Career success
The effects of human capital, person-environment fit and organizational support
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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review relevant literatures on career success and develop a theoretical framework and testable propositions concerning how human capital, person-environment fit and organizational support relate to career success. Whilst acknowledging the substantial literature that has accumulated regarding the various antecedents and operationalizations involved in employees’ career success, there is little research as how person-environment fit and career success are related.

Design/methodology/approach – Literature outlining approaches to career success is summarized and research at the intersection of person-environment fit and organizational support/career success are reviewed. This is followed by a set of propositions based upon the antecedents of career success.

Findings – It is suggested that person-environment fit and organizational support are important antecedents of career success. Knowledge of career changes and these antecedents help individuals and organizations manage career success.

Research limitations/implications – Future research should examine empirically the linkages suggested by the paper along with other relationships asserted or implied by person-environment fit and career success literature as mentioned in the paper.

Practical implications – Both employers and employees may benefit from integrating different types of fit into the psychological contract because each fit will impact aspects of career success. Therefore, organizations need to select and develop employees that can easily adjust and fit into careers that are compatible with their work environments.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the literature by being one of the first to examine the effects of different types of person-environment fit on career success.

Keywords Career development, Personnel psychology, Work identity, Employee development, Human capital

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction
Career success and person-environment fit have received significant attention in studies of the workplace. This is due to the general recognition that these concepts have important implications for individual behaviors and work outcomes and both affect the implementation process of the psychological employment contract. The psychological contract is generally defined in terms of a set of “individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations” (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). One specific aspect of this contract between

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employers and employees has to do with the degree of person-environment fit (Rousseau and Parks, 1992). Person-environment (PE) fit is defined as the compatibility that occurs when individual and work environment characteristics are well matched (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research on person-organization fit indicates that organizational values are a good predictor of job choices and that individuals preferred jobs or careers in organizations which displayed values similar to their own (Schneider, 1987; Tinsley, 2000). In particular, researchers have suggested that different types of fit that fall under the notion of PE fit play significant roles in job or career choice decisions and that each form of fit is considerably influential in areas such as job satisfaction, performance, commitment and career-related outcomes (Ostroff et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Bretz and Judge, 1994). As individuals today are expected to work for more organizations and on a broader range of projects (Tempest et al. 2004), socialized career paths and policies that support career performance and job choice behavior are expected to become increasingly important to their advancement.

Given the importance of career success for individuals’ perceptions of satisfaction with their work roles and the changing nature of careers and the psychological contract (Baruch, 2004; Sullivan, 1999; Hall and Moss, 1998), the study of career success needs to take into consideration the role of PE fit in helping individuals identify their career options and career decisions to fully understand the dynamics of the career advancement process. PE fit helps determine how well career actors fit within a particular work groups or a sub-culture because the “fit” includes feeling comfortable with the organization (O’Reilly, 1989). We believe that PE fit framework to understanding careers is a worthwhile pursuit to explore the ways in which the practice of career progression may be shaped by personal and organizational characteristics or values that career actors appreciate and share to achieve career success. Indeed, PE fit provides a significant level of interaction of individual and situational variables for explaining individual employability and career success. Since PE fit serves many purposes including increasing employee satisfaction and commitment, it has a direct effect on individual career satisfaction and advancement.

In trying to improve selection processes, organizations look to attracting individuals that exhibit values similar to their own. Individuals, in turn, are attracted to and seek career opportunities with organizations that believe they fit in and realize their career ambitions. Thus, the goal of this paper was to explore issues relating to the influence of PE fit and organizational support on career success. We first provide a review of research on approaches to career success. We then review three forms of PE fit and relate them to career success. Finally, we address the effects of organizational support on individual career success. Our research contributes to the career success literature by providing an additional step toward increasing the relevance of PE fit framework to models of career choice and behavior.

**Approaches to career success**

A number of competing approaches have been identified to explain career success predictors. The three well-known approaches are the individual, the structural, and the behavioral perspectives (Rosenbaum, 1989; Aryee et al., 1994).

The first approach draws heavily on individual variables found in the popular literature of human capital and motivational theories. This approach focuses on the
individual as the one who develops his/her own human capital and therefore maximizes his/her education and skill investments for achieving success in careers.

The second approach relies on the management theory of the firm and vacancy models and postulates that organizational factors such as organizational size and internal promotional practices are prerequisites for successful individual careers in organizations.

The third approach assumes that career achievement is a function of certain career strategies including political influence behavior.

**The individual approach**
The human capital theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding the individual approach to career success. Human capital theory (Becker, 1975) suggests that individuals who invest the most in human capital attributes such as education, training, and experience are expected to show higher level of work performance and subsequently obtain higher organizational rewards. According to this theory, an individual’s career progression and success is contingent upon the quantity and quality of human assets one brings to the labor market (Becker, 1964) and that the skills and experiences that individuals bring to their work are related to their compensation (Agarwal, 1981). To the extent that human capital factors influence the performance of employees, greater personal attributes would enable them to better perform their job, and their pay should increase accordingly to compensate them for the additional amount of human capital required by their job. Recent empirical evidence supports the positive linkage between human capital variables and career success (Ng et al., 2005; Tharenou, 2001).

**The structural approach**
The structural approach to career success contends that certain structural characteristics help and others hinder individuals in their career advancement. Under this approach, certain organizational factors such as organizational size and internal promotional practices influence career aspirants’ success. The management theory of the firm supports the structural approach. That is, the central thesis of managerialism is that compensation (objective measure of career success) is primarily a function of organizational size (Tosi et al., 2000). Managerialists assert that the relationship between career success and organizational size is expected since large organizations have more hierarchical systems and engage more in complex and diversified activities. This suggests that large organizations are more likely to facilitate career mobility and success so that individuals’ pay increases as they move up the corporate hierarchy. As Gattiker and Larwood (1988) note, the frequency of promotion is a valuable measure of career mobility and success, since it is important for individuals’ upward climb on a corporate ladder. Oliver (1997) asserts that large organizations still reward their “fast-trackers” with upward career paths and Hall and Moss (1998) consider that such promised career paths are internal parts of the structure of large organizations. Recent empirical evidence supports the structural approach to career paths (McDonald et al., 2005).

**The behavioral approach**
The behavioral approach assumes that individuals have certain control over their career choice and advancement and can therefore assess their career prospects and enact appropriate career plans and tactics that contribute to career success (Gould and
Penley, 1984; Greenhaus et al. 2000). The underlying assumption of this approach is that career aspirants should take a proactive role in managing their own careers and pursue career strategies that are congruent within the context of organizational strategies (Gunz and Jalland, 1996; Gunz et al., 1998), rather than relying passively on organizational career systems. Gould and Penley (1984) suggest that employees use both interpersonal and intrapersonal career strategies since such behavioral strategies (self-nomination and networking) can help them receive favorable performance evaluations. They found a link between the use of such strategies and managers’ salary progression. Nabi (2003) found self-nomination and networking mediated the relationship between career prospects and intrinsic career success.

Contemporary approaches to career success
Recent models of career success have included a number of personality variables (Seibert et al., 2001; Grant, 2000; Seibert et al., 1999). Seibert et al. (1999, p. 16) suggest that “career success is a cumulative outcome, the product of behaviors aggregated over a relatively long period of time.” Building on Crant’s (1995) proactive personality framework and on the interactional psychology perspective (Weiss and Adler, 1984; Terborg, 1981), they argue that proactive individuals receive greater career outcomes and are more effective in shaping their own work environments than less proactive individuals. They found support for the hypothesized positive relationship between proactive personality and career success.

Although previous approaches to career success were driven by the strong belief that career success was rationally and predictably determined by a set of human, structural, and behavioral variables, recent approaches to careers have been driven by the new realities of organizational restructuring and the alterations in the psychological employment contract (Arthur et al., 1995; Sullivan, 1999). As a result, it is useful to examine contemporary perspectives of careers since the nature of employment relationship has fundamentally changed in the past years in ways that make the employer-employee contractual relationship temporary rather than fixed and individual career progression lateral rather than linear.

In the recently published studies on the state of today’s career realities, three particularly important conceptualizations of career success emerged: the boundaryless career, the intelligent career and the post-corporate career.

The concept of “boundaryless” career initiated by DeFillipi and Arthur (1994) and Arthur (1994) is based on a transactional contract, which is short-termism and involves a new form of employability in which the individual, rather than the organization, takes an active rather than passive role in managing his or her career. Individuals are expected to work for more firms and on a broader range of projects. In this respect, the theory of boundaryless career takes a behavioralistic/competency-based approach in which multiskilling is essential. Portable skills, the motivation to tolerate change and ambiguity, foci for new learning, personal identification with portfolio careers and the development of multiple networks of relationships are all integral aspects of the boundaryless career.

An additional concept termed “protean career” was followed, with the focus on the individual as the one in control (Hall, 1996). This new form of career is mostly described as an individual-focused approach, in which individuals are responsible for their careers and that their unique human resource qualities (including human capital and capabilities) drive their success in multi-employer settings. Under this perspective,
the contract is a contract with one’s self and one’s work, rather with the organization, and is based on continuous learning and the development of self-knowledge and adaptability. Individuals in protean careers will have several careers (Hall and Mirvis, 1995) and thus have to adapt to new realities of employment changes across multiple firms and boundaries. In short, protean careers are fluid, flexible, internally-determined and involve continuous learning and growth in the pursuit of career goals (Hall and Mirvis, 1995; Sullivan, 1999; MacDermid et al., 2001).

The concept of the intelligent career introduced also by DeFillipi and Arthur (1994) presented a different behavioral view in which self-knowledge or self-awareness is fundamental. It involves the development of three “ways of knowing”: knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom. Knowing-why has to do with an individual’s work motivation (in a particular occupation or industry), the construction of personal values and interests, and the identification with the employing firm’s culture. Knowing-how has to do with an individual’s career-relevant skills, abilities and competencies available to support current role behaviors. Knowing-whom refers to an individual’s set of interpersonal relationships within and outside current work behavior available to support career opportunities and employability. As Baruch (2004, p.88) indicated “why, how, and whom are primarily individual assets of motivation, skills and relationships.” In brief, the intelligent career places a great deal of emphasis on individual competencies and role behaviors, and on the connections between these competencies (application of the different forms of knowing) and organizational employment processes and practices.

The concept of post-corporate career offered by Peiperl and Baruch (1997) presents somehow a different behavioral view in which vision or self-identity is fundamental. The concept suggests that career paths are horizontally and not vertically evolving over time as individual and organizational career realities are changing in the “post-corporate world”. According to Peiperl and Baruch (1997), current and future careers focus on “horizontal links that transcend geographical and organizational boundaries” and as such links continue to grow, individuals who have scarce skills and competencies will have more opportunities in establishing their professional or entrepreneurial career. As careers become increasingly “intelligents” (Arthur et al., 1995; Parker, 2002), the traditional vertical career paths have been replaced by post-organizational careers in which individuals’ careers are rapidly advancing through professional or industry-based identity than by upward organizational-based identity. The underlying assumption of this approach is that career aspirants should take a professional or entrepreneurship role in managing their own careers and pursue career strategies that fall in line with their personal competencies and occupational excellence. Studies by Morris and Empson (1998), Alvesson (2001), and others, have analyzed managerial and organizational practices regarding career prospects from the perspective of “cultural matching” and knowledge management base. For example, Alvesson (2000, 2001) suggested that, through the active participation of individuals in knowledge-intensive firms, the identity of career actor is reconstructed and his/her loyalty is reinforced by top management to fit into the norms and values prescribed by the corporate culture of the organization (person-culture fit). The reconstruction of corporate identity constitutes the individual as a product of the social techniques of power relations. The prospects of career success involves a commitment to hard work and of being “professional” according to local standards. Individuals are encouraged to define themselves as the kind of people who are influential in creating and maintaining
a particular career identity that can fit to a community of people. Consequently, social identity and “cultural matching” at work in terms of person-job fit and person-organization fit become crucial to employee commitment and career advancement in knowledge-intensive firms (Alvesson, 2001).

In the career literature, career success has been partitioned into extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Judge et al., 1995; Melamed, 1996). Extrinsic success represents the objective component of career success, and refers to observable career accomplishments or outcomes, such as pay, promotions, ascendency, and occupational status (Jaskolla et al., 1985). Intrinsic success represents the subjective component of career success, and refers to individuals’ feelings and reactions to their own careers, and is usually assessed in terms of psychological success such as career satisfaction, career commitment, and job satisfaction (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Judge et al., 1995). We contend that the subjective career success reflects the natural flow of the individual’s perceptions of satisfaction and success in work activities or career roles. The emphasis is on the person rather than the organization. Specifics of the self (achievement of personal goals and needs) dictate the ways in which individual promised paths are established. As Hall (1996) noted, subjective career success becomes more relevant since an individual has a potentially greater responsibility to take in career development. From the subjective side, individuals view their career success as a function of their own internal standards and perceptions of satisfaction and success in social networks of relationships.

Career success may be conceptualized in terms of the desired work and psychological outcomes that individuals hold about their careers over the span of their lifetime. Including both objective and subjective components of career success is important since career success is often operationalized in terms of both extrinsic (tangible) and intrinsic (affective and less tangible) measures (Greenhaus et al. 1990; Turban and Dougherty, 1994; Allen et al., 2004; Ng et al., 2005). In this study, the focus is on both objective and subjective career success. Although we acknowledge that these represent different outcomes of one’s career experience, the phrase “career success” is used here to include both indicators of the construct.

While previous career literature has been useful in identifying several categories of influences on career success, little research on the effect of person-environment fit on career success has been conducted. First, we introduce the effect of human capital on career success. Then the three forms of PE fit (person-job fit, person-organization fit, and person-culture fit) proposed to be related to employees’ perceptions of success in careers are discussed.

**Human capital and career success**

First, early career research typically linked demographic and personal factors to career success. For example, demographic factors such as age and marital status and personal factors such as education and experience were found to be strong determinants of career success (Dalton, 1951; Pfeffer, 1977; Hall and Hall, 1979; Gould and Penley, 1984). More recently, empirical evidence supports the idea that personal and socio-demographic characteristics are strong predictors of career success (Ng et al., 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998). Research evidence indicates that human capital variables have a significant impact on career success because they explain a large proportion of the variation in salary (Chenevert and Tremblay, 2002; Cannings, 1988; Jaskolla et al.,
1985) as well as in the number of promotions (Stewart and Gudykunst, 1982). Researchers have found personal investments in education and experience to be the strongest and most consistent predictors of career progression (Tharenou et al., 1994; Dreher and Ash, 1990). Kirchmeyer (1998) found work experience and tenure to be strongly related to objective and subjective career success. As careers become more uncertain, these personal and portable characteristics become more critical, perhaps more than ever, for career actors that are facing different models of career success. Thus, based on past research, we propose:

**P1.** Human capital factors, including education level, work investment, work experience, and the number of hours worked are each positively related to career success.

**Person-environment fit and career success**

The degree of similarity or fit between a person and the work environment has recently attracted much attention from both scholars and practitioners. The person-environment (PE) concept has been described as, “so pervasive as to be one of, if not the, dominant conceptual forces in the field” (Schneider, 2001, p. 142). The concept is also viewed as “a comprehensive notion that necessarily includes one’s compatibility with multiple systems in the work environment” (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002, p. 985).

The underlying assumption of the PE fit perspective is that the degree of fit or match between people and their environment produce important outcomes or benefits for employees (Van Vianen et al., 2007; Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001). Theories of PE fit draw on organizational psychology in that they consider how personal and situational characteristics combine to influence individuals’ performances and other behaviors in a given environment. The PE fit theory has been used extensively to explain individual differences and organizational psychology traditions (Schneider, 2001). For example, theories that have supported PE fit perspective include personality (Endler and Magnusson, 1976; Erdogan and Bauer, 2005), vocational choice or psychology (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997), and personnel attraction-selection-attrition framework (Schneider et al., 1995; Billsberry, 2007).

In light of the PE fit studies, multiple perspectives and constructs of fit have emerged to include person-job (PJ) fit, person-vocation (PV) fit, person-person (PP) fit, person-group (PG) fit, person-organization (PO) fit and person-culture (PC) fit (O’Reilly et al., 1991; Adkins et al., 1994; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Werbel and Gilliland, 1999; Parkes et al., 2001; Carless, 2005; Morley, 2007). Most PE fit studies have compared individual attributes (needs and values) and situational/organizational characteristics (job demands and occupational type) for predicting and explaining the beneficial outcomes associated with increased fit.

Given the different perspectives on fit and the relationship of PE fit constructs to people’s career-related behaviors (career involvement and career success) and to organizational processes (organizational attraction and selection), our interest lies predominately with specific notions of fit, namely PJ fit, PO fit, and PC fit. We specifically focus on these three types of fit since they impact job or career-focused outcomes and are useful to enquire into PE fit and career success linkage.

Previous research includes the use of PJ, PO, and PC fit perceptions to provide a match or a congruence explanation of individual differences in job choice decisions and proactive career behaviors (Cable and Judge, 1994; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Erdogan and
Bauer, 2005). Werbel and Gilliland (1999) suggested to including different forms of fit in personnel selection. Other researchers have shown how these fit influence employees’ work attitudes and enhance career benefits of proactive individuals (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Erdogan and Bauer, 2005). As these types of fit affect both employees’ behaviors and their work environment, they are acknowledged to have their progressive application in various allied areas of social and behavioral sciences (Morley, 2007).

Person-job fit and career success

Person-job fit is defined as the fit between the abilities of a person and the demands of the job or the needs/desires of a person and the attributes of the job (Edwards, 1991). Kristof (1996) considered PJ fit as one of the well-studied forms of PE fit that it concerns the compatibility between individuals and the specific jobs or tasks they are required to perform in a given contractual relationship. She added that the assessment that individuals make concerning the match between their abilities and those of job requirements are likely to determine the fit. Conceptually, the relative importance of PJ fit is outlined in terms of the distinction between demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit (Edwards, 1991). The first form of fit exists when individuals’ knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA), and other attributes are compatible with what the job requires. The second form of PJ fit occurs when individuals’ needs and desires are commensurate with what the job supplies (job attributes) in order to be performed (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research addressing employee selection or career choice practices has traditionally focused on achieving PJ fit where job applicants or career actors assess the degree of match between their KSA and the job or career requirements using certain selection and hiring techniques such as job analysis, personality assessment, and the use of realistic job previews (Werbel and Gilliland, 1999; Bowen et al., 1991; Wanous, 1992). Researchers demonstrated that high PJ fit has a number of positive outcomes. PE fit has been positively related to job-and-career-focused outcomes (job satisfaction, career satisfaction, occupational commitment), career involvement, organizational commitment, and career success, and negatively related to employee turnover (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Bretz and Judge, 1994; Chatman, 1991; Harris and Mossholder, 1996; Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001; O’Reilly et al., 1991).

Applied specifically to individual career development, PJ fit (needs-supplies fit) may be achieved when career actors’ talents and contributions (KSA, job involvement, career commitment) meet environmental demands (career path, psychological success, continuous learning). PJ fit researchers found that employees choose jobs or careers that utilize their KSA (Carlless, 2005) and that PJ fit was strongly related to their career satisfaction and occupational commitment (Cable and DeRue, 2002).

From an individual perspective, the abilities and competencies that career actors bring to meet job-and-career-related requirements are likely to increase their choice or adjustment to jobs or careers that are congruent with their KSA and/or career-relevant personality types. Studies have shown that employees’ intellectual capital and scarce skills have become highly marketable in high technology and financial services and television industries (Flood et al., 2001; Tempest et al., 2004), and that proactive employees shape their environments and engage in career behaviors that have positive effect on their career progression and satisfaction (Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). A stronger sense of PJ fit is likely to occur when career actors’ KSA and competencies are consistent with the requirements of their perceived career contracts (job demands).
As discussed earlier, the PJ fit between employee and employer is based on the idea of the psychological contract. One of the key issues of a psychological contract is the extent to which both parties share the same benefits regarding their obligations to each other (Rousseau, 1995) and define how well such obligations are met within the specific types of contractual arrangements. Two basic types of contracts have been identified – transactional and relational (MacNeil, 1985; Robinson et al., 1994) – and each type contains elements of different types of careers espoused by specific types of employees. A transactional contract typically involves a short-term monetary exchange of specific contributions and benefits or inducements, with the employer contracting for specific job opportunities with very specific skills and/or positions and then compensating the contracting employee for targeted performance (Hui et al., 2004; Ackah and Heaton, 2004). Employers with psychological contracts are likely to select and hire employees based on job-related skills and career-related knowledge needed for competent performance in work roles. As for employees, they expect transactional contracts to provide immediate direct rewards (pay) and other motivational aspects (training, transferable skills, career experiences) that enhance their career employability. Therefore, PJ fit is most directly relevant in selecting and/or promoting employees for specific skills or duties that are to be satisfactorily performed under the transactional contract. For example, employees acquiring highly portable and marketable skills may take advantage of an opportunity for inter-organizational mobility by leveraging such skills to renegotiate their contract with their current employer (Arthur et al., 2005). They may also seek career opportunities in a variety of organizations and negotiate work arrangements across their life course and enjoy occupational advancement and mobility across different jobs, industries, and organizations. As such, employees may see themselves as fitting particular types of careers such as “boundaryless” or “entrepreneurial” careers that are increasingly prevalent in today’s career world. Empirical evidence shows that employees who invest in “boundaryless” career competencies report higher levels of career success (Eby et al., 2003).

Tharenou (1997, p. 84) found that individual traits and managerial skills to be important in career advancement and that “individual qualities and work environment factors combine to facilitate individuals entering and advancing in management in hierarchical organizations”. Individuals who advanced in their career were ambitious, motivated, intelligent, and “suited to the task demands of managerial jobs” (Tharenou, 1997, p. 83). Similarly, Anackwe et al. (2000) found that the acquisition and utilization of knowledge-related skills to be positively related to career management strategies such as personal learning, goal setting, career strategies, and career decision making. Zabusky and Barley (1996) noted, however, that employee careers are seen as “careers of achievements” in terms of skills and behaviors, rather than seen in terms of an individual’s hierarchical advancement. Individual careers are termed “intelligent careers”, with the focus on the individual as the one in control (Arthur et al., 1995). One fundamental characteristic of an “intelligent career” is “know how” manifested in personal qualities such as career competencies, skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Contrary to Schneider’s attraction-selection-attrition framework of PO fit of organizational choices, Billsberry (2007) found that graduates are attracted to choose particular types of jobs rather than organizational ones.

Together, these studies suggest that career success decisions are influenced by the “fit” between individual skills and competencies and the job or career requirements.
This leads to the proposition that employees’ perceptions of PJ fit will have positive impact on their career success in transactional psychological contracts:

P2. PJ fit is likely to be positively related to career success in employee transactional psychological contracts.

**Person-organization fit and career success**

 Defined as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both” (Kristof, 1996, pp. 4-5), PO fit is associated with a person’s attitudes about the organization based on congruent goals and values (Chatman, 1989; Van Vianen et al., 2007). Manifestations of this congruence include organizational attraction and employee selection (Schneider, 2001; Carless, 2005; Hoffman and Woehr, 2006), employee commitment, satisfaction, and intent to quit (Verquer et al., 2003, Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and work behaviors and career decisions (Bretz and Judge, 1994; Young and Hurlic, 2007).

Although PJ fit and PO fit may be independent and each type is associated with different aspects of the environment and with different outcome variables, PO fit has many dimensions (Piasentin and Chapman, 2006), and acknowledged to be an important factor in explaining the extent of career progression (Bretz et al., 1993). In addition to labeling demand-abilities and needs-supplies fit within PO fit construct, PO fit also includes supplementary fit and complementary fit, both of which are important in PO fit studies. Supplementary fit occurs when individuals' characteristics are similar to organizational characteristics, and complementary fit occurs when individuals' characteristics “fill a void or adds something missing in the organization” (Piasentin and Chapman, 2006). Supplementary fit has to do with matching similar levels of characteristics between employees (personality traits, values, goals) and organizations (culture, values, norms), whereas complementary fit is concerned with bridging the gap between the patterns of these assessed characteristics. However, needs-supplies and abilities-demands fit have attracted more PO fit researchers as they apply to congruence and vocational choice theories (Nikolaou, 2003).

From a needs-supplies standpoint, the degree of perceived or actual fit of career actors to the values of the recruiting or employing organization is defined in terms of their internal career desires, goals, and values. Thus, the assessment that career actors make concerning the similarity between their personal characteristics and those of the organization are likely to determine their decision to negotiate career “deals” in terms of career stages and expectations including their preferences and perceptions of organizational reward policies and practices. Cable and Judge (1994) investigated the PO fit congruence of engineering and hotel administration students in the context of pay preferences and job search decisions. They discovered that the attractiveness of the pay policies of organizations was increased by higher levels of match between individual personality characteristics and those of the pay and compensation system. Similarly, Pappas and Flaherty (2006) examined whether the congruence of salespeople’s characteristics such as career development and risk attitudes matched their reactions to compensation practices (differences in rewards) when predicting motivation. They found that characteristics of the individual salespeople influenced the relationship between compensation and components of motivation (valence for reward, expectancy perceptions, and instrumentality perceptions). Schneider (2001)
noted that individuals are attracted to and seek careers with organizations that they believe they will fit in and organizations in turn may select employees who have similar characteristics to their own. In sum, these studies and a recent meta-analysis conducted by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) support the PO framework suggesting that individuals assess the fit based on the match between their characteristics and the situational characteristics of the environment in which they work.

Although the personal characteristics of career actors determine the PO fit from the effect of personality and value congruence, career researchers noted the need to develop career strategies and behaviors individuals and organizations use to promote career success. For example, mentoring as a networking developmental strategy was found to be positively related to career success (Allen et al., 2004; Van Emmerik, 2004). Individuals that possess similar characteristics with their mentors and/or supervisors are likely to invest in developmental relationships and get the social support needed to help them satisfy their career preferences and advance to higher levels. Mentorship and interpersonal support arise from similarity to the managerial hierarchy in an individual's organization. The similarity-attraction perspective (person-person fit or supplementary fit) argues that individuals are attracted to and prefer those similar to themselves (Byrne, 1971). Kanter (1977) believed that managers choose individuals socially similar to themselves to progress and advance. Empirical evidence supports the similarity-attraction theory regarding mentoring homogeneity and its effect on career success. Godshalk and Sosik (2003) found that mentor and protégé who have and possess similar levels of learning goal orientation reported the highest levels of psychological support and higher levels of career development. The similarity-attraction theory is mostly depicted in terms of a contractual relationship, where the psychological contract between employee and employer may gradually evolve to reflect the socio-emotional and economic benefits of the matching process. Granrose and Baccili (2006, p. 164) noted that “one of the key issues of the content of a psychological contract is the extent to which an employer or a manager is willing to help the employee develop his or her career as it extends over time.” In a relational psychological contract managers would provide inducements including opportunities for training and development, support and career rewards in exchange for the employee providing loyalty and commitment (Rousseau, 2004). A relational contract typically involves a long-term arrangements and a “mutually satisfying relationship between the parties, with open-ended arrangements that include both socio-emotional and economic terms” (O’Neill and Adya, 2007, p. 414). This contract promotes congruence between the person and the organization (PO fit) since it establishes an ongoing relationship between employer and employee (Ackah and Heaton, 2004). An individual would have career success based on the employer providing mentoring relationships and a longer-term career path and development that provide both economic and socio-emotional rewards. Employees with relational contracts are more concerned about stable careers and less concerned about particular jobs in the organization. For these employees, a high level of PO fit is likely to increase their commitment and motivation toward task performance and their engagement in good and lasting relationships (mentoring relationships, organizational citizenship behaviors) with their employers, which in turn will result in positive individual career and organizational outcomes. Although PO fit was demonstrated to lead to job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), it may also lead to career satisfaction and success. Individuals with high levels of PO fit invest in career developmental and networking relationships with other individuals (peers, mentors,
supervisors) in their work environment and engage in career decisions entailing more work satisfaction, upward moves, more promotions and higher incomes. Researchers noted the influence of PO fit on individual career decisions (Young and Hurlic, 2007; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004). Conceiving PO fit to be related to long-term career decisions and it would facilitate organizational career advancement in relational contracts allows us to advance the following proposition:

P3. PO fit is likely to be positively related to career success in employee relational psychological contracts.

Person-culture fit and career success

The degree of congruence or compatibility between the individual’s values and the organizations’ values is typically referred to as person-culture fit (Chatman, 1991; Meglino and Ravlin, 1998; Parkes et al., 2001). The person-culture (PC) fit perspective is based on the notion that individuals adapt and adjust better to their work environments when the organization’s values match their personal values (O’Reilly et al., 1991; Vanderberghe, 1999). O’Reilly et al. (1991) demonstrated that value congruence between a person’s values and his/her organization’s culture predicted outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover. Value congruence is defined as the match between the organization’s existing cultural characteristics (norms and values) and the individual’s values (Chatman, 1991; O’Reilly et al., 1991). A large body of research showed how organizational culture exerts considerable influence on employee performance and commitment and helps determine how well a person “fits” within a particular organization (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982; O’Reilly, 1989).

In particular, culture has been shown to impact on organizational performance and employee-related variables such as work satisfaction and individual career progression (Odom et al., 1990; Lok and Crawford, 1999; Claes and Ruiz-Quntanilla, 1998). One measure of the degree of PC fit is the effect of the dimension of individualism/collectivism (IC) on work behavior. Specifically, PC fit with regard to this dimensions should reflect differences in beliefs and values about how closely employees should be assimilated within their groups in order to advance specific values or career-related outcomes. Internal aspects of individual careers, such as career orientation or success, are likely to be affected by IC dimension since they are embedded in personal perceptions and values on career choices. In individualistic organizations employees value their independence and individuality from their groups, whereas employees in collectivistic organizations see themselves as interdependent members of their groups (Parkes et al., 2001; Hofstede, 1980). IC indicates the degree of interrelatedness among organizational members as well as the way by which members construct their concept of themselves and exchange relationships with their employers (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis et al., 1988; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Thomas and Au, 2002). IC has been reported to be one of the most heavily researched cultural dimension of work-related values (Cox, 1994).

Employees fitting individualistic cultures are encouraged to pursue their own career goals and expectations, with a preference for rewards based on individual achievement (Triandis, 1995; Newstrom and Davis, 2002). They tend to compete for organizational resources and demonstrate initiative to maintain a higher level of performance and satisfaction across the firm as a whole. Conversely, employees fitting collectivistic cultures are encouraged to pursue shared career goals and objectives (Noordin et al., 2002).
They tend to subordinate their personal goals to group goals, with a preference for rewards based on the accomplishments of the group or the organization (Erez, 2004, McMillan-Capehart, 2005). This implies that career success in individualistic cultures is grounded in personal interests and effectiveness based on the equity rule of reward allocation, while in collectivistic cultures it is shaped more by social and group norms and rules based on the equality rule of reward allocation.

Consequently, IC dimension portrays the differences in work attitudes and social behaviors among members of one culture. Wagner and Moch (1986) found that these two cultural characteristics were related to job type. Individualists tended to perform tasks or jobs that are more independent and collectivists performed jobs that required teamwork. They also found that collective rewards of work were less appealing for individualists than for collectivists.

Individualism has to do with autonomy, personal growth and challenge. Employees fitting individualistic cultures see themselves as being independent from members of groups and are inner-directed in pursuing their own career goals regarding the development of self-regulatory competences. On the other hand, employees fitting collectivistic cultures see themselves as group-oriented in promoting cooperative goals and in planning their subordinates' career progression. Thus, career success in individualistic cultures is based on individual initiative and achievement since the focus is on the task (Hofstede, 1980) and on personal career goals and strategies that are relevant to career opportunities (Ashford and Cummings, 1983). Individuals are more likely to take responsibility for managing their own success and for promoting their career achievement.

Further, individuals are expected to perform successfully organizational tasks, engage proactively in career management activities (Sigler and Pearson, 2000; Crant, 1995), and view their career as central to their self-concept. Judge et al. (1995) hypothesized work centrality as one motivational predictor of executive career success. They found that executives whose work was central part of their lives achieved greater career success than those who saw their work less central. A recent meta-analysis by Ng et al. (2005) has shown work centrality to be significantly related to both components of career success.

In most individualistic cultures, employees are rewarded based on their individual contribution to goal attainment (Erez, 2004), with the managers evaluating their performance based on their individual contributions. In collectivistic cultures, an individual's career is perhaps defined much more in group terms and is carefully planned by the firm (Okabe, 2002). An individual sees himself or herself as an aspect of an in-group and his or her success as dependent on the success of an in-group (Early, 1993). According to person-culture fit theory, individualistic employees in individualistic organizations, and collectivistic employees in collectivistic organizations should demonstrate high levels of career satisfaction and success.

Thus, we propose that employees fitting individualistic cultures would facilitate a more internally-oriented career (i.e. protean career) since they strongly rely on initiative and personal qualities (autonomy, self-awareness, self-learning) to get ahead. However, employees fitting collectivistic cultures would facilitate a more bounded career (i.e. traditional career) characterized by vertical success which is planned and managed by their organizations in return for their hard work, loyalty, commitment, and conformity to group harmony and norms.
P4. PC fit is likely to be positively related to career success, such that individualistic employees report high levels of career success in individualistic than in collectivistic organizations and that collectivistic employees report high levels of career success in collectivistic than individualistic ones.

**Organizational support and career success**

Past research has suggested that organizational-level factors need to be taken into account when investigating the antecedents and correlates of career success. In this study we analyze how perceived organizational support relate to individual career success. Recent research has found organizational sponsorship variables such as career sponsorship, supervisor support, training and skill development opportunities, and organizational resources were related to career success (Ng et al., 2005).

*Perceived organizational support and career success*

Eisenberger *et al.* (1986, p. 501) introduced the concept of perceived organizational support (POS) to explain the development of employee commitment to an organization. They suggested that “employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being”, and they added that such global beliefs or perceived organizational support would lead to increased rewards. That is, employees become attached to their organizations because they perceive a beneficial exchange relationship between their contributions and the rewards they receive for service. Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) used social exchange view (Blau, 1964) to explain the reciprocal effect of commitment between the employee and the organization, and they showed that POS is significantly associated with organizational commitment. Given the positive effect of POS on employee commitment and job satisfaction (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), it seems logical to suggest that perceived organizational support is related to career success as well. That is, POS may enhance the individual’s personal competence, a factor also related to career success. Perceptions of being valued and supported by an organization lead to desired employee attitudes and behaviors including organizational commitment and trust, and subsequently to valued rewards (Eisenberger *et al*., 1990; Wayne *et al*., 1997).

In their meta-analysis concerning the contribution of POS to performance-related expectancies, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found POS to be positively associated with opportunities for greater recognition and pay and promotion. Within the work domain, POS may emanate either from the supervisor (perceived supervisor support) or peers or other senior managers. Supportive supervisors affect individuals’ willingness to engage in development activities (Noe, 1996) and are critical for subordinate performance and success. In other words, subordinates’ careers may be enriched by supportive relationships with supervisors or peers. In some organizations, for example, social support provided by supervisors may take the form of career guidance and information, learning opportunities and challenging work assignments that promote career advancement (Greenhaus *et al*., 1990). For example, Dreher and Ash (1990) found mentorship to be related to both objective and subjective measures of career success. Kirchmeyer (1998) found supervisor support significantly predicted men’s and women’s managerial perceived career success and Greenhaus *et al.* (1990) found supervisor support to be significantly related to men’s career satisfaction. Whitely *et al.* (1991) examined mentoring and socioeconomic origins as antecedents of early career outcomes.
for salaried managers and professional graduates working in various organizations. They found career mentoring to be related to career success. Other researchers found that mentorship and supportive work relationships were related to career advancement as well as perceived career success (Turban and Dougherty, 1994). Wallace (2001) found that mentoring for female lawyers increased their career success and satisfaction. Allen et al. (2004) reviewed empirical studies concerning the career benefits associated with mentoring and concluded that career mentoring is more strongly related to subjective indicators of career success than it is to objective career success indicators. Nabi (2001) suggested social support to fall into three categories: personal, peer, and network. He found peer support (support and guidance provided by experienced peer) to be strongly related to men’s subjective career success, whereas personal support (support and enhancing information from friends or career-related issues) to be strongly related to women’s subjective career success. Recent research relates social capital to career mobility and outcomes (Lin and Huang, 2005). Seibert et al. (2001) found that social capital was positively related to promotions and career satisfaction and Burt (1997) reported that managers with more social capital, measured by network constraints, were promoted faster and received larger bonuses than those with less social capital (network composed of few contacts). Hence, we propose that perceived social support at work in the form of mentorship, networking and supportive work relationships would lead to greater career opportunities and enhanced career satisfaction.

P5. There will be a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and career success. Employees who perceive high levels of organizational support will report greater career success than employees who perceive low levels of support.

Limitations and future research suggestions
This study was limited by the set of factors that were proposed to be linked to career success. Although there are many predictors that have been examined in previous models of career success, the study was just a literature review and explored the impact of person-job fit, person-organization fit, and person-culture fit on career success. There has been little research effort to identify what are the different types of PE fit that are most related to components of career success and whether the effect is direct or indirect. Consequently, one area of future research concerns the influence of various levels of PE fit on career success. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found that employees’ work attitudes were differentially predicted by different forms of PE fit. While this study utilized three types of PE fit proposed to influence career decisions, these need to be empirically tested along and/or with other forms. Future research is needed to expand the various levels of PE fit (person-group, person-department, person-supervisor, person-team) for a more complete understanding of the proposed relationships between levels of PE fit and components of career success. For example, there may be individual differences that predict the extent to which employees (and perhaps organizations) place value on fit with the supervisor, fit with one’s workgroup, or fit with one’s team, and these differences might be important for explaining variation in career success.

In this study I have attempted to address the question: how does PE fit relate to components of career success? Because individuals may perceive and assess career benefits and outcomes success according to their perceived and/or actual fit with specific work environment within the context of employment relationships, it is useful
to investigate the effects of contract types on the relationship between various PE fit and career success. For example, Sekiguchi (2007) has recently introduced a contingency perspective of PE fit in employee selection noting the role of PJ fit in transactional contracts and that of PO fit in relational contracts and O'Neil and Adya (2007) suggested that organizations should manage knowledge workers with different psychological contracts across different stages of employment. Therefore, PE fit and the congruence between the psychological contracts of employee and employer and their joint effect on employee selection and success in careers remain to be examined in future career management models.

Conclusions
Organizations are facing incredible pressures in multiple areas (economy, technology, structure, society in general) to adjust to the new, evolving demands of their constituencies and to become more efficient and competitive within their environments. These new demands will likely necessitate changes in planning and managing the careers of their employees. The fit of person and environment is a dominant force in employee selection and in explaining individuals’ job satisfaction, performance, and career success. PE fit and career success should be related since both interact to affect employees’ career decisions and satisfaction and advancement in both the workgroup (subculture) and organization context. This article has discussed promoting career success through a PE fit and social support framework. Accordingly, three conclusions can be drawn from our analysis.

First, the examination of career success from a PE fit perspective should not be independent of organizational career paths or types (bounded vs boundaryless or portable careers). To some extent, employees’ perceptions of their fit to particular career types (traditional vs new organizational norms of career “deal”) and employment relationships mirror their expectations regarding the kind of “careers” their employers would offer. While the psychological contract between employer and employee has shifted to reflect a decreasing promise of a career for life (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995), many employees still expect employers to offer careers which reflect success in subjective terms, such as recognition, influence and personal orientations (Sturges, 2004). Further, psychological contract fulfillment has been shown to lead to various positive employee attitudes and behaviors, including increased organizational support, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000).

Second, considering career success in the context of PE fit suggests that the approaches to career progression are likely to occur across different dimensions of individual or group and organizational values. Indeed, career success is assessed in terms of vocational or career choice or based on value congruence between an employee and his/her manager or between an individual’s value congruence with the workgroup or subculture of the organization. When an employee has a good fit with a particular job or career his/her interest lies first in evaluating the work and tasks to be accomplished then comparing his/her career goals and expectations to these components of PJ. In light of this, specialized skills, personal competencies, and professional knowledge that career aspirants supply for handling specific projects or assigned workloads and tasks across specific or similar jobs or occupations are likely to allow them to experience fluid career paths (e.g. protean career). When an employee has a good fit with a particular organization he/she is likely to engage in development
seeking behaviors and create situations that support higher levels of job performance and achievements. An employee evaluates his/her fit based on the organization’s specific information about its values, policies, and culture (Carless, 2005). For example, PO fit can be seen from the perspective of career aspirants in terms of the organization’s compensations practices (Barber and Bretz, 2000) such as promotional opportunities and equitable rewards. Based on perceptions of fit, career aspirants develop exchange relationships with both the organizations and immediate supervisors and value relational or transactional contract fulfillment that offer them steady employment, promotion, individual learning and growth, and valued rewards. Under the relational psychological contract where the locus of responsibility is on the organization, PO fit that entails long-term relationships associated with long-term career decisions might lead career aspirants to favor a traditional form of career success that offer them lateral or vertical moves to different jobs or areas in the organization.

Moreover, the dimension of IC of person-culture fit is of great relevance to explaining how career actors align their personal career values with a corporate culture or subculture that exhibits their fit for particular career paths. For example, employees fitting individualistic cultures give priority to personal work values and career goals and achievements when compared to others. As such, the individual and the boundaryless perspectives of careers will unfold more and more among career aspirants whose personal competencies, social networks, and professional identities permit them to cross beyond the boundaries of one life employer or industry. However, employees fitting collectivistic cultures seek to promote in-group career goal and are motivated by social-oriented achievement goals and not individual-oriented goals (Niles, 1998; Triandis, 1995) when compared to others, and therefore the bounded career (e.g. structural) is presumed to be the matched career type. Career success in such cultures is largely determined by the organization’s career systems in which group-based reward distribution systems are preferred by individuals who are predisposed to work in cooperative work settings. Organizational commitment and trust combined with competence and hard work predict job performance, which is the direct antecedent to career opportunities and continued employment.

Third, PE fit perspective of career success calls for the rise of organizational support systems that include elements such as mentoring or sponsorship, specialized training and development programs in one area of the organization, clear career paths for success, and work-family support programs that allow a balance between work and family responsibilities. In today’s contemporary work environment, most employees are likely to need social support in managing their careers. Information and career guidance and support from others are needed not just on particular jobs, which may well disappear, but on the direction of the economy, labor market, profession or sector, and therefore the kinds of skills and key competencies which will be relevant in the future. As argued by Peiperl and Baruch (1997), careers in the twenty-first century require a new set of support structures and global links. Support structures incorporate different supporting elements such as social identities and social networks that enable individuals to engage in different career paths with different organizations including employment agencies, professional bodies, and communities-based organizations. Consequently, employees who receive more social support are likely to experience higher levels of perceived fit, which, in turn, enhance their opportunities for career advancement.
To conclude, career success has emerged as an important concern for both employees and employers. This is due in large part to the demonstrated links between career success and a number of individual and organizational variables. Past research has tended to focus on sets of variables pertaining to the theory of rational choice and behavior. Career success was assumed to be a function of human, motivational and organization-specific variables that assessed the success an individual wishes to attain in his or her career. The way we view career success, however, can be envisioned by investigating the influences of different types of PE fit on career success. It is widely acknowledged that individuals and organizations are nowadays experiencing different models of careers as compared to previous decades, and both have to share responsibility in managing and controlling the process and the challenging nature of career success. Because careers are changing, and there is widespread agreement among researchers and practitioners that career success is no longer solely determined by a set of well-defined variables, the effects of different types of PE fit may provide insight into how employees and employers can achieve a substantial fit in managing the process of career advancement. As this article suggests, the influence of various forms of PE fit on career success may prove to be useful avenue for future careers research and may provide additional insights for researchers, employees, employers and counselors.

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**Further reading**


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