C. J. Newton and N. L. Jimmieson

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Subjective Fit with Organizational Culture: An Investigation of Moderating Effects in the Work Stressor-Employee Adjustment Relationship

Dr Cameron J. Newton[a*] and Dr Nerina L. Jimmieson[b]

[a] Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia; [b] Centre for Organisational Psychology, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Abstract

Occupational stress has been a concern for human resource managers in light of research investigating the work stressor-employee adjustment relationship. This research has consistently demonstrated many negative main effects between stressors in the workplace and employee adjustment. A considerable amount of literature also describes potential moderators of this relationship. Subjective fit with organizational culture has been established as a significant predictor of employee job-related attitudes; however, research has neglected investigation of the potential moderating effect of subjective fit in the work stressor-employee adjustment process. It was predicted that perceptions of subjective fit with the organization's values and goals would mitigate the negative effect of work stressors on employee adjustment in an employee sample from three organizations (N = 256). Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed support for the stress-buffering effects of high subjective fit in the prediction of physical symptoms, job satisfaction, and intentions to leave. The theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

Keywords: employee adjustment; organizational culture; stress-buffering; subjective fit; work stressors.

[*] Corresponding author. Email: cj.newton@qut.edu.au

Occupational stress is a global concern and has implications for economies, organizations, and employees (Siegrist, 1998; Atkinson, 2000). Indeed, recent research has highlighted the importance of effective management of occupational stress to human resource practitioners who are increasingly concerned with ensuring that human resource practices promote employee physical and psychological health, positive job-related attitudes and performance. (e.g., Teo & Waters, 2002; Hang-yue, Foley, & Loi, 2005; Quick, Macik-Frey, and Cooper, 2007). There are substantial financial implications of occupational stress such as lost productivity, stress-related law suits and health care expenses (Sulsky and Smith, 2005). In Australia, for instance, workers' compensation claims categorized as "mental stress" increased by 83%, from 4,585 in 1996-97 to 8,410 in 2003-04 (Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2007). Mental stress claims had a median time lost from work of 9.7 weeks and a median direct cost of $12,800, more than double the median time lost for all new claims. Across the globe, there have been several attempts to quantify the financial costs associated with occupational stress. For instance, stress has been estimated to cost Australian workplaces in excess of AUD$1.2 billion every year (ACTU, 2000) and between 200 and 300 billion dollars in the USA (Atkinson, 2000). Other research has estimated that stress may cost up to 10 per cent of a country’s gross domestic product (Midgley, 1997) and, in the United Kingdom, that up to 60 per cent of workplace absences are stress-related.

From an individual or human perspective, Siegrist (1998) reported that the cost of unmanaged stress is, at a minimum, represented by an increased risk of morbidity and mortality, highlighting that the ultimate consequence of stress for employees can be life threatening. There is substantial empirical evidence to show that psychosocial risk factors at work predict undesirable physiological conditions (e.g., gastrointestinal malfunction, cardiovascular morbidity, and mortality) and psychological responses (e.g., anxiety, depression, and burnout) among employees (see van der Doef and Maes, 1999). Further,

occupational stressors have been shown to influence employee attitudes (e.g., job dissatisfaction and organizational commitment) and employee behaviors that have implications for organizational effectiveness (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, and reduced job performance; see Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). The potential consequences of stress in the workplace are clearly vast. Not only do they impact employee adjustment, their perceived presence has been shown to impact and potentially derail the efforts of managers in effecting a variety of human resource practices (Teo and Waters, 2002). Thus, it is imperative that organizational leaders and managers understand the occupational stress process and integrate this knowledge into the strategic and operational planning decision-making.

Managers and researchers have long been interested in workplace characteristics related to employee strain, leading to investigation of many work stressors and their impact on employee adjustment. Inspection of the occupational stress literature reveals two broad types of work stressors; in particular, those relating to job/task characteristics and support and social conditions (e.g., Kompier, 2003; Kenny and McIntyre, 2005). A considerable body of literature has focused on job stressors related to characteristics of the role and specific tasks being performed. Numerous empirical studies have investigated role stressors and employee outcomes, along with several meta-analytic reviews (see Jackson and Schuler, 1985; Abramis, 1994). Recently, Örtqvist and Wincent (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 295 studies that involved role ambiguity (uncertainty about what is required to perform a role), role conflict (conflicting information about the same role or job), and role overload (too much work to complete) and their effects on employee outcomes. Generally consistent with conclusions in existing occupational stress research, role ambiguity was related to increased tension and indicators of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and less favorable levels of job-related attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover). Role conflict also was related to higher levels of

emotional exhaustion and lower job-related attitudes. Lastly, role overload was related to higher tension, exhaustion, depersonalization, and propensity to quit, as well as reduced commitment to the organization.

A significant body of research focuses attention on strain associated with interpersonal or social characteristics that involve people and interactions with others in the workplace. Such stressors include interpersonal conflict (conflict occurring between coworkers in a workplace), lack of supervisor support (feeling that supervisor does not support employee goals and wellbeing), and lack of feedback (not being provided information about how one is performing in a role), all of which have been found to be negatively related to employee health and job-related attitudes (see Elovainio and Kivimaki, 2001). Indeed, interpersonal conflict has been consistently associated with poorer employee well-being and lower job-related attitudes (e.g., Spector and Jex, 1998; de Dreu, van Dierendonck and de Best-Waldhober, 2002). In particular, relationship conflict has been associated with higher levels of psychosomatic health (emotional exhaustion), absenteeism, and intentions to leave (Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Hardy, Woods and Wall, 2003). Lack of supervisor support also has been associated with job dissatisfaction and intentions to leave (Munn, Barber and Fritz, 1996) and increased turnover (Hatton and Emerson, 1998: see also Moore, 2004). Lastly, research has identified that a lack of feedback can have negative consequences for employees as feedback provides a source of informational support that can help the employee function effectively in the environment (e.g., Elovainio and Kivimaki, 2001). Lower feedback has been positively associated with job and career dissatisfaction, and intentions to leave the organization (Searle, 2003; Miller, Yeager, Hildreth and Rabin, 2005). Thus, the first goal of the present study was to re-examine the well-established main effects of both job and social stressors on employee outcomes.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Perceptions of job and social stressors will have main effects on levels of employee health (i.e., negative main effects on psychological health and positive main effects on physical symptoms).

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Perceptions of job and social stressors will have main effects on levels of job-related attitudes (i.e., negative main effects on job satisfaction and positive main effects on intentions to leave).

Responding to research outlining the negative consequences of work stressors, researchers have investigated factors that may moderate their negative effects. Moderation effects occur via a 2-way interaction in which the presence of an additional variable attenuates, or buffers, the negative effects of work stressors on employee adjustment, allowing the employee a means of coping with the demanding situation. Such research is invaluable to managers and supervisors seeking to design strategies to reduce employee strain in the workplace. The stress-buffering hypothesis is commonly used to describe the effects of a range of different variables that may protect individuals from the negative effects of stressful events (Cohen and Edwards, 1989). Several moderating (or stress-buffering) models have been proposed in the occupational stress literature, and the Job Demand-Control Model (Karasek, 1979) has been particularly influential, suggesting that job control acts as a buffering variable in the stressor-strain relationship. More specifically, this model proposes that control over daily tasks ameliorates the negative impact of job demands on levels of employee adjustment. This model was extended by Karasek and Theorell (1990) to include support (see also Theorell and Karasek, 1996), predicting that job strain (i.e., high job demands and low control) will be most marked when employees also have low levels of social support at work.

Research also has identified other moderators of the work stressor-adjustment relationship. These include Type A behavior (Kushnir and Melamed, 1991), locus of control

(e.g., Daniels and Guppy, 1994; Vahtera, Pentti and Uutela, 1996), self-efficacy (Jimmieson, 2000), self-esteem (Makikangas and Kinnunen, 2003), proactivity (Parker and Sprigg, 1999), and trust in management (Harvey, Kelloway and Duncan-Leiper, 2003). Further, perceptions of the balance between effort and rewards for providing effort have been identified as moderators of the work stressor-adjustment process (Siegrist, 2002). While research has identified many task and individual difference variables that can reduce the negative effects of stressors on adjustment, there is an absence of the study of variables that reflect the extent to which employees perceive that they fit with the organizational culture as potential moderating influences. In the present study, the stress-buffering role of subjective fit is given further theoretical and empirical consideration.

Subjective fit

Compatibility between a person and an organization has been theoretically defined in a number of ways. Complementary fit exists when characteristics of the employee complement or 'make whole' the organization (Muchinsky and Monahan, 1987; Powell, 1998). Supplementary fit refers to the closeness of the characteristics of the employee and the organization and its employees (Kristof, 1996). Fit also has been operationalized in different ways (see Verquer, Beehr and Wagner, 2003). Subjective fit directly measures how well employees believe their own characteristics match those of the organization. Alternatively, objective fit compares an individual's self-characteristics with an independent rating of the organization on those characteristics. Lastly, perceived value congruence compares an individual's rating of both themselves and the organization on like dimensions. It has been argued that an individual's perceptions of fit may be more important than objective and indirect measures. If an individual believes they do or do not share similar values, this may be all that is necessary to influence affective and behavioral outcomes (see Kristof, 1996;

Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson, 2005). Thus, this study aimed to investigate employee perceptions of subjective fit with organizational goals and values.

There is a growing amount of research demonstrating the positive effects of perceptions of fit on employee adjustment. Indeed, research has found subjective fit to be positively related to higher work environment satisfaction (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Jansen and Colbert, 2002), job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, and lower intentions to leave (see Verquer *et al*., 2003 for a meta-analysis). Attesting to the broader impact of perceptions of a perceived match with the organization, subjective fit also has been found to be positively related to employee ratings of perceived organizational support and performance indicators, such as citizenship behaviors (Cable and DeRue, 2002). On the basis of this research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *Hypothesis 2a (H2a)*: Perceptions of subjective fit will have main effects on levels of employee health (i.e., positive main effects on psychological health and negative main effects on physical symptoms).
>
> *Hypothesis 2b (H2b)*: Higher perceptions of subjective fit will have main effects on levels of job-related attitudes (i.e., positive main effects on job satisfaction and negative main effects on intentions to leave).

The moderating role of subjective fit

The present study sought to extend the scope of existing research by investigating the stress-buffering potential of subjective fit on the work stressor-employee adjustment relationship. Indeed, the prevalence of change (especially, organizational culture change) in organizations in all sectors across the globe makes an investigation of fit with the organizations culture particularly vital (Noblet, McWilliams, Teo and Rodwell, 2006). While direct effects of fit have been found with respect to a variety of employee outcomes, research has yet to investigate its role in an occupational stress and coping framework. Several sources

of literature assist in the development of hypotheses. First, the value congruence literature provides some support for stress-buffering properties of more direct assessments of subjective fit. Value congruence compares employee perceptions of value importance as a function of the employee and the organization. Studies employing polynomial regression analyses have found value incongruence to be associated with lower job-related attitudes, and high-endorsement value congruence to be related to higher job-related attitudes (e.g., Kalliath, Bluedorn and Strube, 1999; Ostroff, Shin and Kinicki, 2005). These results imply that some values might represent potential stressors where organization values are rated higher than person endorsement of the same values, leading to adverse employee outcomes. Conversely, these results imply values are more acceptable for high-endorsement value congruence, essentially manifesting as a buffering effect against poor employee outcomes.

The sense of belonging literature also provides insight into potential buffering effects of subjective fit on the work stressor-employee adjustment relationship. Components of the definition of a 'sense of belonging' include a valued involvement (or feeling of being valued), and a fit of the person's perception that their characteristics complement the environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema and Collier, 1992). This definition has similar characteristics to subjective fit in that it is partially about values and a match of the person to the environment. Indeed, Sargent, Williams, Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer and Hoyle (2002) investigated the potential stress-buffering effect of a sense of belonging with navy recruits and found that high levels of a sense of belonging had a significant buffering effect on the effects of 'new recruit stress' on depressive symptoms for both depressed and non-depressed recruits with a family history of alcohol abuse. As such, a variable similar to subjective fit (a sense of belonging) was found to buffer the negative effects of stress on strain in an extremely homogenous and clinical, yet organizational sample. This result provides another

perspective from which to draw expectations regarding the effect of subjective fit on the work stressor-adjustment relationship.

Additionally, the concepts underlying organizational identification – a member's feeling of a sense of identification or 'oneness' with their organization--are notable in terms of consistency with the definition of subjective fit (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Indeed, organizational identification literature has found similar relationships to subjective fit with employee outcomes (see Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Riketta, 2005; Wegge, van Dick, Fisher, Wecking and Moltzen, 2006). Haslam, Postmes and Ellemers (2003: see also Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2002) propose that organizational identification is potentially an extension of social (collective) identification. Social identity theory allows us to understand how individuals can be part of a social group (such as an organization), via processes of self-categorization and psychological commitment (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Haslam, 2001). It highlights the causes of ties between individual(s) and an organization, assists in understanding the relative strength of these ties in different circumstances, and enables prediction of consequences for group behavior (Haslam *et al.,* 2003). Within the context of stress research, a social identity, or more correctly, a shared social identity, represents the basis for social support and coping. Indeed, considerable literature has demonstrated that a shared social identity (incorporating a process of categorizing oneself with a group) leads to a greater provision of social support to other in-group members (see Levine, Cassidy, Brazier and Reicher, 2002; Levine, Prosser, Evans and Reicher, 2005). Further, researchers also have demonstrated that a shared social identity can lead to the dissolution of the potential negative personal effects of stressors, via a process of redefining the stressors to be a source of collective eustress (Suedfeld, 1997; Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey, 1999). Subjective fit similarly captures the degree that employee and organizational goals and values are similar. Thus, the identification literature can assist in the development of expectations relating to a

potential buffering effect of subjective fit with the organization in the work stressor-employee adjustment relationship. On the basis, the following hypotheses were proposed:

> *Hypotheses 3a and 3b*: Perceptions of high subjective fit with organizational values will buffer the negative effects of job and social stressors on (H3a) employee health (i.e., psychological health and physical symptoms) and (H3b) job-related attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction and intentions to leave).
>
> *Hypotheses 4a and 4b*: Perceptions of low subjective fit with organizational values will exacerbate the negative effects of job and social stressors on (H4a) employee health (i.e., psychological health and physical symptoms) and (H4b) job-related attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction and intentions to leave).

Each hypothesis related to this study is display graphically in Figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Participants and organizations

Purposeful (maximum variation) sampling was employed (see Patton, 1990). As such, a diverse range of organizations was approached to enable investigation of patterns relating to individual perceptions of work stressors, subjective fit, and employee adjustment. Three organizations (A, B, and C) agreed to participate in the research.

Within organization A (a postal delivery company), 106 surveys were sent to employees from a sales and processing department, with 49 responses received (response rate = 42%). Respondents included 17 males and 32 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 51, M = 33.00, SD = 8.27. Thirty-nine participants were employed on a full-time basis, with 10 employed as permanent part-time with a mean tenure of 6.52 years.

Two hundred questionnaires were sent to organization B (a medical diagnostic imaging company) with 88 questionnaires returned (response rate = 44%). Seventeen participants were male and 70 were females (1 missing), with ages ranging from 20 to 59, *M* = 37.61, *SD* = 10.03. Sixty participants were employed on a full-time basis, 10 employed as permanent part-time, 6 casual, and 1 contractor. Mean tenure for this sample of employees was 4.44 years.

All employees (*N* = 180) of organization C (a city council) were invited to take part in the study, with 119 (68 males, 51 females) participating (response rate = 66%). Age ranged from 17 to 61, *M* = 38.37, *SD* = 12.01 with 98 participants employed on a full-time basis, 3 permanent part-time, 2 casual, 8 contractors, 7 apprentices, and 1 missing. Mean tenure of all participants from organization C was 6.24 years.

Procedure

The same procedure was employed across all three organizations. Employees were informed that a survey of employees was taking place one month prior to distribution. For all organizations, the researcher visited and spoke directly to supervisors and employees about the survey within the month preceding its distribution. Email reminders were sent to all employees encouraging participation in the survey prior to distribution and one week into the 2-week survey period. Employees received their questionnaire in an unmarked envelope containing the survey, an information sheet, and a reply-paid envelope. Upon completion, and to ensure confidentiality, employees returned the survey in the reply-paid envelope directly to the researcher.

Measures

Two categories of work stressors were assessed in this study (job and social). Job stressors included role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict. Social stressors included interpersonal conflict, lack of supervisor support, and lack of feedback. Employee adjustment

was assessed in terms of employee health (psychological health and physical symptoms) and job-related attitudes (job satisfaction and intentions to leave).

Role ambiguity. Perceptions of role ambiguity were measured using Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison and Pinneau's (1980) 4-item scale (e.g., I am often clear about my job responsibilities). Responses were rated from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*). All four items were recoded so that high scores reflected high levels of role ambiguity.

Role conflict. Perceptions of role conflict were measured using Caplan *et al*.,'s (1980) 3-item scale (e.g., People in equal rank and authority over you ask you to do things which conflict). Responses were rated from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*).

Role overload. Role overload perceptions were measured by using a modified version of Caplan *et al*.,'s (1980) 4-item scale that included 'my job requires me to work very fast'. Responses were rated from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*).

Interpersonal conflict. Perceived exposure to interpersonal conflict was measured on 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*) scale. Items in this 3-item measure were adapted from Spector and Jex's (1998) Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale. An example item included 'not getting on well with my co-workers'.

Lack of supervisor support. A perceived lack of supervisor support was measured using items adapted from Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley's (1990) supervisory support scale. Each item was assessed on a 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*) scale and an example item was 'my supervisor not caring about my well-being'.

Lack of feedback. Respondents rated perceived lack of feedback on a 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*) scale with three items adapted from Hackman and Oldham (1975). An example items included 'not having the opportunity to find out how well I am doing on the job'.

Subjective fit. Perceptions of subjective fit with organizational culture were assessed using Cable and DeRue's (2002) 3-item subjective fit scale. An example item in this scale included 'the things I value in life are very similar to the things that (my organization) values'. Respondents rated the items from 1 (s*trongly disagree*) to 5 (s*trongly agree*).

Psychological health. Perceptions of psychological well-being were assessed using the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12, Goldberg, 1972). Respondents were asked how their health had been in general over the last few weeks by responding to a 4-point scale (e.g., have you been able to enjoy your day-to-day activities?'). Response options included 1 (*much less than usual*), 2 (*same as usual*), 3 (*slightly more than usual*), and 4 (*much more than usual*). The scoring procedure was adapted from Goldberg and Williams (1988). Items rated as 1 or 2 were recoded to 0, and items rated as 3 and 4 were recoded to 1. Negatively worded items were recoded (0 to 1, and 1 to 0) then a global score was calculated by summing all items, resulting in a continuous scale (range, 0 to 12).

Physical symptoms. Self-reports of physical complaints were assessed using a scale developed by Caplan *et al*. (1980). Ten items asked respondents to indicate physical symptoms of strain in the last month. An example item from this scale was 'you felt your heart racing'. Respondents rated items on a 3-point scale, including 1 (*never*), 2 (*once or twice*), and 3 (*more than three times*).

Job satisfaction. Levels of job satisfaction were measured using Warr, Cook and Wall's (1979) 3-item scale. This scale is designed to measure how people generally feel about their jobs in terms of enjoyment, happiness, and satisfaction. Responses ranged from 1 (e.g., *I am not happy*) to 5 (e.g., *I am extremely happy*).

Intentions to leave. Respondents' intentions to leave the organization were assessed using a 3-item scale adapted from Fried, Tiegs, Naughton and Ashforth (1996). An example

item included ‘do you seriously intend to transfer to another job in the near future? Items were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely yes*).

Control variables in this study included organization type, gender, age, and negative affectivity in order to minimize the influence of these factors on the focal variables in the study.

Organization type. As data from three organizations was combined in order to conduct analyses, it was necessary to control for organization type using dummy coding procedures set out by Pedhazur (1997). As a result, two dummy variables were created: (1) dummy coding for organization B and (2) dummy coding for organization C. Organization type was controlled for in all regression analyses in this study.

Gender. Gender of respondents was assessed as a dichotomous variable 1 (*male*) and 2 (*female*). Research has demonstrated that perceptions of some work stressors and employee adjustment outcomes can differ as a function of gender (e.g., Nelson and Burke, 2002). Therefore, gender was assessed in this study and preliminary analyses revealed some differences in focal variables between males and females. More specifically, t-tests revealed that role ambiguity, $t(251) = 3.78$, $p < .05$, and physical symptoms, $t(246) = 3.49$, $p = .06$, differed as a function of gender. Males reported higher levels of role ambiguity, $M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.33$, compared to females, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.32$. Males also reported lower levels of physical symptoms, $M = 1.30$, $SD = .32$, compared to females, $M = 1.40$, $M = .44$. Thus, gender was controlled for in all regression analyses.

Age. Age was measured in years and months, representing a continuous scale. Research has identified that older employees sometimes perceive and experience different levels of stressors and strain compared to younger people (e.g., Chandraiah, Marimuthu and Manoharan, 2003). In this study, age was negatively associated with intentions to leave, $r = -.26$, $p < .01$, and positively related to physical symptoms, $r = .22$, $p < .01$, and job satisfaction,

r = .16, p < .05. Additionally, age was negatively correlated with role conflict r = -.20, p < .01. Thus, age was controlled for in analyses in this study.

Negative affectivity. Watson and Pennebaker (1989) reported that negative affectivity can potentially act as a 'nuisance' variable, especially in cross-sectional research based on single-source measures of stressors and strains. A way to limit the potential biasing effects of dispositional variables in the stressor-strain relationship is to statistically control for negative affectivity (see Spector, 2006). Negative affectivity was assessed using an 11-item scale based on the Multidimensional Personality Index (see Agho, Price and Mueller, 1992). An example item included 'I am too sensitive for my own good'. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*all the time*).

Results

Preliminary Data Analyses and Overview of Analyses

Descriptive data (means and standard deviations), correlations, and Cronbach (1951) alpha coefficients are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen, all scales demonstrated good internal consistency. Overall, most correlations were low to moderate, indicating that multicollinearity was not a serious threat to the analyses (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed on the data to test the hypotheses (i.e., one regression analysis for each dependent variable). Independent variables were mean-centered in order to circumvent problems relating to multicollinearity between the predictor variables and two-way interaction terms (see Aiken and West, 1991). In analyses, the control variables were entered on Step 1, stressor variables entered on Step 2, subjective fit on Step 3, and interaction terms (i.e., work stressor x subjective fit) on Step 4.

Insert Table 1 about here

Main Effects

Stressors and employee adjustment. It was predicted that job and social stressors would be negatively related to employee health (H1a) and job-related attitudes (H1b). Entry of the job and social stressor variables at Step 2 accounted for a significant increment in variance on physical symptoms, R^2 *ch.* = .07, $F(6,230) = 4.31$, $p < .001$ (partially supporting H1a), as well as job satisfaction, R^2 *ch.* = .20, $F(6,232) = 10.73$, $p < .001$, and intentions to leave, R^2 *ch.* = .12, $F(6,236) = 6.10$, $p < .001$ (supporting H1b). The stressors as a set did not account for significantly more variance in the psychological health scores, R^2 *ch.* = .02, $F(6,236) = 1.07$, *ns*. With respect to the job stressors, the analyses revealed that role ambiguity, $\beta = .15$, $p < .05$, role conflict, $\beta = .12$, $p = .06$, and role overload, $\beta = .16$, $p < .05$, were significantly related to higher reports of physical symptoms. Interestingly, role overload was related to higher, not lower, levels of job satisfaction, $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$. For the social stressors, analyses revealed that perceived lack of supervisor support and feedback were negatively associated with job satisfaction, $\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$, and $\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$, respectively, and positively related to intentions to leave, $\beta = .17$, $p < .05$, and $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$, respectively.

Subjective fit and employee adjustment. The hierarchical multiple regression analyses were continued to assess the effect of subjective fit on employee health (H2a) and job-related attitudes (H2b). Subjective fit was entered on Step 3 after the control variables (Step 1) and the work stressor variables (Step 2). Failing to support H2a, entry of subjective fit on Step 3 did not account for a significant increment of explained variance in psychological health, R^2 *ch.* = .01, $F(1,235) = .10$, *ns*, or physical symptoms, R^2 *ch.* = .003, $F(1,229) = 1.08$, *ns.* However, there was some support for H2b. These analyses revealed that subjective fit was positively related to job satisfaction, $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$, R^2 *ch.* = .11, $F(1,231) = 39.49$, *p*

< .001, and negatively related to intentions to leave, β = -.32, p < .001, R^2 *ch.* = .07, $F(1,235)$ = 24.62, p < .001.

Subjective Fit and Work Stressor-Employee Adjustment Relationship.

The four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were continued in order to investigate the potential impact of subjective fit on the stressor-adjustment relationship. As shown in Table 2, the Work Stressor Variable x Subjective Fit interaction was entered on Step 4. Entry of all six interactions as a set in each regression analysis did not significantly explain further variance on the dependent variables (see Table 2). However, three significant interactions were revealed. Significant two-way interactions were plotted according to procedures outlined by Jaccard, Turrisi and Wan (1990).

First, the interaction of Role Ambiguity x Subjective Fit on physical symptoms was significant, β = -.16, p < .05 (see Figure 2). In line with H3a, employees reporting high levels of subjective fit were buffered from the positive effects of role ambiguity on physical symptoms, B = -.02, $t(222)$ = -0.59, *ns*. Supporting H4a, simple slopes tests also revealed that the positive effects of role ambiguity on the experience of physical symptoms were exacerbated for employees reporting low levels of subjective fit, B = .07, $t(222)$ = 2.10, p < .05.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Second, the interaction of Interpersonal Conflict x Subjective Fit was significant on both job satisfaction, β = .13, p = .06, and intentions to leave, β = -.19, p < .05. In support of H3b, employees reporting high subjective fit were buffered from the negative effects of interpersonal conflict on job satisfaction, B = .07, $t(222)$ = 0.84, *ns* (see Figure 3). Further, in line with H4b, simple slopes tests revealed that the negative effects of interpersonal conflict

on levels of job satisfaction were exacerbated for employees reporting low subjective fit, B = -.11, $t(222) = -2.56$, $p < .05$.

Several interesting points arise from the simple slopes analysis related to the interaction of interpersonal conflict and subjective fit on intentions to leave. Inspection of Figure 4 revealed a trend to suggest that the positive effects of interpersonal conflict on intentions to leave were exacerbated for those with low levels of subjective fit, although this effect failed to reach statistical significance, $B = .13$, $t(226) = 1.54$, $p = .12$. Interestingly, those with high subjective fit reported significantly lower intentions to leave as interpersonal conflict increased, $B = -.21$, $t(226) = -2.07$, $p < .05$.

Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here

Discussion

This study extended the scope of fit theory and research that has primarily focused on main effects, and has provided evidence that the relationship between subjective fit and employee adjustment extends beyond simple main effects. First, it was hypothesized that job and social stressors would be related to lower levels of employee adjustment. Additionally, it was predicted that employees' perceptions of subjective fit with organizational values and goals would be related to higher levels of employee adjustment. Lastly, it was predicted that higher subjective fit with the organization's culture would act to buffer the negative effects of work (i.e., job and social) stressors on employee adjustment.

Work Stressor Main Effects

In line with previous research and mostly supporting H1a and H1b, the results demonstrated that job and social stressors, as a set, were significantly related to less favorable employee adjustment. Some results, however, were not in line with these hypotheses. First, the job and social stressors entered as a set did not account for further explained variance on

psychological health. While this result differs from previous research, it should be noted that all stressors, with the exception of role conflict, were significantly and negatively related to psychological health (see Table 1). Second, role overload was positively related to job satisfaction. Potential explanations for this result hinge on the items used to assess role overload (i.e., working hard and fast). It is possible that the level of role overload experienced by employees provided motivation (and ultimately satisfaction) for employees. This concept is supported by Locke and Latham's (1990) goal setting theory which, in part, identifies that challenging (but not impossible) goals can be a motivator. From a similar perspective, LePine, Podsakoff and LePine (2005) describe hindrance stressors (e.g., constraints and resource inadequacy) and challenge stressors (e.g., role demands, pressure, and urgency). These authors found that challenge stressors were negatively associated with employee strain and positively related to motivation. Overall, these studies highlight the need to be critical of existing work stressor-employee adjustment theories and mindful of the positive effects of some work stressors on employee adjustment.

Subjective Fit

The prediction that subjective fit would be related to employee health was not supported, after entry of the covariates and work stressors in the model. In line with previous research (e.g., Verquer *et al*., 2003), and supporting H2b, higher perceptions of fit were related to higher job satisfaction and lower intentions to leave. In addition to the main effects role for subjective fit, there was some support for proposal that fit can have a moderating influence on work stressor-employee adjustment relationships. Several discussion points arise from the results revealing moderating effects of subjective fit. Overall, three significant two-way interactions (i.e., Work Stressor x Subjective Fit) were found in the prediction of employee adjustment. These interactions were in line with a stress-buffering hypothesis, such that higher subjective fit buffered the negative effects of role ambiguity and interpersonal

conflict on employee outcomes. More specifically, for two of the significant interactions, those perceiving low fit reported less favorable adjustment as stressors levels increased, whereas those perceiving high fit were not affected by the increase in stressor levels. Further, in the context of turnover intentions, while those perceiving low fit reported a non-significant trend to suggest higher intentions to leave in the face of interpersonal conflict at work, those perceiving high fit reported significantly stronger intentions to remain with the organization, despite the high levels of interpersonal conflict. While further research is needed to understand this result, it is possible that the support networks associated with high fit may afford the members of that group the power to reverse the negative emotions and behaviors that may be otherwise associated with interpersonal conflict at work.

The results of this study also have implications for identity theory. First, this study provides support for an organizational identification approach to understanding work stressor mitigation in an organizational context. An identity approach to occupational stress identifies that stressors can be redefined, essentially manifesting as a collective coping strategy. This process can lead to the reframing of stressors to the point that they can actually become a source of eustress for that collective (Branscombe *et al*., 1999). Indeed, the significant interactions in this study support this perspective to explaining stress-buffering, as those who fit (i.e., were a part of the collective) reported more favorable health and job-related attitudes as work stressors intensified. Conversely, those not part of the collective were not protected against the negative effects of such stressors. What has not been explained by this study, however, is the relationship between subjective fit with organizational culture and organizational identification. It is possible that the two constructs are similar and would, therefore, be highly correlated. Alternatively, it is possible that subjective fit with organization culture is a predictor of organizational identification. That is, the feeling that one fits with the culture can ultimately lead to self-categorization with the in-group that then

affords it the benefits of the shared identity and the coping benefits that are associated with that group. This issue represents an interesting avenue for further research.

While there were three significant interactions in this study, it cannot be left unstated that many of the interactions tested were not significant. For instance, the Work Stressor x Subjective Fit interactions on psychological health were not significant. Additionally, interactions involving several of the job and social stressors were not significant. Reasons for this nonsignificance are unclear. It is possible that the benefits of subjective fit do not extend to mitigating the negative effects of some work stressors – that some job and social stressors are so deleterious that fitting in or identifying with the organization simply does not provide enough protection from their negative effects. Alternatively, these results may be related to the nature of the sample used in this study.

Nevertheless, the importance of these results should not be understated. The finding that high perceptions of fit with the organization can mitigate the negative influence of a variety of job and social stressors on employee adjustment has positive implications for organizations and their members. Practically, these results suggest that increasing employees' perceptions that they fit with the organization's values could lead to a less strained workgroup that is able to adjust quickly to potential workplace stressors. From another perspective, the results have implications for the way in which human resource practitioners recruit and select employees to work within the organization and potentially within workgroups and ad hoc teams. If employees are selected such that they fit with the organizational values and goals, they might come ready-equipped to interpret stressful organizational events in a way that is not damaging to the employee and organizational effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions

A number of limitations and future research investigations are provided by this study. This study was cross-sectional, therefore, participant mood states and dispositional variables could make results related to occupational stress difficult to interpret (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003). A longitudinal design should be employed in future research to enable reduction of common method variance and investigate the relationships over time. Additionally, this study investigated hypotheses based on individual perceptions. Future research should consider conducting individual-, workgroup-, and organizational-level analyses, affording the opportunity to compare the meaning of the results from multiple perspectives. A multi-level approach also enables assessment of cultural fit with subcultures within organizations. Additionally, it will further inform human resource managers at all levels of the organization of the types of interventions that might be appropriate. To further understand the relationships identified in this study, future research should extend investigation to include the potential associations of different coping strategies in the relationships among work stressors, subjective fit, and employee adjustment. Indeed, some researchers have identified that a core component of transactional models of stressor-strain processes is related to the influence of coping strategies (e.g., Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Moos and Schaefer, 1993). Lastly, researchers should investigate the effectiveness of fit-related interventions that human resource managers employ in efforts to manage occupational stress.

Conclusion

Several contributions to knowledge and future research directions have resulted from the present study that assist researchers and human resource practitioners in understanding the influence of fit with organizational culture on the occupational stress process. In particular, evidence has been presented to suggest that high subjective fit can moderate, or

buffer, the negative effects of some work stressors on a variety of employee adjustment outcomes. Additionally, this study has posed some important considerations for future research in terms of understanding the underlying mechanism of this buffering effect. One specific avenue for further research lies in exploring a potential relationship between organizational identity and subjective fit.

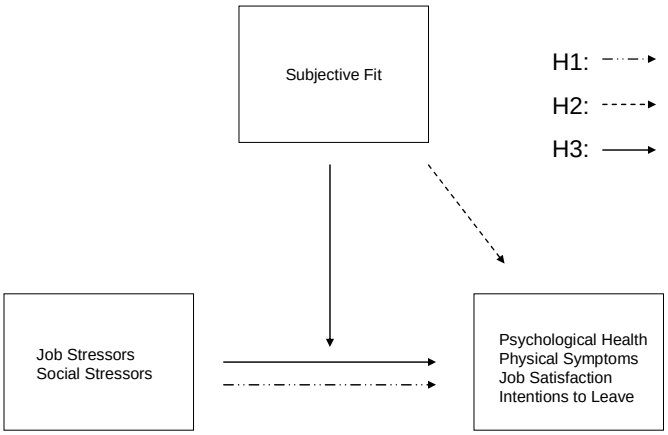

Figure 1. Graphical representation of hypotheses.

Table 1

Descriptive data for focal variables

	Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Role ambiguity	2.82 (1.33)	(.90)											
2	Role conflict	2.90 (1.50)	.41**	(.90)										
3	Role overload	5.20 (1.09)	.23**	-.14*	(.78)									
4	Interpersonal conflict	3.03 (1.32)	.27**	.29**	.07	(.78)								
5	Lack of supervisor support	2.64 (1.78)	.37**	.34**	-.01	.41**	(.90)							
6	Lack feedback	3.45 (1.80)	.34**	.35**	.10	.48**	.58**	(.91)						
7	Subjective fit	2.87 (0.99)	-.34**	-.32**	-.04	-.27**	-.43**	-.38**	(.91)					
8	Psychological health	9.30 (1.93)	-.18**	-.05	-.15*	-.14*	-.20**	-.18**	.13*	(.77)				
9	Physical symptoms	1.38 (0.40)	.32**	.23**	.22**	.16*	.22**	.18**	-.22**	-.41**	(.87)			
10	Job satisfaction	3.14 (0.98)	-.23**	-.29**	.11	-.30**	-.37**	-.39**	.50**	.12	-.23**	(.92)		
11	Intention to leave	2.11 (1.18)	.27**	.20**	.07	.23**	.35**	.34**	-.45**	-.14*	.31**	-.57**	(.86)	
12	Negative affectivity	2.27 (0.72)	.25**	.17**	.15*	.29**	.35**	.18**	-.18**	-.37**	.50**	-.24**	.23**	(.89)

Note. Cronbach's (1951) alpha reliability coefficients appears in the diagonal.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses on employee adjustment outcomes

Independent Variables	Psychological health β	Physical symptoms β	Job satisfaction β	Intentions to leave β
Step 1 – Control variables				
Dummy – Organization B	.02	-.16**	.04	-.07
Dummy – Organization C	.01	-.14	.14	-.07
Gender	.02	.08*	.07	-.07
Age	.07	-.10*	.12*	-.23***
Negative affectivity	-.36***	.47***	-.22**	.19**
Adjusted R^2	.12	.26	.06	.09
R^2	.14***	.27***	.08**	.11***
F	7.75	17.73	4.35	5.91
(degrees freedom)	(5,242)	(5,236)	(5,238)	(5,242)
Step 2 – Job and social stressors				
Role ambiguity	.07	.15**	-.09	.01
Role conflict	-.03	.12*	-.05	.09
Role overload	-.08	.16**	.18**	-.01
Interpersonal conflict	.01	-.05	-.05	-.01
Lack of supervisor support	-.10	.10	-.21**	.17**
Lack of feedback	-.04	-.10	-.16**	.20**
Adjusted R^2	.12	.32	.25	.19
R^2 Change	.02	.07***	.20***	.12***
F change	1.07	4.31	10.73	6.10
(degrees freedom)	(6,236)	(6,230)	(6,232)	(6,236)
Step 3 – Subjective fit				
Subjective fit	.02	-.07	.48***	-.32***
Adjusted R^2	.12	.32	.36	.27
R^2 Change	.01	.01	.11**	.07***
F change	.10	1.08	39.49	24.62
(degrees freedom)	(1,235	(1,229)	(1,231)	(1,235)
Step 4 – Interaction terms				
Role ambiguity X subjective fit	.12	-.16**	-.06	-.01
Role conflict X subjective fit	-.12	.08	.01	.06
Role overload X subjective fit	.07	-.07	-.03	-.02
Interpersonal conflict X subjective fit	-.04	-.02	.13*	-.19**
Lack supervisor support X subjective fit	.11	-.12	.07	-.04
Lack feedback X subjective fit	-.09	.13	-.06	.12
Adjusted R^2	.11	.32	.35	.27
R^2 Change	.02	.02	.02	.02
F change	.83	1.34	.92	1.29
(degrees freedom)	(6,229)	(6,223)	(6,225)	(6,229)

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

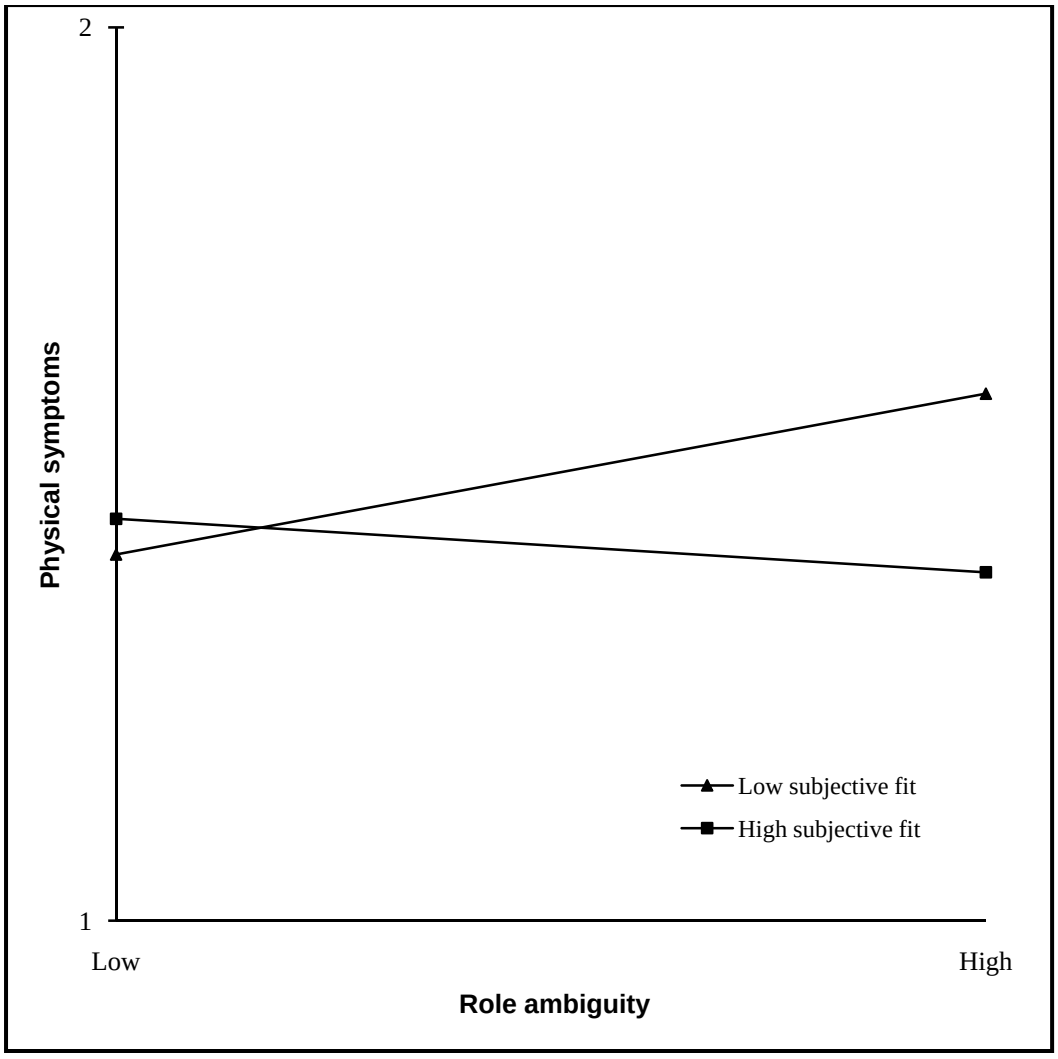

Figure 2. Two-way interaction of role ambiguity and subjective fit on physical symptoms.

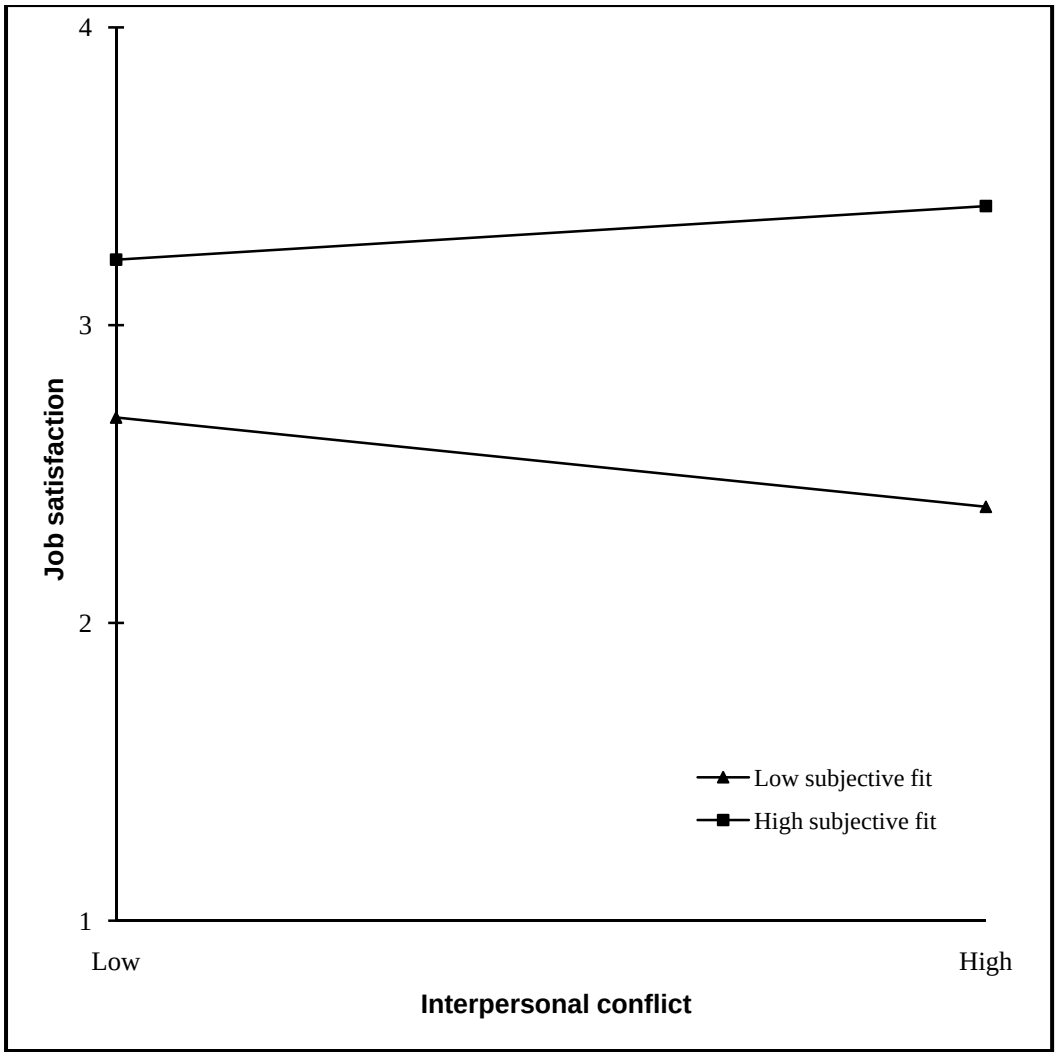

Figure 3. Two-way interaction of interpersonal conflict and subjective fit on job satisfaction.

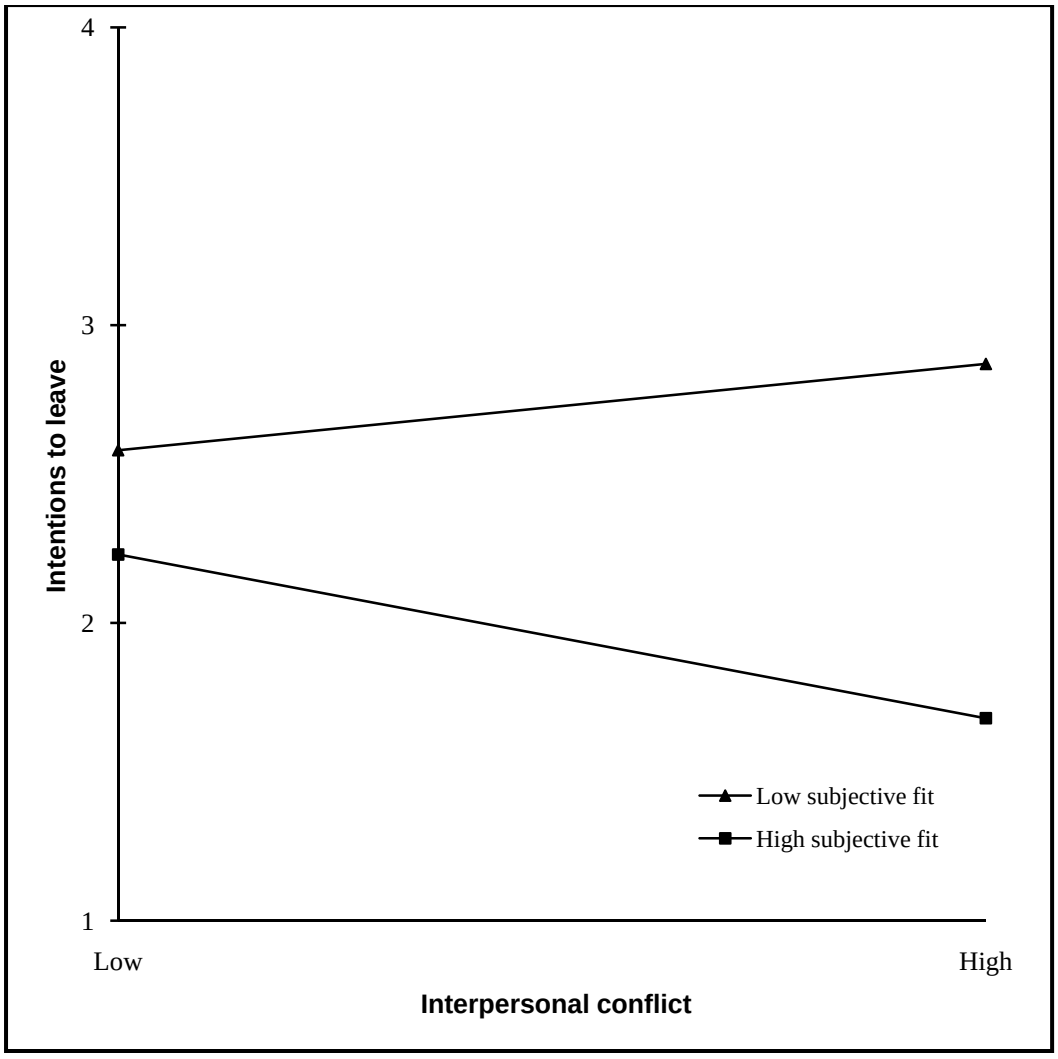

Figure 4. Two-way interaction of interpersonal conflict and subjective fit on intentions to leave.

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