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Fit for the Future

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This is a time of change for scholars of organizational fit (Judge, 2007). Although organizational fit has been shown to influence employees’ motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, tenure, and performance (Arthur et al., 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer et al., 2003), it remains questionably defined and often misunderstood. Yet, it is one of the most widely used psychological constructs in industrial and work psychology. The great irony is that the breadth of fit definitions that entices a wide range of scholars to the topic is what also generates the most criticism (e.g., Edwards, 2008; Harrison, 2007; Judge, 2007). It has been suggested that there are as many ways to conceptualize and measure fit as there are scholars who study it. Yet, we believe that criticisms of conceptual ambiguity are a side-effect of rich methodological variety and distinctly different approaches to the compelling concept of compatibility of individuals and their organizations.

When we review the fit literature we see two dominant, and increasingly distinct, portrayals of organizational fit. This divide is between those researchers who focus on fit as an internal feeling of “fitting in” or of “feeling like a misfit” (usually referred to as “perceived fit”), and those who view fit as the interplay or interaction of internal and external factors. This may take the form of objective or actual fit, when the person and environment are measured from distinct sources, or subjective fit, in which a person reports separately about him or herself and the environment. In both cases, fit is assessed by the explicit comparison of person and environment characteristics to determine whether or not there is a match.

The debate has been vigorous over which type of fit is more meaningful, with strong arguments existing for both perceived fit and the more calculated forms of fit. However, we view them as distinctly different domains that should be treated as...
separate concepts, rather than a competition over which is a more accurate portrayal of the fit construct. It is our belief that the conflation of these two types of fit is a large factor underlying people's uneasiness with the term “organizational fit.” By recognizing that this field of study contains two distinctly different paradigms, and that both have valid interpretations and measurement approaches, forward progress can be made. We review each of these paradigms in turn, beginning with the more interactionist form of organizational fit.

Person–Environment (PE) Fit Paradigm

The bedrock of organizational fit research is person–environment (PE) fit theory (e.g., Caplan, 1983; French et al., 1974; Pervin, 1987). Researchers following this paradigm take a more interactionist approach to assessing fit than those who study perceived fit. They attempt to understand and predict employees’ attitudes and behavior by comparing internal aspects of the person (e.g., values, personality, goals, abilities) to commensurate, or at least conceptually relevant, elements of the external environment (e.g., values, culture, climate, goals, demands). Based firmly in the tradition of interactional psychologies where behavior is a function of the interplay between person and situational factors (e.g., Cable and Judge, 1996, 1997; Chatman, 1989; Krahé, 1992; Pervin, 1968, 1987; Schneider, 1987), researchers capture these two distinct elements to calculate a measure of PE fit. The key difference from perceived fit, which we discuss shortly, is that individuals are never asked directly to report their feelings or cognitions about how well they fit. Instead, they report various sets of data about themselves and/or the environment, which researchers then use to calculate a measure or index of fit.

This calculated form of fit is subdivided into two main streams of research. The first, called subjective fit, is assessed when the individual whose fit is being measured is asked to report regarding internal and external elements. For example, respondents might be asked to report their own values and also their perceptions of their organizations’ values. The distinguishing characteristic is that both assessments originate in the views of the respondent. The second, called objective or actual fit, uses different sources to report the characteristics of the person and the environment. Most typically, the internal dimensions (i.e., personal values or personality) are self-reported by the person whose fit is being calculated, and the external dimensions (i.e., organizational values or climate) come from another source. These external sources may still include perceptions – for example, senior managers’ perceptions of the organizations’ values – but the observation is considered more objective because it is reported by someone else. In other cases, the environment may be measured truly objectively, as when structural characteristics or reward system elements are used as the environment measure.

Researchers of both the subjective and objective approaches use the word “fit” as a noun: a tangible concept that can be calculated by the sum of its parts. The underlying assumption of these approaches is that the more precise the fit or closer
the match between the two set of variables, the better the outcomes (Ostroff, 2012). What a match means, however, can be interpreted widely (Edwards et al., 2006; Edwards and Shipp, 2007). Typically, it is interpreted to mean that when person and environment are in perfect alignment (i.e., high P–high E fit, low P–low E fit), or when the differences between an individual's profile and the environmental profile are minimized, positive outcomes should result. Kristof-Brown and Guay (2011) term this condition of perfect alignment “exact correspondence.”

Results of early fit studies using profile similarity indices and other types of difference scores (e.g., Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1991) appeared to support this prediction. However, as the field transitioned to using more precise methods of calculating congruence, such as polynomial regression and surface plot analysis (Edwards, 1993, 1994; Edwards and Parry, 1993), only a handful of studies supported exact correspondence as predictive of optimal outcomes (i.e., Jansen and Kristof-Brown, 2005; Kristof-Brown and Stevens, 2001; Slocombe and Bluedorn, 1999). In most cases, the functional forms of fit relationships followed a pattern in which fit at high levels of the person and environment is more strongly associated with positive outcomes than fit at low levels of these entities. Moreover, various types of misfit (assessed as points of incongruence) are typically found to have asymmetrical effects, with the effects of the environment generally outweighing those of the person. For example, several studies have found that having inadequate environmental supplies is a more detrimental condition of misfit than is having excess supplies (e.g., Edwards, 1993, 1994; Edwards and Harrison, 1993; Edwards and Rothbard, 1999). Thus, as analytic methods evolved to allow closer investigation of the exact functional form of fit relationships, the simplistic assumption that congruence is always optimal, and that any kind of incongruence is equally suboptimal, has been mostly abandoned. This leaves scholars with the troublesome conclusion that fit may take any number of functional forms, depending on what variables are under consideration.

PE fit is recognized as an umbrella term that allows three major variations. First, scholars can choose which internal or personal factors are most relevant to their research questions. Second, they can then select which environmental variables are most relevant for assessing fit. In many cases they pursue commensurate variables, but sometimes other theoretically justifiable variables of anticipated compatibility suffice (e.g., pay-for-performance systems are considered a good fit for people with a high value for achievement; Cable and Judge, 1994). Such variations in the environment variables have produced different types or dimensions of fit: person–job (PJ) fit, person–organization (PO) fit, person–group (PG) fit, person–vocation (PV) fit, and person–supervisor (PS) fit. Within each of these types of fit, there is a further diversity of characteristics on which fit can be assessed (i.e., values, goals, abilities). Edwards and Shipp (2007, p. 218) present a multifaceted cube in which all of the varieties of possible fit types and characteristics are crossed, producing an almost infinite range of possible fit types.

The third variation in defining PE fit is the flexibility that researchers have for determining what underlies compatibility on the personal and environmental characteristics of choice. Those in the supplementary tradition focus on a compositional
view of similarity and congruence; whereas, the complementary tradition emphasizes more of a compilational view, in which one entity completes the other (Muchinsky and Monahan, 1987; Ostroff and Schulte, 2007). Still others do not calculate fit at all, but instead interpret the statistical interaction of meaningfully related person and environment variables (e.g., Cable and Judge, 1994; Chatman et al., 2008). Even with this wide variety of fit conceptualizations, the underpinning idea of the PE fit paradigm is the notion that an appropriate alignment or interaction of internal and external factors (whatever that might be) will shape individuals’ attitudes and behaviors.

Despite its richness, this is a rather troubled paradigm in the sense that there are many different conceptualizations of PE fit, but little integration in how the various findings knit together. As scholars in this area, we can conclude that some type of interaction between person and environment influences outcomes, typically in a positive direction. However, this gives us little insight into the actual experience of fit by individuals. For example, when Chatman (1991) reported that value congruence as measured by the Organizational Culture Profile (O’Reilly et al., 1991) led to increased job satisfaction, she informed us about the relationship of values to job satisfaction through an interactional lens. Arguably, however, we learned little about how people experience the state of fit or misfit. This is why the second paradigm, which focuses on perceived fit, is burgeoning.

Perceived Fit Paradigm

Some consider organizational fit as a psychological construct, similar to job satisfaction or organizational commitment: as something inside a person’s mind that influences their thoughts and feelings towards their job or organization (e.g., Billsberry et al., 2005; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Ravlin and Ritchie, 2006; Wheeler et al., 2007). As mentioned above, in common parlance, this perspective portrays fit as an individual’s sense of “fitting in” or, alternatively when it does not exist, “feeling like a misfit.” Kristof-Brown and Guay (2011) refer to this conceptualization of fit as “general compatibility,” and provide examples of how it is typically measured directly with questions that ask an individual to report the fit that he or she believes exists. Questions such as “How well do you think you fit in the organization?” and “How well do your skills match the requirements of your job?” are examples of these kinds of direct measures of perceived fit. This perspective of fit as a psychological experience of the individual has been described further in the following way:

Perceived fit allows the greatest level of cognitive manipulation because the assessment is all done in the head of the respondents, allowing them to apply their own weighting scheme to various aspects of the environment. This permits individual differences in importance or salience of various dimensions to be captured in their ratings. (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, pp. 291–292)
Although perceived fit is arguably most proximal to individuals’ decision making and has been shown to offer the strongest relationships to expected outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer et al., 2003), it has attracted comparatively little research and has been criticized for being “just another attitude” and heavily influenced by affect (e.g., Edwards et al., 2006; Harrison, 2007). The longstanding presumption has been that perceived fit is simply the cognitive representation of the person–environment interactions described previously. Therefore, perceived fit and PE calculated interactions should be closely related. Most evidence, however, suggests that there are only low to moderate correlations between these more calculated forms of fit and an individual’s experience of perceived fit (Edwards et al., 2006). Very little is known, then, about how these perceptions form, or why they influence attitudes and behaviors as strongly as they do. This is fertile ground for new organizational fit research, and not surprisingly many of the chapters in this book advocate studies in this area.

The Epistemology of Fit

Although these two paradigms reflect a methodological distinction of indirect (PE interaction) versus direct (perceived) measurement, their differences also suggest distinct epistemological underpinnings. Although few researchers have explicitly stated their epistemological leanings, it is clear to us that positivism, or perhaps more accurately post-positivism, underpins PE fit research, whereas interpretivism is the spirit underpinning the perceived fit paradigm.

These epistemologies differ in the way that researchers position themselves regarding what counts as knowledge. A positivist believes that knowledge is objective. It is an extrapolation from “pure science,” in which the researcher is thought of as a scientist in a white coat carrying a clipboard, who takes measurements to capture the nature of the “real world” to produce universal truths and laws (Blaikie, 2007). It is what many regard as “true” scientific knowledge. A post-positivist relaxes the strict conditions of measurement and accepts that people’s reports of their psychological states constitute objective knowledge, even though such phenomena cannot be seen and objectively measured (Johnson et al., 2007). Alternatively, an interpretivist believes that knowledge is constructed in people’s minds and influenced by their social interactions with others. Discovering what is “real” to the individual is most important, because it is those perceptions that influence their behavior. Interpretivists may also look for general patterns, but their attention is on people’s perceptions and they recognize that these will differ. The goal of interpretive research is not to discover universal rules, but to understand the phenomena under scrutiny more fully. Although there are certainly exceptions, positivists in general look for similarity and interpretivists look for differences to illuminate understanding of a subject.
Relating these approaches to organizational fit, we see that many of the principles of positivism and post-positivism underpin the PE fit paradigm. This approach involves the researcher looking in on the subjects, taking measurements, calculating fit, and drawing general lessons. In these studies, the researchers make predictions about what they expect to see (in the tradition of positively phrased hypotheses), develop studies that gather relevant data to test the hypotheses, and then draw conclusions in the form of universal propositions. For example, in the classic PO fit study by Chatman (1991), hypotheses were set out predicting relationships between PO fit and psychological outcomes, data on newcomers’ values were captured from them, and data on their employing organizations were gathered from senior executives, allowing the researcher to calculate a measure of PO fit for every newcomer to test the hypotheses. Chatman (1991) was able to conclude with a general rule saying that newcomers’ PO fit is positively related to their levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and negatively related to their intent to quit. This is a finding that has been replicated in many subsequent studies (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer et al., 2003).

In the perceived fit paradigm, researchers seek to understand how people make sense of their organizational lives and, in particular, how their sense of fit or misfit is formed and changes over time. They seek an understanding of people’s perceptions and the impact these thoughts have on their behavior. This is a direct correlate of the interpretivist approach, in which researchers want to understand the complexity of people’s thoughts, feelings, and desires, and the impact these have on their work and life experiences. They want to understand the world from the subject’s perspective, allowing people to describe fit in their own ways that are meaningful to them. The perceived fit researcher may then look for similarities or differences across these accounts to draw universal or general rules. Thus, this approach does not have to go to the extreme of idiographic approaches, which seek to understand the richness of a small subset of individuals’ experiences. General conclusions can be drawn, but the impetus for what is included in the measures and experiences of fit is generated by the participants themselves, rather than by the researchers. At the present time, the interpretivist approach to perceived fit is best represented in theoretical work (e.g., Billsberry et al., 2005; Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). However, we would also include in this category studies that seek to understand the relationship between PE fit interactions and perceived fit (e.g., Edwards et al., 2006).

We have deliberately set out these paradigms and their underpinning epistemology because we believe that they can help define the field, remove confusion about what fit is, and give guidance to researchers about how to operate in these domains. However, we note that our categorization of the paradigms and elaboration of the epistemologies is new and not yet fully represented in empirical work. In particular, whilst the PE fit paradigm and its underlying post-positivist epistemology is well established, much of the work conducted in the perceived fit paradigm has also adopted a post-positivist, rather than an interpretivist, epistemology. In these studies, researchers are concerned with individuals’ experience of fit, but use it as a predictor of other outcomes, rather than seeking to understand what underlies it.
(e.g., Edwards and Billsberry, 2010; Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2008). Thus, these studies reflect interests in individuals’ perceptions, but embrace a post-positivist epistemology regarding what counts as knowledge. Recent studies (Seong and Kristof-Brown, in press; Seong et al., in press) have begun to examine how superordinate perceptions of overall fit underlie more specific dimensions of fit. These types of studies help us better understand what underlies people’s perceptions of fit. They remind us that understanding people's experiences of fit can help us make better predictions about how fit relates to attitudes and behavioral outcomes.

In practice, however, research attempting to subvert paradigmatic boundaries is often fraught with definitional, theoretical, and ontological problems. The reality is that epistemologies have considerable difficulty talking to each other. This is not just because the understanding of what constitutes knowledge is fundamentally different; it is also because the approaches construct markedly different conceptualizations to study. In this case, one approach is concerned with a person’s feelings and thoughts about how they do or do not fit in, and how this links to their sense of belonging, inclusion, engagement, and mental well-being. The other approach regards fit as a theoretical underpinning in which forms of similarity (i.e., supplementary approaches) and difference (i.e., complementary approaches) drive behavior. In perceived fit, it is the sense of fit driving behavior; whereas in PE fit it is similarity, interaction, or difference between relevant internal and external factors that are the compelling factors.

Understanding the different epistemologies underpinning the two fit paradigms is crucially important because it explains some of the frustration that researchers have had in appreciating each other’s work. Researchers interested in fit from an interpretivist slant have difficulty understanding how the alignment of particular (or even sets of) values, for example, relates to people’s overall sense of fit. They may see values as one component, perhaps even an important one, influencing people’s fit perceptions. However, separating it from other influences on fit perceptions seems overly simplistic and inappropriate from the interpretivist’s standpoint. Conversely, researchers viewing fit from a positivist slant are aghast at what they see as weakly defined concepts, overly general measures, small sample sizes, and often atheoretical approaches to data generation in perceived fit research. Anyone who has submitted a fit paper to a journal and had reviewers from a different epistemological leaning will know full well how extreme these cross-epistemological reactions can be!

Nevertheless, changing or blending epistemology could be a particularly useful way to find new directions in the organizational fit literature, as we have already noted. We imagine that researchers taking an interpretivist approach to the thorny problem of how the various forms of PE fit (e.g., PJ, PO, PV, and PG) interweave in people’s minds could be very useful. Conversely, a post-positivist approach to perceived fit issues could help us understand to what extent individuals’ perceptions of fit are generic. We do not propose that one view is superior to another, or seek to draw conclusions about the direction in which fit research should proceed – that would do a disservice to a field in which the diversity of views and an intuitive sense that fit does matter motivates a rich, heterogeneous field of inquiry. Theoretical
parsimony may never be achieved by organizational fit researchers, but compelling investigations of a meaningful concept will hopefully continue to thrive.

The Chapters

In the Call for Papers for this edited volume, we invited people to submit chapters that would offer new directions for organizational fit research. This was a response to the various criticisms and concerns that had been voiced over the domain of organizational fit. When we reviewed these papers, we noticed that five of them were arguing for new research within the existing fit paradigms. The other four papers offer quite different takes on organizational fit and offer new ways to approach the subject. Therefore, we decided to separate these two different types of submission into two parts – one looking at new directions within existing fit paradigms and the other looking at new directions for the paradigms themselves.

Part 1: New directions within the fit paradigms

In the first chapter in Part 1, Yu addresses the motivations that lead individuals to strive for perceived fit, and a set of agentic behaviors that they will use to establish and maintain this sense of fit. As such, this chapter delivers on the call for additional research on perceived fit antecedents, and does so by addressing why fit is pursued at a basic motivational level. Yu proposes a variety of fundamental needs that are addressed by maximizing fit. These include a need for consistency, hedonism, and uncertainty reduction, a need for mastery or control over the environment, and a need for belonging. He explores how various types of fit fulfill each of these basic motivations. He then proceeds to describe an individually focused and proactive set of strategies that people intentionally, and perhaps more likely unintentionally, engage in to increase their subjective experience of fit.

Building on Caplan's (1983) distinction between subjective and objective fit, he argues that people’s biases and heuristics will lead them to manipulate their perceptions of PE fit in a way that allows them to fulfill the motivations previously described. Through social projection (i.e., putting one’s own attitudes and views on others), affective-consistency (i.e., modifying perceived fit in such a way that it is consistent with work-related attitudes), and social information processing (i.e., using social information to engage in sense making about person and environment), Yu argues that people are unconsciously managing their perceptions of PE fit through their basic interpretations of people, events, and the situations they encounter. The disconnect between objective fit and subjective fit can thus be explained by the natural tendency to engage in these biases and heuristics. A second set of strategies for managing fit is through the responses of approach and avoidance (through exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect) made to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, respectively. Coping behavior is reviewed as another set of efforts to change both subjective
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(through thoughts and cognitions) and objective (through behaviors) elements of PE fit. Yu briefly reviews the negative feedback loops of the cybernetic models of stress (for more detail, see Chapter 4 in this volume) as an additional, natural set of tactics used to establish and maintain levels of PE fit. And finally, he reviews the proactive strategies of job crafting, role adjustment, and deal making as well as information seeking as ways in which people actively and intentionally maintain high levels of fit.

Yu concludes his chapter by proposing several areas for future research on these motivations for fit, including individual differences and environmental conditions that may influence the degree to which people have a strong desire to attain and maintain fit, and how they might go about actively managing it. A brief set of ideas on conditions that might prompt the desire for lesser levels of fit are presented, but the primary emphasis is on understanding individuals as agentic creators and maintainers of perceived fit.

Kammeyer-Mueller, Schilpzand, and Rubenstein outline a comprehensive model of how perceived fit develops in the course of social interactions among established organizational members and organizational newcomers. They begin by focusing on the process of organizational socialization to emphasize the critical moments for fit development that occur during the initial acquaintance phase. From that point forward they build on the relationship science perspective (e.g., Berscheid, 1999; Kelley et al., 1983) to address how fit evolves as a dyadic process by individuals coming to know one another better. By invoking the relationship literature, they present an in-depth perspective on the development of affective bonds between people and the processes of social acceptance and rejection that occur over time. Thus, the authors emphasize the distinctly “interpersonal side” of fit that emanates from dyadic relationships formed with others in the workplace. They describe three types of interpersonal bonds that can be viewed as the basis for fit relationships: affective bonds, instrumentality/exchange, and animosity. The first becomes the emphasis of a supplementary fit relationship in which the similarities of the two parties create a strong emotional connection and basis for liking. The instrumental bonds, in which one party has something the other values and vice versa, are described as the basis for complementary fit relationships. And the final connection, animosity, is presented as a basis for misfit, in which two parties are so different on fundamental attributes that they form an antagonistic relationship. This view of interpersonal perceived fit as a collection of unique dyadic ties has implications for measures of fit, and PG fit specifically. For example, it provides a rationale for how a single negative interpersonal relationship can create an overall assessment of misfit in the work environment, particularly if that person is the individual’s supervisor.

Building on this notion of dyadic fit, the authors propose a model of how interpersonal fit develops during socialization. The model begins by suggesting that certain personal and environmental conditions can either foster or inhibit dyadic fit for newcomers. If certain dyadic fit conditions are met, a number of self-reinforcing processes are set into motion that build relationships and increase the strength of ties in a reciprocal fashion, resulting in an overall level of increased fit and subsequent positive outcomes. Multiple propositions are set forth, which show dyadic fit
as a dynamic process evolving from an original emphasis on surface characteristics to deeper-level characteristics over time. Team and organizational climate as well as organizational socialization processes are included as means to strengthen these interpersonal processes. As the dyadic relationships develop, additional processes that stem from the social nature of the fit relationship will continue to influence fit. On the positive side, these include personal disclosure, social support, proactivity, and the exchange of goods and services; whereas, on the negative side, the process of social undermining can occur. Concluding their model, they expand traditional affective outcomes of PE fit to include organizational knowledge, turnover, citizenship behaviors, deviance and resilience. Taken together, their chapter presents a holistic view of the development and maintenance (or destruction) of perceived interpersonal fit in the workplace.

The emphasis of Johnson, Taing, Chang, and Kawamoto is on how self-regulation processes may underlie the striving for and attainment of fit. Viewing PE misfit as a discrepancy between people’s ideal conditions and those that they experience, these authors apply self-regulation theory (Latham and Pinder, 2005; Lord et al., 2010) to conceptualize the attainment and preservation of a certain standard of fit as a goal-related process. Through inputs, comparators, feedback loops, and outputs, individuals are proposed to ascertain and work to reduce perceived discrepancies (or misfit). If these feedback loops are organized hierarchically, with some being more central to people’s self-concepts than others, then an interconnected set of feedback loops emerges. Thus, they present a hierarchical model of PE fit in which entity-level fit – that is, across multiple types of fit (PV, PO, PG, and PJ), and labeled “multidimensional fit” in Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2006) and Edwards and Billsberry (2010) – is the highest level, followed by person-level fit (based on needs–values and traits), and then by task-level fit at the most basic level (based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and task goals).

Viewing PE fit as the result of a self-regulation process that unfolds over time prompted these authors to consider both the magnitude of discrepancy involved in fit and also the velocity. They define “velocity” as the direction and rate of change in the size of the discrepancy that underlies fit or misfit. With successful self-regulation depending on both discrepancy and velocity information, these authors assert that prediction of various outcomes can be improved by considering both. Thus, it is not just the current level of fit that predicts an outcome, but also the rate at which this level is perceived to be changing, and in which direction. In fact, these authors go so far as to suggest that velocity may be even more predictive of outcomes than is the magnitude of the discrepancy itself.

Finally, drawing on the rich history of self-regulation theory, these authors propose several individual differences that may influence how fit is perceived and also how it relates to important outcomes. One example is self-consciousness and self-focus, which have been found to influence people’s sensitivities to perceived discrepancies, making them more or less attuned to levels of misfit. Another is individuals’ level of action identification, or the hierarchical level of abstraction at which they typically relate to their behaviors (i.e., concrete, immediate behaviors versus...
abstract, long-term, goal-oriented ones). This is proposed to influence the strength with which fit at the entity, person, and task levels influences outcomes for those individuals. Finally, individuals’ past versus future orientation is proposed as an influence on the effects of both discrepancy magnitudes and velocities on fit–outcome relationships. Thus, by building on self-regulation theory, these authors shed insight into the motivational processes underlying fit, and provide several new directions for research to examine how to strengthen fit–outcome relationships.

Shifting from the perspective of what motivates people to seek fit, Resick, Giberson, Dickson, Wynne, and Bajdo focus instead on what fit motivates people to do. In particular, they explore the oft-reported finding that people who form a strong sense of fit with their organizations also tend to be good organizational citizens. They present a theoretical model examining the social-cognitive psychological processes that are triggered by a person’s conscious perception of fit with an organization, and which then motivates that person to engage in discretionary, prosocial work performance.

They base their model on Mischel and Shoda’s (1995) cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) theory, which proposes that people have cognitive and affective reactions to features of their environments that are relevant to an existing schema. Applying this logic to fit, Resick and colleagues argue that individuals create personally held schemas for what makes a “good organizational fit.” These schemas are based on personal characteristics, such as values and goals, and may be intensified or clarified by past experience. They propose that individuals attend to features of their work environment to assess whether they match their fit-related schema. If they perceive fit, then four cognitive-affective processes are stimulated. These include the incorporation of organizational membership into one’s self-identity, the experience of positive emotion as a result of perceived fit, the formation of motivational strivings that are aligned with organizational success, and the development of specific expectancies that personal efforts can help the organization succeed and thereby preserve employment with that company. These four psychological mechanisms combine to form a processing disposition that inclines people toward engaging in citizenship performance. Building on the logic of self-regulation theory, they then close the loop by proposing that feedback received as a result of citizenship performance will lead to alterations in the intensity of the cognitive and affective reactions, the strength of fit perceptions, and the content of fit-related schema over time. In this way, this chapter views perceived fit as a motivator of other actions at work.

Billsberry, Talbot, and Ambrosini approach organizational fit from a perceived fit perspective, with strong interpretivist underpinnings. They are interested in discovering the nature of people’s perceptions of fit and misfit, how they are formed, and how they influence behavior. However, this chapter is very different from other chapters in this book because, rather than extend fit theory or look at how fit may influence other factors, the authors recognize that perceived fit research is in its infancy and focus their attention on how researchers might develop theories about perceived fit. Their conceptual investigation begins with the nomothetic–idiographic
divide that PE fit researchers (e.g., Chatman, 1989) examined in the early days of organizational fit research. The primary insight in this chapter is the realization that the research stages of data generation and data analysis might be considered differently from nomothetic and idiographic perspectives. From a perceived fit perspective this is important because it suggests that researchers might be able to take idiographic approaches to data generation and thereby gain an in-depth understanding of the individual, but use nomothetic data analysis approaches to look for similarities and differences between people and thereby generate testable propositions.

In the second part of this chapter, the authors look at cognitive mapping as a means to conduct idiographic data gathering that explores individuals' deep-seated perceptions of fit. They also show some of the different ways in which such data might be analyzed. By focusing on this research method, they illustrate how data gathering and data analysis are two separate phases that can be conducted separately. Through their analysis of data generation and analysis, the authors illustrate how different empirical research in perceived fit will be from PE fit when an interpretivist approach is taken.

**Part 2: New directions for the fit paradigms**

Building on the idea that individuals hold fit-related schemas or mental models, Van Vianen, Stoelhorst, and De Goede emphasize the construal process by asking what people “have in mind” when they assess fit. They begin by arguing that people experience a fundamental need to belong, from both evolutionary and psychological perspectives. These perspectives may differ on why people have this need, but they are consistent in asserting people’s natural tendency to strive for belonging, often with similar others. Asking the fundamental question of what people consider when they assess fit, these authors argue that despite the multidimensional nature of fit, people are likely to use only a limited set of cues on which to determine fit. In terms of sources, they emphasize that people are likely to focus on only a few cues from important (and concrete) others regarding what the organization is like. And in terms of focal referent, they suggest that psychological theories emphasize the individual as the primary reference for fit, whereas the evolutionary theories suggest that the environment will be the focal reference. Finally, in keeping with a dynamic view of fit, these authors suggest that this construal process is likely to change over time depending on what stage (attraction, selection, or post-organizational entry) of the work relationship the person is in.

Using Construal Level Theory (CLT; Liberman et al., 2002; Trope and Liberman, 2003), these authors suggest that people will construct mental models of fit differently as their “distance” from the organization changes. At the beginning of the process – for example, when novice job seekers are just beginning to look at companies to join – their fit schema should be based on a few, abstract dimensions. Furthermore, those dimensions will stem from self-rooted perceptions about what is desirable
in an organization. As such, they portray initial fit perceptions as a relatively egocentric and content-deficient assessment. As the selection stage begins, individuals begin to interact more closely with organizational insiders, particularly recruiters. This, combined with pre-interview perceptions of fit, and perceived fairness of the selection system, contributes to the establishment of organizational fit perceptions during selection. Then during the first 4 to 6 months of the employment relationship, individuals focus on particular groups of insiders as the focal reference for organizational fit assessments. These salient individuals become the ultimate source of organizational fit perceptions post-hire, implying that only “some people make the place.” Newcomers’ fit perceptions therefore depend primarily on similarity with the salient and shared features of prototypical members. Lower levels of similarity with such members make it more difficult for newcomers to behave like insiders, and these discrepant behaviors then feed into perceptions of organizational misfit and feelings of social exclusion.

Wheeler, Halbesleben, and Shanine shed further light on the underlying mechanisms through which individuals react to a lack of fit. Using conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1988, 1998), these authors elaborate on four motivational mechanisms that underlie the pursuit and maintenance of fit. Viewing individuals as resource seekers and their environments as resource providers, these authors describe four paths by which individuals will seek to accumulate, protect, and invest resources, all resulting in sustaining a desired level of fit. First, individuals experience stress when they are faced with resource losses, and satisfaction when they experience resource gain. Second, they are motivated to invest their current resources in order to gain others, resulting in a cyclical process of resource expenditure and replenishment. People who have more resources to begin with are generally better able to gain more by relying on social support and also by hoarding excess resources for investment. These processes can result in a resource gain spiral, by which excesses result in additional gains. Alternatively, those who have fewer resources initially to invest will end up in a downward spiral of resource loss or conservation.

The authors argue that COR as a theory can be used to explain multidimensional fit and the diverse conceptualizations of fit that exist. This includes supplementary fit, in which an individual matches with the environment, as well as complementary fit, in which one party adds something new to the other. The key is whether or not individuals have, or can work to attain, sufficient resources to meet the demands of the environment and vice versa. One of the benefits of this resource-based perspective is that it blurs the lines between the traditional domains of supplementary and complementary fit. Needs and values and traits and skills all become resources that are interchangeable. The authors use COR to explain five distinct streams of research on fit, comprising stress, job satisfaction, person–vocation matching, recruitment and selection processes, and culture and climate matching processes, including the ASA model (Schneider, 1987). Additionally, these authors suggest that individuals will not engage in constant assessments of fit because the assessment itself requires
cognitive resources. Instead, they suggest that environmental events or shocks will trigger assessments of fit. Because shocks activate a threat of resource loss, they push people to reevaluate how their fit may be changing.

Wheeler and colleagues build these ideas of resource-based fit to address the relatively unexplored topic of misfits, and what they do in reaction to the recognition that they are misfits in their work environments. In earlier work, Wheeler and colleagues (Wheeler et al., 2007) offered five reactions to misfit: adapt to the environment, withdraw from the environment, become vocal as a means of changing the environment, engage in passive–aggressive behavior designed to hide their misfit, and try and ignore it as best they can. Using a resource-based theory such as COR, these authors argue that individuals will select the reaction that is most likely to convert them from a resource-loss mode to one in which new resources will be gained. In sum, Wheeler and colleagues propose COR theory as a mid-range theory that helps to explain how the various conceptualizations interact with each other, and the types of behavior that people will engage in over time to work to restore desired levels of fit.

Despite early research that incorporated time into assessments of PE fit (Caplan, 1983; French et al., 1974), the majority of recent fit research has been contemporaneous – focusing on a person’s current fit in the current moment. In response, Jansen and Shipp focus explicitly on the topic of temporal fit, which they define as fit assessments that explicitly or implicitly incorporate time in terms of three conceptual dimensions: context (i.e., the temporal setting in which fit is perceived or experienced), impact (i.e., the temporal effects of fit on outcomes), and process (i.e., how fit unfolds over time and influences subsequent fit or outcomes). In terms of context, they propose how both person and environment may change over “clock” time, resulting in shifting levels of fit. They also discuss the notion of “psychological” time and how people construct fit narratives that incorporate their past and anticipated fits (Shipp and Jansen, 2011), when evaluating their levels of fit in the current moment. In terms of impact, they present how changes in fit, the duration of fit, and the salience of fit can impact upon a variety of individual outcomes over clock time. In terms of psychological time, they assert how retrospected and anticipated fit can be “lived” in the present moment (i.e., through nostalgia or dread) to influence outcomes, and how comparisons with past and anticipated fit can moderate the relationships between current fit and outcomes. Finally, they discuss the process of “fitting” over time, as one in which fit evolves through socialization, coping, attrition, sense making, and recrafting fit narratives. Spillover and spiraling processes are described as additional processes in which people’s fit at one point in time can prompt modifications to future experiences of fit. Taken as a whole, their model provides a richer and more complex understanding of an individual’s experience of fit in the present, and how that fit will evolve over time through natural individual and organizational processes. They conclude their chapter by introducing a systematic research agenda that includes a number of specific and actionable recommendations for future projects on fit. This chapter, in conjunction with their earlier
piece (Shipp et al., 2011), lays the foundation for expanding fit theory, conducting empirical research, and informing management practice around the neglected topic of fit situated in time.

In the final chapter, Lee and Ramaswami introduce an important boundary condition to the concept of organizational fit by addressing whether the concept of fit is equivalent across cultures or societies. They point out that, although many studies of fit have occurred using non-US samples, few if any of these have emphasized culture as a meaningful contextual variable. Therefore, in this chapter the authors propose three primary ways in which cultural values can influence the concept of organizational fit. First, they suggest that cultural values are a strong determinant of the way in which individuals think about themselves and the environment. Because culture provides a frame of reference for interpreting the world, they assert that culture will influence sense-making, regarding both self and the environment. Moreover, culture may influence the process by which people combine assessments of person and environment to generate perceptions of compatibility. Second, Lee and Ramaswami argue that cultural differences exist concerning the emphasis that people will place on fit as a desired and expected outcome. Finally, they address ways in which culture influences how fit and misfit are tolerated and managed.

Following the temporal sequence of the ASA model (Schneider, 1987), they present empirical and theoretical arguments for how cultural values including individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance can influence the particular types of fit that people attend to during organizational entry. Shifting to post-hire time periods, they also describe how people’s reactions to misfit are likely to be sifted through a cultural lens. Specifically, they argue that attrition due to misfit may be more prevalent in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic ones. Thus, these authors raise important contextual conditions that influence not only the meaning of organizational fit, but also its relationship with relevant work-related outcomes. Their call for culturally sensitive theory development in the field of organizational fit forces researchers to take a hard look at the context in which they are conducting their research.

Conclusion

Together, these chapters represent varied and intellectually stimulating considerations of organizational fit. Rather than be perplexed and stymied by the lack of consensus on the construct definition of organizational fit, we suggest that this variety be embraced and explored by fit scholars. Within the construct of organizational fit reside many concepts worthy of investigation. We hope that the chapters contained in this book offer new insights and provide the impetus for new and existing scholars to research, theorize, and write about the topic that has fascinated so many of us for so long – organizational fit.
References


