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Person-Organisation Fit and Employee Proactivity: Do Shared Values Matter?

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ABSTRACT

For many years, researchers have theorised that congruence between individuals and their work environment should contribute to various positive outcomes for individuals and organisations. In this study we examined the effects of value congruence on employee proactivity. Polynomial regression analyses on data collected from a sample of public sector employees (N = 3574) provided some support for the hypothesis that fit between an individual's work values and the organisation's values predict proactive acts designed to achieve greater individual job, team or organisational effectiveness.

Keywords: Value congruence, employee proactivity, polynomial regression

We live in an era in which employees are increasingly expected to contribute to organisational effectiveness in ways that go beyond the simple completion of a fixed set of prescribed work tasks. Rather, it is those employees who are flexible enough to meet the demands of a dynamic work environment and show personal initiative in identifying and solving problems who are considered more likely to contribute to effective organisational functioning (Crant, 2000; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996). Proactive work performance is considered particularly relevant for those organisations adopting new forms of management (like lean manufacturing and employee involvement) in which the surveillance function of supervisors is minimised. Given the growing importance of personal initiative in the workplace, the issue for organisations becomes how they might foster the proactive potential of their employees. To date there is limited research investigating how to assess and promote employee proactivity (Parker, 2000). In this study, we examine the potential for value congruence to predict proactive performance. To this end, we first present a brief overview of the proactive work performance construct. Next we theorise as to why value congruence may be expected to influence proactivity. We then test the a value-congruence hypothesis using data collected from a large Australian public sector organisation. This study expands on the person-organisation fit literature by applying P-E fit theory to a new content domain – employee proactivity.

EMPLOYEE PROACTIVITY

Crant (2000) defined proactive behaviour as taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones. Essentially, proactivity reflects an active challenge to the status quo as opposed to a more reactive or passive approach towards work. Proactive employees are those who actively seek information or opportunities for improving things as opposed to those who wait for information or opportunities to come to them. Frese, Kring, Soose and Zempel (1996) similarly described the proactive orientation present in personal initiative, itself defined as an active and self-starting approach to work goals and tasks and persistence in overcoming barriers and setbacks. Morrison and Phelps (1999) included 'taking charge' in the nomological network, a similarly proactive construct defined as "voluntary and constructive efforts, by individual employees, to affect organisationally functional change with respect to how work is executed within the contexts of their jobs, work units, or organisations" (p. 403).

Whilst researchers agree that proactive performance reflects an active rather than passive approach to work, there is less agreement on how to conceptualise proactivity. Some researchers have assumed proactivity reflects a stable personality trait (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Parker, 2000) or other dispositional factors such as need for achievement. Others have suggested proactivity is more a function of situational factors (e.g., Crant, 2000; Morrison & Phelps, 1999) and has been shown to be influenced by organisational culture, organisational norms, and management support (for a review, see Crant, 2000). In this study, however, we suggest that our understanding of employee proactivity can be improved by examining both individual and contextual variables together. To this end, we consider the predictive utility of value congruence.

VALUE CONGRUENCE AND EMPLOYEE PROACTIVITY

Values reflect individual belief systems about desired end states (Rockeach, 1973). Individuals' values pertain to what they believe is important and hence guide their decisions and behaviours. Similarly, organisational value systems provide norms that specify how organisational members should behave (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Value congruence reflects "the congruence

between patterns of organisational values and patterns of individual values, defined here as what an individual values in an organisation, such as being team oriented or innovative” (Chatman, 1991, p. 459). Studies have shown that value congruence is positively associated with job satisfaction, commitment, intention to remain with the organisation, actual turnover, and work performance (Kristoff-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

Theoretically, value congruence should affect employee attitudes and behaviours for a number of reasons. First, employees with values that diverge from the values present in the organisation’s culture may be forced to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs or values. Employees forced to behave in such ways may experience cognitive dissonance (Erdogan, et al 2004), which in turn may induce feelings of alienation, resentment and dissatisfaction. Such people may be less inclined to engage in proactive acts that serve to benefit the organisation. Second, individuals who have different values to the organisation are less likely to identify with the organisation (Erdogan, et al, 2004). From a social identity perspective (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), employees who identify less with their organisation are, again, less likely to take on the organisation’s point of view and hence less likely to expend effort on the organisation’s behalf or act in the organisation’s best interests (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Thus, to summarise, as value congruence may be expected to reduce peoples’ feelings of cognitive dissonance and increase identification with the organisation, we expect value congruence to be related to employees propensity to engage in proactive acts designed to change their situation or themselves in order to achieve greater individual job, team or organisational effectiveness.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from the staff of a large Australian public service agency. Participating in an organisational wide survey, questionnaires were distributed to all staff who were asked to complete the survey during work hours across a two week administration period. Participants were asked to return completed questionnaires directly to the researchers by way of a reply paid enveloped. A total

of 3574 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 78.9%. Sixty-five per cent of respondents were female. The average age of respondents was 43.01 years (SD = 11.19 years) and the average tenure within the organisation was 9.25 years (SD = 9.25 years).

Measures

Individual and Organisational Values. Seven different values were assessed (knowledge sharing, teamwork, contribution, achievement, job security, recognition and customer service) using items originally developed by Maierhofer (2000). Each of the values were measured using three items on a five-point Likert type scale. For an individual's own values, respondents indicated the extent to which each of the assessed values were meaningful to them personally (1 = 'not important to me' to 5 = 'very important to me'). To assess the extent to which the values were present within the organisation's culture, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they perceive each of the assessed values is held to be important by staff across the organisation as a whole (1 = 'not important to other [organisation name] staff' to 5 = 'very important to other [organisation name] staff'). All individual and organisational value variables had reliability coefficients greater than .80.

Employee Proactivity. Employee proactivity was assessed using the individual, team and organisation proactivity dimensions of Griffin, Parker and Neal's (2001) integrated model of work performance. This self-report measure of proactivity assesses the extent to which an employee engages in self-starting, action orientated behaviour to change their situation or themselves to achieve greater individual job, team or organisational effectiveness. Respondents are asked to think about their contribution to either their core job, their team and their organisation over the last six months and rate the extent to which they have engaged in each of three proactive work behaviours relative to the three different levels of analysis (1 = very little; 5 = a great deal"). For an employee's core job, an example item is "Initiated better ways of doing your core tasks". At the team level, an example item is "Developed new and improved methods to help your work unit or team perform better". At the organisational level, an example item is "Made suggestions to improve the overall effectiveness of the organisation (e.g., by suggesting changes to administrative procedures)". All three measures of proactivity had reliability coefficients greater than .80.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between study variables.

To test hypotheses, we conducted a series of polynomial regression analyses (Edwards, 1994) in which linear and curvilinear effects of predictors on the outcome are examined in a hierarchical manner. Lower order person (P = personal values) and environment (E = organisational values) were entered on the first step of the analysis. In the second step, the higher order terms (P^2 and E^2) and the interaction term (P^*E) are entered as a block. Linear, U-shaped and asymptotic relationships are identified by examining the coefficients from the linear and quadratic equations. The presence of fit effects are assumed when (a) the proportion of variance explained by the overall equation is significant; (b) P^2 , E^2 and P^*E are significant individually and as a set, and (c) the quadratic terms (P^2 and E^2) both have positive signs, and the interaction term (P^*E) has a negative sign (Edwards, 1994).

The results of the 21 hierarchical regression analyses (congruence on seven values for individual, team and organisational proactivity) are presented in Table 2. For proactivity towards an individual's core job, results indicate significant and curvilinear fit effects for five of the seven work values (knowledge sharing, teamwork, job security, contribution, and recognition). For proactivity towards the team, there were two significant and curvilinear fit effects (job security and recognition). For proactivity towards the organisation, there were two significant and curvilinear fit effects (contribution and recognition). The pattern of coefficients on the higher-order terms for all fit significant fit effects reflect a response surface (available from the authors) that is convex in nature. In effect, the surface depicted by the coefficients indicates three effects. First, proactivity is greatest when the organisation's culture displays more of the value than is preferred by the individual. Second, when an individual's value preference increases equally with the level of the commensurate value present in the organisation's culture, proactivity increases. Third, at higher levels of a given value, successively larger increases in an espoused by both individuals and the cultural system are needed in order to produce a unit increase in proactive performance.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Variable Intercorrelations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<i>Own and Organisational Values</i>																			
1. Knowledge sharing (own)	4.38	0.64																	
2. Knowledge sharing (org)	3.32	1.07	.16																
3. Teamwork (own)	4.59	0.54	.58	.10															
4. Teamwork (org)	3.32	1.06	.12	.75	.14														
5. Achievement (own)	4.75	0.44	.48	.07	.60	.08													
6. Achievement (org)	3.43	1.13	.10	.75	.08	.80	.09												
7. Job security (own)	4.35	0.70	.42	.11	.37	.11	.42	.10											
8. Job security (org)	3.39	1.12	.13	.68	.09	.65	.09	.69	.15										
9. Customer service (own)	4.66	0.52	.53	.08	.56	.10	.64	.09	.45	.12									
10. Customer service (org)	3.48	1.17	.10	.78	.10	.76	.10	.81	.11	.67	.12								
11. Contribution to Dept. (own)	4.03	0.90	.51	.15	.37	.13	.35	.13	.51	.13	.45	.13							
12. Contribution to Dept. (org)	3.30	1.11	.12	.73	.08	.66	.09	.72	.13	.59	.10	.78	.25						
13. Recognition (own)	4.31	0.75	.47	.09	.34	.04	.33	.05	.39	.10	.36	.05	.30	.07					
14. Recognition (own)	3.47	1.28	.11	.71	.10	.60	.07	.61	.08	.75	.09	.67	.06	.54	.13				
<i>Dependent variables (Proactivity)</i>																			
15. Individual proactivity	3.77	0.85	.35	.04	.25	.01	.23	.02	.23	.05	.24	-.01	.43	.05	.19	.01			
16. Team proactivity	4.14	0.63	.44	.06	.46	.07	.36	.04	.29	.06	.34	.04	.30	.05	.28	.02	.40		
17. Organisation proactivity	4.05	0.67	.32	.05	.29	.05	.27	.03	.25	.05	.26	.02	.27	.03	.23	.03	.43	.56	

Note: Correlations equal to or greater than .05 are significant at $p < .01$. Correlations equal to or greater than .04 are significant at $p < .05$.

TABLE 2.
Polynomial regression results

Outcome variables	Unconstrained equations			Unconstrained equations						
	Step 1 (linear)			Step 2 (curvilinear)						
	P	O	R ²	P	O	P ²	P*O	O ²	Δ R ²	R ²
Individual Proactivity										
Knowledge sharing	.33 [†]	-.01	.11 [†]	-.30	-.31 [†]	.59 [†]	-.06*	.34 [†]	.01 [†]	.12 [†]
Teamwork	.30 [†]	.01	.09 [†]	-.24	-.52 [†]	.48 [†]	-.05*	.57 [†]	.01 [†]	.10 [†]
Achievement	.28 [†]	.01	.08 [†]	-.12	-.50 [†]	.35	-.06*	.54 [†]	.01 [†]	.09 [†]
Job security	.25 [†]	.01	.06 [†]	-.33*	-.41 [†]	.55*	-.07 [†]	.45 [†]	.02 [†]	.08 [†]
Customer service	.26 [†]	-.01	.07 [†]	.11	-.54 [†]	.12	-.02	.55 [†]	.01 [†]	.08 [†]
Contribution	.28 [†]	-.04*	.08 [†]	-.47 [†]	-.28 [†]	.74 [†]	-.04*	.26 [†]	.02 [†]	.10 [†]
Recognition	.23 [†]	.01	.05 [†]	-.35*	-.34 [†]	.54 [†]	-.05*	.37 [†]	.01 [†]	.06 [†]
Team Proactivity										
Knowledge sharing	.44 [†]	-.01	.19 [†]	.27	-.35 [†]	.13	-.05*	.38 [†]	.01 [†]	.20 [†]
Teamwork	.47 [†]	.01	.22 [†]	.56*	-.43 [†]	-.14	-.06*	.48 [†]	.01 [†]	.23 [†]
Achievement	.36 [†]	.01	.13 [†]	-.21	-.55 [†]	.51 [†]	-.08 [†]	.61 [†]	.02 [†]	.15 [†]
Job security	.30 [†]	.01	.09 [†]	-.20	-.53 [†]	.46 [†]	-.08 [†]	.58 [†]	.02 [†]	.11 [†]
Customer service	.35 [†]	-.01	.12 [†]	.05	-.60 [†]	.25	-.05 [†]	.63 [†]	.01 [†]	.13 [†]
Contribution	.31 [†]	-.03	.09 [†]	-.53 [†]	-.27 [†]	.83 [†]	-.03	.26 [†]	.03 [†]	.12 [†]
Recognition	.28 [†]	-.01	.08 [†]	-.42 [†]	-.59 [†]	.64 [†]	-.07 [†]	-.62 [†]	.02 [†]	.10 [†]

Note: For all columns except R², table entries are standardised regression coefficients for equations.
* $p < .05$; [†] $< .01$.

TABLE 2 (Continued). Polynomial regression results

Outcome variables	Unconstrained equations			Unconstrained equations						
	Step 1 (linear)			Step 2 (curvilinear)						
	P	O	R ²	P	O	P ²	P*O	O ²	Δ R ²	R ²
Organisation										
Proactivity										
Knowledge sharing	.35 [†]	-.01	.12 [†]	-.04	-.53 [†]	.33	-.06 [†]	.57 [†]	.01 [†]	.13 [†]
Teamwork	.27 [†]	-.03	.07 [†]	-.10	-.83 [†]	.29	-.08 [†]	.87 [†]	.03 [†]	.10 [†]
Achievement	.23 [†]	.01	.05 [†]	.20	-.93 [†]	-.03	-.03	.97 [†]	.04 [†]	.09 [†]
Job security	.23 [†]	.02	.06 [†]	.33*	-.74 [†]	.15	-.05 [†]	.80 [†]	.02 [†]	.08 [†]
Customer service	.25 [†]	-.03	.06 [†]	.31*	-1.05 [†]	-.13	-.04	1.05 [†]	.04 [†]	.10 [†]
Contribution	.45 [†]	-.06	.19 [†]	-.01	-.34 [†]	.42 [†]	-.04 [†]	.39 [†]	.01 [†]	.20 [†]
Recognition	.19 [†]	-.01	.03 [†]	-.16	-.72 [†]	.28*	-.05 [†]	..75 [†]	.02 [†]	.05 [†]

Note: For all columns except R², table entries are standardised regression coefficients for equations.

* $p < .05$; [†] $< .01$.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to test for interactions between person and environment in the prediction of employee proactivity. A methodology suggested by Edwards (1991) was followed whereby analysis was confined to commensurate measures of the person (P), and the environment (E), and the interaction between the two to predict individual, team and organisationally directed proactivity. Results provide some support for the view that value congruence predicts the propensity to engage in self-initiating or proactive behaviours aimed at benefiting the organisation. Specifically, we find fit effects five of the seven work values examined (knowledge sharing, teamwork, job security, contribution, and recognition). For proactivity towards the team, fit effects were evident for job security and recognition. For proactivity towards the organisation, fit effects were evident for contribution and recognition. Value congruence effects, however, were not evident for proactive acts aimed at improving one's own job.

Theoretically, shared values are thought to influence affective and behavioural outcomes for individuals. Individuals with similar values may coordinate more successfully and have clearer role expectations with less ambiguity and conflict which enabled better communication and better coordination of tasks and activities (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989). The result of shared values has been linked with affective outcomes such as affective commitment and job satisfaction. Indeed some research has also shown that value congruence is associated with positive behavioural outcomes. The processes through which positive behavioural outcomes are produced is less clear. Goodman and Svyantek (1999) despite finding a link between ideal and perceived culture and contextual performance suggested that the explanation of such an outcome is difficult to explain theoretically. Earlier work by Meglino et al.(1989) points out that the mechanism through which affective outcomes may occur (internal adaptation) is unrelated to outcomes that are important for business survival (external adaptation). Proactive behaviours by individuals related to their jobs, their team and the organisation more broadly fall into the category of external adaptation – behaviours that would enhance the viability of an organisation. In addition to the benefits of shared values, such as enhanced commitment and job satisfaction, the present study provides another explanation for a link between shared values and proactive work behaviours. In our results only value congruence that spanned all

three types of proactivity was the value of recognition. This may indicate that part of the motivation for undertaking proactive behaviours was for recognition and reward, which is in agreement with the assertion made by Goodman and Svyantek (1999) that contextual performance or extra-role behaviour is not in fact free.

Limitations

Probably the most important limitation of the present study concerns the negative skewness evident in the dataset. Table 1 shows that the means of the component variables were skewed towards the positive endpoint of the response scale, which in effect restricts the range of responses. Such a restriction in the range of responses served to weaken the congruence effects by limiting the ability to examine outcomes for individuals at all levels of the value dimensions and for all combinations of self-rated values and perceived organisational values (Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Strube, 2005). A second limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of the study, such that we were not able to address the possibility of reverse causality between fit and employee outcomes. It is possible, for example, for more proactive employees (an individual differences perspective) to alter their values to fit the organisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides some support for the ability of value-congruence to predict employee proactive performance. In analyses that included a number of different work values, person-organisation fit contributed significantly to explanation of variance beyond that explained by individual values and by organisation values alone. Given the importance of employee proactivity for continued organisational success, both personalist and situationalist researchers should consider the interactional theories to contribute to the literature and to management practice.

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