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The Influence of Fit on Motivations to Lead

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**United States Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

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14. ABSTRACT As organizations strive to identify individuals who have the potential to succeed in leadership positions, it is important to understand what motivates individuals to lead others (i.e., motivation to lead; MTL). MTL is comprised of three distinct facets, including social-normative motives (i.e., leading with a sense of duty), affective-identity motives (i.e., a natural propensity to lead), and non-calculative motives (i.e., leading without considering the benefits). In this research, the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) investigated how perceptions of person-job (PJ) and person-organization (PO) fit impact each dimension of MTL. Results demonstrated that PJ and PO fit were related to each of the three dimensions of MTL. Exploratory analyses revealed that PO fit was more important in explaining each dimension of MTL, relative to PJ fit. Limitations and future research directions are discussed.					
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THE INFLUENCE OF FIT ON MOTIVATIONS TO LEAD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Requirement:

Previous research has indicated that dispositional (e.g., personality) and contextual (e.g., organizational reward systems) factors impact one's desire to lead others (i.e., motivation to lead; MTL; Badura et al., 2020). Further, meta-analytic work has demonstrated that MTL is related to leader effectiveness and performance. The purpose of this research is to examine how attitudinal factors (i.e., person-job and person-organization fit) impact MTL. While previous research has indicated that an individual's perception of fit with their organization and job is related to important behavioral intentions and work attitudes, job and organizational fit may also impact one's desire to engage in leadership behaviors.

Procedure:

This research examined the link between person-job (PJ) and person-organization (PO) fit and each facet of motivation to lead (MTL; Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Leader motivations investigated in this research include social-normative motivation (SN-MTL), affective-identity motivation (AFF-MTL), and non-calculative motivation (NC-MTL). As past research has linked PJ and PO fit to desirable work attitudes and behaviors, it is expected that both constructs are positively associated with SN- and AFF-MTL, and inversely related to NC-MTL. Data was collected as part of a larger research effort that involved a sample of junior enlisted Soldiers ($n = 3,159$) to complete measures as part of an online assessment. Participants completed measures of PJ fit, PO fit, and MTL by indicating their agreement to a series of items on agreement-type Likert scales.

Findings:

Results demonstrated that PJ and PO fit were positively related to SN- and AFF-MTL, and inversely related to NC-MTL. Notably, PJ and PO fit demonstrated the strongest link to SN-MTL. To investigate the unique contribution of PJ and PO fit in predicting in each facet of MTL, additional analyses were conducted. In each analysis, PO fit explained more variance in each MTL dimension compared to PJ fit. Finally, to supplement the previous results, analyses were conducted to examine predictor-specific effects of PJ and PO fit in predicting MTL. Results demonstrated that PO fit was responsible for between 79-86% of the variance in explaining each dimension of MTL.

Utilization and Dissemination of Findings:

Monitoring employee fit is important, as it could help organizations identify candidates who may be interested in leadership positions, but it could also signal who has the potential to be successful as a leader. Improving methods for identifying individuals with interest and potential to successfully handle leadership roles can enhance the effectiveness of Army programs aimed at developing leaders through training, experience, and education.

THE INFLUENCE OF FIT ON MOTIVATIONS TO LEAD

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Introduction

Since the 1920s, there have been around ten documented eras of leadership theory (King, 1990). What began as a predominantly trait-driven area of research has since shifted to the understanding that environmental, behavioral, relational, and other complex elements contribute to the leadership process (see Dinh et al., 2014). While there has been an emphasis on identifying attributes (e.g., personality) and contextual factors (e.g., reward systems, culture of the organization) that influence engagement in leader behaviors (Badura et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2011; Luria & Berson, 2013), less attention has been devoted to understanding how attitudinal factors impact leader-related motivations and behaviors.

One such attitude that has not been considered an antecedent of leader-related motivations is perceptions of compatibility with one's job (i.e., person-job fit; PJ fit) or organization (i.e., person-organization fit; PO fit). PJ and PO fit are related to desired work outcomes when individuals feel that their values, behaviors, and characteristics are compatible with their role and workplace. As previous research has indicated that perception of fit can drive positive work behaviors (Chi et al., 2012; Vondey, 2010), it is plausible that these attitudes also impact one's desire to lead others (i.e., motivation to lead; MTL). Thus, this research aims to expand on extant studies by investigating whether PJ and PO fit impact MTL.

Motivation to Lead

Leadership behaviors can be regarded as a self-initiated effort by individuals to take the role of a leader (Hong et al., 2011), thereby suggesting that motivation impacts one's interest in leading others. Chan and Drasgow (2001) posited that individual differences influenced by traits, self-efficacy, and personal values should relate to engagement in leadership behaviors. To understand what factors influence leader emergence, Chan and Drasgow (2001) investigated motivations representing an individual's desire to lead (i.e., MTL). MTL consists of three distinct dimensions, including social-normative motivation (SN-MTL), affective-identity motivation (AFF-MTL), and non-calculative motivation (NC-MTL; Chan & Drasgow, 2001). SN-MTL is characterized by the tendency for individuals to lead with a sense of duty and responsibility based on social norms or circumstances. AFF-MTL is characterized by an individual's natural propensity and interest to lead others and take on leadership responsibilities. Finally, NC-MTL refers to the tendency for individuals to agree to lead without estimating the costs or benefits of leadership (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Although the three facets of MTL are related, previous research has indicated that they are distinct and should be examined as individual constructs (Badura et al., 2020).

Drawing from the theoretical tenets of the trait and behavioral theory of leadership (DeRue et al., 2011) and the distal-proximal framework of motivation (Kanfer, 1990), Badura et al. (2020) set forth a model that considers the mechanisms by which MTL influences leadership outcomes. This framework considers demographic and personality characteristics as distal predictors, motivations to lead as proximal variables, and leadership behaviors and effectiveness as outcomes. In this sense, Badura et al.'s (2020) model acknowledges that individual differences and disposition play an influential role in the leadership process while also accounting for the "purposeful role striving" or motivation to lead others that impact subsequent leader behaviors.

Through a meta-analytic investigation, Badura et al. (2020) identified demographic (i.e., gender, past leadership experiences) and personality characteristics (i.e., conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, individualism, and emotional stability) as distal and semi-distal antecedents of MTL, which in turn, impacted outcomes such as leader emergence and effectiveness (Badura et al., 2020). Whereas this formative research considered the mechanisms by which MTL impacts leader behaviors, attitudinal variables were not examined as predictors of MTL. Thus, the present research investigates how perceptions of fit with one's job and organization are related to each dimension of MTL.

Perceptions of Employee Fit

Person-environment (P-E) fit theory draws from interactional psychology, which focuses on the compatibility between an individual and the environment (van Vianen, 2018). Broadly speaking, individuals tend to experience more favorable outcomes when they believe their interests and values are congruent with their environment (Yu, 2011). Within the context of organizational psychology, fit is often a construct of interest in recruitment and selection (Kristof et al., 2005), as employers aim to attract and hire individuals with characteristics that will contribute to organizational effectiveness, just as applicants and new employees gauge their perceived level of fit during early interactions with the organization.

A domain of P-E fit that is narrower than the broader match between an individual and their work environment is person-job (PJ) fit, which focuses on the relationship between a person and their specific job or tasks at work. Meta-analytic work has linked PJ fit to applicant attitudes in the pre-hire phase of employment, such as increased organizational attraction, as well as post-hire employee attitudes, including increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, coworker satisfaction, and decreased turnover intentions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Whereas PJ fit is concerned with the compatibility between a person and a job, person-organization (PO) fit is defined as how a person perceives fit between their values and the organization's values for which they work (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). Like PJ fit, PO fit is associated with increased organizational attraction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and decreased turnover intentions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Taken together, these findings highlight that both PJ and PO fit have a wealth of positive work-related outcomes, including benefits for the organization (e.g., reduced turnover intentions) and for the individual (e.g., increased job satisfaction).

While previous research has indicated that an individual's perception of fit with their organization and job is related to important behavioral intentions and work attitudes, fit may also impact one's desire to engage in leadership behaviors. More specifically, perceptions of fit may enhance feelings of commitment and personal investment to one's work and organization which could impact one's desire to engage in leadership behaviors. Notably, as fit is inversely related to turnover intentions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), it seems unlikely that employees who experience poor fit are motivated to engage in leadership behaviors or pursue leadership opportunities within their job or organization. Thus, this project aims to expand on extant research and examine the link between PJ and PO fit and each MTL dimension. Given that past research has linked PJ and PO fit to desirable work attitudes and behaviors, it is expected that both constructs are positively associated with SN- and AFF-MTL, and inversely related to NC-

MTL. Further, on an exploratory basis, we seek to examine the unique contribution and relative importance of PJ and PO fit in explaining each dimension of MTL.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): PJ fit will be positively related to a) SN-MTL, b) AFF-MTL, and inversely related to c) NC-MTL.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): PO fit will be positively related to a) SN-MTL, b) AFF-MTL, and inversely related to c) NC-MTL.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What is the unique contribution of PJ and PO fit in explaining variance in a) SN-MTL, b) AFF-MTL, and c) NC-MTL?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the relative importance of PJ and PO fit in predicting a) SN-MTL, b) AFF-MTL, and c) NC-MTL?

Method

Participants

Participants in this research included 3,159 junior enlisted Soldiers in the U.S. Army. A majority of the sample were males (75.1% males; 24.9% females), with an average age of 24 years ($M = 23.69$, $SD = 4.43$). Participants were primarily White (White, Not Hispanic = 53.9%; Black, Not Hispanic = 20.1%; Hispanic = 17.2%; Asian or Pacific Islander = 7.5%; American Indian or Alaska Native = 1.2%).

Measures

The measures that participants were asked to complete were developed and validated by Knapp and Kirkendall (2020) to fit an Army context. Namely, “military occupational specialty” was used when referencing one’s job, and “the Army” was specified in relation to organizational fit. PJ, PO, and MTL measures were assessed on 5-point Likert-type scales, where participants were asked to indicate their agreement with items from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were reverse-scored when necessary prior to computing composite variables.

PJ fit. Participants answered a six-item assessment of PJ fit and rated their agreement with the items. The scores were averaged across items to create a composite PJ fit score in which higher averages represent higher perceptions of fit with one’s job ($\alpha = 0.92$). Example items include: “Given my interests, I would be better off in another military occupational specialty” (reverse-scored) and “I like the work I do in my military occupational specialty.”

PO fit. To assess PO fit, participants were asked to rate their agreement to four items. Example items included “The Army fulfills my needs” and “The Army is a good match for me.” The scores were averaged to create an average PO fit score where higher scores represent more favorable perceptions of PO fit ($\alpha = 0.81$).

MTL. The MTL measure consisted of a nine-item assessment that was adapted from Chan and Drasgow (2001). Of the nine items, there were three items for each dimension of MTL. Example items included “I was taught to believe in the value of leading others” (i.e., SN-MTL; $\alpha = 0.76$), “Most of the time, I prefer being a leader rather than a follower when working in a

group” (i.e., AFF-MTL; $\alpha = 0.80$), and “I will never agree to lead if I cannot see any benefit from accepting that role” (i.e., NC-MTL; $\alpha = 0.84$). Scores on each item were averaged to create three separate composite variables for each MTL dimension. Higher scores on SN-MTL reflect greater motivations influenced by social obligations, higher AFF-MTL scores reflect higher motivations related to inherent desires to lead, while lower scores on MTL-NC reflect motives that are not inspired by the benefits of leading.

Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among scales are reported in Table 1. To test *H1* and *H2*, the correlations between PJ fit, PO fit, and each MTL dimension were examined. *H1* and *H2* were supported, as PJ and PO fit were both related to each MTL dimension. Specifically, PJ and PO fit were positively related to SN- and AFF-MTL, and inversely related to NC-MTL. To assess *RQ1*, which considered the unique contribution of PJ and PO fit in explaining SN-MTL, AFF-MTL, and NC-MTL, three multiple regression models were conducted (see Table 2). Specifically, each multiple regression model examined PJ and PO fit as predictors of each MTL dimension. All three models were statistically significant, and both PJ and PO fit explained variance in each MTL dimension. Namely, both PJ ($\beta = 0.07$) and PO fit ($\beta = 0.31$) positively predicted SN-MTL. Similarly, PJ ($\beta = 0.04$) and PO fit ($\beta = 0.19$) were positively related to AFF-MTL. Finally, PJ ($\beta = -0.04$) and PO fit ($\beta = -0.12$) were inversely related NC-MTL.

Table 1

Intercorrelations, Means, SDs, and Reliabilities for All Measures

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 PJ Fit	3.26	1.05	(0.92)				
2 PO Fit	3.33	0.89	0.32	(0.81)			
3 MTL: Social-normative	4.06	0.69	0.17	0.33	(0.76)		
4 MTL: Affective-identity	3.42	0.84	0.10	0.20	0.65	(0.80)	
5 MTL: Non-calculative	2.05	0.82	-0.08	-0.13	-0.37	-0.16	(0.84)

Note: MTL = motivation to lead. PJ Fit = Person-job fit. PO Fit = Person-organization fit. Reliability coefficients are presented in the diagonal. All correlations $p < .001$.

In addition to examining the unique contribution of PJ and PO fit in explaining variance in each MTL dimension, we were also interested in the relative importance of each predictor (*RQ2*). Scholars recommend conducting relative weights analysis (RWA) to supplement the results of multiple regression when attempting to explain the individual and relative importance of predictors on an outcome, as it accounts for the collinearity of predictors and corresponds with multiple R^2 (Johnson & Lebreton, 2004; Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). Stated differently, whereas the effect sizes derived from the results of the multiple regression describe the contribution of each predictor on the outcome variable while holding the effect of other predictors constant, relative weights provide predictor-specific effect sizes while accounting for correlations between predictors (Howardson, 2021; Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). The importance of each predictor is relative to the overall R^2 of each model. Thus, the following results should be interpreted relative to the amount of variance accounted for in each model described in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of the Multiple Regression and Relative Weights Analyses

Predictors	MTL: Social-Normative				MTL: Affective-Identity				MTL: Non-calculative			
	β	RW	95% CI	RI %	β	RW	95% CI	RI %	β	RW	95% CI	RI %
PJ Fit	0.07	0.02	[0.01, 0.03]	13.98	0.04	0.01	[0.00, 0.01]	14.36	-0.04	0.00	[0.00, 0.01]	20.62
PO Fit	0.31	0.10	[0.08, 0.12]	86.02	0.19	0.04	[0.02, 0.05]	85.64	-0.12	0.02	[0.01, 0.03]	79.38
Model R^2	0.11				0.04				0.02			

Note: MTL = motivation to lead, PJ = person-job, PO = person-organization, β = regression coefficient, RW = relative weight, CI = confidence interval, RI = relative importance as a percentage of total R^2 .

In all three RWA models that examined each dimension of MTL as an outcome variable, PO fit was more important than PJ fit. Specifically, in examining SN-MTL as an outcome, the RWA indicated that PO fit was more important than PJ fit, as 86.02% of the effect of these predictors is attributed to PO fit, whereas only 13.98% is attributed to PJ fit. Similarly, in examining AFF-MTL as an outcome, PO fit is more important than PJ fit, as 85.64% of the effect of these predictors is attributed to PO fit, whereas only 14.36% is attributed to PJ fit. Finally, in examining non-calculative MTL as an outcome, consistent findings emerged as 79.38% of the effect of the predictors can be ascribed to PO fit, and 20.62% is ascribed to PJ fit.

Discussion

This research aimed to examine the relationship between PJ and PO fit and MTL. Expanding on research conducted by Badura et al. (2020), it was expected that compatibility with one's job and organization would be related to an individual's desire to lead others, stemming from social obligation, enjoyment, and without expectations of personal gain. As hypothesized, results demonstrated that PJ and PO fit were positively related to SN- and AFF-MTL, and inversely related to NC-MTL. Further, results highlighted that PO fit was more important in predicting each dimension of MTL, relative to PJ fit. Better understanding MTL is crucial, as it may shed light on which employees have the potential to be successful in leadership positions. These findings offer a valuable contribution to the literature by providing empirical evidence that perceptions of fit inspire employees to lead others.

Traditionally, fit has been examined within the context of recruitment and selection as organizations strive to identify individuals with characteristics (e.g., personality, knowledge, skills) that enable them to succeed in their jobs. Results from this research highlight that perceptions of fit have important implications beyond the recruitment and selection context, demonstrating that fit influences employees' motives to lead others. Whereas it was beyond the scope of this paper to hypothesize why fit may share different relationships with each type of MTL, findings indicated that PJ and PO fit were more strongly related to motivations to lead driven by social norms and obligations (i.e., SN-MTL) compared to AFF- or NC-MTL. Notably, this finding is consistent with literature that has examined the impact of socialization tactics on employee attitudes and behaviors. Namely, studies have demonstrated that socialization tactics (e.g., receiving support from coworkers) are positively related to PJ fit (Riordan et al., 2001) and PO fit (Kim et al., 2005), thereby highlighting that social elements of the work environment may impact fit perceptions. This could explain why fit was more strongly related to socially-oriented motives to lead and could indicate that the extent to which fit is related to SN-MTL depends on the presence or quality of certain social factors in the organization.

Further, results from the RWA provided evidence that PO fit was more important than PJ fit in predicting the MTL dimensions. Specifically, in all models, PO fit was responsible for between 79-86% of the overall variance accounted for in each model. Although this is interesting from a theoretical perspective, it is important to reiterate that together, PJ and PO fit explained a small amount of variance in MTL (i.e., between 2-11%). This does not discount the value of these findings but highlights that there are likely other factors that influence MTL to be considered in future work.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research is among the first to provide evidence that fit impacts MTL, we note a few limitations. The main limitation of this research is that leadership outcomes were not assessed. Based on Badura et al.'s (2020) framework, MTL serves as a mediating mechanism between individual-level characteristics and outcomes such as leader effectiveness and leader emergence. In this research, we focused on antecedents of MTL but did not assess outcome variables. Future research should build on this work and examine whether PJ and PO fit are distal predictors of leader behavior by way of motivations to lead. Relatedly, it may be of interest to examine how one's MTL in the early stages of one's career influences future pursuit of leadership positions. Moreover, a longitudinal examination of MTL may be useful to identify critical time points or events (e.g., changes in roles, responsibilities, leadership, economy) that impact interest and success in leadership positions.

In addition, the generalizability of these findings could be challenged as the research was conducted using a military sample and included items adapted to reflect this context. Although research measures were adapted, minimal changes were made to the original items, and the underlying constructs are unlikely to be impacted. In addition, the sample was comprised of participants who work in various types of jobs (e.g., information technology specialists, human resource specialists), many of which are similar to non-military jobs. Moreover, it is often the case that studies target military populations to better understand leadership processes and behaviors (Wong et al., 2003), further highlighting the appropriateness of examining these constructs in this sample. Nevertheless, future research should include employees from organizations in non-military settings to strengthen the applicability of these findings.

Conclusion

In summary, PJ and PO fit are related to motivations to lead, particularly motives driven by social obligation or duty. Understanding which employees are interested in leading others is critical, as several studies have linked MTL to leader performance (e.g., Badura et al., 2020; Van Iddekinge et al., 2009). In practice, organizations could consider incorporating fit assessments into annual employee engagement surveys to examine whether employees feel that they are compatible with their job roles and the organization's values (van Vianen, 2018). Monitoring employee fit would not only help organizations identify candidates who may be interested in leadership positions, but it could also signal who has the potential to be successful as a leader.

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