Does ‘Fit’ Matter in Nonprofits? Exploring Value Congruence, Role Stressors and Employee Health

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ABSTRACT:

The number of employees working in nonprofit organisations has grown significantly. These employees are often motivated to join these organisations by a strong desire to fulfil the particular vision and mission of that nonprofit (such as helping the community). While the effects of employee organisation value congruence on job-related attitudes are reasonably well documented, little consideration has been given to the nonprofit context and also perceptions of work stressors and health outcomes. A sample on nonprofit employees from a human services organisation (N = 181) was surveyed with results suggesting that value congruence was related to lower perceptions of role stressors. The results further revealed that value congruence was related to less favourable employee health in some circumstances. Outcomes are discussed in terms of theoretical and practical importance.

KEYWORDS:

human resource management, values, work environment, organisational culture, stress & stress management, not-for-profits
INTRODUCTION

While more understood within private and public sector employees, the issue of organisational culture and employee value congruence is a salient area to explore within nonprofit organisations, particularly in light of the prominence of altruistic behaviours in the nonprofit workforces (OECD 2003). The importance of value congruence has been measured in terms of employee outcomes such as job-related attitudes, however not by using nonprofit samples. In addressing this omission, this study investigates person-organisation value congruence within a human services nonprofit organisation and contributes to both the organisational behaviour by extending the person-environment fit knowledge with respect to of employee perceptions of role stressors and employee health in a previously under-researched area.

Person-Organisation Value Congruence and Employee Adjustment

In an attempt to integrate the perspectives identified by fit theorists, Kristof (1996: 4) defined person-organisation value congruence as the “compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) [the entities] share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both”. The best match, according to Kristof, is when the needs of both the individual and the organisation are satisfied, and when the person and the organisation share similar characteristics. Overall, there are numerous methods of assessing value congruence and fit (Verquer, Beehr & Wagner 2003). This study is based on perceived value congruence which indirectly asks individuals to rate themselves and the organisation on like value dimensions.

Prior research investigating perceived value congruence and employee adjustment has produced mixed empirical findings. Studies using difference score and profile similarity indices have consistently found value congruence to be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of organisational commitment, and lower intentions to leave (for example, Bretz & Judge 1994; Cable & Judge 1996; O’Reilly et al. 1991). However, these studies have been criticised for the analytical methods as they may not represent the concept of congruence in entirety. Indeed, congruence reflects a match of perceived values at levels ranging from low to high (e.g., Edwards 1994; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson 2005). For example, high team value congruence is
represented by similar levels of endorsement of the team values for the person and the organisation. As such, value congruence is as much about a match between an employee’s beliefs that they, along with the organisation, do not value teams, as it is about a person’s high value of teamwork in an organisation that highly values teamwork. Both scenarios represent high value congruence. Indeed, it is not possible to determine the extent of the congruence using profile similarity and difference score methods as they do not enable a detailed and three-dimensional interpretation of the congruence effect.

The present study follows on from Edwards (1994), and investigates value congruence using a polynomial regression approach with response surface plotting of data that enables a three dimensional interpretation of the data that combats many of the interpretation difficulties of profile similarity methods.

Overall, research has found a strong relationship between high-endorsement value congruence (that is, high ratings of similar values personally and in the organisation) and favourable reports of affective organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and intentions to stay (for example, Cable & Edwards 2004; Lutrick 2003; Slocombe & Bluedorn 1999). Recently, Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) noted that the studies that utilised response surface plotting generally showed that high value-importance congruence was associated with more positive attitudes than low-importance value congruence. So more positive outcomes were found for those rating themselves and the organisation similarly highly on a set of values. The authors also noted that the effects of incongruence were not symmetrical. Simply put, when an individual values something more than the organisation does it can result in decreased job-related attitudes. When the organisation values something more than the individual, it is has negligible effect on the employee’s job related attitude.

Two studies can be cited that have specifically investigated value congruence as by polynomial regression using the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Cameron & Quinn 1999; Kalliath, Bluedorn & Gillespie 1999; Ostroff, Shin & Kinicki 2005). Kalliath et al. (1999) found an over-riding presence and influence of main effects. That is, higher levels of person values were associated with higher ratings of affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Similarly, higher levels of organisation values were related to higher ratings of affective organisational commitment and job satisfaction.
Most recently, Ostroff et al. (2005) investigated value congruence with values obtained from the CVF and also prior qualitative enquiry. The authors found congruence effects were significant for human relations, open systems, and internal process in the prediction of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. A general trend was observed where the slope of the line of fit was significant and positive for satisfaction and commitment, and significant and negative for intentions to leave. As such, in line with Kristof-Brown et al.’s (2005) meta-analysis and Kalliath et al. (1999), congruence of high value importance was related to more positive job-related outcomes than congruence of low value importance.

This review of the literature reveals several gaps. First, previous studies conducted their analyses without any controls for potential demographic factors that might influence congruence relationships. Indeed, there are a number of potential covariates (such as age and gender) that might influence congruence relationships (Ostroff et al. 2005). Second, value congruence studies particularly relating to the nonprofit context are lacking. As such, researchers and practitioners remain uninformed about the potential effects of value congruence or incongruence on employee outcomes within this sector. In addition to this, and from a theoretical view point, researchers are yet to investigate the effects of value congruence on both employee perceptions of role stressors and employee health in both the broader field of organisational behaviour and in nonprofit organisations specifically. In light of these shortcomings, the following research questions are proposed.

Research question 1: Is value congruence related to different perceptions of workplace stressors?

Research question 2: Is value congruence related to different perceptions of employee health?

**METHOD**

**Participants and Organisations**

Employees from one human services Australian nonprofit organisation took part in the study ($N = 181$; response rate 30%). Respondents included 41 males and 140 females with ages ranging from 20 to 64, $M = 42.19$, $SD = 11.26$. Fifty-two percent of the sample was employed full time, with a further 36% employed on a permanent part time basis. Mean tenure for was 4.95 years.

**Procedure**
Employees were informed that a survey of employees was taking place one month prior to distribution. After distribution email reminders were sent to all employees encouraging participation in the survey prior to distribution, and one week into the two-week survey period. Employees received their questionnaire in an unmarked envelope containing the survey, an information sheet, and a reply-paid envelope. Upon completion, and to ensure confidentiality, employees returned the survey in the reply paid envelope directly to the researcher.

**Measures**

*Value congruence.* Both individual and perceived organisational values relating to the CVF and other values identified in a focus group of organisational employees were assessed on a 1 (*not valued by me*) to 5 (*highly valued by me*). Exploratory then Confirmatory Factor Analyses revealed that items loaded onto three factors: control, flexibility, and altruistic values (CFA: CFI = .92; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .05).

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

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

*Psychological health.* Perceptions of psychological well-being were assessed using the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12, Goldberg 1972). Respondents were asked to rate their general health on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Negatively worded items were recoded.

*Physiological symptoms.* Self-reports of physiological illness were using a ten-item scale developed by Caplan et al. (1980) with an additional item relating to headaches. Respondents indicated physiological symptoms of strain in the last month and rated items on a 3-point scale including 1 (*never*), 2 (*once or twice*), and 3 (*more than three times*).
Gender and age. Gender and age were entered as covariates in analyses in this study given differences in perceptions of focal variables as a function of both gender and age.

Negative affectivity. Negative affectivity can potentially act as a ‘nuisance’ variable; especially in cross-sectional research of stress and strain (see also Williams, Cote & Buckley 1989). Analyses subsequently controlled for negative affectivity (see Spector 2006), in order to account for potential effects of common method variance. Negative affectivity was assessed using an 11-item scale (see Agho, Price & Mueller 1992). Items include ‘I am too sensitive for my own good’ and were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time).

RESULTS

Preliminary Data Analyses

Table 1 displays means, standard deviations, zero-order correlations, and reliability coefficients for the focal variables. Correlations among commensurate dimensions of individual and organisation values ranged from -.01 to .32 indicating that measures of personal values and organisation values were relatively independent. Within the source of values (e.g., personal values, perceived organisation values) correlations were low to moderate indicating relatively independent constructs of the value dimensions. As age and gender was related to difference in perceptions of some stressor and health variables, they were included as covariates.

Person-Organisation Value Congruence

Polynomial regression was utilised to conduct the analyses in this study. This method allows three-dimensional plotting of the relationship between the person, and the organisational ratings of values on an outcome (Edwards 1994). Hierarchical regression analysis was used to investigate the research questions with covariates (for example, gender, age, and negative affectivity) entered at Step 1; separate person and organisational values ratings entered at Step 2; quadratic and interaction terms (that is, person values squared, person * organisation values interaction, and organisational values squared) entered at Step 3; and cubic terms for person and organisation ratings entered at Step 4 to check for the presence of higher-order curvatures. In order to reduce multicollinearity and allow more meaningful interpretation of congruence relationships all independent variables were scale-centred (Edwards 1994).
Four additional analyses were then conducted to assist in the interpretation of the estimated response surfaces: significance of the slope and curvature of the lines of fit and misfit.

Main effects of person and organisation values. The main effects of person (i.e., endorsement of values by the employee) and organisation (i.e., perceived endorsement of values by the organisation) values on employee adjustment were investigated.

Flexible organisation values significantly predicted higher levels of role clarity, $B = .19$, $p < .001$, and lower role conflict, role overload, and physiological symptoms, $B = -.12$, $p = .07$, $B = -.18$, $p < .05$, and $B = -.07$, $p < .001$, respectively. Flexible person values only significantly predicted psychological health, $B = .34$, $p < .001$

Control organisation values significantly predicted of higher psychological health, $B = .10$, $p = .07$, and role clarity, $B = .36$, $p < .001$, and lower role conflict and role overload, $B = -.17$, $p < .001$, and $B = -.39$, $p < .001$, respectively. Person control values significantly predicted higher psychological health, $B = .22$, $p < .05$, and higher role conflict and overload, $B = .39$, $p .05$, and $B = .45$, $p < .05$, respectively.

Altruistic organisation values significantly predicted higher levels of role clarity, $B = .14$, $p < .05$, and lower role conflict, role overload, and physiological symptoms, $B = -.12$, $p = .07$, $B = -.26$, $p < .05$, and $B = -.10$, $p < .05$, respectively. Altruistic person values did not significantly predict employee health or perceptions of role stressors.

Response Surface Plots

Response surface methodology provides a visual point of reference for determining the shape of curvilinear relationships (Box & Draper 1987; Edwards & Parry 1993). Table 2 displays results for analyses demonstrating significant curvilinear relationships.

Control value congruence. Three models were investigated following initial analyses revealing significant curvilinearity related to control value congruence. Figure 1 shows the plotted response surface for control value congruence on physiological symptoms. The slope of the line of fit was not significant (slope = -.39, ns) and the curvature of the line of fit was significant and positive (curvature = .14, $p < .10$), indicating that levels of physiological symptoms were higher for employees characterised by low-importance and high-importance control value congruence. The slope and
curvature along the line of misfit were not significant; indicating that higher levels of physiological symptoms were associated with low-importance and high-importance control value congruence.

Further, lowest physiological symptoms were reported by those characterised by value incongruence.

**Figure 1: Response Surface Plot of Control Value Congruence on Physiological Symptoms.**

![Figure 1: Response Surface Plot of Control Value Congruence on Physiological Symptoms.](image1)

Figure 2 shows the plotted response surface for control value congruence on role conflict. The results revealed that the slope and curvature of the line of fit were not significant, however, the slope line of misfit was significant and negative (slope = -1.89, p < .05) and the curvature of the line of misfit was also significant (curvature = .89, p < .05). These results indicate that perceptions of role conflict were greatest when organisation control values exceeded person ascription to those values and that role conflict was higher as value incongruence increased.

**Figure 2: Response Surface Plot of Control Value Congruence on Role Conflict.**

![Figure 2: Response Surface Plot of Control Value Congruence on Role Conflict.](image2)
Table 1: Descriptive Data for Focal Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Flexible values (P)</td>
<td>4.53 (0.45)</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Control values (P)</td>
<td>4.51 (0.43)</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Altruistic values (P)</td>
<td>4.70 (0.41)</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>(.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Flexible values (O)</td>
<td>3.05 (0.95)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Control values (O)</td>
<td>4.03 (0.76)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Altruistic values (O)</td>
<td>4.11 (0.83)</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Role conflict</td>
<td>2.31 (0.84)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Role clarity</td>
<td>4.00 (0.73)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>-.50**</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Role overload</td>
<td>2.68 (0.97)</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Psychological health</td>
<td>4.34 (.54)</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>(.75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Physiological symptoms</td>
<td>1.34 (0.25)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cronbach’s (1951) alpha coefficients appear in the diagonal. **p < .05.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients of Models Displaying Significant Curvilinearity (Based on Person Value Dimensions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value congruence dimensions and outcome variables</th>
<th>Unconstrained equations</th>
<th>Unconstrained equations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model reference</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological symptoms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Overload</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.45**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Altruistic values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological symptoms</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For all columns except those labelled R^2, table entries represent unstandardised regression coefficients for equations with all predictors entered simultaneously. *p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .001.
Figure 3 shows the graphical representation of control value congruence on role overload. The results revealed that the slope and curvature of the line of fit were not significant indicating that perceptions of overload did not significantly increase at different levels of congruence. The slope line of misfit was also not significant (slope = -.11, ns) although the curvature of the line of misfit was marginally significant and positive (curvature = .82, $p < .10$) indicating that role conflict was higher as incongruence increased. Visual inspection of the response surface plot shows this to be more the case for those perceiving higher organisation control values over person control values.

**Figure 3: Response Surface Plot of Control Value Congruence on Role Overload.**

*Altruistic value congruence.* Figure 4 shows the plotted response surface for altruistic value congruence on physiological symptoms. The slope and curvature of the line of fit were not significant although visually, it can be seen that ratings are slightly higher at the low-importance and high-importance value congruence extremes. The slope of the line of misfit was not significant however, the curvature of the line of misfit was significant and negative (curvature = -.24, $p < .05$) such that physiological symptoms were lower as incongruence increased (that is, where organisation values maximally exceeded person altruistic values and where person values maximally exceeded organisation values).
DISCUSSION

This study sought to investigate the influence of perceived person-organisation value congruence on nonprofit employee perceptions of stressors and health. First, the results of this study found that in almost every instance, entry of the main effects accounted for a significant amount of further explained variance on employee health and perceptions of stressors. This result extends the findings of Kalliath et al. (1999) on job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and Ostroff et al. (2005) on satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Kalliath et al. (1999) explained this in terms of decreased ambiguity associated with espoused values. As such, a strongly perceived organisational value would be associated with more guidance in terms of workplace expectations and behaviour, thereby reducing perceived ambiguity and potentially increasing employee-related outcomes. Interestingly, though, person values in the present study were generally not strongly significantly associated with perceptions of role stressors or employee health. While in line with Kalliath et al. (1999) both flexible and control person values were significantly related to more favourable psychological health, person control values were also associated with higher perceptions of role conflict and role overload. This result is new to research and it is proposed that in the nonprofit environment which is often characterised by considerable reactivity, valuing procedures (and other control values) might actually manifest as
increased role conflict and overload. This proposition requires more research, however, to
determine the extent of these potential relationships.

Several points can be noted in terms of the three models displaying curvilinear
characteristics. In line with previous value congruence findings using polynomial techniques,
control value incongruence was associated with highest perceptions of role conflict and overload,
particularly when control organisation values were higher than person control values. Further,
congruence of control values was associated with lower levels of role overload and role conflict.
These results imply that value congruence can be associated with more favourable outcomes for
employees in a nonprofit context.

Somewhat unexpectedly, however, some results of this study deviate from the general
tenet that congruence is associated with more favourable employee outcomes. Indeed, value
congruence relating to control and altruistic values was associated with higher levels of
physiological symptoms than value incongruence. A number of suggestions can be posited in
explaining these results. For instance, it might be that health outcomes operate differently to
attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment with respect to value
congruence. Alternatively, it may be that these results are particular to the nonprofit sector - that
value congruence can result in health problems compared to those characterised by value
incongruence. For instance, if a person possesses high control values and this is encouraged by
the organisation possessing high control values, there is an amplification effect (for instance, the
person could become ‘wound up’). Similarly, if a person possesses high altruistic values, they
may already be compelled to ‘go the extra mile’ in their jobs to help others. If reinforced by the
organisation’s altruistic values, then this is detrimental to their health. Whilst further research is
needed to investigate the tentative explanations for these results, the potential implications for
nonprofit organisations should be noted. For example, managers could engage strategies to ensure
that employees who are characteristically value congruent with the organisation do not over-
engage in such ways that could lead to burnout. Such strategies might include monitoring hours,
providing and strongly encouraging self-responsibility with respect to how work is engaged, or allowing access to activities such as exercise that can work towards decreasing physiological symptoms.

A number of limitations may be noted with respect to this study. First, the sample for this study was relatively small \((N = 181)\) and it is possible that a larger sample would have detected more potential congruence effects. It should also be noted that the method of assessing organisation and person values in this study means that an organisation could be rated highly on all values in the same way that a person could rate themselves equally highly on all values. Inspection of the data revealed that ratings of the organisation tended to be selective such that all values were not rated equally. Conversely, however, many participants rated themselves equally highly on values across a range of organisational cultures. As such, it is possible that ceiling effects could have inhibited the true nature of the results.

**Conclusion**

Collectively, these results are important theoretically and practically as they extend understanding of concepts relating to organisational culture and the effects of value congruence and incongruence in human services nonprofits. Moreover, this study extends our understanding of the potential effect of value congruence on employee perceptions of role stressors and health. Future research should endeavour to extend these results to nonprofit organisations engaged in other activities (such as culture and health) as well as for-profit and public sector organisations to determine if these effects are generalisable across different contexts.
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