

# PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF ITS CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, MEASUREMENT, AND IMPLICATIONS

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This article presents a comprehensive definition and conceptual model of person-organization fit that incorporates supplementary as well as complementary perspectives on fit. To increase the precision of the construct's definition, it is also distinguished from other forms of environmental compatibility, such as person-group and person-vocation fit. Once defined, commensurate measurement as it relates to supplementary and complementary fit is discussed and recommendations are offered regarding the necessity of its use. A distinction is made between the direct measurement of perceived fit and the indirect measurement of actual person-organization fit, using both cross- and individual-level techniques, and the debate regarding differences scores is reviewed. These definitional and measurement issues frame a review of the existing literature, as well as provide the basis for specific research propositions and suggestions for managerial applications.

Person-organization (P-O) fit is a topic that has attracted the attention of both scholars and managers during recent years. In essence, research on P-O fit concerns the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work. As organizations confront downsizing, quality initiatives, and changes in or removal of job structures, the benefits of employing people who can be mobile within an organization have been widely recognized (e.g., Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Bridges, 1994; Dumaine, 1987; Howard, 1995). Achieving high levels of P-O fit through hiring and socialization is often touted as the key to retaining a workforce with the flexibility and organizational commitment necessary to meet these competitive challenges. Although the P-O fit literature has been reviewed (Judge & Ferris, 1992; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995), there have been few attempts at integrating its various conceptualizations, operationalizations,

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or measurement strategies. Therefore, the present paper explores the domain, measurement issues, and contributions of this literature, while also suggesting research directions for future investigations of P-O fit.

The paper is organized around four specific objectives. The first objective is to clearly define the topic of interest. Rynes and Gerhart (1990) described P-O fit as “elusive” and as having an imprecise and inconsistent definition. Imprecision in a construct’s definition can result in contradictory operationalizations, inadequate measures, and even conflicting results (Schwab, 1980). Therefore, this paper begins by describing P-O fit’s multiple conceptualizations and distinguishing it from other forms of person-environment (P-E) fit.

Once a construct has been defined, it is critical that its measurement is aligned with that definition. Therefore, this paper’s second objective is to clarify the measurement issues relevant to the operationalization and analysis of P-O fit. Commensurate measurement, direct assessments of perceived fit, indirect assessments of actual fit, and various fit indices are discussed in order to integrate the variety of measurement strategies that have been used to assess P-O fit. In addition, as sensitivity to levels of analysis issues is critical in establishing a construct’s validity (Rousseau, 1985), recommendations regarding these issues as they pertain to measures of actual P-O fit are made.

The third objective is to propose a framework that highlights the antecedents and consequences of various conceptualizations of P-O fit. This framework is then used to organize a review of the existing P-O fit literature. Finally, the fourth objective is to suggest future research directions and practical implications. A discussion of general issues as well as specific propositions is offered as a guide for upcoming investigations. In addition, general conclusions are drawn to provide guidance for managers interested achieving and maximizing the benefits of P-O fit.

### *Defining Person-Organization Fit*

The definition of P-O fit has been subject to confusion due to its multiple conceptualizations and operationalizations, as well as its limited distinction from other forms of P-E fit (Judge & Ferris, 1992; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). When confusion exists regarding what falls under the rubric of P-O fit, research on the topic is necessarily open to misinterpretation and equivocal operationalizations.

The following section takes a two-step approach to defining P-O fit. First, various conceptualizations of P-O fit and their most common operationalizations are presented. The purpose of this first step is to describe clearly what is encompassed in the construct of P-O fit (Schwab, 1980).

Second, a distinction is made between P-O fit and other types of P-E congruence to describe what *is not* included in the construct (Judge & Ferris, 1992; Schwab, 1980). Three additional categories of congruence are presented, each addressing the fit between a person and an aspect of the environment: the vocation, group, or job. Brief overviews of these other types of person-environment fit are presented to establish clear boundaries of the P-O fit construct.

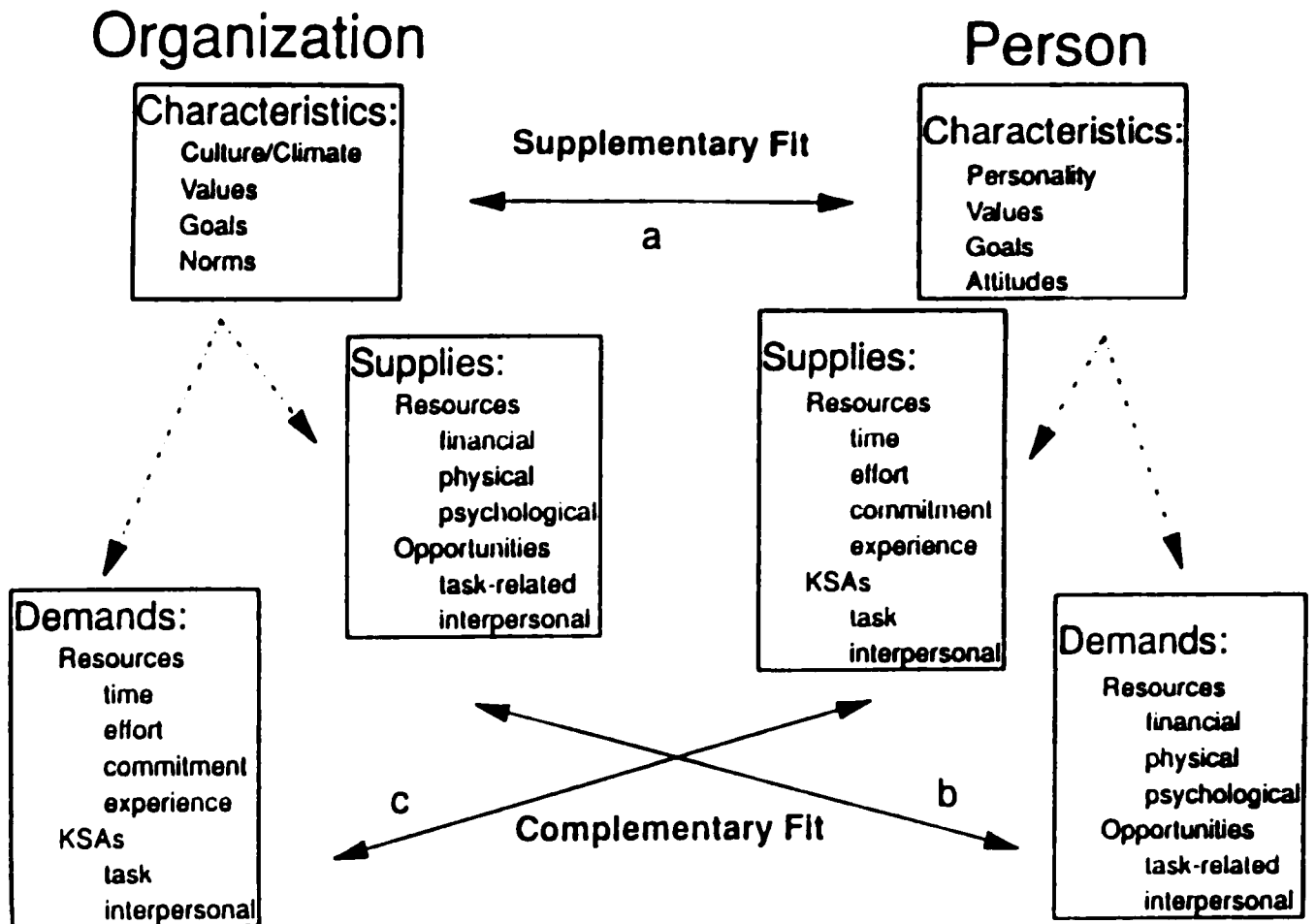
### *Multiple Conceptualizations P-O Fit*

Most researchers broadly define P-O fit as the compatibility between individuals and organizations. Compatibility, however, may be conceptualized in a variety of ways. Two distinctions have been raised that help clarify these multiple conceptualizations. The first distinction is between supplementary and complementary fit. *Supplementary fit* occurs when a person “supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals” in an environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 269). This congruence can be differentiated from *complementary fit*, which occurs when a person’s characteristics “make whole” the environment or add to it what is missing (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 271).

A second perspective on P-O fit is offered by the needs-supplies and demands-abilities distinction which is often raised in discussions of other forms of congruence (e.g., Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1991). From the *needs-supplies* perspective, P-O fit occurs when an organization satisfies individuals’ needs, desires, or preferences. In contrast, the *demands-abilities* perspective suggests that fit occurs when an individual has the abilities required to meet organizational demands.

Although these two distinctions have been discussed frequently by authors, they have rarely been integrated. For example, most empirical investigations have defined fit from only one perspective, while ignoring the existence of others (for exceptions see Bretz & Judge, 1994; Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993). These multiple conceptualizations of fit reasonably explain the variety of operationalizations that have been used to examine P-O fit, yet to integrate the variety of P-O fit conceptualizations, a comprehensive definition is needed.

An illustrative figure may assist in generating this definition (see Figure 1). In this model, supplementary fit (arrow “a”) is represented as the relationship between the fundamental characteristics of an organization and a person. For the organization these characteristics traditionally include the culture, climate, values, goals, and norms. On the person side of the model, the characteristics most often studied are values, goals,



*Figure 1: Various Conceptualizations of Person-Organization Fit*

personality, and attitudes. When there is similarity between an organization and a person on these characteristics, supplementary fit is said to exist.

In addition to these underlying characteristics, organizations and individuals can also be described by what they supply and demand in employment agreements. These demands and supplies are likely to be influenced by the underlying characteristics of both entities (Hogan, 1991; Schein, 1992), as is indicated by the dotted arrows in Figure 1; however, they represent distinct dimensions on which fit or misfit may occur. More specifically, organizations supply financial, physical, and psychological resources as well as the task-related, interpersonal, and growth opportunities that are demanded by employees. When these organizational supplies meet employees' demands, needs-supplies fit is achieved (arrow "b" in Figure 1). Similarly, organizations demand contributions from their employees in terms of time, effort, commitment, knowledge, skills, and abilities. Demands-abilities fit is achieved when these employee supplies meet organizational demands (arrow "c" in Figure 1). Both of these demand-supply relationships can be described by expanding Muchinsky and Monahan's (1987) definition of complementary fit.

Based on the relationships described above and presented in Figure 1, in this paper P-O fit is defined as *the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c)*

*both*. This definition recognizes the multiple conceptualizations of P-O fit and allows for both the supplementary and complementary perspectives to be considered concurrently.

### *Operationalizations of P-O Fit*

The literature has focused primarily on four operationalizations of P-O fit. Two of these reflect supplementary fit and one stems from the needs-supplies conceptualization. The fourth operationalization may be interpreted with either of these two perspectives.

Investigations of supplementary fit have been concerned with measuring the similarity between fundamental characteristics of people and organizations. The most frequently used operationalization of this perspective on fit is the congruence between individual and organizational values (e.g., Boxx, Odom, & Dunn, 1991; Chatman, 1989, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Posner, 1992). O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) use the same description for person-culture fit. As they posited that "congruency between an individual's values and those of an organization may be at the crux of person-culture fit" (O'Reilly et al., 1991, p. 492), in this manuscript P-O and person-culture fit will be treated as equivalent terms. Value congruence is a significant form of fit because values are "fundamental and relatively enduring" (Chatman, 1991, p. 459) and are the components of organizational culture that guide employees' behaviors (Schein, 1992).

Guided by B. Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework, several researchers have also used individuals' goal congruence with organizational leaders and peers to operationalize P-O fit (e.g., Vancouver, Millsap, & Peters, 1994; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Witt & Nye, 1992; Witt & Silver, 1995). The ASA framework is based on the premise that similar people are attracted to and selected by organizations whose goals are similar to their own or will enable them to attain their individual goals (B. Schneider, 1987; Vroom, 1966). Thus, it uses P-O fit as an explanation for the increase of within-organization homogeneity over time.

The third common operationalization of fit reflects a strict needs-supplies perspective by defining fit as the match between individual preferences or needs and organizational systems and structures (e.g., Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Cable & Judge, 1994; Turban & Keon, 1993). This operationalization has its roots in need-press theory in which environmental "presses" facilitate or hinder the meeting of people's physical and psychological needs (Murray, 1938). It can also be thought of in terms of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). According to

this theory, a person will be satisfied with work if his or her needs are fulfilled by the environment. Although the theory has most often been used to study person-vocation fit (e.g., Rounds, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1987), it has also been cited as an explanation for P-O fit (Bretz & Judge, 1994).

The fourth operationalization describes P-O fit as a match between the characteristics of individual personality and organizational climate—sometimes labeled organizational personality (e.g., Bowen et al., 1991; Burke & Deszca, 1982; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1984; Tom, 1971). Although this operationalization can be viewed as reflecting supplementary fit, because it describes congruence between the two entity's personalities (arrow a in Figure 1), its measurement often suggests a complementary needs-supplies perspective. This second interpretation is best explained by the acknowledgement that climate is frequently operationalized in terms of organizational supplies (such as reward systems or communication patterns) and individual personality is often construed in terms of needs. For example, an organization's collectivist climate may be operationalized as a team-based compensation system that may or may not meet an individual's need for achievement. Because few researchers specify their underlying conceptualization of fit, it is often difficult to determine whether the supplementary or complementary needs-supplies perspective is the basis for their models of personality based P-O fit.

Although the model in Figure 1 distinguishes between the various perspectives on fit, it is not meant to suggest that they are contradictory. In fact, quite the opposite is true. As was demonstrated in the operationalization of fit as the match between personality and organizational climate, often it is difficult to differentiate between fit perspectives. The definition presented above recognizes that the *optimum* P-O fit may be achieved when each entity's needs are fulfilled by the other *and* they share similar fundamental characteristics. Therefore, it is not contradictory with the definition posed in this paper that multiple perspectives on fit may be incorporated into one operationalization.

### *Other Forms of Person-Environment Fit*

The third step in defining P-O fit is to illustrate what lies outside this construct's domain by distinguishing it from other forms of P-E congruence. Although some authors have discussed the distinction between various types of P-E fit (e.g., Judge & Ferris, 1992), frequently the lines between these types are blurred (e.g., Blau, 1987; Edwards, 1991). Therefore, in this paper the differences between P-O fit and fit at three other levels of the environment—job, group, and vocation—are

explicated. This paper does not include a discussion of fit between an individual and his or her supervisor, because this research has developed relatively independent of that of P-E fit—primarily in the literature on vertical dyadic linkage (e.g. Graen & Cashman, 1975; Pulakos & Wexley, 1983).

As suggested by B. Schneider et al. (1995), fit may be a viable construct at many levels of analysis. The “appropriate” level at which to examine fit is determined primarily by the a priori rationale for expecting fit to be relevant at that particular level. However, it is also important that the measurement strategies selected are appropriate to the level that is chosen.

*Person-Vocation (P-V) fit.* The broadest level of the work environment with which a person may fit is the vocational level. For example, Super’s (1953) vocational development theory suggested that people choose an occupation based on its congruence with their self-concepts. Similarly, Holland (1985) suggested that both people and occupations have “personalities,” which he characterized with the RIASEC typology (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional personality types). Fit is determined by measures assessing the similarity between an individual’s personality and that of a vocational environment (e.g., Holland, 1977).

Although these theories may predict vocational choice, they do not contribute to predictions of fit with particular organizations. Even in predominantly vocation-specific industries, such as law and accounting, the cultures of individual organizations may vary (e.g., Chatman, 1991; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1992). For example, biodata scores predicted specific accounting and law firms that people would join, even after vocation was held constant (J. Schneider, 1994). Thus, there is some empirical support for the conceptual distinction between P-V and P-O fit.

*Person-Group (P-G) fit.* As work teams become more widely used in the corporate world, person-group fit becomes an increasingly relevant construct (e.g., Guzzo & Salas, 1995; Hoerr, 1989). Specifically, person-group (P-G) fit is defined as the compatibility between individuals and their work groups. The definition of work group, however, may range from a small group of immediate coworkers to any identifiable subunit of an organization, such as a functional department or geographic division. Few studies have examined antecedents or consequences of this type of fit, although there are several related research streams.

The literature most closely related to P-G fit is that of team composition. Although these literatures are distinct (composition is a group

level variable, whereas P-G fit is most frequently considered for individuals), Klimoski and Jones (1995) suggested that achieving high levels of individual-team fit is the driving principle behind effective team composition. Studies of composition have shown that goal (e.g., Shaw, 1981; Weldon & Weingart, 1993), value (e.g., Haythorn, 1968; Klimoski & Jones, 1995), and sometimes personality (e.g., Driskell, Hogan, & Salas, 1987; Hackman & Morris, 1975) homogeneity influence behavioral and attitudinal outcomes for groups and their members. In line with a demands-abilities perspective on fit, other studies have shown that teams composed of members with heterogeneous knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) are more effective than those with homogeneous KSAs (e.g., Haythorn, 1968; Laughlin, Branch, & Johnson, 1969; Shaw, 1981).

A related body of literature concerns group demography, or the composition of teams based on demographic, rather than psychological variables. Group demographic composition has been shown to influence behavioral patterns such as turnover (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991) and psychological patterns such as attachment to the group (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992).

This group composition research has suggested that the work group in which a person functions is a relevant and distinct type of P-E fit. Support for the distinction between P-G and P-O fit is found in the literature that suggests that sub-organizational units such as groups may have different norms and values than the organization in which they are contained (e.g. Louis, 1990; Patsfall & Feimer, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus, the degree of fit between an individual and group may differ radically from the fit between the person and the organization.

*Person-Job (P-J) fit.* One of the most well-studied types of P-E fit is the compatibility of individuals with specific jobs. Person-job (P-J) fit was defined by Edwards (1991) as the fit between the abilities of a person and the demands of a job (i.e., demands-abilities) or the desires of a person and the attributes of a job (needs-supplies). Unfortunately, "job" is a term that has been loosely equated to environment in some fit research (e.g., Blau, 1987), causing some confusion about its domain. In this paper, a job is defined as the tasks a person is expected to accomplish in exchange for employment, as well as the characteristics of those tasks. Using this definition, P-J fit should be judged relative to the tasks performed, not the organization in which the job exists.

Although it is likely that many job requirements will mirror characteristics of the organization, they are conceptually distinct elements of the work environment. For example, although organizational compensation policies establish guidelines, managers often have considerable flexibility in determining the reward structures for specific jobs (Bartol



& Martin, 1988). Therefore, the reinforcement systems of the organization and the job should be considered as separate entities with which a person may or may not fit. Non-significant correlations between measures of P-O and P-J fit also support that, despite the potential overlap, individuals may experience varying degrees of fit at the job and the organization level (O'Reilly et al., 1991).

In summary, although various aspects of the environment may be interrelated, there is conceptual and empirical support for the distinction between P-O fit and other types of congruence. It is important that this distinction is made because of potential interactions between fit at the various environmental levels. Specific propositions regarding these interactions are suggested in the final portion of this paper. Although these other types of fit are equally interesting and viable determinants of various outcomes, in the present paper attention is focused on the distinct construct of P-O fit. Once P-O fit has been defined, both through an explanation of what it is and what it is not, the relevant measurement issues may be explored.

### *Measuring Person-Organization Fit*

As with most constructs, the ideal P-O fit measurement procedures are a function of the research questions asked. This section begins with a description of the relevance and difficulties of commensurate measurement in the study of P-O fit. Following that discussion, direct measurement of perceived fit and two forms of indirect measurement of actual fit are presented, along with a description of the levels of analysis issues relevant to each. The section concludes with a description of indices of fit and of the recent debate between supporters of differences scores and polynomial regression.

#### *Commensurate Measurement*

Commensurate measurement—describing both person and organization with the same content dimensions—is often recommended for assessing fit because it ensures mutual relevance of the characteristics under investigation (e.g., Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1991; French, Rogers, & Cobb, 1974). Patsfall and Feimer (1985), however, suggest that commensurate dimensions are not necessary because a priori hypotheses can be used to predict the level of fit of any individual characteristic in an organization. This ongoing debate is complicated further by the vagueness of the distinction between commensurate and non-commensurate measures. Although a construct may have similar characteristics at the

individual and organizational levels, there will still be some inherent differences, resulting in non-identical measures. This leaves the interpretation of commensurate up to debate, as researchers strive to define how similar measures must be to meet the standard of “commensurability.”

As noted, it is difficult to achieve perfectly commensurate measures. Keeping this limitation in mind, the position taken in this paper is that for supplementary fit, all attempts should be made to maximize the measures’ commensurability. This ensures that high levels of fit imply similarity between an individual and an organization on specific characteristics, such as honesty values or social welfare goals. For complementary fit, however, the level of commensurability should depend on the breadth of the construct under investigation.

For narrowly defined, directly measured characteristics, such as pay level, fit can easily be assessed with commensurate questions such as “How much pay do you receive?” and “How much pay would you like to receive?” Fit on broader, latent characteristics, however, is not as amenable to commensurate measurement because of the characteristics’ inherent multidimensionality. For example, there are many things that an organization can do to meet people’s need for achievement, such as offering merit bonuses, commission-based pay, and formal recognition ceremonies. Because of the multiple ways for need for achievement to be satisfied, strictly commensurate measurement is not necessary. It is necessary, however, that researchers using non-commensurate measures precisely specify the constructs and dimensions they are investigating, as well as why the individual and organizational constructs are conceptually linked.

### *Direct and Indirect Measures of Fit*

Once the individual and organizational characteristics have been selected for investigation, researchers have a variety of techniques at their disposal for assessing the extent of fit. Some authors have elected to use *direct* measurement, which involves asking people explicitly whether they believe that a good fit exists. Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt’s (1985) study is a good example of the use of direct measurement to assess value congruence. Managers directly rated how compatible their values were with those of their organizations and how often they had to compromise personal principles to meet organizational expectations. Those who evaluated their values as highly congruent with the organization reported a variety of positive effects such as greater feelings of personal success and higher organizational commitment than those reporting low value congruence.

Direct measures are beneficial if the construct under investigation is subjective or *perceived* fit, that is, if fit is conceptualized as the *judgment* that a person fits well in an organization (Cable & Judge, 1995; French et al., 1974). Using this conceptualization, good fit is said to exist as long as it is perceived to exist, regardless of whether or not the person has similar characteristics to, or complements/is complemented by, the organization. For example, perceived fit has been shown to influence the evaluation of job applicants, even when fit as calculated by a comparison of individual and organizational values showed no influence (Cable & Judge, 1995).

Although direct measures of perceived fit may show significant relationships with individual outcome variables, several criticisms have been leveled against their use. Edwards (1991) denounced direct measures primarily because they confound the constructs of the person and environment, thereby preventing estimation of their independent effects. Additionally, when the questions do not explicitly describe what values or other characteristics are to be considered in the respondents' answers, it is almost impossible to ensure that commensurate dimensions are being considered. Finally, when direct measures are used in conjunction with measures of other work-related attitudes, a consistency bias (i.e., "I think that I fit well, so I must be satisfied with my job.") could potentially influence the results (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977).

In consideration of these drawbacks, some researchers rely on *indirect* measures to assess *actual* or objective fit (Cable & Judge, 1995; French et al., 1974). Whether interactions, difference scores, or polynomial regressions are used, indirect measures of fit involve an explicit comparison between separately rated individual and organizational characteristics. This type of measurement strategy is said to reflect actual fit because it allows a verifiable assessment of similarity or complementarity, without asking for implicit judgments of fit by those involved in the situation being analyzed. Whether actual and perceived P-O fit are the same constructs, simply measured differently, or whether they are two distinct constructs is an empirical question that deserves further investigation. Propositions regarding the distinction between these two conceptualizations are offered in the final section of this manuscript.

In addition to the distinction between direct and indirect measures of P-O fit, there are also different techniques for indirect measurement. Two of these techniques and their levels of analysis implications are discussed below.

*Indirect cross-levels measurement.* The cross-levels approach to indirect measurement is commonly used to assess both supplementary and complementary P-O fit. The cross-levels technique involves assessing

the compatibility of individuals with verifiable organizational characteristics; therefore, it involves measuring characteristics at *two* levels of analysis. Research on level of analysis issues offers suggestions on appropriate procedures for this type of measurement (e.g., Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Roberts, Hulin, & Rousseau, 1978; Rousseau, 1985).

Klein et al. (1994) suggested that specifying the level of one's theory is a critical step in addressing levels of analysis issues. In all theories of P-O fit individuals are hypothesized to have varying levels of compatibility with organizational characteristics. Individuals' characteristics are assumed to be independent, such that between-individual variation exists. Specifically, the values, goals, personality, or needs of one individual in an organization or applicant pool are assumed to be independent of these characteristics in others. Answering questions such as "What do you value?" each respondent describes him or herself. Because of their hypothesized independence, variability reflecting individual differences should exist in their responses.

Measurement of the organizational level variable, however, is more complicated. One type of organizational-level measure is "global data not divisible across individuals," such as organizational ownership or structure (Roberts et al., 1978, p. 85). This type of measure is not fundamentally perceptual in nature, as it can be verified by examining organizational charts or records. Measures of organizational variables that *are* perceptual, however, require the aggregation of data based on a composite of lower-level (individual) scores. In P-O fit research, the organizational constructs of interest are often values, goals, climate, or culture—variables that are most frequently measured by perceptions. Therefore, the aggregating of individual perceptions should be used in the measurement of actual P-O fit.

There is a controversy, however, as to whether a sufficient level of agreement should be shown before individual data can be aggregated to create an organizational level variable. The discourse between Glick (1985, 1988) and James (1982) and his colleagues (James, Joyce, & Slocum, 1988) is an example of this controversy. Glick (1985, 1988) suggested that agreement between individuals is unnecessary because variance between individuals can be considered error surrounding the one true score of the organizational variable. Alternatively, James and colleagues (1982, 1988) argued that when the organizational variable is perceptual in nature, one true organizational score may not exist. Their argument is based on the idea that variance between individuals' perceptions may not be simply error, but a representation of veridical differences within the organization regarding that variable. For example, if a mechanic does not perceive customer service as a value in an organization, but the CEO perceives it as one of the organization's primary

values, then it may not be valid to assert that an organizational value for customer service exists at the organizational level. To use the mean of these two individuals' value ratings would mask the existence of different values for customer service in the two organizational sub-units (the mechanical division and the top management team).

Because of the perceptual nature of the organizational characteristics most often examined in studies of P-O fit, the position taken in this paper reflects that of James and his colleagues (1982, 1988). Specifically, it is suggested that agreement (although not perfect homogeneity) between individual responses to organizational level questions (i.e., "What does *your organization* value?") must be demonstrated to establish the organizational variable. It is important to note that individuals are not required to respond similarly to the individual-level question (e.g., "What do *you* value?"), only that they agree on the values of the organization as a whole. For example, Chatman (1989) describes organizational values as those that "are a group [organization] product; even though all members of the group would not have the same values, a majority of active members would agree on them and members of the group would be aware of the group's support for a given value" (p. 339).

This condition of sufficient agreement (the reader is referred to George and Bettenhausen, 1990, for an indication of what may be considered "sufficient") may appear to restrict the study of P-O fit to organizations in which one dominant culture exists. This is only partially true. If an organization does not have a culture that is agreed upon by its members, then it does not make sense to assess an individual's fit with that culture. It is more appropriate in this case, as in the customer service value example used above, to measure P-G fit with particular sub-units of that organization, rather than the organization as a whole. However, although there may not be organizational agreement on a particular aspect of culture, such as the value for customer service, there may be consensus on other aspects, such as a value for efficiency or cost-cutting. Therefore, P-O fit can meaningfully be investigated on those variables on which there is agreement, whereas P-G fit may be more meaningful on those where there is disagreement at the organizational level. It is important to remember, however, that agreement must then be shown at the group level to evaluate P-G fit.

The implication of this discussion is that verification of (a) variability on individual characteristics, *and* (b) sufficient agreement or consensus of responses for organizational characteristics is necessary for cross-level studies of actual P-O fit. In the P-O fit literature, Chatman (1991) provides one of the best examples of handling these levels of analysis issues by (a) using a large number of managers and partners, familiar with the organizational values, to create organizational culture profiles, (b)

reporting indicators of the value structures' consistency over time (e.g., .78 median interrater correlation between time 1 and time 2), and (c) reporting coefficient alphas (.84–.90) and average interrater correlations to roughly estimate consensus on values within each organization.

Although Chatman builds some evidence for consensus on organizational values by using reliability indices, stronger evidence could have been demonstrated by the use of an agreement index such as  $r_{wg}$  (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984). For a more thorough exploration of the differences between reliability indices (consistency estimates) and agreement indices (consensus estimates), the reader is referred to Kozlowski and Hattrup (1992).

*Indirect individual-level measurement.* Although the very words “person-organization fit” seem to imply cross-levels research, this is not necessarily true. Whereas in cross-level studies organizational characteristics were assumed to be homogeneous (e.g., the organization as a whole is the unit of analysis), in individual-level investigations of actual fit, the organization construct is no longer verifiable organizational characteristics, but individuals' *perceptions* of those characteristics. Measures typically consist of each respondent answering parallel questions such as “What do you value?” and “What does your company value?” The similarity of the answers to these questions is then calculated, using either traditional difference scores or polynomial regression, resulting in an individual level measure of actual P-O fit. Regardless of the statistical analyses used to estimate fit, all measurement occurs at the individual level of analysis. Therefore, as in the case of other individual characteristics, peoples' perceptions of organizational characteristics are assumed to vary. This assumption could be (although rarely is) verified by showing a high level of variance or lack of agreement among individuals' perceptions.

Because many fit theories discuss congruence with organizational characteristics rather than with individuals' perceptions of them, why would researchers elect to use individual level measures? Similar to the rationale behind the importance of perceived fit, a primary reason is that people's perceptions of reality drive their cognitive appraisals of and reactions to specific situations (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Therefore, the perception of organizational characteristics may have a stronger influence on individual outcome variables such as stress, satisfaction, or commitment than would fit with organization's actual characteristics. This may be particularly true for fit on characteristics that are difficult to verify, such as values or goals.

In summary, whether researchers use direct or indirect measures, it is important for them to recognize the link between those measures and

the constructs they are investigating. Although both perceived and actual fit may be equally viable determinants of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, care should be taken to interpret results in terms of which was the measured construct.

### *Indices of Actual Fit*

Whether cross-level or individual-level measurement is used, researchers have a variety of options available for assessing the actual fit of a person with an organization. Edwards (1991) described several ways that P-E fit can be measured, although two have been most used in the context of P-O fit. The first is the calculation of a product term that reflects the moderating effects of one of the entities (person or organization) on the relationship between the other entity and an outcome variable. This focus on the interaction between person and organization is used in a variety of studies (e.g., Chesney & Rosenman, 1980; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1982; Pritchard & Karasick, 1973), only a subset of which use commensurate dimensions to describe both entities.

A second popular method for assessing fit is the reduction of person and organization measures into a single index reflecting the degree of similarity between them. Researchers have typically used the bivariate congruence indices of algebraic ( $X - Y$ ), absolute ( $|X - Y|$ ), or squared differences  $(X - Y)^2$ . In the case of multiple predictors, profile similarity indices (PSIs) such as the sum of algebraic differences ( $D^1$ ), the sum of absolute differences ( $|D|$ ), the sum of the squared differences ( $D^2$ ), the Euclidean distance ( $D$ ), or the correlation between two profiles ( $Q$ ) are used (Edwards, 1993; Edwards & Parry, 1993).

Much of the goal congruence literature has used the  $D$  statistic (Cronbach & Gleser, 1953), choosing to ignore the direction of the difference between the person and organization variables (e.g., Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Witt & Nye, 1992). Value congruence, however, has more frequently been investigated with the use of Q-sort (Bem & Funder, 1978; Block 1978) based profile correlations such as the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; O'Reilly et al., 1991) and the Organizational Fit Instrument (Ryan & Schmit, 1992).

Despite their wide-spread use in the fit literature, difference scores have been criticized repeatedly for a variety of problems (e.g., Cronbach, 1958; Edwards, 1993; Johns, 1981; Nunnally, 1962). One concern is with the *conceptual ambiguity* that results from difference scores concealing the individual contribution of each element to the overall score (Edwards, 1993; 1994). *Discarded information* is a second problem because



the absolute level of the person and environment variables is lost (Edwards, 1993; 1994). This problem is compounded by a loss of information regarding the direction of the difference with "symmetric" indices (i.e., the absolute difference, squared difference,  $D$ ,  $D^2$ ,  $|D|$ , and  $Q$ ). It is important to note that although Q-sort data may appear to give information on the direction of fit or misfit (i.e., fit could range from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ ), it can only describe the similarity of profile shape. Specifically, parallel profiles yield correlations of  $+1.00$ , whereas "mirror-image" profiles yield correlations of  $-1.00$  (Edwards, 1993). In the case of multiple predictors, PSIs are also *insensitive to the sources of profile differences* (Edwards, 1993; 1994). They do not reflect that a variety of elements may lead to differences between the two entities, while these elements may represent vastly different psychological experiences. Finally, *restrictive constraints* are placed on the sign and magnitude of the coefficients in difference score equations; constraints that are seldom substantiated by the data (e.g., Edwards & Parry, 1993; Edwards & Harrison, 1993).

In addition to these criticisms of difference scores in general, further concerns with profile correlations have been raised. Because profile correlations are ordinal and ipsative, Edwards (1993; 1994) strongly cautioned against their use because they cannot provide information regarding the magnitude of differences between the individual and the organization. This criticism is particularly relevant to, but difficult to overcome, in the value congruence literature (e.g., Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Much of the literature on values has indicated that they are arranged hierarchically and that Likert-type measures of values are prone to a social desirability bias. Therefore, Ravlin and Meglino (1987) support the use of ipsative measures because they are less prone to a social desirability response bias than Likert-type scales and they address the hierarchical arrangement of values. They do not, however, offer suggestions for how to overcome the problem of discarded information.

The alternative procedure suggested by Edwards (1993; 1994) is polynomial regression. The use of this procedure is based on the assumptions that: (a) The relationship between two entities and an outcome should be considered in three dimensions, (b) The analyses should use three-dimensional response surfaces to depict the joint relationship of the two entities (i.e., person and organization) with the outcome, and (c) The constraints implied by traditional fit indices should be considered as hypotheses that can be tested and supported to lend credibility to the proposed model.

The procedure begins with a researcher selecting the functional form of the conceptual model that should best underlie the data and identifying the corresponding constrained and unconstrained regression equations (Edwards & Parry, 1993). By testing the model with each of these



equations, and comparing their results, the functional form corresponding to the conceptual model of interest may be directly tested, rather than assumed. Using this technique for a reanalysis of French, Caplan, and Harrison's (1982) study on P-E fit and stress revealed conceptually meaningful findings, concealed by the use of difference scores in the original study (Edwards & Harrison, 1993). In the process of reanalysis, the proportion of variance explained was more than doubled (Edwards & Parry, 1993).

Although Edwards' technique addresses some of the problems inherent in difference scores, it is not without limitations. One concern is with the multicollinearity that results from expanding the constrained to the unconstrained equations. For example, the algebraic difference  $(P - O)^2$  for one set of person ( $P$ ) and organization ( $O$ ) variables is expanded to yield five terms:  $P$ ,  $O$ ,  $P^2$ ,  $O^2$ , and  $P \times O$  in the unconstrained equation. In this case, both of the quadratic terms and the interaction term have some multicollinearity with the initial  $P$  and  $O$  variables. A second concern is that Edwards' tests of constrained versus unconstrained models are highly dependent on sample size and power. Although this is a problem with any type of significance test, it is particularly relevant to Edwards' technique because of the high number of degrees of freedom used in each test. Additional difficulties with Edwards' technique are encountered when testing complex moderation models and in using dummy-coded variables. Interpreting a moderating relationship would involve the testing of interactions with quadratic expansion terms, and the polynomial expansion terms of dummy-coded variables are correlated perfectly with their original coding (e.g., for gender codes,  $0^2 = 0$  and  $1^2 = 1$ ).

Two final issues with the polynomial regression procedure reflect conceptual rather than statistical concerns. First, a concern has been voiced with the conceptual validity of the higher order terms that can be created using Edwards' technique (Bedeian & Day, 1994). Although these higher order terms may receive empirical support, unless they are theoretically relevant, they do not aid in conceptual understanding. It should be noted that Edwards (1994) acknowledges this argument and does not promote the use of his technique unless guided by theory. Finally, some researchers have argued that difference scores may represent something conceptually distinct from their components (Tisak & Smith, 1994). If this is true, then Edwards' technique of analyzing the component parts does not address the same construct as would analyzing a difference score. This assertion deserves empirical evaluation by contrasting the nomological nets of difference scores and their components.

Thus, the longstanding debate regarding the usefulness of difference scores to measure fit continues. In the future, research should be conducted that uses *both* the traditional methods of assessing fit and the polynomial regression technique recommended by Edwards. This will allow the strengths and weaknesses of each method to be explored, as well as add to our knowledge of the intricacies of congruence relationships. For example, as previously mentioned, much of the value congruence literature continues to be conducted with ipsative measures, such as the OCP (O'Reilly et al., 1991). In order to compare these methods with polynomial regression, researchers may try using Likert scales to assess values, rather than the currently supported measures. Using Likert scales with increased gradation at the upper end would allow respondents to discriminate more finely between positive responses, thereby reducing the social desirability effects indicated by Ravlin and Meglino (1987).

### *Reviewing the Person-Organization Fit Literature*

When researchers do not specify the type of P-O fit they are investigating (i.e., supplementary vs. complementary, perceived vs. actual), it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding the construct. Therefore, in the previous two sections of this manuscript, relevant distinctions that can be used to describe the P-O fit literature were presented. In the following review, these distinctions are used to organize and integrate the existing literature on P-O fit and various aspects of the employment experience.

Theories regarding P-O fit have highlighted three aspects of the employment experience that affect or are affected by individual-organizational congruence. First, the ASA framework suggests that consideration of P-O fit during organizational entry is one of the primary influences in creating organizational homogeneity (B. Schneider, 1987). A recent review article by B. Schneider et al. (1995) reviews the role of P-O fit in determining individuals' job search and choice behaviors as well as organizations' selection decisions. Following organizational entry, individual and organizational socialization practices have been supported as a second contributor to P-O fit (Chatman, 1989). Finally, long-term outcomes attributed to P-O fit include turnover (e.g., B. Schneider, 1987), work attitudes (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), pro-social behaviors (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), work performance (e.g., Tziner, 1987), and organizational outcomes (e.g., B. Schneider, Kristof, Goldstein, & Smith, in press).

These three aspects of the employment experience (organizational entry, socialization, and long-term outcomes) are used in conjunction

TABLE 1  
*Empirical Studies of P-O Fit Classified by Conceptualization  
 and Field of Research*

Field of research	Supplementary fit	Complementary fit
<b><u>Organizational entry</u></b>		
Individual		
Job search		Rynes et al. (1991)
Job choice	Behling & Tolliver (1972) Burke & Deszca (1982) Judge & Bretz (1992) Keon et al. (1982)	Bretz et al. (1989) Cable & Judge (1994) Turban & Keon (1993)
Organizational		
Recruitment		
Selection	Adkins et al. (1994) Cable & Judge (1995) Chatman (1991) Rynes & Gerhart (1990)	Rynes & Gerhart (1990)
<b><u>Socialization</u></b>		
Individual	Chatman (1991)	
Organizational	Chatman (1991)	
<b><u>Outcomes</u></b>		
Individual		
Work attitudes	Boxx et al. (1991) Bretz & Judge (1994) Chatman (1991) O'Reilly et al. (1991) Posner (1992) Posner et al. (1985) Vancouver et al. (1994) Vancouver & Schmitt (1991) Witt et al. (1993) Witt & Nye (1992) Witt & Silver (1995) Witt & Voss (1995)	Bretz & Judge (1994) Downey et al. (1975) Tziner (1987)
Intention to quit/ attrition	Bretz & Judge (1994) Chatman (1991) O'Reilly et al. (1991) Vancouver et al. (1994) Vancouver & Schmitt (1991)	Bretz & Judge (1994)
Stress		Chesney & Rosenman (1980) Ivancevich & Matteson (1980) Matteson & Ivancevich (1982)
Prosocial behaviors	O'Reilly & Chatman (1986) Posner (1992) Posner et al. (1985)	

Table 1 (Continued)

Field of research	Supplementary fit	Complementary fit
Work performance	Bretz & Judge (1994)	Andrews (1967) Bretz & Judge (1994) Downey et al. (1975) Pritchard & Karasick (1973) Tziner (1987)
Organizational		Livingstone & Nelson (1994)

with the supplementary and complementary fit distinction to provide a framework for the following literature review. Table 1 illustrates areas in this framework that have been well-explored, in addition to those that require future investigation. Because of the high number of non-empirical research articles, as well as the limited number of studies utilizing different variables, it was not feasible to conduct a meta-analysis on the current body of P-O fit research. As more empirical research is conducted, however, future reviewers should consider using meta-analytic procedures (e.g., Hunter & Schmidt, 1990).

Two primary criteria were used in selecting studies to be included in this review. First, only articles that investigate the fit between people and organizations (rather than jobs, vocations, or groups) were reviewed. Theoretical and conceptual pieces, as well as empirical studies were included, because of their fundamental importance to the study of P-O fit. These studies were identified by an electronic search of the published management, I/O psychology, vocational psychology, and interactional psychology literature. In addition, unpublished papers from professional conferences were included if the authors provided them in response to a request for materials. Second, only those empirical studies using commensurate measurement or explicitly arguing for the conceptual link between the individual and organizational-level variables were included. As previously mentioned, the standards for consideration as commensurate measurement are often vague; therefore, the best judgment of the author was used when determining the inclusion or exclusion of a study.

### *Organizational Entry*

*Individual job search and choice.* Although job search and choice behaviors are conceptually distinct, they often have not been investigated as such (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994). This is particularly true in the P-O fit literature, where individuals' preferences for organizations, rather than search behaviors or actual choice decisions have been the

focus. Only one study concentrated specifically on job search behaviors as an antecedent of P-O fit. In this study, job applicants reported that they formed assessments of fit with companies at which they were interviewing based on interactions with both formal organizational representatives (i.e., recruiters) and informal contacts with others in the firm (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). The specific influences on fit assessments were the firm's general reputation, attitude toward product/industry, status of particular functional areas within the firm, training and advancement opportunities, and geographic location (Rynes et al., 1991). With the exception of this study, the P-O fit literature has concentrated on the consequences, rather than the antecedents of individuals' assessments of P-O fit during organizational entry.

Much of the research on P-O fit and job choice has been conducted in laboratory settings; therefore, investigators have used organizational attractiveness ratings as a surrogate for job/organization choice. In particular, personality variables have been used to predict peoples' preferences for organizations with certain types of reward systems. Upper-level students with a high need for achievement have been reported to prefer hypothetical organizations characterized by encouragement and reward of competitive individual effort and accomplishment (Bretz et al., 1989; Turban & Keon, 1993). Other personality characteristics, such as materialism and self-efficacy, have significantly predicted individuals' preferences for organizations with pay systems involving specific characteristics such as high pay levels and individual-based pay (Cable & Judge, 1994). Corresponding results have been found for self-esteem and preferences for organizational centralization (Turban & Keon, 1993). These results indicate that needs-supplies fit between individual personality traits and organizational characteristics may significantly influence applicants' job choice decisions.

Supplementary P-O fit has also been found to predict organizational preferences. For example, Tom (1971) hypothesized that people prefer and choose to work for employers whose organizational images (knowledge, belief, and feeling structures) match their own personal self-concepts. Similar hypotheses have been supported by empirical studies operationalizing P-O fit as either (a) the match between individual personality and organizational climate, or (b) value congruence. For example, Type A and Type B personality (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974) students were found to prefer organizational climates reflecting commensurate characteristics (Burke & Deszca, 1982). Type A individuals—characterized by ambition, competitiveness, impatience, high needs for achievement, and hostility—preferred organizations exhibiting high performance standards, spontaneity, ambiguity, and toughness, labeled

as Type A organizational behaviors. In terms of value congruence, graduate and professional students were more likely to accept job offers from hypothetical organizations whose value orientation matched their own than those that did not (Judge & Bretz, 1992). This relationship held true even when non-value information such as pay and promotion opportunities was also presented. Taken as a whole, these findings lend some support to the hypothesis that people are differentially attracted to organizations with which they anticipate a supplementary fit.

A few moderators of the relationship between supplementary fit and organizational attraction have also been investigated. Several studies have shown that the desire for self-organizational congruence is greater among students with positive versus negative self-images (Behling & Tolliver, 1972; Keon, Latack, & Wanous, 1982). Students with negative self-images were more likely to prefer organizations and graduate schools least like themselves (Behling & Tolliver, 1972; Keon et al., 1982). These findings support self-esteem or self-image strength as a moderator of the relationship between P-O fit and organizational choice.

*Organizational recruitment and selection.* Just as few studies have been conducted on individuals' job search behaviors and P-O fit, research is also lacking on the topic of P-O fit and organizational recruitment. Most research has focused on the importance of fit in selection decisions, rather than the recruitment process, and much of this research has been fairly recent. Prior to the late 1980s researchers of selection did not ignore the construct of P-O fit (e.g., Argyris, 1957; Kanter, 1977; Wanous, 1980); however, their primary focus was on P-J fit rather than individual-organizational congruence. Even in the late 1980s when several practitioner-focused articles highlighted the benefits of hiring managers to fit with the strategies (Herbert & Deresky, 1987; Leontiades, 1982), life cycles (Kerr, 1982), or general business conditions of an organization (Gerstein & Reisman, 1983), the discussion centered on hiring those best able to meet job rather than organizational demands.

Bowen et al. (1991) made one of the first significant arguments for the desirability of P-O fit as a desired outcome of the hiring process. Whereas traditional models focused primarily on P-J fit, Bowen et al. (1991) suggested that individual-organizational fit becomes the critical factor when selecting employees for long-term employment and organizational flexibility. Selecting people whose personalities are compatible with the organizational culture creates a flexible workforce with employees who can be moved easily between jobs. As a guide for practitioners, Bowen et al. (1991) recommended a four step procedure that would help incorporate P-O fit at each step in the selection process. Despite the increased time and financial requirements for such a system, its adoption

was predicted to improve employee attitudes, reduce absenteeism and turnover, and reinforce organizational design.

Several authors have argued that P-O fit criteria are *already* included in the selection process (Chatman, 1989; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Judge & Ferris, 1992). These researchers suggested that managers are reluctant to abandon the interview, despite its questionable reliability and validity (e.g., Harris, 1989), because it is the most effective way of selecting applicants who appear to fit well with the organization. This point is reinforced by Karren and Graves (1994), who found that the structured interview is one of the most effective ways to assess an applicant's fit with an organization. To more comprehensively describe how this assessment of fit coordinates with the traditional assessment of job-relevant criteria, Judge and Ferris (1992) proposed a descriptive model of selection that incorporates both P-J and P-O fit considerations.

Empirical support for the role of P-O fit in organizational selection decisions has been mixed. Some results suggest that interviewers desire firm-specific qualities in applicants, above and beyond general qualifications (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Specifically, interviewers appear to be more stringent in their evaluation of firm-specific employability and show greater variability in firm-specific evaluations than in general employability assessments (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). However, Cable and Judge (1995) found that only value congruence as *perceived* by the interviewers, rather than *actual*, value congruence, was predictive of interview outcomes. Similarly, Adkins et al. (1994) found no significant relationship between actual applicant-organization value congruence (as perceived by the recruiter) and the direct perceived fit assessments or judgments of general employability. Instead, they found that these assessments were significantly related to two other types of fit: (a) value congruence between the applicant and *recruiter* (idiosyncratic fit or what might be called a 'similar-to-me' bias); and (b) between the applicant and an "*ideal*" applicant (universal fit or what may be called a 'similar-to-an-ideal' bias; Adkins et al., 1994).

Support for both idiosyncratic and universal fit has been found by several researchers; however, universal fit has been reported as the most influential on selection decisions (e.g., Bretz et al., 1993; Dalessio & Imada, 1984). When asked to directly rate applicants' P-O fit and then to list the reasons why those ratings were assigned, organizational representatives indicated that more emphasis was placed on job-specific and general fit (applicants with universally desirable traits) than on fit with their particular organizations during the early stages of hiring (Bretz et al., 1993). Thus, although P-O fit may play an important role in representatives' decision making, their assessments of fit may be influenced

by universally desirable traits rather than firm-specific fit, at least during early stages of the selection process.

These results also demonstrate that perceived fit, as measured by direct assessments of organizational representatives, may not reflect actual levels of P-O fit. Further, although structured interviews may be an effective way to assess P-O fit, individual biases may influence the accuracy of these assessments (Karren & Graves, 1994). It has also been suggested that techniques such as personality measures, forced-choice scales, and Q-sort methodologies (e.g., individual and organizational profiles) could instead be used to assess fit, while negating the effects of interviewers' biases (Karren & Graves, 1994).

*Summary.* Substantial support has been shown for the positive relationship between all types of P-O fit and individuals' preferences for organizations. This relationship has also been supported for organizations' selection decisions; however, the relative importance of P-O fit, universal fit, and idiosyncratic fit have yet to be determined. It is also supported that perceived, rather than actual fit, is more influential during the selection process. This is understandable because of the short period of time that individuals and organizations have to express their value, goals, and personalities. It is also possible that P-O fit may play a larger role in organizations' decisions at later stages of the selection process, once overall qualifications have been established. This idea is explained further in the final section of this manuscript, along with specific suggestions for investigating the previously unresearched links between P-O fit, job search behaviors, and organizational recruitment practices.

### *Socialization*

Because P-O fit is not the sole determinant of job choice or selection decisions, a range in the initial level of fit will most likely exist in an organization's new hires. Several studies have shown that simply as tenure increases, people learn and come to accept the goals and values of their employing organization (e.g., Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1975; Hinrichs, 1964). In addition, Ostroff and Rothausen (1995) hypothesized that increased tenure leads to a better fit between individuals' personal orientations and organizational climate. Results from their study of secondary school teachers supported this hypothesis most strongly at the aggregate level, such that groups of teachers with longer tenure had higher levels of fit with their environments. Specific socialization activities are not discussed in these studies; however, it is evident that over time individuals come to assume characteristics of their organizations, resulting in higher levels of supplementary fit.



The purpose of socialization is to facilitate learning about various aspects of the organizational environment, including performance proficiency, people (the establishment of working relationships), politics, organization-specific language, organizational history, and organizational goals and values (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). This final dimension is the most common topic addressed in the socialization literature (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), and appears particularly relevant to supplementary P-O fit. Recent research has focused on the importance of individual as well as organizational socialization practices, indicating that employees can take an active role in learning and increasing their level of P-O fit (Morrison, 1993a; 1993b).

Although researchers often offer increasing levels of P-O fit as an explanation of the positive effects of socialization (e.g., Chao et al., 1994; Hall et al., 1975), fit is rarely included as a variable in their studies. Chatman's (1991) investigation of accounting firms' new hires is an exception. In that study, supplementary fit on values and goals was proposed to mediate the relationship between socialization and outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Results indicated that socialization, particularly mentorship activities and attendance at firm-related social events, had positive effects on levels of P-O fit within one year of organizational entry. Furthermore, both initial and socialized levels of fit were found to predict turnover over the two and a half years of the study's duration (Chatman, 1991).

*Summary.* These results indicate that organizational tenure and socialization practices may lead to increased levels of supplementary P-O fit. The effects of these variables on complementary fit, however, has been relatively unexplored. Both organizational (mentorship) and individual socialization attempts (attendance at social activities) appear to increase fit, although only a small number of practices have been investigated. Remaining questions concerning socialization and P-O fit are posited in the final section of this manuscript.

### *Long-Term Consequences*

After devoting resources to attracting, selecting, and socializing employees for high levels of P-O fit, managers hope for positive results. Although researchers have examined the effects of fit on several outcomes, most studies center around positive outcomes for individuals, such as improved satisfaction and reduced intention to quit. However,

several theorists have suggested that high levels of P-O fit produce negative outcomes at the organizational level (B. Schneider, 1987; B. Schneider, Kristof, Goldstein, & Smith, in press; B. Schneider, Smith, & Goldstein, 1994; Walsh, 1987). This section is organized around the various individual and organizational level outcomes of P-O fit.

*Work attitudes.* Strong support has been found for the positive effects of P-O fit on individual work attitudes. In terms of supplementary fit, value congruence has been well supported as a determinant of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This relationship has been documented for junior-level accountants (Chatman, 1991), executives in the public sector (Boxx et al., 1991), and MBA students, senior accountants, and middle-level managers (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Additional work attitudes affected by value congruence include motivation (Posner, 1992) and feelings of work group cohesion (Boxx et al., 1991), as well as feelings of personal success and greater concern for stakeholders by managers in large manufacturing firms (Posner et al., 1985).

Researchers have reported similar effects on work attitudes for supplementary fit operationalized as actual goal congruence. Vancouver and Schmitt (1991), in a study of teachers and principals from over 350 secondary schools, found that both superior-subordinate (teacher-principal) and member-constituency (teacher-other teachers) goal congruence were positively related to satisfaction and commitment. Of the two types of goal congruence, member-constituency congruence had the greatest impact on these work attitudes (Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991). Similar results were reported by Witt and his colleagues (e.g., Witt & Nye, 1992; Witt, Hilton, & Hellman, 1993; Witt & Voss, 1995); however, in one study they found supervisor-subordinate congruence to be most influential for non-supervisory employees.

In a follow-up to the Vancouver and Schmitt (1991) study, Vancouver et al. (1994) turned their attention to the group level of analysis. The focus in this study was on between-constituency (agreement of all teachers with the principal) and within constituency (overall level of agreement among teachers) goal congruence. Results indicated that both types of group level goal congruence had an effect on work attitudes after controlling for individual level congruence. Specifically, teachers in schools with high within-constituency congruence had more positive attitude scores than those with low within-constituency congruence. Contrary to their hypothesis, however, teachers in schools with high between-constituency congruence (i.e. most teachers' goals were congruent with the principal's) indicated lower attitude scores. These results, taken as a whole, indicate the strong impact of goal congruence, at both the individual and group levels of analysis, on the work attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Moderators and mediators of the relationship between goal congruence and work attitudes have also been explored. Exchange ideology, defined by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986) as individuals' expectations for what should be given and received in an exchange relationship, has been shown to moderate the fit-satisfaction relationship (Witt et al., 1993). Their results indicated that fit is more strongly related to satisfaction for employees who have a strong exchange ideology (i.e., have high social exchange expectations) than for those with weaker ideologies (Witt et al., 1993). Additionally, workplace politics have been supported as a mediator of the relationship between goal congruence and work attitudes. Employees with high co-worker goal *incongruence* perceived higher levels of workplace politics, which in turn led to decreased focus on customers and reduced continuance commitment (Witt & Voss, 1995). Taking a different perspective, P-O fit has been supported as a moderator of the relationship between team politics and cohesion (Witt & Silver, 1995). Results indicate that high levels of goal congruence can mitigate the detrimental effects of politics on team cohesion (Witt & Silver, 1995).

Positive work attitudes have been shown to result from P-O fit conceptualized from a needs-supplies perspective as well as from these supplementary perspectives. High levels of fit between organizational climates and people's preferences for them (Tziner, 1987), as well as climates and personality characteristics (Downey, Hellriegel, & Slocum, 1975), have been found to predict high levels of satisfaction and organizational commitment. Industrial employees reporting low discrepancies between their organization's climate for achievement and their preferences for such a climate were more satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organizations than those reporting high discrepancies (Tziner, 1987). Similarly, individuals requiring social contact and interdependence with others were more satisfied in organizations with open and empathic climates than those with closed, bureaucratic, and impersonal climates (Downey et al., 1975). Further, individuals with high self-confidence were more satisfied in structured organizations versus all others in unstructured organizations (Downey et al., 1975).

One of the few studies to examine the effects of multiple conceptualizations of fit on work attitudes was conducted by Bretz and Judge (1994). They operationalized fit in four ways: (a) value congruence (supplementary), (b) individual personality and organizational image similarity (supplementary), (c) the degree to which organizational reinforcement systems met individuals' needs (needs-supplies), and (d) the extent to which individual KSAs met job requirements (more indicative of P-J than P-O fit). Their results showed powerful direct effects of P-O fit, when conceptualized in multiple ways, on organizational satisfaction.

*Intention to quit and turnover.* Not only do various conceptualizations of P-O fit significantly predict satisfaction and commitment, they are similarly predictive of intentions to quit. Specifically, high levels of supervisor-subordinate and peer goal congruence (individual level), as well as within-constituency congruence (group level), are negatively related to intentions to quit (Vancouver et al., 1994; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991). Similarly, employees with lower levels of value congruence with their organizations are more likely to report an intention to leave their organizations than those with higher congruence levels (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1991).

Furthermore, several studies have shown that these intentions to quit are often realized. Survival analysis by O'Reilly et al. (1991) indicated that value congruence was a significant determinant of actual employee turnover within 2 years of the initial assessment of fit. Similarly, Chatman (1991) reported that levels of value congruence measured both at entry (initial) and after 1 year of employment and socialization (resulting) significantly predicted turnover. Utilizing multiple conceptualizations of P-O fit, Bretz and Judge (1994) also found that P-O fit had a strong direct effect on organizational tenure.

*Stress.* Lower levels of work-related stress have also been associated with high levels of P-O fit (Chesney & Rosenman, 1980; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1982). Researchers have typically used self-reports to characterize subjects and their organizations as either Type A or a Type B entities (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). Results have shown that when individuals join matched-typed organizations (i.e., Type A individuals join Type A organizations and Type B individuals join Type B organizations) they experience lower levels of job stress, as indicated by self-reports and lower blood pressure, than do their "mismatched" counterparts.

*Prosocial behaviors.* Behavioral effects of P-O fit have included increased prosocial behaviors such as organizational citizenship behaviors (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), self-reported teamwork (Posner, 1992), and tendencies toward ethical behavior (Posner et al., 1985). Undergraduate students were more likely to report helping with orientation and school-related activities, and MBA students pledged more money to their schools, when high levels of value congruency existed (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Similarly, congruence with an organization's core principles or values has been found to have significant positive effects on self-report ratings of teamwork (Posner, 1992) and tendencies toward ethical behavior (Posner et al., 1985). However, because most of these results are based on self-reports, future research should attempt to incorporate more objective behavioral measures, such as the pledges by MBA students (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

*Work performance.* Self-reports have also been utilized to assess the effects of P-O fit on individuals' work performance. Industrial employees reporting low discrepancies between their organization's climate for achievement and their preferences for such a climate had higher self-appraised work performance than those reporting high discrepancies (Tziner, 1987). Other researchers have used more objective measures of work performance such as the number of promotions and percent salary increases for managers (Downey et al., 1975; Bretz & Judge, 1994). Downey et al. (1975) found that individuals with high need for social contact and interdependence with others performed better by these measures in organizations with humanitarian climates than did their less sociable counterparts. Bretz and Judge (1994) examined fit as a predictor of career success. Their results indicated indirect effects of P-O fit on job promotions and to a lesser extent salary level, in addition to direct effects on organizational tenure and satisfaction.

Andrews (1967) found an interaction between managers classified as achievement- or power-oriented and their organizations' values of achievement or power. Managerial performance composite scores, consisting of job status, number of promotions, and number of raises, were significantly higher for the managers in organizations "matching" their values. Pritchard and Karasick (1973) found support for similar hypotheses regarding managers with a high need for order in highly structured environment, and low level managers with a high need for dominance in low status polarization organizations.

*Organizational consequences.* As reviewed above, the majority of the P-O fit literature has focused on the positive outcomes for individuals. At the organizational level, however, the benefits of high levels of fit have been questioned. Argyris (1957) theorized that organizations with too many people of "the right type" would be in danger of stultification and lack of innovation. Others have begun to focus attention on this "dark side of good fit" that may result in myopic perspectives, an inability to adapt to a changing environment, and a lack of organizational innovation (B. Schneider, 1987; B. Schneider et al., in press). Walsh (1987) supported these propositions by suggesting that high levels of *poor* fit can stimulate organizational maturation and development. Thus, it appears that although fit may offer several benefits for individuals, these benefits may come at the expense of organizational effectiveness.

Some suggestions have been made, however, on how to help elevate these negative organizational consequences. B. Schneider et al. (in press) propose that although high levels of fit may be desirable for lower level employees, managers at higher levels should be selected for heterogeneity. Further, Greenhalgh (1983) and B. Schneider and his colleagues suggested that "misfits" are particularly important during the

later stages of an organization's maturation, when decline may be promoted by stagnation.

In contrast to these arguments, initial support has been found for a model of "creativity fit" that disputes the argument that high levels of fit necessarily lead to low levels of innovation (Livingstone & Nelson, 1994). Both demands-abilities and needs-supplies fit are incorporated in this model, to elucidate the positive consequences of matching creative people with creativity-rich organizations. More research concerning these ideas should be conducted to more accurately determine the long-term organizational consequences of P-O fit.

*Summary.* The empirical results supporting the positive consequences of P-O fit for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, extra-role behaviors, and retention rates are extensive. In addition, these benefits have been shown utilizing multiple conceptualizations of fit. However, the benefits of P-O fit for performance are still questionable. Studies employing objective measures of performance such as productivity, product quality, or cycle time would provide stronger tests of the fit-performance relationship for individuals. Also, although several authors suggested that high levels of P-O fit may have detrimental effects on organizations, this relationship has received little empirical examination.

### *Recommending Future Research Directions and Implications of P-O Fit*

The demonstrated relevance of P-O fit in the hiring process and its subsequent effects on individual and organizational outcomes make it an important topic for continued research. As practitioners are encouraged to hire people for the organization, rather than for specific jobs, the importance of understanding the complexity of P-O fit becomes even more critical (Bowen et al., 1991; Bridges, 1994). One objective of the current paper was to integrate the existing theoretical and empirical research; however, this integration indicates that there are many issues that remain unaddressed. In this final section a variety of directions for future research are proposed, specific propositions to guide prospective investigations are offered, and recommendations for managers interested in the practical implications of P-O fit are made.

### *Multiple Conceptualizations of P-O Fit*

One of this manuscript's major contributions is its specification and integration of multiple P-O fit conceptualizations. One benefit of recognizing these multiple perspectives is that by examining more than one in any single study, a more comprehensive picture of fit may be attained. The P-O fit definition presented earlier suggests that the benefits of fit

may be maximized if both supplementary and complementary fit exist concurrently but on different characteristics. This suggests an additive effect of fit conceptualizations. However, it is also possible that once one type of fit is attained, the effects of other types might be constrained. For example, it may be proposed that supplementary fit on values produces such a high level of satisfaction that the complementarity of KSAs does little to add to this positive attitude. Only by investigating multiple conceptualizations of fit in a single study, can these two competing propositions be explored.

*Proposition 1a:* Supplementary and complementary fit (on different characteristics) have additive effects on dependent variables, such that people who are high on both types of fit will have more positive work attitudes and lower turnover rates than will those who have only high supplementary or high complementary fit; or

*Proposition 1b:* Supplementary and complementary fit (on different characteristics) have convergent effects on dependent variables, such that people who are high on one of these types of fit have similar attitudes and turnover rates as those who are high on both types.

Another possibility is that the various conceptualizations of fit may differentially predict particular dependent variables. Bretz and his colleagues (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Bretz et al., 1993) provide a good example of investigating multiple conceptualizations of fit, but this work could be extended to disentangle the effects of each type on the dependent variables. In particular, supplementary fit on values and goals may be predicted to have a strong effect on affective outcomes because they both involve attitudes, but a lesser effect on individual performance because they are distally removed from daily work behaviors. The opposite effect could be proposed for complementary fit on KSAs, such that this type of fit would strongly influence daily on-the-job performance.

*Proposition 2:* Supplementary fit on values, goals, and personality will have a stronger effect on attitudinal outcomes than will complementary fit on KSAs; whereas, complementary fit on KSAs will have a stronger effect on individual performance.

The potential conflict that would result if fit existed on one conceptualization but not on others provides further opportunities for research. For example, if a person fits with an organization's reward system, but this system is incongruent with the organizational values and goals, job seekers and employees may have a difficult time assessing their fit with the company. Research on "paradoxical communication," described by Soldow (1981, p. 502) as that which "entails an obvious message that conflicts with an ambiguous and less obvious message. . .," has shown that



these messages result in increased role confusion and job dissatisfaction. Therefore, such inconsistency may confuse or reduce employees' evaluations of perceived P-O fit. Therefore, the more internally consistent an organization's characteristics, the easier it should be for applicants and incumbents to evaluate their fit with the organization.

*Proposition 3:* Within-organization, cultural inconsistencies—such as conflicting values and reward systems—will reduce individuals' perceptions of their overall level of P-O fit.

Managers can benefit from recognizing the multiple conceptualizations of P-O fit. For example, organizations may receive optimal benefits from P-O fit if their employees have high levels of supplementary fit on goals but complementary fit on specific KSAs (B. Schneider et al., in press). This suggestion has received support in the group composition literature (e.g., Morgan & Lassiter, 1992), but has not yet been tested at the organizational level. By specifying what types of fit are most desired, managers can establish more precise guidelines for employee selection and develop training geared at improving particular types of fit.

#### *Other Types of P-E Fit*

A second contribution of this manuscript is the expanded differentiation of P-O fit from other types of environmental compatibility (i.e., P-G or P-J fit), as suggested by previous researchers of P-O fit (e.g., Judge & Ferris, 1992). By distinguishing between these constructs, the fit or misfit of individuals with various aspects of their environment may be explored. The potential moderating, mediating, or even competing relationships between various types of fit raise questions regarding the relative importance of P-O fit. For instance, high levels of P-V or P-G fit may undermine organizational commitment.

Research has shown that organizational commitment may be displaced onto a group within that organization (e.g., Becker, 1992; Reichers, 1985; Zaccaro & Dobbins, 1989). Any organizational characteristic that would lead to the development of strong distinct group cultures—such as strong departmentalism, group-based reward systems, or merger-induced countercultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993)—is likely to reduce the influence of P-O fit, relative to P-G fit, on individual outcomes. For instance, organizational goals may be discarded for group goals, such as self-preservation or accumulation of scarce resources. Similarly, organizational values, such as innovation or creativity, may suffer as group values of precision and perfection take precedence.



***Proposition 4:*** The relative influence of P-O fit on individual outcomes in organizations with multiple distinct subcultures or groups will be less than in organizations with one dominant culture.

Moreover, a distinction has been raised between people who identify most strongly with their vocations, and those who identify more closely with their specific employers (i.e., “cosmopolitans” and “locals,” Gouldner, 1957). A recent study by B. Schneider, Hanges, Goldstein and Braverman (1994) showed support for the distinction of these two identification patterns, and found that each significantly predicted various types of performance. Because of their strong vocational ties, it is expected that cosmopolitans’ performance and work attitudes would be more affected by P-V fit than P-O fit. Similarly, P-O fit should have more impact on locals’ individual outcomes than would P-V fit.

***Proposition 5:*** The work attitudes of individuals who identify strongly with their vocations will be more influenced by fit with their vocation than by fit with any one particular organization.

Managers attempting to promote high levels of P-O congruence should consider these other environmental elements with which employees may desire good fit. To increase the relevance of fit with the organization, managers should promote a strong, consistent organizational culture by emphasizing corporate goals and values, reducing distinctions between organizational subunits, and publicizing the organization’s unique contributions to employees’ vocations.

### ***Measurement of P-O Fit***

Because of the variety of methods used to assess fit, a third important contribution of this manuscript was the elucidation of the link between measurement strategies and various P-O fit constructs. Currently, studies of P-O fit are discussed as investigations of the same construct, regardless of whether they employ (a) direct measurement of perceived fit, (b) indirect cross-levels measurement of actual fit, or (c) indirect individual-level measurement of actual fit. However, as mentioned previously, it is possible that each of these measurement strategies is assessing a distinct construct. This is a largely an empirical question that can be explored by investigating the nomological networks surrounding each construct. One way to begin to build evidence for the distinctiveness of these construct is to determine if each type leads to different outcomes.

When considering perceived fit, the construct closely resembles an attitude. As such, it can be predicted that other attitudes should be strongly affected by perceived fit. If a person perceives that he or she

fits well in an organization, then it is likely that satisfaction, commitment, and low intent to leave will result (Posner et al., 1985). Similarly, if an interviewer perceives that a job applicant fits well with the company, then it is likely that the interviewer will have a positive reaction to the applicant and offer a favorable evaluation (Cable & Judge, 1995; Ferris & Judge, 1991).

Actual fit, however, may be predicted to have somewhat different effects. Cable and Judge (1995) explain that theories of similarity-attraction (e.g., Byrne, 1971) imply that even if congruence is not perceived to exist between a person and an organization, the actual congruence of these two entities could lead to positive outcomes because of facilitated communication. This argument can be extended to suggest that actual fit between people and organizations may result in improved *process* outcomes, such as communication, group functioning, or work coordination, even if the perception of fit does not exist. Thus, the following proposition is a first step toward differentiating between the constructs of perceived and actual fit.

*Proposition 6:* Perceived fit should have more of an impact on individual attitudinal outcomes; whereas, actual fit should be more influential on process and performance outcomes.

Taking this discussion a step further, differential outcomes can also be predicted for actual fit depending on how it is measured. If researchers use individual-level measures of actual fit (i.e., an individual completes a self-evaluation of values and an evaluation of organizational values), then perceptions still play an important role in the construct. In this case it is the individual's perceptions of the organizational values, rather than a verified organizational level variable, on which fit is calculated. Therefore, similar to case of perceived fit, this measurement strategy may assess a more "socially constructed" judgment of fit than would cross-levels measurement. The question that is being answered is whether the person fits with the organization that he or she perceives to exist. Because of the similarities between this construct and directly measured perceived fit, it is likely that its effects will be more similar to those of perceived fit than actual fit as measured by cross-levels research.

*Proposition 7:* Actual fit, measured only at the individual level, will have outcomes more similar to those of directly measured perceived fit than actual fit measured with a cross-levels technique.

Although researchers may debate the construct validity and relative importance of fit measured in these various manners, the relationship

between the constructs offers a variety of exciting research opportunities. Although a variety of individual and environmental differences could influence their relationships, there have been few investigations into the correlation between perceived versus actual fit assessments, and none into the correlation between actual fit measured at multiple levels versus the individual level.

It could be predicted that when individuals first enter organizations they are not likely to have full information about their organizations' values, goals, or reward systems. The socialization process is a time during which individuals obtain information regarding these organizational characteristics (e.g, Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Therefore, it is likely that individuals' direct assessments of perceived fit at organizational entry will show less correspondence to actual P-O fit than will those assessments made after socialization experiences. Similarly, after an organization undergoes a significant change, such as re-engineering, top management replacement, or downsizing, it may take time before new organizational values emerge and become consensually shared. Once again, perceived fit should become more similar to actual fit with the passage of time. These propositions are specified below:

*Proposition 8:* Levels of perceived P-O fit will be less aligned with actual levels immediately following organizational entry than after socialization experiences.

*Proposition 9:* After significant organizational change, levels of perceived and actual P-O fit will be highly divergent; this divergence will shrink as the organization's emergent values, goals, and culture become more apparent to employees.

Managers have a variety of available options for increasing the accuracy of employees' P-O fit assessments. Mentorship programs and extensive orientations conducted at the beginning of an employees' employment experience can provide early instruction on important organizational characteristics. Similarly, reorientation programs and question-and-answer sessions following organizational changes may be effective in helping to solidify emerging values and goals.

Because cross-levels measurement of actual fit is difficult in a field setting (i.e., the need to demonstrate consensus), many researchers have elected to use hypothetical organizational profiles, presented as scenarios in a laboratory setting, to create organizational variables. This avoids

the extensive analyses required to support agreement on the organizational variable. This is a viable methodology for producing strong internal validity (Cook & Campbell, 1979); however, the practical applications are more limited than those of research conducted in actual organizations. In addition, because it is unclear to what extent real organizations are perceived in ways similar to the profiles used in these studies, further examination of the profiles' ecological validity is in order.

Pertaining to levels of analysis issues, Vancouver et al. (1994) and Ostroff and Rothausen (1995) have begun a new stream of research in the P-O fit domain. Their investigations of P-O fit at the aggregate level have illustrated a variety of similarities and differences with the individual level construct. For example, Ostroff and Rothausen found moderating effects of tenure on relationships between personal orientations and climate at the aggregate rather than the individual level. Similarly, differential relationships with outcome variables have been reported for aggregate and individual level goal congruence (Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Vancouver et al., 1994). Reasons for these differences include potential measurement error as well as substantively different processes operating at the individual and aggregate levels. For example, when examining between-constituency goal congruence (congruence between a group of teachers and the principal), Vancouver et al. (1994) found a *negative* relationship between fit and individual attitudes. This suggests that a person's level of P-O fit relative to others in the work environment may have a moderating effect on the relationship between that individual's absolute level of fit and work attitudes. Future research should continue to investigate potential group level moderation of other types of individual P-O fit relationships.

### *Antecedents of P-O Fit*

A further contribution of this manuscript was the integration of empirical and conceptual literature regarding the antecedents and consequences of P-O fit. This section builds on the review of P-O fit's role in organizational entry and socialization, to make suggestions for future research as well as suggestions for practitioners interested in P-O fit. Because many of the research directions involve practical implications, they will be discussed concurrently.

Although studies indicate that fit influences individuals' organizational preferences and organizations' selection decisions, we still do not have a clear understanding of how specific recruitment practices and job search strategies affect levels of P-O fit. For instance, recruitment practices strive to present realistic organizational previews (e.g., site visits or

meetings with potential coworkers), or target job candidates with particular characteristics (i.e., through specific recruitment sources such as professional outlets or personal references), may promote higher levels of fit than more general recruitment strategies such as newspaper advertisements (Rynes, 1991). Because it is difficult for applicants to assess organizational values during recruitment, a particular effort must be made to increase their salience to applicants.

*Proposition 10:* Recruitment strategies, such as realistic organization previews or site visits, that illustrate firm-specific values and goals will increase the relevance of P-O fit to job applicants.

In addition to these organizational differences, there are individual differences between applicants that may predispose certain people to place more of an emphasis on fit during their job search and choice activities. For instance, individuals who display high levels of conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1992) are likely to thoroughly investigate potential employers. Therefore, they will have more information on which to assess P-O fit during their selection decisions than those who simply apply for all jobs for which they qualify. An individual's self-awareness is another individual difference that may affect the importance of P-O fit for job applicants. People who are more aware of their own values, goals, and personality are more likely to be attentive to those characteristics in organizations.

*Proposition 11:* Conscientious and self-aware job seekers will weight anticipated P-O fit more heavily in their job/organization choice decisions than those who are less conscientious and self-aware.

Another relatively unexplored area regarding organizational entry and P-O fit is the accuracy of fit assessments made during recruitment and job/organization search. Recruiters trained to convey important aspects of organizational culture may aid job seekers in more accurately determining levels of fit. Moreover, training recruiters to use individual value profiles, personality tests, and other means of assessing "non-job specific" qualifications may help them to recognize applicant qualities that reflect a good fit with the organization. Similar to realistic job previews (e.g., Rynes, 1991; Wanous, 1980), using these methods to increase the accuracy of early fit assessments can save individual and organizational resources by improving organizational screening mechanisms and individuals' self-selection out of particular firms.

**Proposition 12:** Training recruiters to present realistic organizational previews by understanding and communicating vital aspects of the organization's culture will increase the accuracy of both applicant and recruiter assessments of P-O fit.

It is likely, however, that differences in applicants will have an influence on the accuracy of fit judgments made by interviewers during the selection process. Ferris and Judge (1991) suggest that political influence tactics can be used to promote the perception of fit, and thus influence human resources decisions. For example, applicants who engage in high levels of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) and impression management (Tedeschi & Melberg, 1984) may be more capable of presenting the image that they fit with the company than those who do not engage in these self-presentation strategies. Because high self-monitors are capable of scanning the environment for social cues, they should be more able to attend to those cues and give an impression of good fit. There is initial evidence that applicants who promote the image that they fit with a company will be evaluated favorably by recruiters and will be more likely to receive an offer for a site visit (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). However, because these self-presentation strategies may convey an unrealistic portrait of the applicant, the actual fit of these applicants to the organization should be lower than those who present their "true" selves during interviews.

**Proposition 13a:** Job applicants who engage in high levels of self-monitoring and assertive impression management will be more able to convince recruiters that they have a good fit with the company than those who do not engage in these self-presentation behaviors; and

**Proposition 13b:** Job applicants using these self-presentation strategies will have lower levels of actual P-O fit once hired than those who did not use these strategies.

Research on decision making offers additional suggestions for how P-O fit may be incorporated into organizational selection. Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) suggests that people attempt to avoid losses during early stages of decision making. Image theory (e.g., Beach, 1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1987) would label this stage of decision making the *compatibility test*, in which applicants are judged to determine if they meet minimal job qualifications. During this stage it is likely that a demands-abilities perspective on P-J fit is being used, because applicants are screened based on the compatibility of their KSAs with job requirements. Once a subset of applicants pass the screening, however, a *profitability test* occurs in which the best remaining applicant is determined (Beach, 1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1987). Kahneman and Tversky (1979)

would classify this stage as an attempt to assure a win in the gamble of selection. It is during this later stage that P-O fit is most likely to play a deciding role, as all applicants who passed the screening criteria are assured to meet the minimal job qualifications. It is important to remember, however, that because selection procedures are legally required to be job related, the reliance on P-O fit at the final stages of selection must also be justifiable as relevant to job performance. By incorporating both P-J and P-O fit into the selection process in this manner, managers can maximize the fit of new hires with both levels of the environment.

*Proposition 14:* A demands-abilities perspective on P-J fit will influence an organization's early screening decisions; however, the final selection decision among the applicants deemed qualified by the screening process will be based primarily on P-O fit.

After organizational entry, both individual and organizational socialization practices continue to influence P-O fit. The mechanism for how these processes change P-O fit levels, however, has not been well-explored. One possible mechanism is the information acquisition process that newcomers undertake in order to assimilate into their organizations (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). This acquisition is typically described as a learning process, with a focus on the attainment of cognitive knowledge. Although cognitive learning is a likely product of socialization, changes in P-O fit may be produced by other types of learning. For example, socialization leads to supplementary P-O fit through the process of newcomers' values and goals becoming more similar to those of the organization. This changing of goals, values, or attitudes implies affectively-based, rather than simply cognitive learning (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993). Socialization may also lead to complementary fit on KSAs by increasing employees' skill-based as well as cognitive learning (Kraiger et al., 1993).

*Proposition 15:* Socialization processes lead to affectively-based and skill-based learning, which in turn lead to increases in supplementary and complementary P-O fit, respectively.

Behavioral modeling has been shown to be an effective means for promoting both affective- and skill-based learning (Kraiger et al., 1993); therefore, managers desiring to change employee values or goals may find this to be a particularly useful socialization technique. To maximize employees' affective- and skill-based change, managers should also encourage individuals' proactive socialization attempts by suggesting that they request information from peers, ask for feedback from supervisors, and read company literature.

Despite managers' best attempts at socializing for high levels of P-O fit, numerous individual differences are likely to affect the amount of socialization-induced learning. For example, the strength with which newcomers hold their values and goals should determine how likely they are to assimilate to those of the organization. The personality characteristic of openness to experience is another individual difference that may lead some newcomers to adopt organizational values or goals more easily than others (e.g., Goldberg, 1992).

*Proposition 16:* Newcomers with strongly held values and goals and with low openness to experience will be less likely to experience affectively-based learning and change their values and goals as a result of organizational socialization than will those with weakly held values and goals and high openness to experience.

### *Consequences of P-O Fit*

Just as individual differences may affect the relationships between selection, socialization and P-O fit, they may also moderate the relationship between fit and outcomes. As was indicated in Figure 1, there are a variety of individual and organizational characteristics on which fit can be assessed. The relevance of fit on any one of these variables will be a function of how important that characteristic is to the individual and the organization. For example, if an individual has values congruent with those of the organization, but those values are irrelevant to everyday performance on the job, then a high level of fit on values is not likely to be a significant predictor of individual outcomes. Therefore, levels of P-O fit are most influential for the characteristics that are relevant to the individual and the organization.

*Proposition 17:* The relationship between any specific form of P-O fit and an individual outcome variable will be moderated by the importance of the characteristics on which fit is assessed (e.g., achievement values or social welfare goals) to the individual.

Sheridan (1992) suggested that organizational differences may also moderate the relationship between fit and individual outcomes. He proposed that some situations may exert such extreme constraints that fit has little utility in determining employee reactions. His results showed that organizations with interpersonal orientations, as opposed to those with work task cultures, were characterized by lower turnover rates for *all* employees. Although individual values were not measured, which would have allowed stronger conclusions to be drawn regarding the role of P-O fit, his interpretation of the results suggested a situational moderator of the fit-outcome relationship.



**Proposition 18:** The strength of situations may moderate the relationship between levels of P-O fit and individual outcomes, such that strong situations eliminate fit-outcome relationships.

These propositions suggest that managers may be able to influence the strength of the relationship between P-O fit and individual outcomes. By emphasizing particular values and goals through memos from top management, monthly newsletters, and value-based reward systems, managers may be able to increase the importance of these values to employees. However, it is also possible that by maintaining a strong and consistent culture, managers will promote the attrition of those who do not fit well with the organization.

The discussion up to this point has been focused on what managers can do to promote higher levels of P-O fit, thereby creating positive outcomes for their employees. However, in the literature review it was noted that organizations employing people with high levels of fit become extremely homogeneous. This homogeneity, in turn, can create problems such as strategic myopia and inability to change. Therefore, B. Schneider, et al. (in press) offer a variety of recommendations for how to optimize the organizational benefits of P-O fit. They suggest that P-O fit should be a goal for employees at lower levels in the organization, but diversity of perspectives and competencies should be pursued for top managers. Moreover, value similarity at the top level may be useful if it signals a strong vision for the future, but steps should be taken to encourage diversity in strategic perspectives. Finally, it is suggested that high levels of fit should be pursued during the early stages of an organization's life cycle. During this time cohesiveness and cooperation are important, yet once the organization has achieved initial success, attempts to encourage innovative perspectives should be made. These attempts could include formal resocialization experiences, changes in an organization's recruitment strategy, or creativity training.

These recommendations by B. Schneider et al. (in press) suggest that managers can take particular steps to reduce the detrimental effects of homogeneity. However, it should be noted that like homogeneity, heterogeneity can also have detrimental side effects if employees have difficulty communicating or do not support common values. Therefore, the challenge for managers is to achieve an optimal level of various types of P-O fit in the organization.

Determining this optimal level, however, depends on several things. Primarily, it depends on the type of fit and the organizational outcome that is being considered. If the desired outcome is to reduce high levels of employee turnover, then pursuing a high level of supplementary fit on values and goals might be beneficial. If, however, the desired outcome is

quick adaptation to environmental changes, a lower level of fit on these characteristics may be optimal.

Because of the many types of P-O fit and the large number of organizational outcomes, it is important to understand the functional form of the relationship between fit on a certain characteristic and a specific type of performance. For example, if this relationship has the form of an inverted-U, then performance will be harmed if fit levels fall below or exceed a particular level. This form may be expected for the relationship between fit on values and organizational responsiveness, with the optimal level of fit being high enough to facilitate communication but low enough to avoid groupthink and stagnation. This same dependent variable, however, may have a linear relationship with complementary fit on KSAs, such that higher levels of complementary fit will always improve the organization's ability to respond to change.

*Proposition 19:* Following an inverted-U relationship, both low and high levels of supplementary fit on values will harm an organization's flexibility in responding to environmental changes.

*Proposition 20:* Following a linear relationship, high levels of complementary fit on KSAs will be beneficial to an organization's responsiveness to the environment and high levels of supplementary fit on values will be beneficial to employee relations.

### Conclusion

As P-O fit becomes a more popular topic with both researchers and managers, increased attention must be paid to its multiple conceptualizations and measurement strategies. Only when these issues have been attended to can researchers draw convincing conclusions concerning the consequences of fit for individuals and organizations. Many of the questions raised in this paper can only be answered by further empirical research. Potential directions for this research are offered, so that by building on the frameworks proposed in this paper, future research can continue to specify and explore the domain of P-O fit.

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