The Impact of Person Environment fit in creating Social Capital

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of person environment fit as an antecedent to social capital.

Design/methodology/approach- This is a conceptual/theoretical research paper whereby we utilize social identity theory, Schneider's (1987; 2001) attraction-selection attrition model and logical arguments to justify that person environment fit plays an important role in the creation of social capital within organizations.

Findings- We hypothesize that person organization fit is positively related to structural social capital. We assert that person group fit is significantly positively related to relational social capital. In addition, we also contend that person job fit is significantly positively associated with cognitive social capital.

Research limitations/implications- We have proposed our arguments on the available literature and suggested which type of person environment fit will be most beneficial in the creation of which social capital dimension. Though a number of other relationships among dimensions of person environment fit and social capital were also possible but we did not include them as they were beyond the scope of the present research.

Practical implications- Our study is beneficial for managers in determining that they need to recruit and select employees who are compatible with their environments as person-environment congruence would promote social capital maintenance and development in organizations.

Originality/value- The conception of fit or congruence is of central focus of psychology and organizational behavior research for the past three decades. Though the foundations of fit and social capital seem to be logical but these two arenas have rarely been studied together. This article fills an important gap in the literatures on Person environment fit and social capital by proposing how congruence can play a pertinent role in the creation of social capital in organizations.

Keywords: Person organization fit, Person Group fit, Person job fit, Cognitive social capital, Relational social capital, Structural social capital.

Paper type: Research paper.

Introduction

The conception of fit or congruence is of central focus of psychology and organizational behavior research for the past three decades (Nadler & Tushman, 1980; Saks and Ashforth, 1997). The basic assumption of the person-environment fit is that individual behavior, attitudes and other variables are a result of an interaction of both the person and environment (Lewin, 1951; Murray, 1938; Pervin, 1989).

Person-environment (PE) fit is expressed as the compatibility that transpires when individual and work setting features is well matched (Kristof-Brownet al., 2005). Person environment fit is a broad term which encompasses different types of fit such as person job fit, person organization fit, person vocation fit and person group fit (Kristof, 1996). PE fit aids in determining the extent of how employees fit within a specific work groups or a sub-culture as the "fit" embraces feeling contented with the firm (O'Reilly, 1989).

Besides it is contended by researchers that presently organization's success greatly relies on the capacity to initiate, share and convert the social capital of the firm into sustainable and inimitable core competencies (Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou & Prastacos, 2010). Social capital can be assumed as concrete or possible reserves embedded in more or less institutionalized associations of mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1980). Putnam (1995) observed that social capital is a multi-dimensional construct sharing a mutual interest in relational resources that aid the conduct of social affairs (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). It has become imperative for organizations to select and develop workers who can smoothly adjust and fit into careers that are well-suited to their work settings.

Though the foundations of fit and social capital seem to be logical but these two arenas have rarely been studied together. We believe that PE fit framework to understanding social capital development will be worthwhile because of its capacity to enhance organizational effectiveness and functioning.

This article fills an important gap in the literatures on social capital and PE fit by highlighting the following links. Specifically, we (1) examine the three types of fit (person-job, person-group and person-organization) as antecedents of social capital dimensions (cognitive, relational and structural) (2) argue that organizations, as institutional settings, are able to develop high levels of social capital in terms fit among its various components.

Our research paper is divided into the following sections. Firstly, we review the literatures on the three dimensions of PE fit and social capital dimensions. Secondly, in the next section we build the theoretical framework by linking the three types of fit as antecedents to social capital. Lastly,

in the discussion section we provide future research directions, limitations and managerial implications.

Literature Review

Person Job fit

Person job fit is the oldest and most extensively discussed form of PE fit in the HRM literature (Edwards, 1994). Person job fit is defined as the congruence of employee's knowledge, skills and abilities with the job demands (Bretz, 1993; Edwards, 1991). The literature on person job fit depicts two aspects of PJ fit which include a demands-abilities linkage and a needs-supply connection (Edwards, 1991).

The demands-abilities linkage tends to highlight how much compatibility exists between demands or requirements of the job performed and the abilities of the individual whereas the needs-supply relationship explains the match between the needs of an individual and the supplies provided by an organization to fulfill those needs (Hecht and Allen, 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Lopez et al., 2009). Although initially researchers considered these two namely abilities-demands and needs-supplies as two different types of fit however later these two were subsumed under the broader classification of person job fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Scroggins, 2007).

Person Group Fit

Person-group (P-G) fit exists when there is interpersonal congruence between the individual and other members of the immediate work group (Judge & Ferris, 1992; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). The construct has been operationalized in several different ways; most often, individuals are compared to their coworkers in terms of goals (Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001), values (Adkins et al., 1996), or personality traits (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research on P-G fit is infrequent parallel to P-O and P-J fit as it is a comparatively fresh notion, but few empirical studies are available on it.

Person Organization Fit

Person organization fit is defined as how much individual's values, beliefs and needs are compatible with the organization's culture (Chatman, 1989). As the main concern of person organization fit is to attain match between individual and the organization's culture therefore it considers person environment fit from a macro level of analysis (Bowen et al., 1991). Since Person organization fit stresses congruence between the individuals and the work environment as a whole, strong organizational identity is fostered for individuals by matching the values of the individual with the organizational values.

In the past researchers have used many different facets to explain the concept of person organization fit but the most frequently and popularly used dimensions are supplementary and complementary (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). Supplementary fit refers to how much congruence there exists between the individual and organizational values whereas complementary fit refers to how much compatibility exists between the individual and organizational goals. The past literature on person organization fit clearly highlights that supplementary and complementary fit result in positive outcomes for the individual and the organization (Ostroff et al., 2002).

The above view of person– organization fit is closely linked to the Attraction–Selection–Attrition (ASA) model developed by Schneider (1983). The results of these studies suggest that individuals tend to favor organizations which support their beliefs and values. Thus, as values are essential for determining how individuals interpret situations and evaluate acceptable behavior, attaining value compatibility is the essential for successful adaptation to the workplace (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996; Rokeach, 1973).

Social Capital

Social capital is defined as the total resources which are available, firmly rooted and derived from the network of relationships by an individual or social unit (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In essence social capital not only includes the set of connections but also the resources which might

build up through the network. Thus, social capital establishes the development and facilitation of connections and ties and the parties involved (Anderson & Jack, 2002).

Just as physical capital is created by bringing about changes in raw materials so as to promote production and human capital is generated by developing new skills and abilities, social capital is shaped when the connections and ties among individuals change in such a way that is beneficial for organizations (Coleman, 1990).

Adler and Kwon (2002: 18) speak of social capital as an "umbrella concept" that integrates related concepts such as trust, social resources and social networks. Social capital has been operationalized at different levels of analysis (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). In this paper we define social capital at the individual level and focus on its development from the achievement of PE fit in the organization.

Dimensions of Social Capital

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) classified social capital as a construct comprising of three dimensions namely structural, cognitive and relational.

Structural Social Capital

The structural dimension of social capital focuses on the aggregate arrangement of relationships existing in organizations. This dimension encompasses the degree to which individuals in organizations are connected to each other i-e how much individuals are acquainted with one another (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This dimension consists of network connections, network patterns and network appropriability.

Network connections exist when employees develop ties with one another. Network patterns imply the overall configuration of a network in an organization. Several factors can determine the configuration of network which are structural holes (i.e., the lack of ties between organizational members), centralization (i.e., the extent to which connections are concentrated

among few individuals), and density (i.e., the degree to which all individuals are interconnected in relation to the total number of potential connections among all employees).

Relational Social Capital

The relational dimension of social capital, in contrast, refers to assets that are rooted in these relationships, such as trust and trustworthiness (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). Trust can act as a governance mechanism for embedded relationships (Uzzi, 1996). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), the relational dimension of social capital is characterized by high levels of trust, shared norms and perceived obligations, and a sense of mutual identification. Their conceptualization of relational capital is quite similar to Granovetter's (1973) notion of strong ties, which he describes as connections between individuals that are characterized by trust, reciprocity, and emotional intensity. The relational dimension is thus concerned with personal assets such as trust that have been embedded in these linkages through a series of interactions.

Cognitive Social Capital

The cognitive social capital implies those resources which provide shared mental models, interpretations and systems of meaning among the actors involved. Cognitive social capital would encompass individual's unique skills, competencies which are firmly entrenched in the organization's functioning (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The cognitive dimension treats facets that offer a common source of understanding such as shared values and goals (Kostova & Roth, 2003).

Research Model

Person Environment Fit	**Social Capital**
Person Job fit	Structural social capital
Person Group fit	Relational social capital
Person Organization fit	Cognitive social capital

Fig. 1 Figure depicting person environment fit as an antecedent to social capital

Proposition Section

We developed a framework that examines the dynamics of PE fit and social capital in organizations. Briefly, our model proposes that different fit dimensions lead to differential social capital dimensions. However, in our model we are particularly interested in how fit is pertinent in the creation of social capital in organizations.

Person Environment Fit as an Antecedent to Social Capital

The concept of PE fit is considered to be one of the dominant conceptual forces in the field of interactional psychology (Schneider, 2001). We propose that PE fit dynamics play a critical role in building social capital. Identifying and recruiting workers who not only possess the right sets of knowledge and skills, but also embrace values similar to those of the organization, are critical for organizations to succeed in achieving their goals (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Kristof, 1996).

Person Organizational fit as an antecedent to Structural Social capital

We contend that person organization fit might be instrumental in promoting structural social capital. We argue that person organization fit is likely to bring individuals together in such a way so as to increase the number of ties among individuals, to change the arrangement of relationships and to promote the development of connections which might be beneficial in other contexts.

Researchers often mentioned person–organization fit (P–O fit) when writing about the homogeneity hypothesis, stating that as organizations mature, they become increasingly occupied by similar people. Over time, an organization's members tend to become similar in terms of personality, values, and interests, this contention open up our mind that with increasing value congruence the employees are likely to develop structural capital in order to perform well and fit in organizational settings.

Researchers in the past very rarely studied that how socialization operate between an employee's work values and the organizational environment due to mostly methodological difficulties (Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2008). However, the present study attempts to highlight this unexplored area and provides an insight on how these relationships will function to serve as a base for development of structural social capital.

Over time individuals may change their values and personalities in the direction of organization values (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Due to these phases the employees come into the process of building their network ties, which enhances their structural social capital. Due to socialization individuals establish an organizational identity and display attitudes, values, and behaviors that coincide with the organization's culture (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998) building structural social capital.

The development of structural social capital requires that individuals build ties and are interconnected with one another (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). High levels of person organization fit indicates the existence of value congruence between individuals and organizations which is highly instrumental in building connections and ties resulting in the creation of structural social capital.

According to Bailey (1993) individual's behavior is a function of ability, opportunity and motivation to engage in that behavior. We believe that values similarity and goal compatibility between the individual and the organization might easily help and motivate individuals to create larger number of connections and highly concentrated ties with other individuals resulting in the creation of structural social capital.

Social identity theory also provides useful insights on how individuals having high person organization fit might contribute to the development of structural social capital. Social identity theory posits that individuals derive their identity from the image of the organization to which they are associated (Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002). If individuals believe that the organization has a positive representation, they will make higher contributions on their part to promote organization's success (Colvin & Boswell, 2007).

The more the individual values are similar to the organizational values the more likely that they will perceive positive organizational identity and will engage in co-operative behaviors (Dukerich et al., 2002). We believe that high levels of value congruence between the person and the organization might reflect positively on the individual and individuals might be more willing to build connections with one another resulting in the development of structural social capital.

Moreover, high person organization fit indicates goal compatibility between the individual and the organization. This means that in order to achieve individual and organizational goals, individuals will not only develop ties with others but also the amount of connections and density of connections with other individuals resulting in the creation of structural social capital. Thus we propose:

Proposition No 1: Person organization fit will be positively related to structural social capital.

Person Group fit as an antecedent to Relational social capital

Lee, Reiche & Song (2009) argued that individuals' fit with their immediate work group fit (i.e., PG fit) will help them to develop relational social capital in the organization. We contend that high PG fit characterized by selection of immediate work group will be characterized by trust which will enhance the development of relational social capital.

High levels of PG fit in terms of surface and deep-level similarity may facilitate relational social capital building. Social identity theory indicates that similarity helps individuals to develop a sense of belonging to a common group or category (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Feelings of common membership can enhance the frequency and quality of interaction and relationship building (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Turner, 1985).

Through self-categorization, the categorizing of oneself in terms of a particular social grouping (Turner et al., 1987), people may place themselves in certain social categories based on perceived similarity. This categorization can in turn contribute to the emergence of a collective

identity, defined as "the degree to which people cognitively merge their sense of self and the group" (Tyler & Blader, 2001: 210).

Through such a collective identity people may build a sense of mutual attachment and affective commitment (Ellemers et al., 1999; Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004), which may facilitate the development of relational social capital. Since we have argued earlier that similarity between coworkers helps to promote mutual attraction and liking, it is reasonable to assume that PG fit helps to engender goodwill among them so as to enhance trusting relationships and thus relational social capital in the organization (Lee, Reiche, & Song, 2009). Thus we propose:

Proposition No 2: Person Group fit will be positively related to relational social capital.

Person Job fit as an antecedent to Cognitive Social Capital

We contend that high levels of person job fit are highly instrumental in promoting cognitive social capital. We base our arguments on the assertion that when individuals are capable to full fill job requirements they are better able to not only understand the requirements of their own jobs effectively but also provide valuable input to others regarding the design of work processes, share ideas and information and provide more effective guidance to one another (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) resulting in the creation of cognitive social capital.

The development of cognitive social capital requires that employees develop shared mental models and mutual perspectives. The fit of individual's ability with the job demands helps them to come up with new perspectives and exchange information with others which results in the development of a shared and collective perspective generating cognitive social capital (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Nohria, 1992).

As person job fit elevates one's self confidence and self esteem (Xie & Johns, 1995); individuals feel confident to discuss ideas and transfer knowledge which creates mutual awareness among organizational members building high levels of cognitive social capital. Thus we propose:

Proposition No.3: Person job fit will be positively related to cognitive social capital

Discussion

Past literature on fit depicts that the development of fit is inherently social in nature (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). The study of fit in relation to social capital promises to advance our understanding of these interplays. However, despite the increasing research attention PE fit and social capital have received (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), the two literatures remain largely unconnected. We address this gap in literature by proposing the various dimensions of person environment fit as an antecedent to social capital.

Research Limitations

Although this research paper attempts to fill an important gap in the literature by integrating social capital and fit but there are a few limitations that need to be highlighted. Firstly, this paper is theoretical in nature as we have proposed our model based on theories and existing literature which requires empirical investigation. Secondly, in the past literature, researchers have studied social capital as an antecedent of PE fit (Lee, Reiche, & Song, 2009) so our competing propositions should be tested empirically to ascertain the above contended relationships.

Future Research Directions

We suggest certain avenues for future researchers. Firstly, the above stated relationship should be empirically tested. Secondly, future researchers should clearly contend the above mentioned limitation i-e whether PE fit leads to social capital or social capital leads to fit in organizations. However, the present researchers are of the view and have supported their stance that PE fit is highly instrumental in the creation of social capital. Several other relationships among dimensions of person environment fit and social capital were also possible but is beyond the scope of the present research. So future researchers should take up these possible links in detail

such as future researchers could explore the role of person organization fit as important predictor of cognitive social capital in the perspective of complementary fit.

Managerial Implications

Our research has numerous practical implications for managers in organizations. Our research depicts that congruence can play an important role in enhancing the network of ties and the quality of ties. Managers should try to recruit compatible candidates as individuals who possess compatibility with their organizations in terms of value similarity and goal congruence will be more motivated to engage in the development of relationships with others.

Managers need to understand that person job fit is also another important variable while hiring employees as individuals whose personality traits and abilities match with the job demands are better able to understand others point of view and ultimately develop mutual cognitive perspective of looking at things. Thus, person job fit essentially promotes mutual mental co-ordination among employees working in organizations which is beneficial in achieving goals. Particularly for business organizations where there is team based structures and where individuals have to interact with peers to achieve their mutually assigned goals; person job compatibility will help individuals to develop shared interpretations and mental models which helps to effectively achieve goals.

Furthermore, our research contends that an individual's congruence both in terms of values and skill diversity helps to build relational social capital in organizations. In organizations, not only the number and structure of connections and mutual mental co-ordination is important for the achievement of goals but the kind, quality and strength of relationships is also important for the achievement of goals. Managers need to make sure that while staffing, training and motivating individuals in groups, each individual needs to be compatible with the other group members as this compatibility helps to forge trust, emotional bonding and mutual identification with the group to which they belong i-e promotes the development of relational social capital.

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