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Cheri Ostroff and Timothy A. Judge (Editors). **Perspectives on Organizational Fit**. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007, 477 pages, $95.00 hardcover.

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From the first moment you set your eyes on this book, you are aware that it is a serious endeavor. Edited by two of the most published people in the field and sporting an imposing black and lime green dust cover containing an image of a swarm of black skull-headed moths, it contains chapters written by virtually all of the 'good and the great' of the field. A flick through the pages reveals hundreds of pages of narrow margins and dense typescript interspersed with equations and three dimensional graphs. This is a book that demands attention.

The editors describe their intentions in the following way: 'We conceived and edited this book with the aim of extending and building upon recent advances in the fit area. By offering a comprehensive treatment of fit across content domains (e.g., selection, recruitment, diversity, leadership, teams, and HRM practices) and across levels of analysis (e.g., implications for individuals, groups, and organizations), we hope to guide further advancements in the area. (pp. xiii-xiv).'

To achieve these aims, the book the editors have brought together twenty-six authors (all from the USA) to write thirteen chapters, although the eleventh chapter, which is entitled Methodological and Analytical Techniques in Fit Research, has five subdivisions each focusing on a different technique and each authored by a different writing team. The chapters are grouped into three parts: 'Extending Fit Theory', 'Linking Theory and Analysis', and the third part, 'Commentary and Reflections', contains just one chapter, which is a wrap-up and summary by one of the editors.

Space constraints prevent a detailed analysis of all the contributions. Instead, we offer reflection on some of the general themes and want to pull out some of the new advances advocated by the authors. Before doing this, it is important to position this book within the organizational fit literature. This literature is concerned with the extension of interactional psychology into the organizational domain. In doing so, its purpose is to predict the behavior of employees (Chatman, 1989) and organizations (Schneider, 1987). In its earliest days, theoretical and conceptual papers raised some key questions that threw the spotlight on the subject. Does someone's sense of fit influence which organizations they join? Do organizations select people like those they already contain? Do misfits leave organizations? Does fit decrease creativity? Is greater fit good or bad for employees and organizations?

Within this literature there has always been a tension between fit conceived as a general and subjective state of mind, which is increasingly being called 'gestalt fit', and fit deconstructed along theoretical lines into more easily testable hypotheses and propositions. This tension is reflected in this book with the extended first chapter by Ostroff and Schulte putting great effort into defining the construct. But after sixty-six pages of detailed work, we are left with a sense that this construct is one we are a long way from defining. This is a theme running through the book and most authors choose

to define fit in their own terms or dodge the issue altogether. This definitional issue is brought into sharp relief in the chapter by Harrison. He offers a powerful and critical overview of the domain and challenges fit researchers to define the construct properly. His preferred approach is to study objective fit where the two sides of the person–environment equation are captured separately, thereby aligning himself with the ideas in the chapter by Edwards and Shipp that usefully explore how these two sets of variables can relate to one another.

Within the definitional debates several new ideas emerge. Ostroff and Schulte tease out a new way of thinking about different constructions of fit by introducing the terms compilational and compositional fit to combat multi-level issues in fit. Compilational fit refers to forms of fit where the fit between two 'lower level' constructs result in a 'higher level' outcome. For example, greater homogeneity between people in a department may result in greater organizational performance. This form of fit assumes a hierarchy from individuals through teams and departments to the organizational level. Compositional fit refers to calculations of fit where the subjects are at different levels such as in the classic person–organization fit.

Extending the temporal and multidimensional fit literatures, Kristof-Brown and Jansen introduce the concepts of spillover and spiraling. They argue that when a person experiences high (or low) fit in one dimension it will 'spillover' into other dimensions. Spiraling is a process of mutual reinforcement where feelings of fitting in beget further feelings of good fit. The process also works in reverse with negative feelings of fit creating a deeper sense of poor fit. Although this runs counter to trigger events causing misfit, it offers a testable proposition that will help us understand fit and misfit more thoroughly.

The more the chapters move away from the mainstream fit literature, the less successful they become. When experts from other fields write about links between their own field and fit, the difference in the authors' appreciation of the two fields undermines their work. Atwater and Dionne, for example, give an excellent explanation of leader–member exchange (LMX) and its expressions in vertical dyad linkage (VDL) and individualized leadership (IL), but their lack of familiarity of the fit literature prevents them from drawing strong conclusions. This is a pity because it would be interesting to explore how fit techniques might help explain LMX, VDL and IL and vice versa, especially as these appear to be very closely related to person–person fit.

Higgins and Freitas' focus on 'regulatory fit' – i.e., 'the sense of 'fit' as an experience of feeling right about what is happening' (p. 71) – moves even further away from the fit literature. In their chapter they do not cite a single paper from what might be considered the mainstream fit literature preferring to focus exclusively on their area of expertise. Although there is value in looking at related domains, most readers will be reading this book because they are doing research in fit and some attempt by the authors to draw a roadmap suggesting links and the way forward might have been a better route to go down. In the case of the Higgins and Freitas paper, this is particularly unfortunate because their approach offers considerable potential for explaining the way that people's fit is formed.

Perhaps the greatest criticism that might be laid at the book is that it fails to deliver on its aim to extend and build upon recent advances in the fit area. Occasionally the authors manage this, such as in the chapters picked out above, but by and large most chapters are state-of-the-art reviews of the area under consideration. The vast majority of the writing summarizes what has gone before and only pays

scant regard to looking ahead; the notable exception is the final chapter by Judge which identifies key issues that fit researchers need to address. Nevertheless, these reviews have been written by experts in the fields and are very successful and provide a tremendous overview of the current state of the field. This state, however, is not a healthy one. The chapters combine to create an overall impression that after twenty-five years of study, the only 'big' fit question that can be answered with any degree of confidence is that higher levels of fit are good for people. We have very little understanding of the impact on organizations, or how fit develops. Harrison's chapter takes this to the natural conclusion and asks if all this research work has been worthwhile especially as we still cannot even define the construct.

Another criticism that might be leveled at the book givens its stated aims is the failure to consider fit perspectives that are radically different from the deconstructed mainstream. Gestalt/subjective/perceived fit might have deserved a chapter, so might misfit. Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework and homogeneity hypothesis is a curious omission given the centrality of these ideas to the literature, although a book (Smith, 2008) exclusively on the approach was published the following year. Evolutionary psychology is another topic that might have warranted a chapter. And, as hinted at earlier, some non-American voices may have added different perspectives as well.

Despite these reservations, this book contains first-rate scholarship by the leaders of the field. This book sets out in one place most of the problems associated with fit research. These include variations in the way the construct is conceptualized, problems with units and levels of analysis, the variety of methods that can be used to study the topic, the multidimensionality and complexity of the construct, its temporal and elusive nature, and issues with perceived and 'actual' fit. After reading the

articles in this book, no researcher will have any excuse not to have thought through

all of these issues. This book is timely, critical and essential reading for all

organizational fit researchers. We now need volume two that genuinely looks to the

future.

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