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Consequences of compatibility level between employee and job characteristics: recommendations for HRM

Konsekwencje stopnia dopasowania pomiędzy cechami pracownika i pracy: rekomendacje dla Zarządzania Zasobami Ludzkimi

Summary of the doctoral dissertation

in the discipline of management and quality studies

Dissertation written under the supervision of

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With changes in the labor market going in two opposite directions: (1) more jobs with HIGH job autonomy & LOW level of routinization; (2) more jobs with LOW job autonomy & HIGH level of routinization, the question of who is better suited to these types of work is very important.
The empirically focused dissertation has tested whether employee working style can explain differences in relationship between jobs autonomy/routinization level and their well-being.
The main objective of the dissertation was to deepen HRM knowledge of the risk factors resulting from the mismatch between the POINT vs. INTERVAL working style [WIS] and low or high job AUTONOMY. The operational goal of the dissertation was to perform 3 research tasks and test 18 hypotheses. The focused on empirical work doctoral dissertation contains 4 chapters and the Annex.

Chapter 1, titled **'Literature review for the development of hypotheses',** is organized into sections of different length due to differences in the number of research that has been identified. In the third decade of the twenty-first century, when the number of publications on any topic is growing exponentially, a difficult decision was made to focus the literature review on the general theory of the Person-Job fit (PJ fit), with particular emphasis on the fit between the level of Job Autonomy and Working Style. The literature review consists of the following five sections.

The first section, titled **'Person-job [PJ] FIT'**, addresses the problem in the context of Person-Environment FIT Theory and 4 other types of fit: (1) to vocation, (2) to organization, (3) to group, (4) to supervisor. The Job DEMANDS-RESOURCE Model **(JDR),** used for PJ fit assessment incorporates a wide range of working environment factors and employee characteristics into the analyses of consequences of different levels of fit. The chapter ends with the clarification of components of PJ fit and the characteristic of the consequences of fit/misfit between supplies and demands (job side) vs. abilities and needs (employee side).

The second section, titled '**Job charateristics'**, describes the [**JCM**] Job Characteristics Model[1] with the 5 core features: (1) skill variety, (2) task identity, (3) task significance, (4) **autonomy,** (5) feedback.
Recent meta-analysis[2] did not show significant changes in the association between these five core job characteristics and satisfaction over time, although it has found some evidence of a change in job characteristics. On average, workers have perceived higher levels of skill variety and autonomy since 1975 and interdependence since 1985. The main focus of the section was put on impact of **Job Routinization**, which could lower Job Autonomy.

The third section, titled '**Employee characteristics',** presents the review of the literature on employee characteristics: (1) commonly used by researchers - the BIG FIVE personality traits;

[1] Oldham & Hackman 2010; Hackman & Oldham, 1975
[2] Wegman et al., 2018

(2) selected for empirical analyses of this dissertation: **working style [WIS]** as an explanatory variable and the need for achievement and reactivity as covariates. **The working style** is the preferred way to plan and execute job tasks. The INTERVAL working style is associated with **imprecise goals** settings and ways of achieving them, **starting an action without planning**, and **switching between different tasks**. The opposite is the POINT working style, which is characterized by high precision focus, precise planning, and a sequential, **methodical way** of execution of tasks (see the table below).

POINT WORKING STYLE	**INTERVAL WORKING STYLE**
When making choices **rejects a lot** and forms NARROW goal-categories.	When making choices **accepts a lot** and creates BROAD goal-categories.
Tries to achieve **one goal at a time**.	Tries to achieve **many goals at a time** (multitasking).
When comparing objects, "the same" means EXACTLY the same.	When comparing objects, "the same" means MORE or LESS the same.
Pays attention to **details** and considers them **important**.	Does not pay attention to **details** and considers them **unimportant**.
Carefully plans and **prepares**.	**Does not plan** or **prepare** carefully.
Reluctant to shift or substitute goals when current goal is blocked.	**Readily switches** or substitutes **goals** when a goal is blocked.
Rigidity: persists in attempts to complete an activity before switching to another.	**Flexibility**: readily gives up an activity before it is completed and switches to another.

Source: Wieczorkowska & Burnstein, 2004

The fourth section, titled '**Consequences of PJ misfit**', addresses the description and examples of research of the main consequences of person-job misfits: **lower job satisfaction, emotional balance** at work, higher **level of stress,** and **worse employee health assessment.** The chapter ends with a summary of organizational consequences such as **turnover** and **absenteeism** rates.

The last short and methodological section titled **'Four types of measurement of PJ fit'** describes 4 ways of operationalizing the PJ fit: (1) SUBJECTIVE - based on the subjective perception (**"This job suits me"**), (2) OBJECTIVE - measured directly and based on external criteria (e.g., education) and assessed by external observers such as recruiters, (3) PERCEIVED – calculation based on a comparison of attributes assessed separately by an employee (applied in Study B), (4) PREDICTED[3] where employees are asked to evaluate TARGET DESCRIPTIONS of different jobs (applied in Study C).

The first chapter ends with the selection for further consideration of one employee characteristic: WORKING STYLE (owing to the identified research gap in the world literature) and one job characteristic: AUTONOMY which is related to the level of Job ROUTINIZATION. When job constraints allow employees to have a high level of autonomy, they can perform work according to their working style.

3 Wieczorkowska, 2022

Chapter 2, titled **'The methods and objectives',** presents the methodological paradigm 'WiW' used in the dissertation and SSA. It includes a description of the samples, procedures, and operationalization of the variables. Chapter 2 concludes by identifying the **objectives** of the dissertation and the **research tasks**.
Chapter 3, titled **'Results'**, contains analyses of data from 3 **studies** in which a total of **849 employees** (**own research** - study B: N = 234, and C: N = 615) and **5668 employees** participated (preexisting data from the **European Working Conditions Survey**).
Chapter 4, titled **'Summary'**, contains a discussion of the results of the 3 studies, limitations, directions for further research and recommendations for HRM.

Before summary of main findings, let us start with limitations of the the empirical part of dissertation.
First limitation is MEASUREMENT. The basic problem in the social sciences is not a lack of theoretical considerations (there are too many of them) but problems of measurement. Measuring employee characteristics is the easiest part of estimating compatibility, because psychologists have developed many questionnaire-based measures over the decades. They are far from perfect, because they are based on self-reports, but they are tested repeatedly.
Measuring the characteristics of a job is much more difficult than employee characteristic, because we very rarely have access to an objective [independent from employee perception] description of the work characteristics. Our respondents [employees who took part in research] usually work in different places, do different types of jobs. It means that if we had to rely on the work description delivered by the employees (as was in study A and B when employees assessed both themselves and their job characteristics), they could be distorted by their psychological characteristics.

Second limitation is SAMPLING. As in the vast majority of studies in HRM, the employees participating in studies B and C were not randomly drawn from the entire employee population. Only in Study A the analyses were conducted on representative Polish, Czech, Hungarian, German and Turkish samples. In study B, a convenience sample of employees who agreed to participate in the study (recruited by doctoral students) participated. In study C, random sampling of employees with predetermined sociodemographic characteristics of the members of commercial panel. People can be drawn out of the population, but they cannot be forced to participate in research. Therefore, the external validity of research in the social sciences is increased by replicating studies, not by studying representative samples. Random representative samples are necessary when we want to estimate the variables' distribution in the population, but not when we test the relationships between variables.
As both studies B and C were collected by web survey - it should be mentioned the serious threat to validity of web survey: FALSE respondents who voluntarily participate in a survey and answer questions without thinking (e.g., chooses a random or first good enough answer). The special procedure was used to eliminate such respondents, which reduced sample sizes to 80% in study A, 81,5% in study B, and 86,5% in study C.

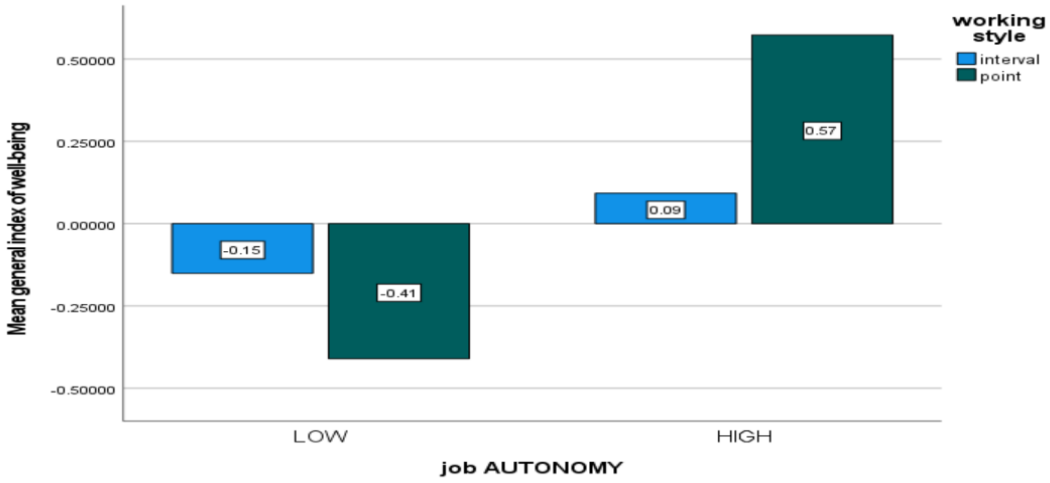
The third limitation is the CORRELATIONAL design. Despite the fact that in the dissertation the phrases: the interactional "effect" of working style and Job AUTONOMY on well-being of employees are used, the results obtained cannot be interpreted in terms of cause-and-effect relationships, because study B was correlational and not experimental. It is important to remember that, as in all correlational research, the effect of the 'third variable' is unavoidable. Uncontrolled variables in our studies, such as family or financial situation, could have influenced well-being at work. At the same time, the validity of the results obtained is supported by the fact that they are consistent with the theory and results of previous studies. This is why we could claim that a low level of Job AUTONOMY reduces well - being at work. However, it is important to remember that all scientific quantitative analyzes are conducted in a *"ceteris paribus"* paradigm (where the influence of other variables is kept constant), but in organizational practice, "*ceteris* is NEVER *paribus".*

Findings

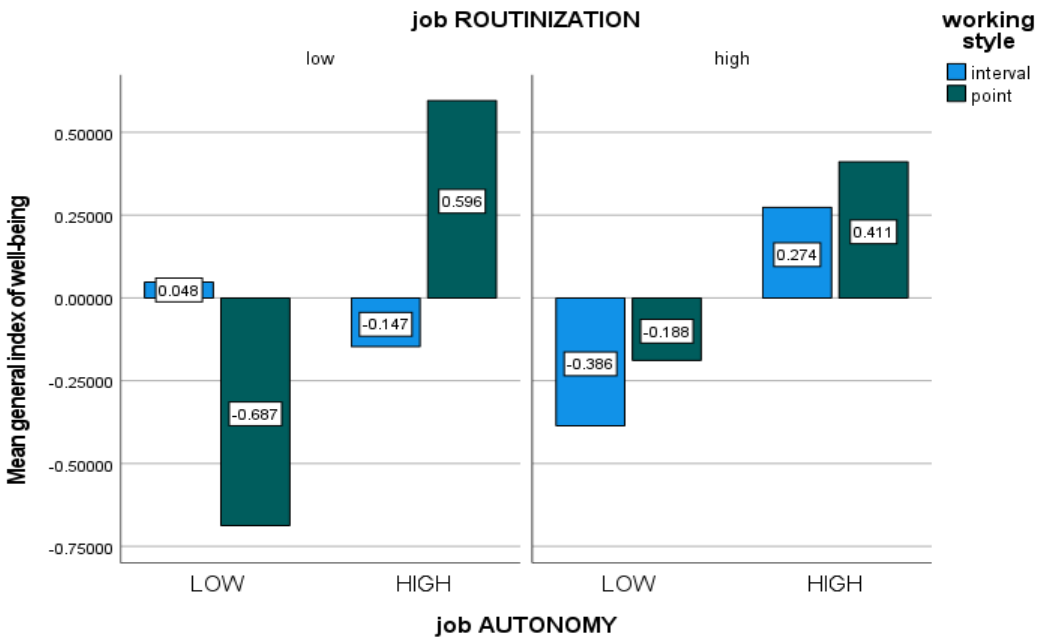
In the dissertation, 3 research tasks were completed. In Research **Task #1** <Testing the relationship between employee well-being and job AUTONOMY> two main hypotheses were tested in Study A: (1) **H1:** The higher the the job AUTONOMY, the better the employee well-being. (2) **H2:** The higher well-being, the better health (self-report). These hypotheses were tested separately in each of the five countries. Analyses in 5 countries served only to check the universality of variable relationships. Multinational differences in the means of explanatory or explained variables (e.g., significantly lower self-assessment of the health of Polish employees) have not been discussed, because cultural differences were not the subject of the dissertation. " The results of the **hypotheses testing** can be summarized as follows: **< Job Autonomy→ Job Well-being→ Employee Health**>, with the warning that, as in all correlation studies, the direction of these relationships has not been proven. The implication <Job Well-being→ Employee Health> could have the opposite direction , <Employee Health→ Job Well-being>, one can argue that it could be difficult for 'sick' employees to be happy at work. It is much more difficult to find arguments in favor of the reversing relationship: <Job Autonomy→ Job Well-being> because it is difficult to argue that happier employees feel more autonomy, but as it is in all correlation studies, you can NEVER exclude all possible effects of 'the third variable'.

In study A, individual differences were not taken into account (except for simple sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, etc.). Study B and C focused on the impact of individual differences in working style.
In Research **Task #2** was tested the preferential paradox < POINT employees feel worse in case of low job AUTONOMY (high level of routinization), but at the same time prefer when asked about it, highly routinized work>.
In study B, **H3 <** Impact of job AUTONOMY on **well-being** is **moderated** by the employee's **working style** and the job ROUTINIZATION> was examined. According to the WIW paradigm, triangulation of operationalizations was used. The aggregate index Job of Well-being consists of 5 highly correlated indicators: y1 - emotional balance at work; y2 – work overload

(reversed); y3 – feeling appreciated; y4 – liking job; y5 – job SATISFACTION. **H3 was confirmed** on an aggregate index Job of Well-being and **on almost all its components**:



In 5 out of 6 analyzes the 3 way interaction of WIS (point vs. interval), the job AUTONOMY (high vs. low) and the job ROUTINIZATION (high vs. low) was significant. It should be noted that the need for achievement in separated analyzes failed to be a significant moderator of relationship < Job Autonomy→ Job Well-being> so this is why it was used as a covariate (with age, gender, education in years) only. Study B showed an **unexpected** and **interesting** difference between job AUTONOMY and job ROUTINIZATION. In previous studies, both job characteristics were treated as negatively correlated: High job ROUTINIZATION → low job AUTONOMY. In study B, it turned out that both indicators are uncorrelated, and including them as independent factors in the analyzes revealed the moderating effect of job ROUTINIZATION (see the figure below).



We learned from these analyses that while the lack of autonomy has “always” negative impact on well-being, the job routinization level is not a significant predictor of well-being.
The result could be understood if you think about different functions routines could have. Routines described as patterns of interdependent organizational activities can vary in scope, degree of detail.... They can be primarily **informative -** when they are a record of multivariant options and they can be treated as only tips on how to perform the task. Routines can also have **a strictly controlling character** when any execution errors are severely punished. In the first case, the existence of a routine does not reduce the level of autonomy of the employee; in the latter case it reduces greatly.

These results require further research, with a better Job Routanization indicator than the one used in study B. It would also be worth conducting experimental studies in which the level of autonomy is manipulated, so we could exclude impact of possible confounded variables (as type of job).

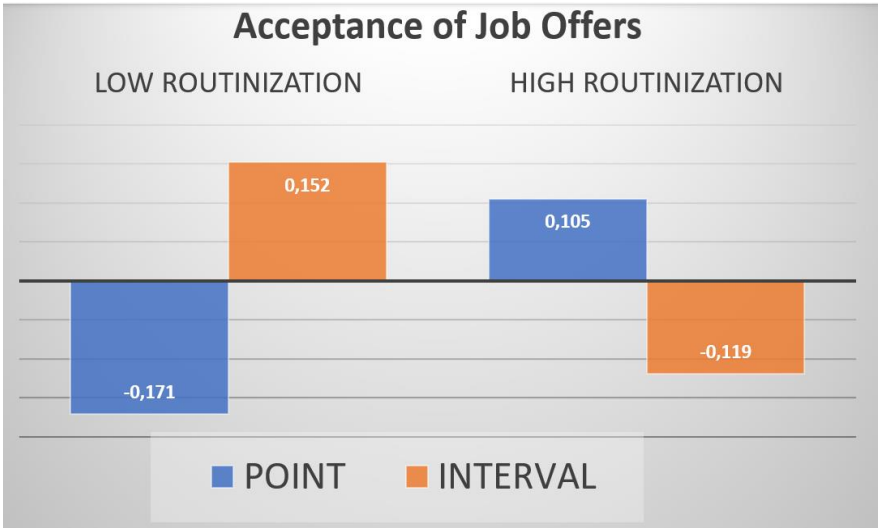
In study C, **H #4**: <When have a choice: **POINT** employees prefer jobs with **HIGH** level of routinization, whereas **INTERVAL** employees prefer jobs with **LOW** level of routinization> was confirmed in 2 **ways**: (1) in experimental study, when 618 divided into 2 groups based on their working style evaluated 2 job offers with HIGH vs. LOW level of routinization; (2) in comparison of WIS score, the groups differ in their response to open questions on their preferences regarding the level of job routinization. It is worth underlining that in study C the experimental method was used - employees had to PREDICT their decision regarding artificially constructed job offers (see Table below). This is a much better method to assess individual differences. When people describe their job, we do not know what their job is like in reality. With the TARGET DESCRIPTION method we know that they evaluate the same stimuli. This method should be used in future studies.

company A – HIGH level of routinization	**company B - LOW level of** routinization
In Company A, employees are given not only a list of tasks, but also a step-by-step procedure on how to complete them. Some people appreciate this structured way of doing things, others would expect more freedom of action.	In company B there are no written procedures, what matters is the task and the way in which the goal is achieved is less important. Some people prefer this spontaneous way of working, others think that the lack of order leads to chaos.

	Frequency	%
Under no circumstances	52	8.6
if there were no other choice	147	24.4
Without enthusiasm	139	23.1
Willingly	172	28.5
With the greatest pleasure	93	15.4
Total	603	100

	Frequency	%
Under no circumstances	81	13.3
if there were no other choice	169	27.8
Without enthusiasm	132	21.7
Willingly	155	35.5
With the greatest pleasure	70	11.5
Total	607	100

As predicted by H4: **POINT** employees preferred **HIGH** over **LOW** job routinization, while **INTERVAL** employees the opposite: preferred **LOW** over **HIGH** job routinization (see Figure below).



Thus, the preferential paradox was confirmed: POINT employees feel worse in the case of low job AUTONOMY (high level of routinization) and at the same time prefer when asked about it, highly routinized work. In other words: although in study B as in previous studies has been shown that POINT employees feel worse in low job AUTONOMY conditions they are not 'aware' of this. Similarly, recent studies have shown that POINT employee prefer to have POINT not INTERVAL supervisors, forgetting that adapting to other people's routines **is resource costly.** The fact that POINT employees love to design their own routines does not mean that they would like to follow ALIEN (e.g., designed by their managers) routines. Research shows that in many organizations nowadays, constantly new routines are introduced.

The Research Task #3 was completed by showing good psychometric properties: reliability and predictive validity of the measurement of WIS by SSA. The doctoral dissertation ends with recommendations for HRM. To conclude, empirical data have shown that Drucker was right when he said in his seminal paper 'What executives should remember' published in 2006 in *Harvard Business Review*:

"It is amazing how ***few people*** *can define their method and* ***working style****. Most do not even know that each of us works differently, which is probably why many* ***people copy other people's methods*** *of working and end up with* ***mediocre results****. [...] We perform well not only when we do the work for which our innate talents predestine us, but also when our working method and style enable us to do it as well as possible".*