Complementary person-supervisor fit: An investigation of supplies-values (S-V) fit, leader-member exchange (LMX) and work outcomes☆

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ABSTRACT

By applying the supplies-values (S-V) fit approach from the complementary person-environment (P-E) fit literature to the leader-employee perspective, and drawing upon social exchange theory, we examine how fulfillment of different work values is related to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and work outcomes. First, polynomial regression analyses combined with response surface analysis of data collected at two time points (N = 316) showed that LMX (Time 2) was higher the more the leader fulfills the employee’s work values (Time 1). Second, LMX (Time 2) was higher when leader supplies (Time 1) and employee work values (Time 1) were both high than when both were low. Third, analyses of data from a sub-sample of matched leader-employee dyads (N = 140), showed that LMX (Time 2) played a mediating role on the relation between S-V fit (Time 1) and work outcomes (Time 2). Specifically, we found eight out of 10 relationships between S-V fit (Time 1) and leader-rated task performance and OCB (Time 2) to be fully mediated by LMX (Time 2). LMX (Time 2) partially mediated the relation between S-V fit (Time 1) and job satisfaction (Time 2) as only two out of five relationships were fully mediated.

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Introduction

A great number of studies have examined value congruence and the importance of supplementary fit in work environments as well as its implications for leadership processes (e.g., Ashkanasy and O’Connor, 1997; Dose, 1999; Edwards and Cable, 2009; Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, and Sutton, 2011; Saks and Ashforth, 2002). Yet, the role of complementary fit, such as Supplies-Values (S-V) fit, has not received significant attention by prior leadership research. According to person-environment (P-E) fit research, supplementary fit focuses on the similarity between the person and other individuals in the environment whereas complementary fit occurs when one part (person or organization) provides the other part with what they want (Edwards and Shipp, 2007). In the leadership domain, the supplementary fit tradition of the P-E fit field, which includes research on person-supervisor (P-S) fit, has focused on the importance of person-organization value congruence (Kristof, 1996) and person-supervisor value congruence (e.g., Dose, 1999; Hoffman et al., 2011). More specifically research has explored the role of leader-follower value congruence on Leader-
Member Exchange (LMX) relationships (Markham, Yammarino, Murry, and Palanski, 2010) and transformational leadership (Hoffman et al., 2011; Jung and Avolio, 2000). Nevertheless, results remain inconclusive (e.g., Ashkanasy and O’Connor, 1997; Dose, 1999; Steiner, 1988; Steiner and Dobbins, 1989). Only one study (Dose, 1999) has found support for a significant positive effect of leader-follower value congruence on LMX quality. There are, thus, several questions that remain unanswered regarding the role of P-E fit variables for LMX suggesting a need for examining different types of P-E fit in this context.

Similar to supplementary fit the role of complementary fit, such as S-V fit, has received significant attention in P-E fit research and shown to be a good predictor of employee work outcomes (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson, 2005). However, the role of complementary fit for leadership dynamics remains unexplored. Building on this, our study aims at introducing the complementary fit approach in the LMX field by specifically addressing the role of S-V fit on LMX quality. We specifically draw from both the P-E fit literature and social exchange theory to build our hypotheses and explain the theoretical mechanisms of the proposed relationships.

According to LMX theory, leaders develop exchange relationships of different quality with their followers (Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell, 1993). Using social exchange theory (SET, Blau, 1964), LMX researchers have argued that the quality of the relationship depends on the exchanges between the leader and the follower where each party provides the other with a service or something that the other party values (Wayne, Shore, and Liden, 1997). The norm of reciprocity underlies social exchange relationships (Gouldner, 1960) suggesting that when the leader provides the follower with what the follower values LMX quality is enhanced, which leads the employee to reciprocate in terms of positive attitudes and behaviors (Masteron and Lensges, 2015; Masteron, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor, 2000). One could thus argue that complementarity (and mutuality) are at the heart of LMX theory suggesting that complementary fit is important for LMX quality.

In the complementary (P-E) fit research it is argued that employees’ work values are fulfilled when they receive what they value at work (Butler, 1983) and that it is mainly the organization that fulfills employees’ values (e.g., Cable and DeRue, 2002). The organization is not, however, an abstract entity that delivers promises and fulfills the values. The leaders, especially the immediate supervisors, are important representatives of the organization and influence employee-organization exchanges (Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, and Tetrick, 2008). They are, thus, likely to play a vital role with respect to the fulfillment of the employees’ work values. Consequently, an empirical examination of complementary person-supervisor (P-S) fit can offer important insights on the dynamics of leader-follower interactions.

Based on the norm of reciprocity, that underlies leader-follower relationships, and given the strong theoretical support in SET for a positive relationship between the leader’s fulfillment of the employee’s work values and LMX (Masteron and Lensges, 2015), we argue that this is a fruitful area of study that can potentially contribute to both the LMX and the P-E fit literatures. We further argue that LMX will be a critical mediating mechanism explaining the relationships between complementary fit variables and employee outcomes found in previous research (Cable and Edwards, 2004). Given that the leader is a key actor who can fulfill (or not fulfill) the employees’ values in organizational contexts, the quality of the relationship an employee has with the manager will filter the effect of value fulfillment on employee outcomes. To the best of our knowledge no research has directly examined the founding assumption in LMX about how the leader’s fulfillment of the employee’s work values is related to LMX. Based on SET (Gouldner, 1960), the leader’s fulfillment of the employee’s work values will enhance LMX quality leading the employee to reciprocate in terms of positive attitudes and behaviors (Masteron et al., 2000).

In summary, by building on SET and P-E fit theories we examine the role of complementary P-S fit for the quality of leader-follower relationships and work outcomes. We specifically apply the supplies-values fit approach (e.g., Edwards, 1996; Edwards and Rothbard, 1999) and further respond to the call for examining the mediating role of LMX (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, and Ferris, 2012) in the relationship between S-V fit and outcomes. By integrating these two theoretical approaches and by examining a neglected strand of the P-E fit research (i.e., complementary fit) in the leadership field our research aims to cast additional light on the dynamics of P-E fit and leadership in organizational settings.

Theory and hypotheses
Supplies-values fit and LMX

Values can be categorized as general life values and domain-specific values (e.g., work) and according to Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, p. 551) values can be seen as “(a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviors, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance”. According to Ros, Schwartz, and Surkiss (1999) work values concern what a person wants out of work. Thus, work values could be seen as beliefs about desirable objects, behaviors, situations at work and refer to what a person wants out of work in general. Work values guide and determine behavior. However, it should be noted that what employees desire from work has often been referred to as ‘work values’, ‘needs’ and ‘job characteristics’. Although these terms indicate different constructs, the content dimensions on which they have been evaluated are similar and include aspects such as having influence on how the work is done, being sure the job will last, working on different tasks at work and receiving a high pay (Cable and Edwards, 2004; Lyons, Higgins, and Duxbury, 2010).

A range of work values have been identified in work value measures such as the Work Values Inventory (WVI) by Super (1970), the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ) by Gay, Weiss, Hendel, Dawis, and Lofquist (1971), the Work Aspect Preference Scale (WAPS) by Pryor (1981) and the Work Values Questionnaire (WVQ) by Elizur, Borg, Hunt, and Beck (1991). Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2006) used work values from all of the above measures and conceptualized five work value factors (i.e.,
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