

An Exploratory Study into the Construction of Employee Fit and Misfit

Danielle Talbot
The Open University

Jon Billsberry
The Open University

Philip Marsh
The Open University

BAM Track: Organizational Psychology

Word Count: 5764 words (excluding references)

Tables: 315 words

Author Note

All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Danielle Talbot, Open University Business School, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK8 0DA, United Kingdom; +44 (0) 1908 655888; Fax +44 (0) 1908 655898; electronic mail may be sent to d.talbot@open.ac.uk .

An Exploratory Study into the Construction of Employee Fit and Misfit

SUMMARY

Although there have been many studies looking at what makes people fit in organisations, there has been little research to ascertain what causes people to become misfits. This paper outlines a preliminary study using in-depth interviews and causal mapping to identify the antecedents of both fit and misfit to ascertain whether these states are two ends of a continuum or whether they are in fact different constructs. The findings suggest that these constructs are categorical, as they are caused by different factors and impetuses and employees seem to step rather than slip from one state to another. Additionally, the study found that misfit appears to be caused by chains of events, the majority of which are managerially influenced, and where this causes negative psychological states in individuals, feelings of misfit ensue.

An Exploratory Study into the Construction of Employee Fit and Misfit

When people join organisations they do so in the hope that they will find their new job rewarding and satisfying. Furthermore, they are likely to hope that they will feel comfortable in the organisation and get on well with colleagues. In essence therefore, “people select environments that fulfil their needs” (Cable and Judge, 1996: 294), where they feel they will ‘fit’. However, we regularly hear reports that people are not happy at work and according to the British Government’s Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2006), one in five UK employees feels that their job is highly stressful. In the HSE’s ‘Survey of self-reported work-related illness, 2004/05’, they reported that self-reported work-related stress, anxiety and depression account for an estimated 12.8 million days of absence from work in Britain every year. The factors causing this stress were thought to include high workload, tight deadlines, lack of support, changes at work and problems with inter-personal relationships.

The ways in which people ‘fit’ with organisations, the job itself, their colleagues and work teams are important to individuals (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005). As illustrated in the theoretical background, much research has been undertaken in the person-organisation fit (PO fit) field to ascertain how and why people fit into organisations. Although research into PO fit is in its infancy, researchers in this field are nevertheless taking great strides in furthering our understanding of what causes people to fit in organisations. We know that people tend to stay with organisations when they fit and leave when they do not (Chatman, 1991; Kristof-Brown et al, 2005; O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Schneider, 1987). Given these findings, how can we account for the millions of people who remain with their employers in stressful situations when they do not fit? As this study outlines, little research has yet been conducted to find why some people do *not* fit, in other words, why are there misfits in organisations and what has caused them not to fit? Additionally, how does fitting in differ from not fitting in?

This study is a preliminary investigation, based in one organisation, which explores the antecedents of fit and misfit. As outlined in this paper, the research aims to build on the theoretical constructs and empirical findings of studies in the PO fit field as well as drawing on related disciplines in order to further academic understanding and the literature in this area.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Within PO fit research, the question of how individuals fit with organisations has been studied from a number of different angles. Two established approaches are the study of job seekers’ PO fit (e.g. Cable and Judge, 1996; Chatman, 1991; Judge and Cable, 1997), and the study of recruiters’ perceptions of PO fit (e.g. Bowen, Ledford and Nathan, 1991; Cable and Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000). For example, Kristof-Brown (2000) conducted a study to investigate how recruiters form perceptions about whether a job applicant is likely to ‘fit’ the role and company that they are applying to. Kristof-Brown specifically focused on person-organisation fit (PO fit) and person-job fit (PJ fit) and defined PO fit as essentially being how well an individual’s values match those of the organisation whereas PJ fit describes how well an individual meets the job requirements (Kristof-Brown, 2000). In Cable and Judge’s (1997) study of interviewer’s perceptions of PO fit, they brought together previous research by “defining PO fit as the congruence between individuals’ and organizations’ values” (Cable and Judge, 1997: 547).

These definitions of fit illustrate that much of the research into PO fit has focused on how people and organisations are alike and share similar values, known as supplementary fit. However, Kristof (1996), building on Muchinsky and Monahan's (1987) theoretical paper, identified that fit could also be complementary. As the term suggests, complementary fit is said to exist when the organisation and individual add something of benefit to the other party. Therefore, individual complementary fit is where the organisation meets the individual's needs in some way (needs-supplies fit) whereas in organisational complementary fit, the individual provides the organisation with key skills, knowledge or abilities for example, that the organisation is in need of (demands-abilities fit). This contrasts with supplementary fit which is said to exist when the organisation and individual share similar values or attributes.

How fit is defined and conceptualized was further refined in 2005 by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson who published a meta-analysis drawn from 172 'fit' studies. In addition to PO fit, Kristof-Brown et al (2005) identified person-vocation (PV), person-job (PJ), person-supervisor (PS) and person-group (PG) fit from the literature, which she found were "only moderately related to each other" (Kristof-Brown et al, 2005: 315). Billsberry, Ambrosini, Marsh, Moss-Jones and Van Meurs (2005) questioned whether in fact these were the only possible sub-types of fit and identified thirteen possible sub-types of fit.

Much of the research in the PO fit field has to date concentrated on identifying the many guises of organisational fit, but recently, the subject of misfit has come to the fore. In a study by Billsberry et al (2005), they identified that, rather than leaving the organisation under study, as Schneider (1987) had supposed, misfits stayed, "acting as centres of rebellion, disaffection and malcontent" (Billsberry et al, 2005: 12).

Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2005) also focused on misfit, by studying the effects of employees being in and out of 'sync' with the general pace of their work environment. They found that those individuals who kept pace with their co-workers tended to experience greater satisfaction and display more helping behaviours. A mismatch between the individual's pace and the hurriedness of the group resulted in lower levels of satisfaction.

Misfit is of interest not only because it has not been explored fully by academics but also because it is known that not fitting in an organisation is stressful to individuals. Le Fevre, Matheny and Kolt (2003), in their study of Person-Environment (PE) fit and organisational stress, found that the concept of 'eustress' (what has been commonly termed 'good' stress) was redundant and that being a 'misfit' increased stress levels, resulting in physiological or psychological symptoms. In relation to organisational misfit, PE fit theory suggests that individuals may employ coping or defence mechanisms in order to increase their fit. Le Fevre et al (2003: 733) assert that "Good PE Fit may confer positive health benefits."

Although relatively little research has focused on misfit, management practitioners seem to be all too aware of this phenomenon and much has been written with practitioners in mind. For example, Bittel and Ramsey (1983) reported on data gathered by the National Survey of Supervisory Management Practices who surveyed 7000 supervisors from 116 organisations. The survey found that, of the managers who had been promoted from the 'employee ranks' to supervisor status, one-in-five had negative attitudes and felt that they were a misfit. In a similar vein, Blenkinsopp and Zdunczyk (2005) conducted an exploratory, retrospective study of misfit managers. Using in-depth interviews based on critical incident techniques, they studied managers who perceived themselves as misfits after making mid-career role transitions and found that in these situations, there was a mismatch between the individuals' expectations and the reality of the job. Managers revealed that their expectations were based on assumptions and inference rather than the facts and information provided by the employer. For example, one participant had inferred from the slickness of the recruitment and selection process that the whole organisation was well managed.

The studies by Bittel and Ramsey (1983) and Blenkinsopp and Zdzunczyk (2005) are of interest because they revealed that it is possible that there are trigger events which may cause misfit at work. They identified that promotion and a change of career were the impetus for individuals feeling that they did not fit. As such, these findings raise the question of whether there are other trigger events causing people to experience misfit and if so, what they are.

One potential consequence of misfit is that individuals will leave the organisation. In the literature, much attention has been paid to organisational employee turnover and withdrawal (e.g. Mobley, 1982; Zeffane, 1994; Carmeli and Gefen, 2004). Sacco and Schmitt (2005) for example studied employees' demographic misfit as compared to their co-workers as a predictor of turnover risk and furthermore, looked at the relationship of these factors to the organisations' profitability. In this study, the researchers specifically focused on the demographic variables of race, age and sex to assess whether dissimilarity between co-workers would disrupt social relationships between individuals. Sacco and Schmitt (2005) found that there was a relationship between demographic misfit and turnover, i.e. where employees were not of a similar age, sex and race to their colleagues, they were more likely to leave.

Sacco and Schmitt's study, in common with many studies in the PE fit, organisational behaviour and PO fit fields, draws on and supports Schneider's attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) model (1987: 445). Schneider's (1987) theoretical paper looks at the broad area of the causes of organisational behaviour and concludes that "the people make the place": in other words, it is not the organisational structure, environment, systems and technology that make an organisation the way it is, it is the people who inhabit it. In arguing this point, Schneider challenges the view that the situational context is relevant in shaping behaviour. Instead, Schneider theorises that similar people are attracted to organisations and then will remain in those settings. If people erroneously join organisations where they do not fit, they will leave (attrition). The danger implicit in the model is drawn out, namely that there is the possibility that an organisation becomes so 'ingrown' that it is incapable of adapting to new situations and Schneider therefore stresses the importance of organisations recruiting people who do not fit to improve the chances of its long term survival. In terms of misfit therefore, Schneider (1987) suggests that misfits are rarely recruited and if they are, they leave.

Towards a Definition of Misfit

Thus far therefore, there have been a number of studies investigating how individuals fit in organisations and there have been relatively few investigating what it means to be a misfit at work. What has not been answered by these studies is what causes misfit nor how misfit can be conceptualized. It is possible that misfit may be the opposite to fit and that there is a scale with perfect fit at one end and misfit at the other. This view of fit and misfit seems to underpin many PO fit studies, particularly those that measure fit using the Organisational Culture Profile (OCP) which is a 'deck' of 54 value statements which need to be sorted by the participants (recruits and organisation representatives) into being "most representative" to "least representative" of the organisation or the individual (Cable and Judge, 1996: 299). This tool was developed by O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991) specifically to measure organisational fit. Measuring fit as a continuous variable would suggest that misfit is its opposite.

In Billsberry, van Meurs, Coldwell and Marsh's (2006) theory paper however, they suggest that misfits are not polar opposites to individuals who fit and they propose that it is not necessarily the case that when the factors which cause fit are absent, misfit occurs. Misfits they argue are conscious of their misfit, having either been wrongly appointed or becoming

misfits during the course of their employment. Billsberry et al (2006) define misfit as occurring “when the compatibility [between the individual and the organisation] is detrimental to both parties” (2006: 10).

Billsberry et al (2006) acknowledge that this is a topic which has been under-researched and that “at present we know very little about the process of becoming a misfit” (2006: 12). In studying the antecedents of both fit and misfit, it may be possible to ascertain whether misfit is the opposite to fit; whether the same factors cause both states or whether misfit is a completely different construct. It may also be possible to identify whether people ‘slip’ into misfit, suggesting that it is a continuous variable or ‘step’ into it, which would suggest that misfit is categorical. This study starts to address these questions by identifying the antecedents of both fit and misfit in a sample from one organisation and assessing whether a person’s fit or misfit are caused by similar factors.

METHODS

The data on individuals’ perceptions of fit and misfit were collected using in-depth interviews within which causal mapping was used following the suggestion of Billsberry, Ambrosini, Moss-Jones and Marsh (2005). To complement this approach, a projective device, namely the ‘Blob Tree’ (Wilson, 1988), a drawing of cartoon characters in different positions on a large tree, was used as a way of encouraging interviewees to identify how they perceive themselves in relation to their employer (the tree and its branches) and their co-workers (the other characters on the tree) (see appendix A). Projective techniques, akin to the benefits of causal mapping, are useful in that individuals may “reveal hidden levels of their consciousness” (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002: 102). The Blob Tree projective device thereby allowed the research participants to articulate their own ideas and thoughts about the way in which they perceived their fit within the organisation without undue prompting.

Discussing a person’s ‘fit’ or lack of fit with the organisation is a potentially emotive subject. Although the term ‘misfit’ has been used liberally in this study, care was taken not to use the term unless the interviewees defined themselves as such. Rather than asking how people perceived themselves to be misfits, participants were asked to talk about how they did ‘not fit’. The term ‘not fit’ was therefore used as it was felt to be less confrontational and pejorative. However, not fitting at work is essentially the same as misfitting and the terms ‘not fit’ and ‘misfit’ are therefore used interchangeably henceforth.

The Sample

The research participants were all employees of the Open University’s Human Resources (HR) Department. Of the 113 members of HR, 10 volunteered to take part in the study (9%). The HR Department’s staffing was made up of 65.5% secretarial and clerical (S&C) staff, 29% academic related staff and two academic staff members (5.5%). The majority of staff were female (87%).

The study attracted a fairly representative number of female (90%) and male (10%) volunteers for the study, although with 50% of the sample being from the S&C staff grouping and 50% being academic related staff, the Open University’s HR staff population staffing was not reflected in the sample. However, the study was not aiming to generate findings for this particular population and therefore having a mixture of male and female participants from the largest two staff groupings was felt to be adequate for a study of this type.

RESULTS

The data gathered from the in-depth interviews comprised ten Blob Trees, causal maps and audio recordings of each of the interviews which were transcribed. The data provided by the Blob Trees was not used in the overall analysis for this study as it was used as a projective device, designed to stimulate thought and conversation rather than being seen as a data gathering tool in its own right.

The ten causal maps contained many similarities, despite having used the individuals' verbatim comments. For example, in saying how they felt that they fitted, seven of the interviewees mentioned that having flexibility in their role and their hours of work helped them to fit. The maps were coded by looking for such similar concepts in the ten maps. Other topics that were mentioned by more than one respondent in relation to 'fit' included several around work/life balance, training and development, team working, the job and the nature of the work that the individuals were performing and were coded as such.

In looking at causes of *not* fitting, participants again identified some common factors. In this area, seven out of the ten participants identified that 'frustration' caused them to feel that they did not fit although this was not always caused by the same stimuli. Lack of feedback and decision making, meetings, others' negative behaviour, unfair treatment and politics were cited by more than one participant as causing them not to fit.

As a result, ten coded maps were arrived at which were analysed to determine the root causes of both fit and misfit. Root causes are the primary reasons given by the research participants as causing them to fit or not and are at the base of each causal chain. From the causal maps, 63 root causes of fit were identified. As can be seen in table 1, 30% of these causes related to the individuals' jobs (e.g. enjoying the job and the nature of the role), whilst 24% were to do with the organisation's culture, policies and working practices (e.g. benefits such as leave entitlement). The job and the organisation therefore accounted for 54% of the root causes of people's perceptions of fit at work but fitting in also stemmed from the individuals themselves. For example, participants reported that their previous experience, long term plans and even their religious faith were prime reasons for them fitting in. One factor which was mentioned six times by participants as causing organisational fit was the working environment and this was never associated with misfit.

In comparison, of the 44 root causes of misfit identified from the causal maps, the vast majority related to either the organisation's culture, policies and procedures or originated from managerial action or inaction (e.g. lack of support), which jointly accounted for 73% of the prime causes of misfit. Again, the participants looked within themselves for the causes of misfit and gave examples such as being shy, highly qualified or having an illness. Of the root causes of misfit only two stemmed from colleagues (5%) and one from the job itself (2%).

 Insert Table 1 about here

Although the root causes described above are the prime causes for the individuals under study fitting or not fitting at work, they are not the only causes. There are chains of causes leading to people feeling that they fit or not and within these chains the research participants cited 168 causes of fit and 141 causes of misfit. A summary of these is given in table 2.

 Insert Table 2 about here

In relation to misfit, the factors mentioned ranged from broken promises, political correctness and the slow pace of work to perceiving that the organisation had changed and no longer feeling needed. Interestingly, the causes of misfit mentioned as part of the causal chain were somewhat different to the root causes. Whereas the root causes of misfit generally related to the organisational policies, procedures and culture, management and the individuals themselves, the causal chain included 26 references to emotions or psychological states. The most commonly cited emotion was one of 'frustration', mentioned by 70% of the participants. Such feelings were never the root cause of misfit.

Similarly, participants mentioned emotions and psychological states when talking about what made them fit at work and perhaps not surprisingly, these tended to be positive emotions such as feeling appreciated and happy. However such positive emotions constituted only 6% of the total number of antecedents of fit. Participants most frequently mentioned flexibility, the job itself, the organisation's mission and values as well as employment benefits such as salary, pension and leave entitlement. Although the nature of the individuals' work was most often referred to in relation to fit, this was not a cause of misfit. Equally, although the agreeable work environment was mentioned as causing people to fit at work, this was not a cause of misfit and neither was work-life balance. While the root causes of misfit tended to be different to the factors given in the causal chains, the root causes and causal chains of 'fit' were strikingly similar.

The causal chains can be illustrated by looking specifically at two example hierarchical models: one of 'fit' and another showing the causes of 'misfit'. The participants tended to either strongly voice their feelings of misfit (interviews 1, 7 and 8) or they described themselves as being 'good fits' at work (the remaining 7 interviewees). However, whether the individuals described themselves as misfits or not, each gave both reasons for fitting at work and not fitting. Every causal map therefore had elements of fit and misfit. The two hierarchical models in figures 1 and 2 illustrate fairly typical fit and misfit maps.

The hierarchical model shown in figure 1 more clearly reflects the causal chain that leads to people feeling that they do not fit. Broadly, at the base of each of the misfit maps are the organisational factors (which generally can be managerially influenced). For example in figure 1, the grading structure is shown as a root cause for the individual not fitting. These factors have implications for the organisation or the individual; in this example, the grading structure has led to promises being broken. Moving up the hierarchy of causes, it can be seen that the root causes have implications which then generate emotions or psychological states for the individual. In this case, the 'grading structure' has led to broken promises and this has resulted in the individual not feeling part of the HR Division and becoming frustrated.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 shows an example hierarchical model of fit where it can be seen that several of the individual's root causes of fit centre around her role (variety, being busy, making a contribution etc.) whilst the other root causes focus on the organisation (its culture and reputation). The organisation's reputation leads to feelings of pride and loyalty and the features of the job lead to enjoyment and consequently, fit.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Fit and Misfit Compared

An analysis of the data showed that three root causes were mentioned by the study's participants both in relation to fit and to misfit. In addition to the root causes of 'mission', 'previous experience' and 'project role'; 'meetings', 'manager' and 'dress code' were common factors causing both feelings of fit and misfit in different respondents. Taking 'dress code' as an example, in interview 2, B said that the informal dress code made her feel uncomfortable as she preferred to wear a suit for work in keeping with her professional status. In interviews 3 and 5, the participants conversely said that being able to dress informally made them feel that they fitted.

As well as there being common concepts causing fit and misfit, there were also a number of opposites. Whereas 'training and development' was given by five participants as helping them to fit at work, 'lack of training' was mentioned by one person in relation to not fitting. Similarly 'feedback' appeared as a 'fit' concept whilst 'lack of feedback' was attributed to not fitting; 'support' was mentioned by two people in relation to 'fit' whilst 'lack of support' was mentioned by four people as a cause for their not fitting; appreciation was mentioned against 'fit' whilst 'lack of appreciation' was mentioned against 'not fit'; and 'freedom' and 'autonomy' were cited as causing people to feel 'fit' whilst 'controlling', 'over supervision' and 'not able to use own initiative' were cited as causing people not to fit. Nineteen causes of misfit were clear opposites of 'fit' concepts, but there were others which were less clear cut and were therefore not included in this tally. For example, the opposite to 'overqualified for job' could be said to be 'skills and knowledge' and 'not many shared experiences' may be seen as the reverse of 'team' and 'working collaboratively', but these were felt to be too ambiguous to be included as opposites.

Out of the 141 concepts given as causes for individuals not fitting at work six were also cited as factors contributing to 'fit' at work (4%) and 19 were polar opposites (13%). The remaining 116 concepts (82%) were mentioned only in relation to misfit. The 'misfit' concept which appeared on 70% of the causal maps – 'frustration' – did not feature in relation to 'fit', nor did the most frequently cited root cause of misfit – the grading structure.

DISCUSSION

The main finding of this study is that the antecedents of both fit and misfit are complex and numerous. That 'fit' and 'misfit' are complex is not new: it confirms Billsberry et al's (2006) findings. The hierarchical model depicted in figure 1 indicates that there are layers of misfit, with root causes being at the start of a chain of concepts which lead to emotions or psychological states resulting in people feeling that they do not fit. In interview 7 for example, the individual says that the University's grading structure leads her to feel that she needs to conform in order to progress and that as a result she feels that she can not be herself which she cites as a cause for her feeling a lack of fit. Therefore, although an organisational policy or procedure is the base cause of G's perceptions of misfit, it is how this policy is managerially implemented and enforced that lead to G's feelings of frustration. Similar patterns within the causal chains were seen in each of the individuals' causal maps.

It is therefore proposed that there are sources of organisational misfit, originating mainly from organisational culture, policies or procedures and management interventions, but also from colleagues and the individuals' own circumstances. These actions, behaviours and

policies have effects on individuals which lead to emotions or psychological states. This model of the causal chain of misfit is depicted in figure 3.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

This is at variance from the causal maps of fit in that the root causes are strikingly different. Whereas the root causes of misfit are primarily organisationally or managerially based (73%), 70% of the perceptions of fit originate from the job, the environment, colleagues and the individuals themselves. Managers it seems have a limited role in generating feelings of fit in individuals (accounting for 6% of the root causes of fit and 10% of the total causes) but play a far more significant role in generating misfit perceptions.

A further finding from this study is that the same root cause can lead to different causal chains in different people. This is illustrated by those root concepts which were cited by more than one participant. For example, the grading structure leads to feelings of not fitting in three of the participants, but different concepts are mentioned by each. What is striking about the concepts within the chain is that the vast majority are managerially influenced, being policies or procedures or the way in which these are implemented. At the end of this chain are emotions and psychological states, and it should be noted that these were never cited as the root cause of misfit. It therefore seems that although the root causes of misfit are varied and the causal chains differ greatly, that once individuals become frustrated or experience other negative emotions, perceptions of not fitting ensue.

As noted above, in their theory paper, Billsberry et al (2006) suggest that misfit and fit are not polar opposites. That 'fit' is a different construct to 'misfit' seems to be borne out by this study in that 82% of the causes of misfit were different to the causes of fit. Although six common causes for misfit and fit were identified, the causal chains which were described by the participants differed greatly. The key difference would seem to be that misfit is the result of not simply a root cause but the subsequent managerial action (e.g. controlling, holding work up, broken promises) or inaction (e.g. lack of decision making, lack of feedback, lack of support) and that these lead to negative emotions and consequently misfit.

If misfit is indeed a different construct, then fit and misfit are not opposite ends of a spectrum. This would suggest that people do not 'slip' from fit to misfit (or vice versa) along a continuum but rather that misfit is categorical. Even those participants who stated at the start of the interviews that they were a good fit at work nevertheless all gave examples of ways in which they did not fit when probed during the causal mapping exercise. Fit and misfit may therefore be more like adjoining webs than a continuum, with some shared points leading to very different paths.

The finding that fit and misfit are not two ends of one continuous variable is important for the PO fit literature in that much emphasis in this field has focused on identifying how organisations can recruit people who fit (e.g. Cable and Judge, 1996; Cable and Judge, 1997, Bowen, Ledford and Nathan, 1991) and several have used the OCP instrument to measure fit (Chatman, 1991, Judge and Cable, 1997). However, it is possible, and even likely, that even those employees who fit well have elements of misfit. Furthermore, it is possible that this is desirable in employees: perhaps the people who are able to look critically at organisational behaviours, policies, procedures and others' behaviour are the best fit. Another possibility is that some people are able to 'put things in perspective', 'accept it and move on' or have a 'positive mindset', (which were all mentioned by participants) so although they see that there are ways in which they do not fit, they are able to deal with it positively.

This study's findings also chime with other studies. Interviewee A tendered her resignation and left the organisation. Similarly, in interview 3, C described how she left her previous job in another organisation because she felt that she did not fit there. In interview 4, D said that she would leave "*if it does get really bad*" and F advised her colleagues "*you either put up with it or go.*" These examples support Schneider's (1987) ASA theory which theorises that misfits leave organisations. C's description of experiencing misfit in another organisation where her colleagues were much younger also accords with Sacco and Schmitt's (2005) study in which they found that people who shared dissimilar demographic characteristics with colleagues tended to experience misfit.

Limitations and Strengths

Although this study has generated some interesting findings, its limitations are also recognised. The study was conducted on a fairly small scale, with ten participants from one department. The University has four main staff categories: academics, technical, secretarial and clerical and academic related and only the latter two categories were represented. The participants for this study volunteered to take part and as such, they were not randomly selected. It is therefore possible that only those people in the HR Department who felt strongly about their fit came forward.

Because of the sampling limitations and the small number of participants, it is not known to what extent the findings from this study are generalizable. It is possible that the findings are specific to the Open University's HR Division or to the HR profession. However, given that the findings support other studies in this field (Billsberry et al, 2006; Sacco and Schmitt, 2005; Schneider, 1987) suggests that they may be more widely generalizable. In order to establish whether this is in fact the case, further research with a larger, more diverse sample would be profitable.

However, the study does have a number of strengths. In terms of reliability, the main research method used, causal mapping, had been previously used to study 'fit' and worked well. The Blob Tree (Wilson, 1984) projective device had not been previously used and its reliability has not been tested. However, it stimulated the individuals to think about their place and role in the organisation and as such was felt to be extremely useful in 'opening up' the conversation.

In order to validate the findings, the individual causal maps were sent to the participants and they were invited to comment on the maps if they wished to do so. Six of the ten participants responded with positive feedback and no response was received from the other four individuals. The validity of the research is further enhanced by basing the methods on those used in other 'fit' studies.

Conclusion

The findings of this study further our understanding of the concept of misfit by demonstrating that perceptions of misfit have a root cause: a behaviour or action which in the majority of cases is managerially or organisationally instigated. These behaviours or actions tend to have consequences or are acted upon by managers which give rise to negative emotions or psychological states. The root causes are therefore not the antecedents of misfit per se; it is the causal chain and the negative feelings or psychological states which arise which result in misfit.

Although there are also causal chains leading to people feeling that they fit within the organisation, these chains have very different factors within them and perhaps most importantly are initiated by different triggers. Interaction with colleagues, the job and the

environment seem to be jointly more important in engendering feelings of fit than organisational policies and procedures and management interventions.

As shown in this study, misfit can result in individuals leaving organisations and misfit is clearly stressful to individuals. However, not being a 'perfect fit' at work does not seem to be wholly negative: even those people who saw themselves as being 'good fits' at work reported elements of not fitting. Although this study has started to investigate the causes of misfit at work and its relation to fit, further research could be conducted to further understanding and the associated literature. One key question arising from this study seems to be: is an element of misfit desirable? Future research could also substantiate that fit and misfit are different constructs by using a larger, representative sample, possibly from a range of different organisations.

REFERENCES

- Billsberry, J., Ambrosini, V., Moss-Jones, J. and Marsh, P.J.G. (2005) Some Suggestions for Mapping Organizational Members' Sense of Fit, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 19, 555-570.
- Billsberry, J., Van Meurs, N., Coldwell, D. A., Marsh, P. J. G. (2006) The Dynamic Dual Interest Model of Fit: A Metatheory for Understanding the Complexity of Fit. Paper presented at the Academy of Management, Atlanta.
- Bittel, L. R. and Ramsey, J. E. (1983) Misfit Supervisors: Bad Apples in the Managerial Barrell, *Management Review*, February, 8-13.
- Blenkinsopp, J. and Zdunczyk, K. (2005) Making Sense of Mistakes in Managerial Careers, *Career Development International*, 10 (5), 359-374.
- Bowen, D. E., Ledford, G. E., and Nathan, B. R. (1991) Hiring for the Organization, Not the Job, *Academy of Management Executive*, 5 (4), 35-51.
- Bryson, J. M, Ackerman, F, Eden, C and Finn, C. B. (2004) *Visible Thinking: Unlocking Causal Mapping for Practical Business Results*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester
- Cable, D. M. and Judge, T. A. (1996) Person-Organization Fit, Job Choice Decisions, and Organizational Entry, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 67 (3), 294-311.
- Cable, D. M. and Judge, T. A. (1997) Interviewer Perceptions of Person-Organization Fit and Organizational Selection Decisions, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82 (4), 546-561.
- Carmeli, A and Gefen, D (2004) The Relationship between Work Commitment Models and Employee Withdrawal Intentions, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20 (2), 63-86.
- Chatman, J. (1991) Matching people and organizations: Selection and socialization in public accounting firms, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 459-484.
- Deal, T.E. and Kennedy, A.A. (1982), *Corporate Cultures*. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Easterby-Smith, M, Thorpe, R and Lowe, A (2002), *Management Research: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition, London, Sage.
- Edwards, J. R. (1996) An Examination of Competing Versions of the Person-Environment Fit Approach to Stress, *Academy of Management Journal*, 39 (2), 292-339.
- Health and Safety Executive (2006) Stress Related and Psychological Disorders: Survey of Self-Reported Work-Related Illness, accessed at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.htm>
- Jansen, K.J. and Kristof-Brown, A.L. (2005) Marching to the beat of a different drummer: Examining the impact of pacing congruence. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 97, 93-105.
- Judge, T. A. and Cable, D. M. (1997) Applicant Personality, Organizational Culture, and Organizational Attraction, *Personnel Psychology*, 50, 359-394.
- Kristof, A. L. (1996) Person-Organization Fit: An Integrative Review of its Conceptualizations, Measurement, and Implications, *Personnel Psychology*, 49, 1-49.
- Kristof-Brown, A. L., (2000) Perceived Applicant Fit: Distinguishing between Recruiters' Perceptions of Person-Job and Person-Organization Fit, *Personnel Psychology*, 53, 643-671.
- Kristof-Brown, A.L., Zimmerman, R.D. and Johnson, E.C. (2005) Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person–job, person–organization, person–group, and person–supervisor fit, *Personnel Psychology*, 58, 281-342.
- Le Fevre, M., Matheny, J. and Kolt, G. S. (2003) Eustress, Distress and Interpretation in Occupational Stress, *Journal of Management Psychology*, 18 (7), 726-744.

- Mobley, W. H. (1982) Some Unanswered Questions in Turnover and Withdrawal Research, *Academy of Management Review*, 7 (1), 111-116.
- Muchinsky, P. M. and Monahan, C. J. (1987) What is Person-Environment Congruence? Supplementary versus Complementary Models of Fit, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 31, 268-277.
- O'Reilly, C.A., Chatman, J. and Caldwell, D. F. (1991) People and Organizational Culture: A Profile Comparison Approach to Assessing Person-Organization Fit, *Academy of Management Journal*, 34 (3), 487-516.
- Sacco, J. M. and Schmitt, N. (2005) A Dynamic Multi-Level Model of Demographic Diversity and Misfit Effects, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90 (2), 203-231.
- Schneider, B. (1987) The people make the place, *Personnel Psychology*, 40, 437-453.
- Wilson, P (1988) *Games without Frontiers*. Marshall Pickering
- Zeffane, R. M. (1994) Understanding Employee Turnover: The Need for a Contingency Approach, *International Journal of Manpower*, 15, (9/10), 22-37.

TABLE 1
A Summary of the Root Causes of Fit and Misfit

Root Cause	Misfit	Fit
Organisational	50%	24%
Managerial	23%	6%
Individual	20%	17%
Colleagues	5%	13%
Job	2%	30%
Environment	-	10%

TABLE 2
Summary of Causes of Fit and Misfit

	Fit	Misfit
Job	59 (35%)	-
	e.g. Specialism Challenge Feel job is important Giving advice	
Organisational Causes	40 (24%)	47 (33%)
	e.g. Mission & values Organisation's reputation Proud of the organisation	e.g. Bureaucracy Grading Structure Dress Code Change of Logo
Individual	18 (11%)	15 (11%)
	e.g. Previous experience Long service Commitment to learning	e.g. Graduate amongst non graduates Shy Previous Experience
Colleagues & Team	16 (10%)	7 (5%)
	e.g. Like minded people Talking to people	e.g. People Complaining
Managerial	10 (6%)	45 (32%)
	e.g. Support Feedback Involvement	e.g. Controlling Lack of Feedback Holding up Work Lack of Decision Making
Environmental	8 (5%)	-
	e.g. Facilities Working conditions	
Work-Life Balance	7 (4%)	-
	e.g. on-site nursery	
Emotions/Psychological States	10 (6%)	26 (18%)
	e.g. Feel happy Feel at home Positive mindset	e.g. Frustration Can't be Myself Not Valued

FIGURE 1
Hierarchical Model of 'Misfit' - Interview 8

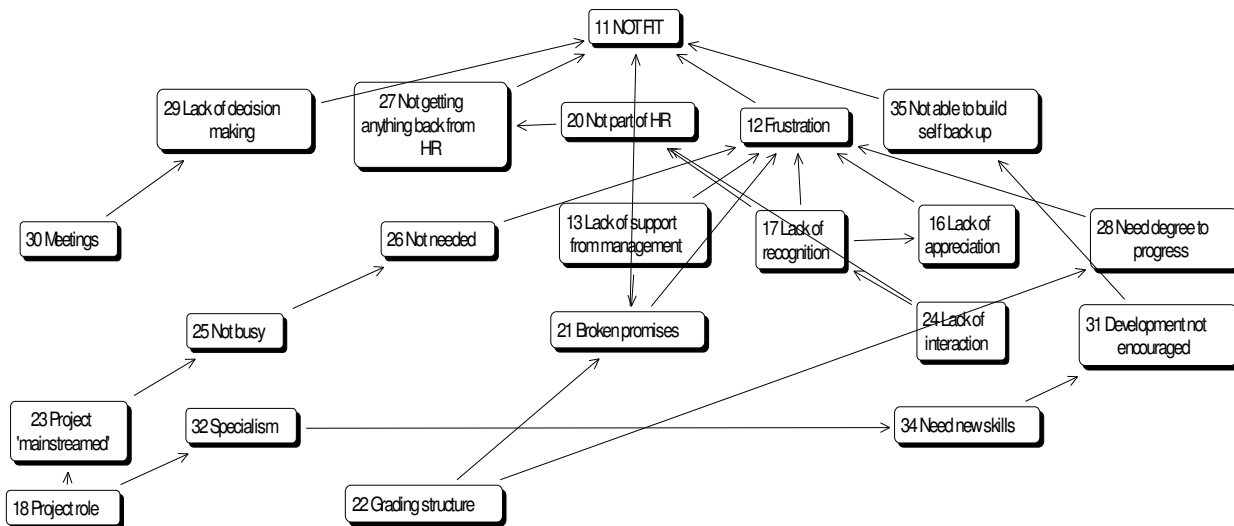


FIGURE 2
Hierarchical Model of 'Fit' – Interview 5

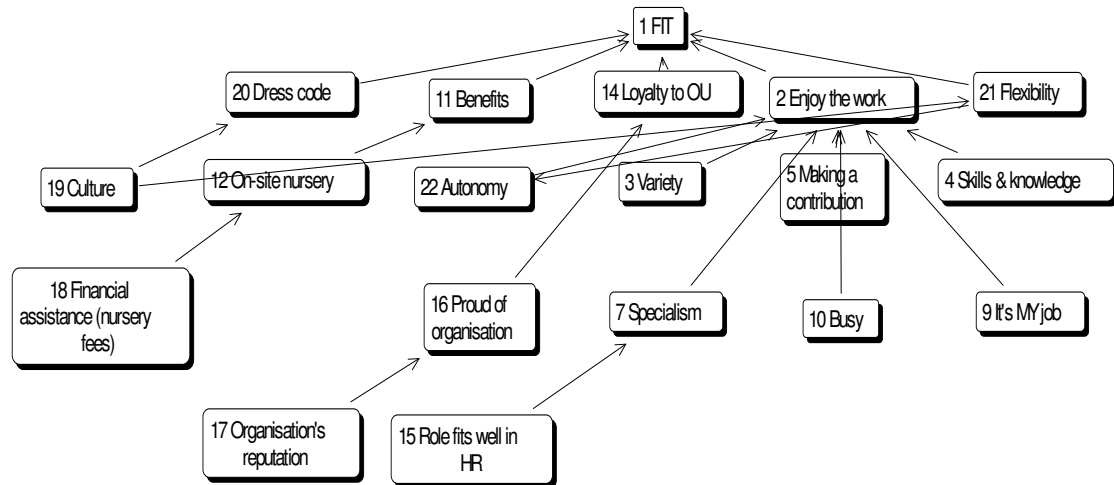
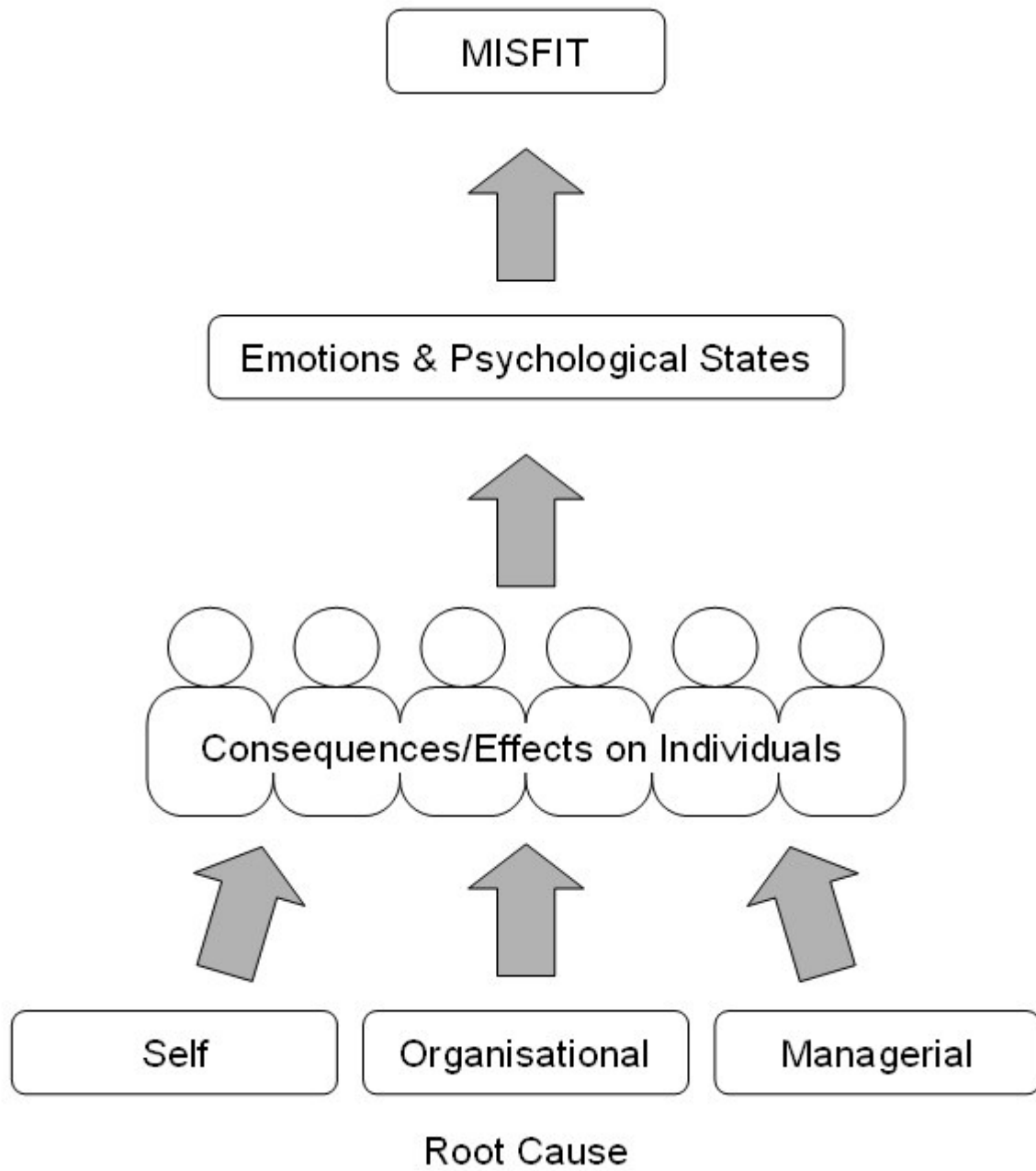
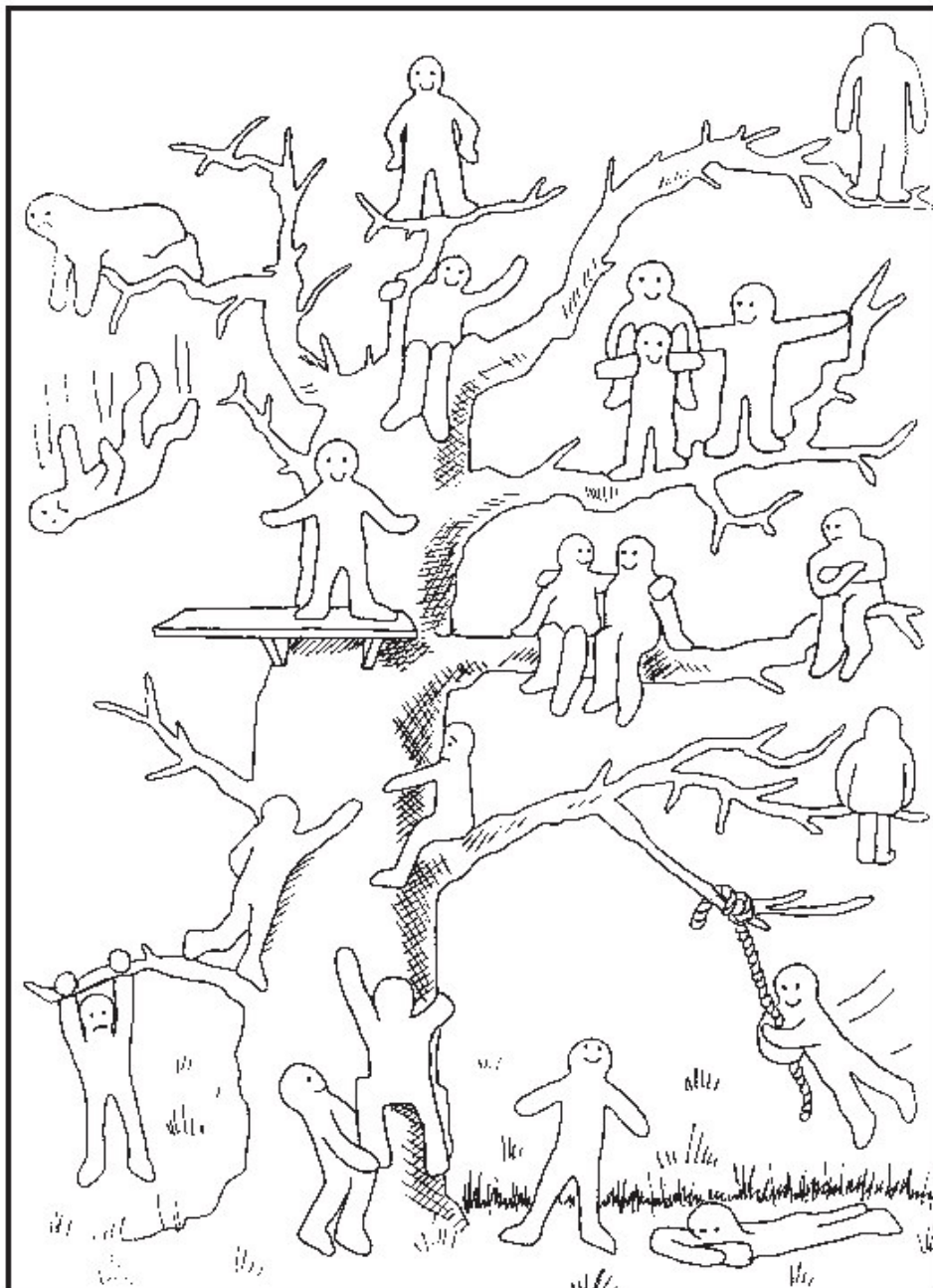


FIGURE 3
The Causal Chain of Misfit



APPENDIX A THE BLOBTREE



Copyright Pip Wilson, from 'Games without Frontiers'

isbn: 0-551-01554-3

published by Marshall Pickering imprint of Harper Collins Publishing. Not to be published without written permission from:- pip@pipwilson.com www.pipwilson.com