of fit in, for example, Hoffman & Woehr, 2006) can bolster or mitigate the effect of fit on work outcomes (De Cooman et al., 2019).

An illustrative example of how individual differences moderate fit–outcomes relationships can be found in van Vianen (2018), who showed that the importance of fit is likely to be amplified when the fit concerns an attribute linked to a personal goal that is meaningful to an individual. Moreover, Backhaus (2003) showed that a prior experience of poor fit with an organization boosts the importance placed on fit in future job searches. The latter finding supports the idea that fit narratives, which also include recollections of past fit and anticipations of future fit, play an important role in explaining how fit influences attitudes and behaviors (Caplan, 1983; Shipp & Jansen, 2011). Regarding general traits and demographics, variables like conscientiousness, optimism, locus of control, self-efficacy, and age were found to moderate the relationship between (mis)fit and work outcomes (see De Haas & Van Eerde, 2015; Resick et al., 2007; Seong et al., 2012a). For example, Krumm et al. (2013) found that older workers reacted more strongly to needs–supplies misfit compared to younger workers, while Kim et al. (2020) reported a similar finding for changes in person–job fit. Finally, fit also becomes more salient and important with increased tenure (Yu, 2009). Individuals become more aware of their personal attributes and qualities and their work environments over time. Therefore, their perceptions become more certain, which boosts the impact of fit. In general, employees pay more attention to managing

particularly salient types of fit, because they consider fit with these dimensions to have a more noticeable impact on their functioning and well-being (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Kristof-Brown & Jansen, 2007).

As an illustration of how situational factors moderate fit–outcome relationships, it was found that the strength of a climate or situation matters, a finding that aligns with situational strength theory (Meyer et al., 2010). In weak situations—for example, when behavioral norms are less clear, skill requirements are largely lacking, perceptions of the work environment vary, and interindividual variability is high—PE fit tends to become more important (Simmering et al., 2003). Related to this, Ghielen and colleagues (2020) showed that employer brand clarity, which in their study reflected a strong situation, slightly attenuates the relationship between person–organization fit and employer attractiveness. Weak situations (compared to strong ones) invoke uncertainty, and with uncertainty, people tend to attach more importance to the evaluation of their fit. Further concerning the situation, Hamstra et al. (2019) showed that within dyads (i.e., employee–supervisor) one person's fit may influence the impact of another one's fit. In particular, Hamstra et al. found that an employee's perceived person–organization fit is associated with higher task performance only when their supervisor also perceives high levels of person–organization fit. Likewise, Chi et al. (2020) found that different levels of fit may interact. They confirmed that person–group fit buffers the positive relationship between initial needs–supplies misfit and turnover, while person–mentor fit buffers the negative relationship between demands–abilities misfit and task performance. Finally, some fit–outcomes relationships tend to be dependent on national culture. For example, 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, 2014). Notwithstanding the above findings, there remains a need to identify theory-based moderators that are responsible for conditioning fit–consequences relationships (De Cooman et al., 2019).

Temporality

Many of the models discussed in this article recognize, either explicitly or implicitly, that fit is a temporal construct (for an overview of the temporal nature of PE fit, see Vleugels et al., 2022). For example, the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) includes a temporal component explaining how employees maintain their fit over time. In particular, the model recognizes that person and environment are not stable entities and therefore need to be managed to maintain acceptable levels of fit over time. Work adjustment encapsulates the continuous and dynamic process by which the individual seeks to achieve and maintain correspondence with the work environment. Likewise, French and colleagues (French et al., 1974) approached fit as an adjustment process and discussed fit in dynamic terms involving the use of coping and defense behaviors to manage fit across time. That is, if a person and a work environment are not, or are no longer, congruent, the person will seek to change their own characteristics, characteristics of the environment, or their perceptions thereof. These models show that PE fit should not be seen as a stable condition. Over longer time frames, maintaining fit requires ongoing maintenance and progressive action on the part of the individual and/or the work environment (see Kim et al., 2020). However, studies also show that fit can change over shorter time frames (e.g., days,

weeks), not only during the pre-entry recruitment and selection process (see Swider et al., 2015), but also after entry, in response to fluctuating work experiences (see Gabriel et al., 2014; Vleugels et al., 2018) or the deprivation of a value or particular need (see Tepper et al., 2018). While not everyone seems to experience the same level of dynamics in fit across time, differences in temporal profiles may form the core of more generic fit and misfit "types," such as stable fits, dynamic fits, low fits, mavericks, and misfits (Vleugels et al., 2019). In addition, research on fit narratives (Caplan, 1983; Shipp & Jansen, 2011) also suggests that work outcomes are influenced not only by current PE fit perceptions, but also by changes in fit relative to the past (retrospected fit) and expectations of fit in the future (anticipated fit). For instance, Jansen and Shipp (2019) found that, over time, individuals tend to develop different fit narrative types (e.g., temporary setback, riding the wave, anticipated decline, and downward slide), each of which is characterized by a distinct set of experiences of retrospective and anticipated fit. Hence, and from an employer's point of view, it might be worthwhile to trace the origins of such changes in fit and to assist employees in making constructive sense of their past and future fit in the present, because these temporal components of fit may have important implications for an employee's job satisfaction, work-based affect, and day-to-day performance in the workplace (Gabriel et al., 2014; Tepper et al., 2018; Vleugels et al., 2019).

PE Fit in Times of Uncertainty

The PE fit literature consistently shows that human beings have a strong need to attain fit with their environment, with positive outcomes being linked to achieving high levels of fit. 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 and to grow (see Bandura, 1991; Follmer et al., 2018). People have an innate need for uncertainty reduction that is derived from the human need for cognitive closure, which is manifested through a desire for predictability and structure, and an intolerance for ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). This motivation leads people to seek fit because it is seen as a way to reduce uncertainty (Yu, 2013). In line with this reasoning is the finding that value congruence primarily works on improving the level of trust, quality of communication, and interpersonal attraction between organizational members (Edward & Cable, 2009), suggesting that fit indeed has uncertainty-reducing effects by, for example, improving the quality of information exchange between members and satisfying individuals' sense of belongingness. Moreover, uncertainty is often associated with increased stress, while organizational fit has been found to be associated with favorable effects on the employee stress process (Mackey et al., 2017). Moreover, the literature on proactive behavior indicates that employees are more likely to exhibit a variety of proactive behaviors (e.g., job crafting) when encountering situations of uncertainty or need frustration (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007) than when in situations of optimal fit. These behaviors lead individuals to implement small changes to their work environments and enable employees to fully avail themselves of personal qualities and attributes. This, in turn, provides temporary relief of suboptimal fit while also offering opportunities to learn and grow (Black & Ashford, 1995). However, in cases of a more serious crisis event (e.g., personal loss, organizational change, or societal crisis), such as the Covid-19 pandemic, PE fit may come under increased pressure, leading individuals to radically redefine and reattain fit. For example, remote

work, altered workplace policies, the implementation of safety measures, and a drastic reduction in social contact during the pandemic have all induced changes in the E portion (e.g., work demands, environmental supplies, organizational values) of PE fit. Likewise, the Covid-19 crisis may also have substantially altered P attributes, including personal values and needs. For example, during the pandemic, people may have come to realize what they truly need and foremost appreciate (e.g., work–life balance and personal autonomy) in their work. Shock events such as the Covid-19 pandemic show that the salience of an abrupt incongruence between personal and environmental attributes, as well as the great level of uncertainty associated with this, can lead specifically to experiences of misfit and consequently reduced well-being and impaired professional functioning. This, in turn, may explain the emergence of phenomena like the "great resignation" in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), which is symptomatic of a growing underlying discrepancy between P and E, resulting in large numbers of people leaving their jobs and even their professions and careers.

Relevance of PE Fit Beyond the Individual

The focus on the relevance of PE fit for the individual is understandable because the larger part of the fit literature takes a person-centered perspective on PE fit, mainly looking at employee attributes and individual differences in outcomes of fit. However, and from a business and policymaking point of view, it also is relevant to focus on PE fit from the perspective of teams, organizations, and societies.

The Team Perspective on PE Fit

In light of the trend toward more project-based teamwork and an increased organizational reliance on self-managing teams, workers have become more (virtually) connected to each other and increasingly interdependent in terms of their personal work achievements. Therefore, the interest in person–group fit (i.e., the compatibility between a person and their group environment, which includes other members and group tasks; see DeRue & Morgeson, 2007), and how team dynamics influence employees' perceptions of fit (see Klaic et al., 2018), has markedly grown throughout the first two decades of the 21st century. Person–group fit has been found to predict key attitudes and performance metrics of team members as well as team processes and outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, the interactions of individuals in a work unit may produce a collective sense of fit that supersedes the sum of the fit experiences of all individual team members combined (Aumann & Ostroff, 2006). Thus, group-level fit is build up out of "shared and collective constructions of fit among team members" (Seong & Choi, 2021, p. 3). The existence of this type of fit has been confirmed in empirical research (e.g., Shin & Choi, 2010; Seong & Choi, 2014; Seong et al., 2012b), showing that collective notions of fit provide an independent contribution to the prediction of individual and unit-level outcomes (see De Cooman et al., 2016). For instance, Kristof-Brown et al. (2014) found that perceptions of team-level collective fit are unique and often different from aggregated individual perceptions of person–group fit. In addition, in a study by Seong and Choi (2021) on creativity, collective fit was found to explain incremental variance in individual as well as team outcomes (i.e., individual and team creativity). In another study, Seong and Choi (2019) showed that under circumstances of high

leader–member and team–member exchange, employees with high person–organization fit exhibit the highest level of creativity. One may thus conclude that employee PE fit does matter for teams and teams matter for PE fit and its consequences.

Impact on Organizations and Society

Just as much as individuals and teams are influenced by PE fit, organizations are affected by the fit of their members. In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, organizations may suffer from employees with low fit due to relationships between (mis)fit and interpersonal conflict, workplace deviance, and turnover (Mulki et al., 2006; Naus et al., 2007; Williamson & Perumal, 2021). On a positive note, organizations may benefit from high levels of fit because individual fit is associated with employer loyalty, organizational citizenship behavior, and increased performance (see Hu et al., 2021; Kristof-Brown et al., 2018). The main reason why organizations benefit from, and thus strive for, PE fit is because employees who fit in are better adjusted to their work setting (Borman et al., 1997; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), meaning that they are better able to cope with work demands and better understand company values and goals. Moreover, over time, fit leads to the consolidation of an organization's culture (i.e., shared values, expectations, and practices that inform the actions of all organizational members; Schneider, 1995), which is found to pay off directly through an increase in bottom-line performance and the attainment of organizational goals (Bowen et al., 1991; Saks et al., 2007). Also, the broad endorsement of company values, expectations, and organizational practices pays off indirectly through lower turnover and reduced staffing costs (Werbel & DeMarie, 2005). Therefore, in literature on strategic management, PE fit is suggested as a deliberate strategy and a tool to direct human resources management policies. Indeed, the amalgam of employee attributes that are recruited, selected, and developed through fit-based human resources practices, and the organizational human capital that is cultivated through this process, determine the nature of an organization's competencies over time (Ployhart, 2006; Toh et al., 2008).

While in general PE fit is hypothesized to result in positive outcomes, scholars also express caution. According to Schneider's (1987) ASA model, organizational-level fit may produce positive effects in early stages of organizational maturity (i.e., exploration) but may have vital negative effects in later stages (i.e., exploitation; March, 1991; Schneider et al., 1995). Schneider held that homogeneity, defined as within-organization similarity in terms of personality, behavior, and work experiences, grows along with organizational maturity. This homogeneity can in turn be detrimental to organizational performance and long-term organizational viability (Oh, 2018). Overly homogeneous organizations may suffer from groupthink, self-censorship, and the pressure to conform, resulting in unwise decision-making (Sternberg, 2013). When this happens, organizations can become so ingrown that they fail to adapt their processes and structures to environmental changes, endangering innovation and eventually organizational survival (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Therefore, Chatman argued that "some optimal level of fit may exist both in terms of how close the fit is for any one individual and in terms of the proportions of high and low 'fitters' within an organization" (Chatman, 1989, p. 344). In order to enhance individual fit while also maintaining a sufficient level of diversity (i.e., organizational

heterogeneity) in the workforce, organizations could offer employees the freedom to craft their jobs and could select a diverse range of applicants who are capable of proactively coping with misfit (van Vianen, 2018; Vogel et al., 2016).

The impact of PE fit also transcends the organizational level. Due to links between PE fit and both mental and physical health (Cooper & Payne, 1978; Edwards, 2008), high numbers of workers experiencing good fit should help to create, support, and maintain a healthy and sustainable labor force (van Engen et al., 2012), and hence help to contain levels of stress and burnout on a societal level. PE fit not only can be considered an important element of peoples' work life, but also seems to benefit their private life and to contribute to a career-long harmonious work–nonwork combination (De Gieter et al., 2022). Through PE fit, people can find meaning in the work they do, satisfy their needs, and pursue those personal values and interests that provide the foundation of their self-esteem, identity, and position in society (see Roberts & Robins, 2004). However, despite these purported benefits, also on the societal level, there may be a dark side to seeking PE fit. Most notably, an overly stringent focus on PE fit may endanger diversity and inclusivity beyond the organization level. Indeed, a narrow focus on a restricted set of deep-level attributes (e.g., values, personality traits, communication styles), especially those that are dominantly or traditionally desired in businesses (e.g., ambition, extroversion) might lead to cloning and favoritism (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Rivera, 2012) within organizations, and therefore initiate discrimination, lower the employability of minorities, and thwart inclusivity on a societal level

Conclusions

Since the first publications on PE fit emerged five decades ago, substantial progress has been made in theoretical thinking and empirical testing. Central to the notion of PE fit is the idea that high levels of compatibility between individuals and their work environment will result in advantageous outcomes for both employees and organizations. This article provides a state-of-the art overview of dominant thinking about PE fit, a review of prevailing methodological and conceptual approaches, and a synopsis of relevant empirical work in the field. Herein, some of the early 21st century debates within the fit literature have been examined, including those about conceptualization and measurement of fit, the definition of fit and misfit, the dynamic nature of fit, and the unanticipated side effects of fit on group, organizational, and societal levels.

In reviewing the literature, several gaps in the current understanding of PE fit were highlighted in the hope that recognizing these gaps will inspire scholars to address these fertile grounds for future research. In particular, we call for more studies that examine the various temporal dimensions of PE fit, the implications of dynamic change in PE fit for both work and nonwork attitudes and responses, and the dark side of PE fit (in addition to the bright side of misfit), as well as studies that can help to identify theory-based moderators responsible for conditioning antecedent–fit and fit–outcome relationships.

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