

# How do newcomers fit in? The dynamics between person–environment fit and social capital across cultures

International Journal of  
Cross Cultural Management  
10(2) 153–174  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1470595810370911  
ccm.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

This paper integrates the concepts of person–environment (PE) fit and social capital and examines the social dynamics of organizational newcomers' development of fit with their new environment in the light of national cultural variations. Specifically, we present a conceptual framework that illustrates how newcomers fit in with their work environment in terms of person–job (PJ) and person–organization (PO) fit through their building and exercising of social capital. We suggest that newcomers' initial fit with their direct supervisor (i.e. PS fit) and their immediate work group fit (i.e. PG fit) will help them to develop structural and relational social capital in the organization, which in turn facilitate the development of greater PJ and PO fit. Acknowledging that social processes are culture-bound, we also examine the moderating effects of individualism/collectivism and power distance on the process of developing PE fit, and we provide insights for both scholars and managers in applying the model.

## Keywords

individualism/collectivism, organizational newcomers, person–environment fit, power distance, social capital

## Introduction

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 and Ferris, 1993; Kristof, 1996). Broadly defined as 'the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well

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matched' (Schneider, 2001: 142), person–environment (PE) fit theory has been one of the most useful frameworks to deal with these organizational challenges. Several distinct types of fit have garnered attention and person–job (PJ) fit and person–organization (PO) fit have emerged because of their theoretical and practical relevance. Whereas PJ fit concerns the relationship between an individual's characteristics and those of a specific job (Caplan, 1983; Edwards, 1991; French et al., 1982), PO fit refers to the compatibility between an individual and the organization in which s/he works (Chatman, 1989, 1991; Schneider, 1987).

Extant research has widely addressed the relationship between dimensions of fit and its outcomes from both organizational and individual perspectives. From the perspective of organizations, PJ and PO fit are expected to lead to higher performance, stronger organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions among the workforce. From an employee's perspective, achieving fit may elicit higher job satisfaction, lower stress, greater well-being and superior opportunities for career advancement (Edwards and Shipp, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Indeed, a large body of literature in the fields of OB and HRM, including selection, job design, mentoring, coaching, and training and development, aims at helping workers and organizations to achieve higher levels of PJ and PO fit.

Although research on outcomes of fit is abundant, the simultaneous investigation of the dynamics and interrelationships among various types of fit is scarce. With few exceptions (e.g. Ostroff et al., 2005), most studies have either treated different types of fit separately, or have focused only on their relative importance, without scrutinizing the relationship among them. Furthermore, existing research generally lacks insights into the dynamic processes for individuals to achieve PJ/PO fit. Given that the development of fit is inherently social in nature (Kim et al., 2005), the study of social capital as a theoretical lens promises to advance our understanding of these dynamics. However, despite the increasing research attention PE fit and social capital have received (e.g. Adler and Kwon, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), the two literatures remain largely unconnected.

Several arguments support the notion that the two concepts are inherently related. First, both PE fit and social capital entail similar underlying premises to the extent that they apply a relational rather than actor-centric perspective to the study of individual behaviour in organizations. For example, social capital is generally understood as the goodwill engendered by the fabric of social relations (Adler and Kwon, 2002) and thus focuses on the patterns of interactions between actors rather than the individual actor in isolation in determining individual behaviour. Similarly, PE fit refers to a state of consistency among various elements, often between individuals and various levels of their work environment, and therefore emphasizes the actor in interaction with the context rather than the actor or the context independently in influencing individual behaviour. Second, both concepts have been instrumental in predicting a multitude of similar outcome variables that include organizational commitment (Cable and Judge, 1996; Morrison, 2002), individual performance (Shaw and Gupta, 2004; Sparrowe et al., 2001), career success (Bretz and Judge, 1994; Seibert et al., 2001) and turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001). PE fit and social capital thus both serve as key channels through which relevant work outcomes can be reached.

Building on these arguments, the objective of this paper is twofold. First, we aim to understand the social dynamics underlying organizational newcomers' achievement of higher levels of fit with their job and their organization. We focus on two specific dynamics in this process: (1) leveraging person–group and person–supervisor fit to build social capital, and (2) exercising social capital to achieve person–job and person–organization fit. Since the socialization into a new organizational environment represents a major challenge for organizational newcomers (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979), the building and exercising of social capital may be particularly pertinent for them to achieve

PJ and PO fit. We propose that newcomers' fit with their direct supervisor and their immediate work group relate to their development of structural and relational social capital in the organization and that these two dimensions of social capital in turn relate to newcomers' fit with their job and the larger organization. Second, we investigate how these social dynamics may vary across national cultures, focusing on two specific cultural values: individualism/collectivism and power distance. Whereas extant research has examined the intra-societal variance in PE fit and social capital, for example concerning the organizational level (Leana and Van Buren, 1999; O'Reilly et al., 1991), our understanding of how these concepts affect work-related outcomes in different national cultures remains limited. However, initial evidence suggests that both PE fit (Lee and Antonakis, 2006; Nyambegera et al., 2001) and social capital (Burt et al., 2000; Monge and Eisenberg, 1987) are culture-sensitive. In examining how cultural differences affect the relationships between social capital and PE fit, we address the call for more a priori theorizing about the distinct effects of culture on work-related outcomes (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003).

We begin with a review of the literatures on PE fit and social capital. Subsequently, we propose a model that develops a conceptual link between social capital and PE fit, and we derive testable propositions. We also identify relevant cultural dimensions and discuss how they may moderate the proposed relationships. We conclude with implications for research and practice.

## Person–environment fit

The concept of PE fit is considered to be one of the dominant conceptual forces in the field of interactional psychology (Schneider, 2001). In PE interaction research, PJ and PO fit are gaining currency due to the practical relevance they bring to workers and organizations. PJ fit is defined as the congruence or match between a person's characteristics and those of the job or tasks that are performed at work. According to Edwards (1991), PJ fit refers to how individuals' skills and capabilities fit with the demands of organizations (demands–abilities PJ fit), or it refers to how the characteristics of jobs fulfil individuals' needs (needs–supplies PJ fit). In contrast, PO fit addresses the compatibility between people and entire organizations, with value congruence being widely accepted as the defining operationalization of PO fit (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996; Verquer et al., 2003). Many researchers have examined how interviewers inculcate PJ and PO fit to select the right candidates in terms of skills and shared organizational values (Cable and Judge, 1996; Judge and Ferris, 1993). However, less research has focused on how exactly PJ and PO fit are developed through socialization processes (Cable and Parsons, 2001; Kim et al., 2005), which is one of the main contributions of this paper.

Other types of PE fit exist with regard to the dyadic relationships between actors and other individuals in their work environment. This dyadic fit encompasses both person–group (PG) fit, which occurs between coworkers (e.g. Antonioni and Park, 2001), and person–supervisor (PS) fit, which concerns the relationship between mentors and protégés (e.g. Turban and Dougherty, 1994), or supervisors and subordinates (e.g. Van Vianen, 2000). In summary, two types of fit may exist with reference to a newcomer: (1) how s/he fits with other individuals in terms of PS and PG fit, and (2) how s/he matches with the work environment in terms of PJ and PO fit. In this paper, we address PJ and PO fit from both the newcomer's and the organization's perspectives, and intend to explain the process through which newcomers achieve fit with their work environment (i.e. PJ/PO fit) based on their initial fit with their coworkers (i.e. PS/PG fit) and their building and exercising of social capital.

## Social capital

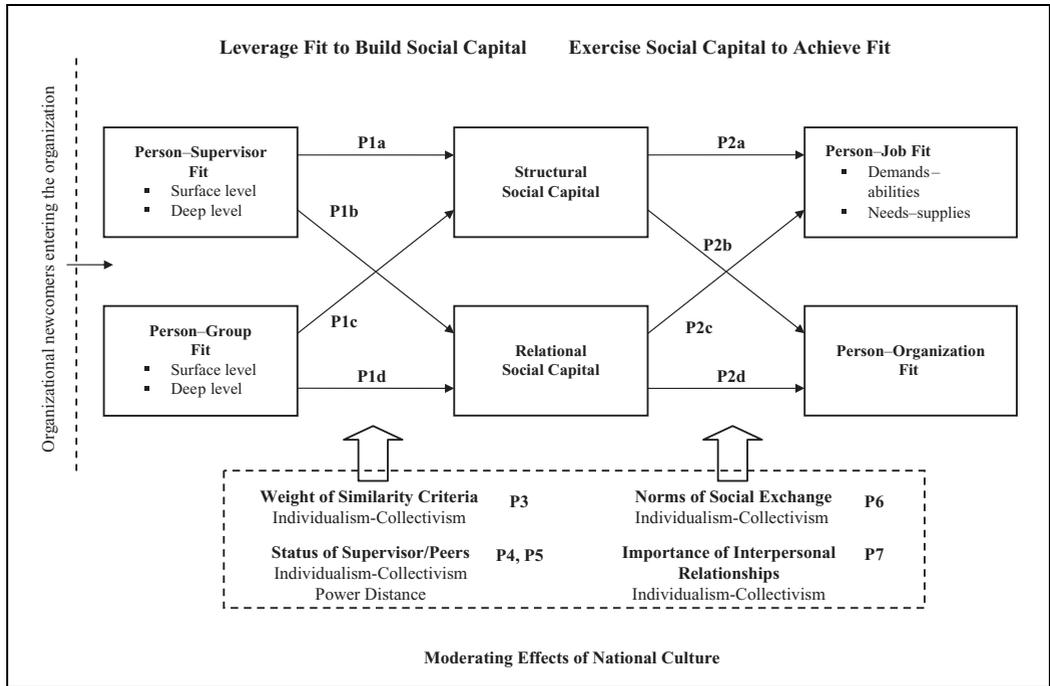
Adler and Kwon (2002: 18) speak of social capital as an ‘umbrella concept’ that integrates related concepts such as trust, social resources and social networks. In this paper, we will follow this view and regard social capital as an overarching theoretical framework that links several of the conceptual approaches in social network research (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003). Specifically, we define social capital as ‘the sum of actual or potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit’ (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 243).

Building on the notion that social capital is a multidimensional concept (Putnam, 1995), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) identified and operationalized three interrelated but distinct dimensions, namely structural, relational and cognitive. The structural dimension refers to the overall, impersonal configuration of ties between individuals or units and includes aspects such as network size and network range (Brass, 1995). It is important to note that these structural configurations can have different qualities, for example in the case of an individual’s social tie with a senior decision-maker in the organization versus that of a subordinate. However, irrespective of these different qualities, structural social capital represents a dichotomous concept that depends on whether the respective social tie exists or not. In contrast, the relational dimension is concerned with personal assets such as trust that have been embedded in these linkages through a series of interactions. Relational social capital may thus have varying levels of depth. Finally, the cognitive dimension treats facets that offer a common source of understanding such as shared values. To avoid conceptual overlap with PO fit, which also focuses on value congruence, and based on the wider use of the structural and relational dimensions in existing research (e.g. Kostova and Roth, 2003), we will exclude cognitive social capital from our theorizing.

Social capital has been operationalized at different levels of analysis (Leana and Van Buren, 1999). In this paper we define social capital at the individual level and focus on newcomers’ structural and relational social capital with other organizational actors. A newcomer’s social capital is thus bounded by the organization s/he has entered rather than the immediate work group or an organizational subgroup. Also, while these social ties may involve formal, hierarchical relationships in the organization (e.g. between supervisor and subordinate), we concentrate on the informal friendship ties that newcomers may develop during their organizational membership (Morrison, 2002). Despite some negative externalities (e.g. Labianca and Brass, 2006), social capital benefits have been well supported in the literature. For example, researchers have emphasized that individuals’ informal ties in organizations can increase job satisfaction, performance, access to information, salary, power and career advancement (e.g. Brass, 1984; Seibert et al., 2001; Sparrowe et al., 2001). Here, we focus on the specific group of organizational newcomers to explore two additional outcome dimensions of social capital that have not received much attention in previous research. We propose that social capital dynamics play a critical role in linking PS and PG fit to PJ and PO fit.

## Conceptual model

In the remainder of this paper, we develop a framework that examines the dynamics of PE fit and social capital of organizational newcomers (see Figure 1). Briefly, our model proposes that organizational newcomers’ fit with their direct supervisor and their immediate work group affect their development of structural and relational social capital in the organization. We call this process *leveraging PS and PG fit to build social capital*. We acknowledge that organizational newcomers



**Figure 1.** A cross-cultural framework for the dynamics of person–environment fit and social capital of organizational newcomers

may already possess an initial level of PJ and PO fit prior to entering the organization (see Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, in our model we are particularly interested in how fit and social relationships with other organizational members contribute to newcomers’ development of PJ and PO fit over the course of their organizational membership. Accordingly, our model proposes that newcomers’ structural and relational social capital in the organization affects their fit with the job and the organization. We refer to this process as *exercising social capital to achieve PJ and PO fit*. Finally, we argue that cultural values such as collectivism and power distance moderate both processes.

**Leveraging fit for building social capital**

We define person-based fit, which encompasses both PS and PG fit, as the similarity between a focal newcomer and his/her colleagues in the workplace, such as his/her direct supervisor and colleagues. Although it is possible to construe person-based fit from different angles, similarity is by far the most widely accepted way to conceptualize PS and PG fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It has been demonstrated that demographic and attitudinal similarity can contribute to the development of relationships among workers (Liden et al., 1993; Tsui and O’Reilly, 1989). Similarity can be further divided into aspects that are based on more readily detectable characteristics such as gender, age, and race (i.e. surface-level similarity), and those that are based on more intangible attributes such as attitudes, norms and personalities (i.e. deep-level similarity, see Harrison et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 1995).

At the surface level, age differences between supervisors and subordinates were found to be negatively related to supervisors' liking of subordinates (Judge and Ferris, 1993). Age differences can also cause lower levels of social integration, which refers to the degree to which group members are psychologically linked or attracted towards interacting with one another in pursuit of a common objective (O'Reilly et al., 1989). Such dissimilarity may prevent newcomers from effectively establishing relations with colleagues, hence hindering the development of social capital (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989). At the deep level, research indicates that attitude similarity acts as one of the most important predictors of attraction and friendship (Bauer and Green, 1996; Byrne, 1971; Turban and Jones, 1988). Moreover, Phillips and Bedeian (1994) found that personality similarity contributes significantly to the quality of leader-member exchanges (LMX). Especially when there is only little information available for organizational newcomers and incumbents to know each other, individual characteristics become more salient in determining one's attitude and behaviour in the interaction. In contrast, high levels of PS and PG fit in terms of surface- and deep-level similarity may facilitate social capital building.

We posit that PS and PG fit influences the development of social capital in both *affective* and *cognitive* terms. The affective impact is consistent with the similarity attraction phenomenon, contending that perceived similarity between workers impacts attitudinal outcomes such as mutual attraction and liking (Engle and Lord, 1997; Schneider, 1987). Likewise, studies on LMX indicate that perceived similarity between leaders and members is related to liking (Byrne, 1971; Engle and Lord, 1997; Turban and Jones, 1988), which in turn plays a crucial role in determining the quality of the LMX relationship (Liden et al., 1993; Wayne and Ferris, 1990). The cognitive effect explains how PS and PG fit helps newcomers to build social capital in the light of rationality. Social categorization may guide subsequent information processing (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). As a result, the initial classification of another person, resulting from perceived similarity and consequent liking, can pave the way for a relationship to develop (Lord and Maher, 1991). Such initial categorization and its impact on consequent information processing will lead supervisor and colleagues to perceive organizational newcomers as more effective and competent (Judge and Ferris, 1993; Wayne and Liden, 1995). Be it biased or not (Bauer and Green, 1996; Engle and Lord, 1997), such perceptions will increase actors' motivation to invest in building this relationship.

Studies have also found that actor diversity can lead to less cohesive team structures, increase the number of negative social relationships and fuel conflict (Labianca and Brass, 2006; Pelled et al., 1999). We expect higher levels of PS and PG fit to help reduce such problems. We will examine the dynamics of social capital building in more detail by differentiating between PS and PG fit as well as separating structural and relational social capital.

***Person-supervisor fit and structural social capital.*** PS fit exists in the dyadic relationships between individuals and their supervisors in the work environment. As mentioned previously, in this paper we define PS fit as the similarity between a newcomer and his or her direct supervisor. Further, we define structural social capital as a newcomer's number and quality of informal friendship ties to other members in the organization (Morrison, 2002). We propose that PS fit will positively influence newcomers' structural social capital in the organization.

As suggested by LMX theory, attitudinal similarity can cast an important influence on leader-follower interactions, which in turn will determine the development of social capital (Liden et al., 1993; Phillips and Bedeian, 1994). More specifically, a higher level of PS fit (i.e. similarity) will prompt the supervisor to engage in more mentoring and sponsorship towards the newcomer.

Through their sponsorship, supervisors may introduce their protégés to other colleagues and thus share their own social network with their protégés, helping them to develop social ties themselves (Higgins and Nohria, 1999; Sparrowe and Liden, 1997). For example, evidence shows that protégés boast a higher level of perceived organizational influence, perceived access to important people and perceived control over resources in the organization (Fagenson, 1988). These mentoring-related outcomes are likely to influence both the opportunity and ease of access to form new social ties with other organizational members and thus enhance a newcomer's ability to build structural social capital. Similarly, mentors may provide 'reflected power' to their protégés (Kanter, 1977), which may increase the opportunity for newcomers to establish network ties.

Proposition 1a: Organizational newcomers' fit with supervisors (i.e. PS fit) will positively influence the development of newcomers' structural social capital in the organization.

*Person-supervisor fit and relational social capital.* We conceptualize relational social capital as interpersonal trust (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998) and claim that PS fit will positively influence newcomers' relational social capital in the organization. In this paper, we follow Rousseau et al. (1998: 395) in defining trust as a 'psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another'. Personal characteristics are one of the key determinants of building trust (McAllister, 1995; Whitener et al., 1998). Accordingly, similarity between a newcomer and his or her supervisor may affect how the newcomer builds trust with others in the organization. In general, supervisors play two distinct roles. The first role refers to a career-enhancing function that entails sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility, etc. The second role concerns the provision of psychological support by offering role modelling, counselling, confirmation and friendship (Kram, 1985; Kram and Isabella, 1985). As a higher level of PS fit will prompt a supervisor to trust his or her new subordinate, the supervisor is more likely to introduce newcomers with whom s/he has a high level of fit to high-status others and implicitly communicate a certain level of confidence in the protégé's skills. In this vein, Higgins and Nohria (1999) argue that the mentor's support is likely to increase other members' first impression of a newcomer as they may assume that the mentor specifically chose to guide and support this person above others. As a result, if a mentor shows trust in his or her protégé, it is reasonable to argue that other organizational members are also more likely to trust the protégé, which in turn will enhance the protégé's chances of developing relational social capital in the organization.

Proposition 1b: Organizational newcomers' fit with supervisors (i.e. PS fit) will positively influence the development of newcomers' relational social capital in the organization.

*Person-group fit and structural social capital.* We define person-group (PG) fit as the similarity between the newcomer and members of his or her immediate work group, and argue that PG fit will positively influence newcomers' structural social capital in the organization. Research has demonstrated that peer relationships are important in enabling individual development and growth throughout successive career stages (Kram and Isabella, 1985). At times, peers may play a more important role in this process than supervisors because 'the lack of the hierarchical dimension in a peer relationship might make it easier to achieve communication, mutual support, and collaboration than it would be in a mentoring relationship' (Kram and Isabella, 1985: 112).

In general, individuals entering a new environment are likely to have a minority status, which negatively impacts on their ability to exert social influence (Gruenfeld et al., 2000) and develop

social ties (Mehra et al., 1998). Those newcomers that enjoy a higher level of initial fit with their work group colleagues will be in a better position to reduce this status deficit. Research on actor similarity (McPherson et al., 2001) indicates that individuals with similar demographic, educational, functional or cultural backgrounds are more likely to interact with each other. As a result, a newcomer with a higher level of PG fit may be able to receive more social support and establish a dense friendship network with other group members. Research suggests that such friendship ties help newcomers to develop a greater sense of social integration with the larger organization (Morrison, 2002) and may thus prompt them to extend their structural social capital beyond the group context.

Proposition 1c: Organizational newcomers' fit with peers (i.e. PG fit) will positively influence the development of newcomers' structural social capital in the organization.

*Person–group fit and relational social capital.* We also argue that PG fit will positively affect newcomers' relational social capital in the organization. Social identity theory indicates that similarity helps individuals to develop a sense of belonging to a common group or category (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Feelings of common membership can enhance the frequency and quality of interaction and relationship building (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and 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 and Blader, 2001: 210). Through such a collective identity people may build a sense of mutual attachment and affective commitment (Ellemers et al., 1999; Ashmore et al., 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 newcomers' trusting relationships and thus relational social capital in the organization.

Proposition 1d: Organizational newcomers' fit with peers (i.e. PG fit) will positively influence the development of newcomers' relational social capital in the organization.

### *Exercising social capital to achieve better fit*

We contend that organizational newcomers may achieve higher levels of PJ and PO fit by exercising the social capital they have developed in the organization. On the one hand, we expect individual social capital to help newcomers achieve better fit with the job or tasks they perform at work. For example, social capital can increase the likelihood that an individual knows, values and gains timely access to what a colleague knows while also reducing the cost of seeking information (Borgatti and Cross, 2003). Similarly, research has shown that social capital enables organizational members to access task-related and strategic information (Cross and Cummings, 2004). Consequently, social capital may help newcomers to gain access to specific knowledge relevant for performing their job, thus enhancing their PJ fit.

On the other hand, newcomers' social capital may also help them to achieve better fit with the larger organization. For instance, Adler and Kwon (2002) argued that one of the benefits of social capital is solidarity, which implies strong social norms and beliefs in the work setting so as to promote value congruence between individuals and their organizations. In the next sections, we

explore specific relationships between the two dimensions of social capital and the two types of fit. Given its conceptual relevance in the following discussion, we would like to highlight again that PJ fit entails two distinct dimensions: Whereas *demands–abilities* PJ fit indicates a match between employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as the requirements of the job, *needs–supplies* PJ fit refers to the degree of congruence between what one values or needs on the one hand, and what one receives from a job on the other (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). We propose that newcomers' structural and relational social capital can contribute to their *demands–abilities* PJ fit, while newcomers' relational social capital is also crucial to enhancing their *needs–supplies* PJ fit.

***Structural social capital and person–job fit.*** Learning and acquiring job-related knowledge and information are critical for developing *demands–abilities* PJ fit. In this regard, relationships are important for the acquisition of information (Borgatti and Cross, 2003; Burt, 1992). Evidence shows that the development of social ties helps with job-related learning. For example, Morrison (2002) found that newcomers' building of relationships with their new colleagues in terms of structural network characteristics such as tie strength, network size, network range, and network density facilitate their acquisition of organizational knowledge, and increase their level of task mastery and role clarity. Structural social capital also leads to *perceived* PJ fit. People may develop attitudes or perceptions as a function of the information available to them through their social relationships (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Possessing higher levels of structural social capital may lead to more favourable job-related perceptions including higher performance, a phenomenon known as halo effect (Balzer and Sulsky, 1992). Similarly, senior organizational members may perceive the level of PJ fit of those newcomers with whom they maintain structural social capital to be higher and therefore selectively coach them. Through this coaching, newcomers will be able to better perform their jobs, thus leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wayne et al., 1997). In sum, structural social capital provides newcomers with information benefits which in turn help to increase their PJ fit in the eyes of both the newcomers and their supervisor.

Proposition 2a: Organizational newcomers' structural social capital in the organization will positively influence their level of *demands–abilities* fit with their job (PJ fit).

***Relational social capital and person–job fit.*** Interpersonal trust has been found to facilitate the exchange of task-related and strategic information (Bouty, 2000; Levin and Cross, 2004). Accessing this information may help the individual develop his or her knowledge, skills and abilities in order to increase fit with the demands of the task environment. Several arguments from the trust literature support these claims. One key dimension of trust that has been identified in the literature is cognition-based trust (McAllister, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Competences and responsibilities are key elements in cognition-based trust. As a result, cognition-based trust fosters credibility and thus prompts others to trust the focal actor with important job-related responsibilities. Gaining trust from peers in terms of job competence in turn increases individuals' *perceived* fit with their jobs.

In addition, there is an affective dimension of trust that concerns helpful and loyal behaviour enacted by the trustee towards the trustor based on an emotional bond (McAllister, 1995). Affective trust may also influence the processing of performance information. More specifically, if leaders trust a subordinate, they will more likely perceive this worker to be a high performer (Bauer and Green, 1996; Engle and Lord, 1997; Schaubroeck and Lam, 2002), implying a higher level of *demands–abilities* PJ fit in the eyes of supervisors. Klein and Kim (1998) found that high-quality

LMX correlated significantly with a commitment to assigned goals. Such goal commitment may translate into a stronger motivation to acquire knowledge and skills (Dunegan et al., 1992; Klein and Kim, 1998), increasing PJ fit both from the newcomer's and the supervisor's perspective. Similarly, a newcomer's interpersonal trust (i.e. relational social capital) can facilitate career-enhancing activities both by the supervisor/mentor in terms of sponsoring, coaching or protection and from peers through information sharing, career strategizing and job-related feedback (Kram and Isabella, 1985). Such activities will contribute to a higher level of PJ fit. Specifically, knowledge sharing in organizations can be considered as one of the key channels for organizational newcomers to learn job-related skills and thus enhance their demands-abilities PJ fit. Coworker collegiality, the quality of interpersonal relationships and rapport in the workplace (Lu et al., 2006) may facilitate such knowledge sharing.

As argued earlier, relational social capital may not only contribute to a higher level of demands-abilities PJ fit, but also increase needs-supplies PJ fit with regard to the well-being of newcomers. In general, a newcomer may expect to receive more care and support from those supervisors or peers that tap into his or her needs, if s/he has developed a high level of relational social capital with them. In addition, supervisors may be more willing to offer support to satisfy newcomers' needs regarding job design when the newcomers can be trusted. According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This perceived organizational support is often shaped by employees' relationships with their supervisors because supervisors can be considered representatives of the organization. Closer leader-member relationships in the form of higher relational social capital may lead employees to feel that their needs are met in the job, thus achieving a higher PJ fit in terms of needs and supplies.

Proposition 2b: Organizational newcomers' relational social capital in the organization will positively influence their level of demands-abilities as well as needs-supplies fit with their job (PJ fit).

**Structural social capital and person-organization fit.** We define PO fit as the congruence in values between the organizational newcomer and the larger organization (O'Reilly et al., 1991) and argue that newcomers' structural social capital will positively influence their PO fit. This impact can be explained by two social mechanisms within organizations. First, the literature on organizational socialization (Morrison, 2002; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) highlights the role of social interactions for the diffusion of organizational values and individuals' social integration with colleagues. If newcomers have established a high level of social ties with other organizational members, they will be more able to learn organizational values from their colleagues. Second, structural social capital can provide access to information, which facilitates shared sense-making (Weick, 1979) of organizational values and activities. In particular, information about the organizational vision helps newcomers to create a sense of meaning and purpose (Conger and Kanungo, 1988), which can enhance their feelings of fit to the organization.

Proposition 2c: Organizational newcomers' structural social capital in the organization will positively influence their level of fit with their organization (PO fit).

**Relational social capital and person-organization fit.** In their model of organizational social capital, Leana and Van Buren (1999) highlight the role of generalized trust as a key element of social capital at the organizational level. This generalized trust is not directly based on relationships

between a particular set of organizational members but rather rests with the norms and behaviors that are generalized to other individuals in the collectivity as a whole. In the same vein, newcomers who have established a wide range of trusting relationships and thus relational social capital in the organization will more likely be willing to extend their trust to other organizational members of whom they do not have direct knowledge. Through such impersonal trust, newcomers will accept their organizational affiliation and increase their value congruence with the organization.

On the other hand, personal trust can also facilitate psychological functions of supervisors/mentors and peers in providing acceptance and confirmation, emotional support and friendship. Such functions may help to create stronger affective bonds with the result that organizational newcomers become more willing to 'buy in' the values of the organization to which they belong. Other research has pointed to a positive influence of trust on employees' organizational citizenship behaviour (Robinson, 1996), which indicates a stronger commitment and fit with the organization.

Furthermore, socialization processes may enable organizational newcomers to make sense of their organizational experiences, adjust better in the workplace and perceive a better fit with the organization (Saks et al., 2007). Organizational socialization refers to the process through which an individual learns and understands the values, norms, expected behaviours and social knowledge that are essential for assuming an organizational role in the workplace (Chatman, 1989, 1991). In this regard, organizational members with greater relational social capital are more likely to engage in an organization's socialization activities, exposing themselves to the core values of the organization (Cable and Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004) and gaining access to knowledge about organizational goals, values, and politics (Chao et al., 1992). As a result, they may enjoy a higher level of PO fit (Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992).

Proposition 2d: Organizational newcomers' relational social capital in the organization will positively influence their level of fit with their organization (PO fit).

## **Moderating effects of national culture**

There is some initial evidence that individuals' cultural background affects the formation and dynamics of social relationships. For example, research by Monge and Eisenberg (1987) indicates that Japanese employees tend to build stronger ties with coworkers than French employees. In this paper, we explore the effects of two cultural dimensions – individualism-collectivism and power distance – as they are particularly relevant in our model. The cultural dimension of collectivism refers to the degree to which people in a culture prefer to subordinate their individual goals to those of the collectivity (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Hofstede (2001) defines power distance as the degree of inequality among people which a culture considers as normal, ranging from relatively equal (low power distance) to extremely unequal (high power distance). Although both dimensions are not empirically independent (i.e. collectivist societies also tend to show higher power distance, see Hofstede, 2001), we argue that conceptually they should be treated as two distinct dimensions (Smith, 2006). In the following sections, we discuss how these two cultural values affect the process of leveraging fit to build social capital and exercising social capital to achieve fit.

### *Culture and social capital building through fit*

*Differences in weight of similarity criteria across cultures.* Although both surface- and deep-level similarities contribute to social capital building in all societies, their relative importance may differ across cultures. More specifically, we argue that deep-level fit may play a more important role in

individualist compared to collectivist societies. In individualist cultures, people tend to care more about 'with whom' they want to establish a tie, and go through a more selective process of evaluating fit in terms of value or personality similarity because this similarity can be beneficial either affectively or cognitively in performing their job. Individualists therefore pay more attention to deep-level similarities in terms of personality and values, which can help to cooperate more effectively with colleagues. In this regard, Schaubroeck and Lam (2002) demonstrate that similarity of personality traits, the deep-level similarity, among work group members has a significantly weaker effect on peer integration in a collectivist culture than in an individualist culture.

On the other hand, in collectivist societies people tend to build relationships based on a broader range of commonalities. As a result, the effect of surface-level similarity may be relatively more pronounced. For example, Farh et al. (1998) found that relational demography, which concerns surface-level similarities between an individual and others with regard to factors such as age, gender, race, education and occupation, is important for subordinates trusting their supervisors in Taiwan and Mainland China. Similarities that are based on coming from the same village or the same town, bearing the same family names or attending the same schools can more easily create a sense of belonging and hence facilitate social capital building. Likewise, Chen et al. (1998) found that group membership carries stronger psychological attachment for collectivists than for individualists. Membership that derives from the same school affiliation, geographical origin or family names is more likely to trigger sufficient mutual identification in collectivist cultures to serve as a solid basis for emerging cooperation. However, these memberships by themselves may not be sufficient to have an impact on social interaction in individualist societies. Therefore, surface-level similarity matters more for social capital building in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures.

Proposition 3a: In collectivist societies, newcomers' PS and PG fit in terms of surface-level similarity will have a stronger effect on building social capital in the organization than in individualist societies.

Proposition 3b: In individualist societies, newcomers' PS and PG fit in terms of deep-level similarity will have a stronger effect on building social capital in the organization than in collectivist societies.

*Different status of supervisors and peers across cultures.* We contend that the proposed relationship of PS fit on social capital will be moderated by power distance. In high power-distance contexts, supervisors enjoy higher status and influence in organizations (Carl et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001). As a result, once supervisors explicitly demonstrate support and mentoring for specific newcomers, other members of the organization may be more willing to open up their social network to the newcomers given the influence of their supervisors. However, the social and psychological distance between newcomers and their supervisors may be larger in high power-distance societies (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Moreover, in such cultural contexts, people are constrained by defined role expectations which make it more difficult to build close social ties with high-level individuals (Lee et al., 2000; Tyler et al., 1995). Consequently, supervisors in high power-distance cultures may be less likely to engage in organizational sponsorship and signal trust in his or her protégé to other organizational members, unless they have a strong motivation to do so. This motivation may stem from affective liking due to similarity and thus PS fit. We would thus assume that in high power-distance cultures, PS fit may serve as an important factor to overcome the leadership distance, and prompt supervisors to engage in active mentoring, which may in turn have a higher impact on relationship building than in low power-distance cultures. In contrast, we contend that

PS fit will play a less important role in social capital building in low power-distance contexts because, due to the relative absence of status differentials, there is less need to rely on PS fit for motivating supervisors to facilitate subordinates' social capital building.

**Proposition 4:** In high power-distance societies, newcomers' PS fit will have a stronger effect on building social capital in the organization compared to low power-distance societies.

Similarly, we argue that the proposed relationship of PG fit on social capital will be moderated by collectivism. Collectivist societies place a strong focus on the in-group (Earley, 1993). Members of the in-group are expected to continue to contribute to the benefit of the group rather than engaging in behaviours that reach beyond the group boundary. In this vein, research in collectivist environments such as China suggests that brokerage positions rich in structural holes are detrimental to an organizational member (Xiao and Tsui, 2007), contrary to what has been commonly found in individualist environments (Burt, 1992). Accordingly, collectivist cultures reward those people whose behaviours are coherent with the collectivity's core values. In collectivist cultures, we would therefore assume that newcomers with a high level of PG fit will be less likely to develop social relationships beyond their group in order not to jeopardize their social ties in their immediate work group.

**Proposition 5:** In collectivist societies, newcomers' PG fit will have a weaker effect on building social capital in the organization than in individualist societies.

### *Culture and social capital effects on fit*

*Different norms and expectations in social exchange.* Norms and obligations are important constructs in social exchange relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) and they are culture-bound. Sparrowe and Liden (1997) quoted Sahlins's (1972) work on social exchange, underscoring three primary dimensions of reciprocity: immediacy of returns, equivalence of returns, and degree and nature of the interest of the parties involved in the exchange. These dimensions are likely to vary across different cultures. For collectivists, affect-based trust exercises a stronger influence on knowledge sharing and mutual support compared to individualists (Chen et al., 1998). In individualist societies, as Chen and his colleagues argued, 'the "fairness as equity" concept may be such a core belief that it constitutes an important part of an individualist's self-image' (1998: 297). Thus, competences and social ties are more important in determining the behaviour of information exchange which consequently enhances PJ fit. As a result, we contend that structural social capital may matter more in individualist cultures because it represents a kind of resource (in terms of quantity and quality of ties one possesses) for exchange. In contrast, in collectivist societies people are less calculative about both the immediacy and the equivalence of returns and instead rely more on affective criteria in framing their exchange behaviour. First, collectivists tend to take a longer term perspective towards their relationships and thus do not emphasize immediate returns in the relationship dynamics (Davis et al., 1997). Second, for collectivists relationships also have a normative component (Wasti, 2003) which makes people in collectivist societies more tolerant to minor violations of strict equivalence of returns in exchanges when dealing with other in-group members. As a result, we expect that in collectivist cultures, relational social capital matters more in predicting PJ fit through knowledge and information sharing.

Proposition 6a: In individualist societies, structural social capital in the organization will have a stronger effect on newcomers' PJ fit than in collectivist societies.

Proposition 6b: In collectivist societies, relational social capital in the organization will have a stronger effect on newcomers' PJ fit than in individualist societies.

*From immediate work group relationships to organization-level value congruence.* In collectivist cultures, people tend to make clear distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, and adopt different norms in treating members of different groups (Triandis, 1995). In general, they do not automatically equate the group they belong to with the organization as a whole. Evidence shows that people in individualist cultures display a higher propensity to trust and a lower propensity to distrust than those from collectivist cultures (Huff and Kelley, 2003). For individuals from collectivist cultures, whether or not to trust someone is highly dependent on that person's in- versus out-group status. Collectivists have a stronger in-group bias, resulting in a lower individual propensity to trust people external to their in-group.

In collectivist cultures, as long as the values and objectives of smaller groups are consistent with the larger organization, the effect of relational social capital on a newcomer's PO fit will be strong because the newcomer can easily transfer his or her affective attachment from the immediate work group to the organization. However, the values and objectives of the newcomer's work group may deviate from those of the organization. In this case, close and trusting relationships within the work group may even weaken the development of organization-level value congruence because collectivists tend to comply with the in-group to which they are more strongly expected to show loyalty and commitment. Similarly, in collectivist cultures strong social capital may impose a kind of obligation for newcomers to comply with the values of the smaller in-group, to the detriment of the interests of the larger whole (Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000). This in-group favouritism may, however, prevent individuals from developing higher levels of fit by driving them to deviate from organizational values, thus diminishing PO fit. Implicit to this notion is the risk of negative externalities of social capital described by Adler and Kwon (2002: 31) in that 'strong identification with the focal group may contribute to the fragmentation of the broader whole'. As a result, the effect of social capital on PO fit may not be constant in collectivist societies, but rather tends to appear close to the extreme points. Specifically, we argue that the effect may be either extremely strong when in-group values and goals are aligned with organizational values and goals, or extremely weak when the in- versus out-group distinction undermines larger organizational cohesion.

In contrast, the distinction between in- and out-group is less important in individualist societies, which suggests that there is less variation in the impact of exercising social capital for achieving PO fit. At the same time, we would assume that in the case individuals' attachment to the group can be fully transmitted to their organizational attachment, the impact of social capital on PO fit may not be as strong in individualist as in collectivist societies. Specifically, we claim that the expected impact of social capital on PO fit in individualist societies will be moderate but with smaller variations, resembling a bell curve that is concentrated on the centre of the scale, whereas the impact in collectivist societies will be strong, yet with higher variations, and thus rather resembling a two-peak M-shaped curve with a higher possibility to fall in both the high and low ends of the scale instead of the middle.

Proposition 7a: In collectivist societies, the effect of social capital on newcomers' PO fit will have more extreme values and larger variance – that is, either very strong or very weak,

depending on the extent to which the newcomers' immediate work group embraces the values of the organization.

Proposition 7b: In individualist societies, the effect of social capital on newcomers' PO fit tends to be at a moderate level and more stable (i.e. lower variance).

## Discussion and directions for future research

The main contributions of this paper are threefold. First, while extant PE fit research has focused mainly on the outcomes of fit, we contribute to the literature by illustrating how newcomers can achieve fit in organizations, hence illuminating practical ways to achieve benefits of PE fit. In particular, our contribution is pertinent in that it addresses how newcomers are socialized into organizations, learn about and internalize organizational cultural norms and values, a question that has not been studied sufficiently (Bauer et al., 1998). Second, our model offers insights into the social dynamics for achieving higher levels of PJ and PO fit by linking two traditionally separate domains – PE fit and social capital. This connection not only allows the two fields to further flourish through cross-fertilization, but also gives scholars and practitioners a more subtle understanding of the dynamic interplay of social factors in organizations through which fit and its advantages can be achieved. Third, our proposed model also captures possible variations across cultures. As all social processes are embedded in specific societal and cultural systems, it is unrealistic to assume that a model explaining such processes is generalizable across different cultures. Consequently, understanding the social dynamics of achieving fit requires the simultaneous examination of the model's key constructs as well as various cultural factors. We argue that cultural values such as individualism/collectivism and power distance will exert important effects on the process of leveraging fit to build social capital and exercising social capital to achieve fit.

We believe that the questions addressed in this paper are of theoretical and practical relevance. For scholars, a useful next step would entail empirically testing the model. Such endeavour would involve a careful research design that allows researchers to collect paired data from multiple sources (i.e. the newcomers, their immediate work group, their direct supervisor). In addition, the measurement of structural and relational social capital may represent a challenge for researchers in testing this model as these concepts refer to newcomers' social ties with general others in the organization and thus reach beyond their immediate work group. Given its relational and potentially asymmetric nature, an appropriate measurement of social capital requires the use of social network techniques for data collection to obtain information about the focal newcomer from each alter (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003). Further, in measuring various types of PE fit, it is critical to distinguish between actual fit and perceived fit as they carry different meanings and may reveal distinct patterns (Edwards et al., 2006). Finally, investigating the role of national culture involves collecting data from matched samples in multiple cultures. To systematically test the effects of individualism/collectivism and power distance, a multi-level research approach is necessary (Tsui et al., 2007), which calls for inclusion of a larger number of countries.

Conceptually, it is also possible to further refine our model. For example, it is conceivable that certain feedback loops may exist. First, PJ fit may strengthen social capital building. Specifically, as the competences of the focal actor become more obvious and apparent, it may be easier for him or her to develop social capital because s/he is able to share more knowledge and information, while also fostering more trust and credibility through the acquisition of new competences (Mayer et al., 1995). Second, PO fit may increase social capital because value congruence and common identification with the organization may motivate organizational members to build closer and more

trusting relationships. Further, PO fit may also strengthen PS and PG fit because it reinforces attitude/value similarity and liking. Studies have demonstrated that even personality may continue to evolve as a consequence of fit (Roberts and Robins, 2004). While an explicit consideration of these feedback loops reaches beyond the scope of this paper, we would encourage future research to explore them in more detail.

Other contextual factors may also moderate the relationships in the model. In addition to national culture, organization-level factors such as organizational culture and related HRM policies may also play a role. For instance, if an organization adopts an internal labour market approach to recruitment and promotion, the employment relationship tends to be oriented towards the longer term. Newcomers may be more willing to invest efforts and time to build social capital in the organization and to achieve PO fit. Similarly, the organization may be more attentive to the initial personal fit (i.e. PS/PG fit) and the dynamic social processes to help newcomers to achieve PJ/PO fit in the long run. The picture may be considerably different in an organization that embraces an external labour market orientation, which encourages competition and quicker turnover. Future research may consider how HRM policies and organizational culture influence the process of how newcomers fit in.

For practitioners, our model offers guidance on how organizations may help their newcomers to fit in with their work environment through carefully designed strategies of employee selection and socialization. Recruiting newcomers with desirable personal characteristics to ensure high levels of PS and PG fit may facilitate their subsequent development of social capital. In this regard, the type of surface- and deep-level characteristics that are relevant will depend on different organizational and societal contexts. Managers need to take cultural value orientations into account in making the strategic decisions on recruitment. Furthermore, our model suggests that activities of building and exercising social capital may not necessarily occur in a planned manner by the various social actors interested in the cognitive and affective benefits embedded in them. However, instead of letting this process happen spontaneously, managers and organizations need to pay special attention to creating formal (e.g. through mentoring or socialization systems) and informal (e.g. through shaping organizational culture) mechanisms that facilitate social capital building and exercising so that newcomers may grow and integrate into the organizational system more rapidly. Finally, applying our model to specific societal contexts, managers need to face the challenge of adjusting their approach so as to fit into the cultural system. As demonstrated in the model, managers need to understand the effects of individualism/collectivism and power distance on the dynamics and tailor their approach accordingly.

We believe that our model has pioneered a small yet important step in advancing our understanding of how newcomers fit in by integrating the PE fit and social capital literatures in a culture-sensitive manner.

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## Résumé

### Comment les nouveaux arrivants s’intègrent-ils ? La dynamique entre le fit personne/environnement et le capital social dans différentes cultures

Yih-teen Lee, B. Sebastian Reiche et Dongmei Song

Cet article intègre les concepts de P/E fit (compatibilité individu/environnement) et de capital social et examine la dynamique sociale du développement de l’adéquation des nouveaux arrivants organisationnels à leur nouvel environnement à la lumière des variations culturelles nationales. Plus spécifiquement, nous présentons un cadre conceptuel qui illustre comment les nouveaux arrivants s’adaptent à leur environnement de travail en fonction du fit individu-travail (PT fit) et du fit individu-organisation (PO fit) grâce à la construction et à l’exercice de leur capital social. Nous suggérons que l’adéquation initiale des nouveaux arrivants à leur superviseur (PS fit) et à leur groupe de travail immédiat (PG fit) les aide à développer un capital social structurel et relationnel au sein de l’organisation, ce qui à son tour va faciliter le développement d’une meilleure congruence PJ et PO.

Reconnaissant que les processus structurels sont ancrés dans la culture, nous examinons aussi les effets modérateurs de l'individualisme/collectivisme et la distance hiérarchique sur le processus de développement du PE fit et donnons enfin aux chercheurs et aux managers des idées d'application de notre modèle.

## 摘要

新人如何融入群体？跨文化的个体—环境匹配与社会资本之间的动态关系

*Yih-teen Lee, B. Sebastian Reiche and Dongmei Song*

本文整合了个体—环境匹配与社会资本的概念，考察了在国家文化差异的背景下，组织中的新人与新环境相匹配的社会化动态过程。具体而言，我们提供了一个概念架构，用以描述新人是如何通过建立和运用社会资本来通过个体—工作匹配以及个体—组织匹配来融入工作环境的。我们认为，新人与他们的直接主管（即个人—主管匹配）以及与他们最近的工作小组（即个人—小组匹配）之间的初始匹配有助于促进他们在组织内形成结构型和关系型社会资本，这两种社会资本反过来又有助于进一步实现更好的个体—工作匹配和个体—组织匹配。在承认社会化过程是受文化约束的前提下，我们同时也考察了个人主义/集体主义和权力距离对于个体—环境匹配形成过程的调节效应，最后我们为学者和管理者应用这一模型提供了建议。