



A quantitative review of the relationship between person–organization fit and behavioral outcomes

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Abstract

This paper extends the meta-analysis of Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner by providing a meta-analytic review of the relationship between person–organization fit (PO fit) and behavioral criteria (job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and turnover). Results indicate that PO fit is weakly to moderately related to each of these outcome variables. Results further show that the way in which fit is measured is an important moderator of fit–outcome relationships; however, definition of fit did not moderate the relationship between fit and behavioral criterion. Implications of these findings and avenues for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

To date, Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner (2003) have conducted the only quantitative review of the person–organization (PO) fit literature. These authors meta-analytically examined the relationship between PO fit and attitudinal outcomes. Their results indicated that PO fit was related to intent to quit, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Additionally, the results of this meta-analysis indicated that the dimension of PO fit (value congruence versus

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other forms of congruence) and the method used to measure PO fit (subjective, perceived and objective fit) moderated the relationship between PO fit and attitudinal outcomes. Importantly, Verquer et al. did not examine the relationship between fit and behavioral outcomes. Despite the contributions of their meta-analysis, the exclusion of behavioral outcomes left important relationships unexamined. Given the typically weak interrelationship between attitudinal and behavioral criteria (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985), the pattern of relationships between PO fit and behavioral outcomes may markedly differ from the relationships reported between PO fit and attitudinal outcomes.

Importantly, behavioral outcomes (e.g., job performance) are typically used to validate measures in selection contexts. Given the recent emphasis placed on PO fit as a method of staffing organizations to meet the needs of the “changing nature of work” (Borman, Hanson, & Hedge, 1997; Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Nelson, 1997; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999), a clearer picture of the correspondence between PO fit and work behaviors is crucial. Additionally, by focusing only on attitudinal variables, potentially important differences in the relationship between PO fit and outcomes may be ignored. In particular, Verquer and her colleagues cited the robust relationship between subjective measures and attitudes as evidence of the relative efficacy of this measurement approach. However, this relationship may not hold when considering behavioral outcomes. Thus, although the meta-analysis presented by Verquer and her colleagues has provided a useful first step in consolidating the PO fit literature, many important questions about the nature of person–organization congruence remain unanswered.

The primary purpose of this paper is to extend the meta-analysis by Verquer et al. (2003) by providing a quantitative summary of the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes (job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover). Given the substantial variation in the assessment of PO fit in the extant literature, an additional purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the operational and conceptual definition of PO fit moderates the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes.

1.1. What is fit?

Kristof (1996, p.1) defined PO fit as the “compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work.” Essentially, PO fit theory posits that there are characteristics of organizations that have the potential to be congruent with characteristics of individuals, and that individuals’ attitudes and behaviors will be influenced by the degree of congruence or “fit” between individuals and organizations (Argyris, 1957; Pervin, 1989). Despite the general consensus that PO fit involves the compatibility between individuals and their organizations, the exact nature of this compatibility has resulted in much confusion in defining PO fit (Kristof, 1996).

PO fit has been defined in a variety of ways including value congruence, goal congruence, needs-supplies fit, and demands-abilities fit (Kristof, 1996; Munchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Value congruence, the most frequently assessed dimension of PO fit, involves the similarity between organizational values and those of the organization’s employees (Kristof, 1996). Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith’s (1995) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework also posits goal congruence as an important dimension of PO fit. According to the ASA framework, individuals will be attracted to organizations whose goals are instrumental in meeting the goals of the individual. Thus, goal congruence involves similarity between the goals of the organization and those of the organization’s employees, and it

is expected to relate to individual goal attainment such as job performance and individual attitudes such as commitment. Munchinsky and Monahan (1987) distinguished between needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. Needs-supplies fit may be defined as the extent to which the organization fulfills the needs of an individual, whereas demands-abilities fit occurs when an individual's characteristics fill the needs of the organization. Importantly, very few studies have directly compared the impact that these various conceptualizations of fit have on the relationship between fit and outcome variables. This study provides a meta-analysis of the difference in fit–outcome relationships due to fit definition.

1.2. The measurement of PO fit

Confusion in the PO fit literature is also due to the variety of methods used to measure PO fit. In an integrative review of the PO fit literature, Kristof (1996) classified differences in the measurement of PO fit into three categories: subjective fit, perceived fit, and objective fit. The primary commonality between these approaches is that all three assess discrepancies between the characteristics of an individual and the characteristics of the organization. However, the method used to obtain this measure of person–organization discrepancy varies widely across the three approaches.

Subjective fit measures involve directly asking an individual how well their characteristics fit with their employing organization's characteristics. That is, subjective fit measures do not involve the explicit measurement of either individual or environmental characteristics. Instead, respondents are assumed to have a mental representation of the organizational profile and to cognitively examine the congruence between their personal characteristics and their perception of the organizational profile (Edwards, 1991).

Perceived fit measures ask individuals to describe themselves, as well as their perceptions of organizational characteristics. The degree of fit is then calculated by assessing the discrepancy between a respondent's self-description and that same respondent's description of the organization. Perceived fit measures are conceptually similar to subjective fit measures in that the degree of fit in both is operationalized as the discrepancy between an individual's self-image and the same individual's perceptions of the organization. The primary distinction between perceived and subjective fit measures is that perceived fit measures explicitly ask respondents to describe both their own characteristics and the organization's characteristics via questionnaires; whereas subjective fit measures assess PO fit by asking respondents how well they fit with their organization using self-report items.

Both perceived and subjective fit measures may be contrasted with objective fit measures, which ask an individual to describe his or her own characteristics, and then ask other organizational members to describe the characteristics of the organization. Typically, agreement across organizational members' perceptions of the environment is then assessed (Chatman, 1989). To the extent that organizational members agree on the nature of the organization's characteristics, organizational members' responses are then combined to form a measure of the organization's climate. Fit is then operationalized as the congruence between an individual's self-description and the aggregate organizational climate.

1.3. PO fit and work-related outcomes

PO fit is expected to relate to a variety of both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. To that end, the meta-analysis by Verquer et al. (2003) indicated that PO fit was related to

intent to quit ($\rho = -.21$), job satisfaction ($\rho = .28$), and organizational commitment ($\rho = .31$). PO fit has also been proposed to be an important antecedent of behavioral outcomes. Kristof (1996) suggested that PO fit would explain significant variance in job performance, OCB, and turnover. Research on the effects of PO fit and behavioral outcomes has produced mixed results. This meta-analysis estimated the population relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes by combining primary studies that examined the relationship between PO fit and job performance, OCB, and turnover.

In sum, the primary purpose of this paper is to extend the meta-analysis by Verquer and her colleagues by performing a quantitative review of the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes. Given the substantial variation in the assessment of PO fit in the extant literature, an additional purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which, if at all, the definition and measurement of PO fit moderates the relationship between PO fit behavioral outcomes.

2. Method

2.1. Location of data

Both computer and manual searches were conducted for empirical studies investigating the relationship between PO fit and outcomes in order to locate data for this meta-analysis. In particular, we searched the computer database PsycINFO (1967–2003). The search terms *fit*, *person–environment fit* (P-E fit), *person–organization fit*, *value congruence*, *goal congruence*, and *congruence* were entered as key words. We also conducted a manual search of the reference lists from relevant studies and past qualitative reviews (e.g., Kristof, 1996). Additionally, we located unpublished studies (dissertations, theses, and professional presentations) in an attempt to avoid the file drawer problem.

The initial search resulted in 121 studies that discussed the relationship between person–environment fit and outcome variables. These 121 studies were then evaluated for inclusion in the meta-analysis. In accordance with our a priori definition of the population and relationships of interest, several inclusionary rules were established. First, to be included, a study must have included a measure of person–organization fit (those that measured person–job fit, person–supervisor fit, person–group fit, or person–vocation fit were excluded). Additionally, for a study to be included, it must have included empirical data (qualitative reviews and theoretical works were excluded). To be included, a study must have included a correlation between PO fit and an outcome variable of interest, or some statistic that could be converted into a correlation. Finally, only studies conducted in organizational settings were included. The evaluation process ultimately resulted in the inclusion of 24 studies. Of these, 16 were published studies and 8 were dissertations or unpublished manuscripts. These studies are presented in the reference list. Inclusion of these studies resulted in 58 independent data points with an overall sample size of 14,652.

Once the preliminary list of studies was narrowed by the inclusion criteria, the studies were coded on the variables of interest. Criteria were coded as job performance, OCB, and turnover. The majority of studies identified for this meta-analysis had defined fit using value congruence. In contrast, a relatively small subset of studies has examined goal congruence, needs–supplies fit, and demands–abilities fit. Therefore, consistent with the meta-analysis by Verquer et al. (2003), goal congruence, needs–supplies fit, and demands–abilities fit, were necessarily combined and coded as “other.” The measurement of fit was classified

as perceived, subjective, or objective fit. In addition, to ensure accuracy in coding, multiple raters coded a random sample of 15% of the studies. Interrater agreement was in satisfactory range (mean $r^{\text{wg}} = .89$). Any inconsistencies were discussed and resolved resulting in 100% agreement.

3. Artifact distribution and meta-analytic procedures

Using Arthur, Bennett, and Huffcutt's (2001) SAS PROC MEANS program to conduct the analyses, the meta-analytic approach used was Hunter and Schmidt's (1990) meta-analysis procedure. This procedure allows for the correction of artifacts. Because artifact data were not available for every study, a distributional artifact correction was used based on reliability data associated with all studies reporting reliability data. A distributional artifact correction is the mean value of the terms to be corrected that were reported in the individual studies (e.g., the mean observed reliability of predictor and criterion variables). This mean value is then used to correct for attenuation across all observed correlations. The resulting corrected correlation is commonly referred to as rho (ρ). In deciding to test for moderators, if correcting for statistical artifacts does not account for all or nearly all of the observed variation in studies, or the standard deviation of the estimated true validities is large, or both, then there is reason to believe that the validity is dependent on situational moderators. On the other hand, if all or a major portion of the observed variance in validities is due to statistical artifacts, one can conclude that the validities are constant.

We also computed the 90% credibility interval (90% CI) to assess whether the validities are positive across situations (i.e., whether validities are non-zero). The credibility interval is conceptually similar to a confidence interval, but credibility intervals are calculated using corrected data. Similar to confidence intervals, the credibility interval also gives an indication of the lower bound estimate of the relationship between two variables. Specifically, the lower-bound 90% credibility value (90% LCV) indicates that 90% of the estimates of the true validity lie above the value of the 90% LCV. Thus, if this value is greater than zero, one can conclude that the validity is non-zero (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990). However, the 90% LCV can be greater than zero and yet still have sizeable variance in the validities after correcting for statistical artifacts (e.g., the range of the credibility interval is large). Under these conditions, it can be concluded that the validities are positive, although the actual magnitude may vary as a function of moderators (i.e., situational specificity). Thus, the variance accounted for by statistical artifacts and the estimated magnitude of the 90% CI are indicators of whether sufficient variance remains in the validities to suggest the presence of moderators.

4. Results

The results of the meta-analysis of the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes are presented in Table 1. The relationship between PO fit collapsed across both fit definition and measurement approach and each of the behavioral outcomes was moderate ($\rho = .25$). However, the range of the 90% credibility interval (.06–.45) and the relatively small magnitude of the percent of variance accounted for by statistical artifacts (29.5) suggest non-methodological moderators of this relationship. Consequently, we examined the relationship between PO fit and specific dependent variables.

Table 1

Meta-analytic results for the relationship between PO fit and outcomes

	Total sample size	Number of data points	Corrected statistics			Min. R_{xy}	Max. R_{xy}	% Var. due to statistical artifacts	90% Credibility interval	
			R_{xy}	RHO	SD RHO				Lower bound	Upper bound
Overall	14,652	58	.21	.25	.12	-.17	.51	29.5	.06	.45
Turnover	3,152	11	.21	.26	.14	-.17	.36	19.8	.04	.49
Task performance	8,836	34	.21	.26	.12	-.05	.51	29.4	.07	.46
OCB	2,664	13	.17	.21	.09	.05	.39	49.1	.07	.35

Note. For the following tables, R_{xy} is the uncorrected mean correlation, RHO is the fully corrected mean correlation, SD RHO is the standard deviation of the fully corrected correlation coefficients within the population, Min R_{xy} is the minimum uncorrected mean correlation, Max R_{xy} is the maximum uncorrected mean correlation.

Table 2

Meta-analytic results for the impact of measurement type on fit–outcome relationships

	Total sample size	Number of data points	Corrected statistics			Min. R_{xy}	Max. R_{xy}	% Var. due to statistical artifacts	90% Credibility interval	
			R_{xy}	RHO	SD RHO				Lower bound	Upper bound
Objective fit	7,863	32	.22	.28	.13	-.05	.51	28.2	.07	.48
Turnover	1,471	5	.22	.27	.08	.11	.36	45.0	.14	.40
Task performance	5,712	23	.23	.28	.14	-.05	.51	24.0	.05	.51
OCB	680	4	.21	.26	.07	.05	.30	63.2	.14	.37
Perceived fit	3,759	10	.22	.27	.09	.06	.43	34.2	.13	.42
Turnover	1,106	4	.29	.35	.07	.24	.32	100	.24	.46
Task performance	2,199	4	.20	.25	.07	.12	.43	35.9	.13	.37
OCB	454	2	.17	.21	.17	.06	.39	18.1	-.08	.49
Subjective fit	3,030	16	.14	.17	.10	-.17	.31	44.2	.01	.34
Turnover	575	2	.06	.07	.21	-.17	.20	10.7	-.28	.41
Task performance	925	7	.16	.20	.06	.11	.31	100	.10	.31
OCB	1,530	7	.16	.19	.03	.09	.30	89.3	.14	.24

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1 and indicate that PO fit is related to a variety of behavioral outcome variables. PO fit was related to behavioral outcomes including: and turnover (.26), task performance (.26), and OCB (.21). However, the percentage of variance accounted for by statistical artifacts is small and the 90% credibility interval is quite large for each of the relationships between PO fit and behavioral outcomes. Thus, considerable variation remains in each of the estimated population relationships. Consequently, we examined the relationship between PO fit and outcomes, while considering fit measurement approach as a moderator of these relationships.

The results of the analyses investigating the moderating effect of fit measurement strategy are presented in Table 2. Analyses indicated that subjective measures were weakly related to behavioral outcomes ($\rho = .17$), while perceived and objective fit measures were moderately related to behavioral outcomes ($\rho = .27$ and $.28$, respectively). The relationship between each measurement strategy and specific outcomes is also presented in Table 2. The percent of variance accounted for by statistical artifacts and the 90% credibility intervals indicate that the method used to measure fit moderates the relationship between PO fit and

Table 3
Meta-analytic results for relationship between definition of PO fit and outcomes

	Total sample size	Number of data points	Corrected statistics			Min. R_{xy}	Max. R_{xy}	% Var. due to statistical artifacts	90% Credibility interval	
			R_{xy}	RHO	SD RHO				Lower bound	Upper bound
Value fit	10,631	41	.21	.26	.13	-.17	.51	26.5	.05	.47
Turnover	2,194	7	.21	.26	.16	-.17	.35	16.4	0	.51
Task performance	7,179	25	.21	.26	.13	-.05	.51	25.4	.05	.46
OCB	1,258	9	.21	.25	.06	.05	.39	73.4	.15	.36
Other forms of fit	4,021	17	.20	.24	.10	.06	.42	40.8	.09	.40
Turnover	958	4	.22	.28	.07	.11	.36	54.4	.16	.40
Task performance	1,657	9	.23	.28	.08	.12	.42	56.0	.15	.41
OCB	1,406	4	.14	.17	.09	.06	.30	35.7	.03	.32

outcomes. Still, the percentage of variance accounted for by artifacts typically did not exceed 80% for the estimated relationships; thus, additional substantive moderators of the fit–outcome relationship may exist.

Consistent with prior research (Verquer et al., 2003), we next sought to determine the extent to which, if at all, the definition of fit moderates fit–outcome relationships. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 3. Analyses indicate that the relationship between value congruence and outcomes ($\rho = .26$) is slightly larger than the relationship between other forms of fit collapsed across outcomes ($\rho = .24$).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to extend the work of Verquer and her colleagues by providing a quantitative review of the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes, and to determine to what extent this relationship is moderated by fit measurement strategy and fit definition. Our results suggest that PO fit is moderately related to a variety of behavioral outcomes, demonstrating weak to moderate relationships with turnover, task performance, and OCB. These results suggest that in addition to attitudinal outcomes, PO fit is an important correlate of behavioral outcomes. Importantly, the method used to measure fit is an important moderator of the fit–outcome relationship such that perceived and objective fit measures were more strongly related to behavioral outcomes than was subjective fit. In contrast, the definition of fit (value congruence versus other forms of congruence) does not appear to be an important moderator of the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes.

In previous reviews of the literature (Kristof, 1996), it has been suggested that PO fit would be more strongly related to organizational-level outcomes (e.g., OCB) than job level outcomes (e.g., task performance). Interestingly, the relationship between PO fit and task performance was actually greater than the relationship between PO fit and OCB. Thus, the results of this study do not support the assertion that PO fit will be more strongly related to organization-level compared to job-level outcomes. One possible explanation for this finding is that respondents are unable to distinguish the characteristics of their organization from the characteristics of their job. Consequently, measures of PO fit may be systematically biased by the degree of respondents' PJ fit. Additional research is needed to clarify the nature of the relationship between PO and PJ fit.

Finally, consistent with Schneider et al.'s (1995) ASA framework, PO fit exhibited a consistent relationship with turnover. However, the magnitude of this relationship may be characterized as moderate, at best. This finding is consistent with prior research that suggests that turnover is a complex phenomenon with many situational and individual determinants (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996). Still, that PO fit manifested consistent non-zero relationships with turnover indicates that PO fit is indeed an important predictor of employee turnover.

In a previous quantitative review, Verquer et al. (2003) demonstrated that subjective fit measures demonstrated the strongest relationship of the three measurement methods with attitudinal outcomes. Although subjective fit measures demonstrated the strongest relationship with attitudinal outcomes in the Verquer meta-analysis, subjective measures were the most weakly related to behavioral outcomes in the present meta-analysis. In fact, the difference in the relationship between subjective fit and attitudes (mean $\rho = .59$) reported by Verquer et al. and subjective fit and behavioral outcomes (mean $\rho = .17$) reported in this study is quite substantial.¹ Given that subjective measures are typically self-reported at the same time as attitudinal questionnaires, the robust relationship between subjective measures and attitudes reported by Verquer et al. may in part reflect common method variance. Alternatively, objective fit measures exhibited a slightly stronger relationship with behavioral outcomes (mean $\rho = .28$) than their relationships with attitudes reported by Verquer and her colleagues (mean $\rho = .22$). Thus, by examining behavioral outcomes in this meta-analysis, a clearer picture of the impact of measurement approach on the relationship between PO fit and outcomes is provided.

Our results indicate that the definition of fit generally does not moderate the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes. With the exception of "other" value congruence measures and OCB ($\rho = .17$), each of the other relationships between fit and outcomes ranged between .25 and .28, regardless of fit definition. Also noteworthy is that few studies have been conducted which defined fit using a framework other than the value congruence framework. Thus, we necessarily collapsed alternate definitions of fit into the "other" category. Collapsing these approaches into a single variable may have masked important differences due to fit conceptualization in fit–outcome relationships. Clearly, additional research is needed to examine the impact of alternate definitions of congruence on fit–outcome relationships.

The results of this study have important implications for the use of PO fit by organizational practitioners. In particular, the finding that objective measures moderately related to behavioral outcomes is encouraging for the incorporation of fit in selection systems. That is, perceived and subjective fit measures are less amenable to incorporation into personnel selection systems with applicant samples. Specifically, since both are self-reported and require respondent familiarity with the organizational value system, an applicant with little experience with the organization would be unable to respond accurately to these types of measures. In contrast, objective fit measures require only that a respondent report his or her personal characteristics. These personal characteristics are subsequently compared to a

¹ We also coded primary studies examining the relationship between PO fit and attitudinal outcomes. 66 data points were added to Verquer et al.'s original 48 data points. The magnitude of all PO fit-attitude relationships was equitable to those reported by Verquer and her colleagues.

pre-existing organizational climate profile. Thus, in that objective fit measures do not require respondent familiarity with organizational characteristics, they can be incorporated into personnel selection systems.

In addition to providing a summary of existing PO fit research, the findings of this study also point to many important directions for future research. First, additional research should continue to examine the impact of fit measurement strategy on the relationship between fit and outcomes. In particular, attention should be focused on the interplay between objective, perceived, and subjective fit measures. We were unable to locate any studies that included multiple methods of measuring PO fit in a single sample. Similarly, future research should focus on alternate definitions of PO fit such as goal congruence. Finally, given the substantial variation associated with the estimated relationships, additional substantive moderators must be examined to further delineate the circumstances that lead to strong relationships between fit and outcomes.

This study contributes to the fit literature by consolidating existing research and pointing to important directions for future research. Despite these contributions, this study has some important limitations. Most importantly, when examining the impact of fit measurement strategy on congruence–outcome relationships, very little data were available. For example, we were only able to locate two studies that examined the relationship between subjective fit and turnover. The dearth of research in this area highlights the critical need for additional research examining the relationship between PO fit and behavioral outcomes, particularly if organizational practitioners continue to incorporate PO fit into personnel selection systems. Additionally, several studies were omitted from analyses due to failure to report a correlation coefficient between fit and an outcome of interest. Edwards (1993) argued that difference scores and correlations between person and organization factors should be abandoned in the congruence literature due to their conceptual ambiguity and potential for inflated relationships. All of the studies using objective and perceived fit included here were necessarily based on fit measures derived from difference scores or correlation measures calculated between person and organization factors. Thus, the findings of this study may have been subject to Edwards' criticisms of difference scores and correlation-based measures. Unfortunately, Edwards' other proposed method of assessing fit (polynomial regression) is a non-linear technique that does not report a statistic which is convertible into a correlation coefficient. Still, the purpose of this study was to ascertain the state of the art of PO fit, as it currently exists in the literature.

Our findings lend credence to the importance of PO fit as a correlate of a variety of organizationally relevant behavioral outcomes. Based on a comparison between the findings of Verquer and her colleagues and the findings of the present study, the method used to measure fit is an important moderator of fit–outcome relationships. Thus, researchers must be aware of the properties of various fit measurement instruments when conducting PO fit research. To that end, the results that objective measures demonstrated moderate relationships with behavioral outcomes suggests the usefulness of PO fit in the context of personnel selection. Despite the relatively positive findings of this quantitative review, we are certainly not suggesting that the field of PO fit has been sufficiently examined. Rather, it is our hope that this meta-analysis has helped to delineate gaps in the literature and will serve to stimulate future research in the domain of PO fit.

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