A Cognitive Dissonance Explanation of the Effect of Self-adjustment on the Relationship between Person-Situation Discrepancy and Situational Commitment

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This study examined whether the effect of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment was moderated by a person's self adjustment to the situation. The unit of inquiry consisted of dyadic working relationships between supervisors and subordinates, where the supervisors represented significant situations for the subordinates. It was hypothesized that self-adjustment interacts with person-situation discrepancy to affect situational commitment negatively. Contrary to the prediction, the results showed that the sign of the interactive effect was positive, indicating that the negative effect of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment became less pronounced for those subordinates who had gone through greater self-adjustment in interacting with their supervisors. The meanings of the findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: self-adjustment; latent and manifest personality traits; person-situation discrepancy; situational commitment; cognitive dissonance.

There are two major traditions of psychology - i.e., the personologist school on the one hand, and the situationist school on the other (Murray, 1938). The personologist believes that behavior is trans-situationally consistent; and the situationalist believes that behavior is situation specific. Out of the long lasting and still lively debate emerged the interactionist paradigm as a dialectic resolution (Endler, 1982; Mugnusson & Endler, 1977). The basic tenet of this paradigm is that a person's behavior is jointly determined by the internal dispositions of the person and by the external conditions of a situation in which the person operates.

A logical extension of the interactionist perspective suggests that a person's dispositional attributes manifest themselves differently across situations. Based on this line of thinking, we propose that latent and manifest modes of personality traits be considered to describe a person's characteristics of individuality. The latent personality traits refer to an individual's genotypical personality attributes that are relatively independent of situational influences, and relatively constant over time. The manifest personality traits, on the other hand, refer to the individual's phenotypical personality characteristics that are expressed in surface behavior and are not likely to be stable across situations and over time.

From the distinction should follow a variety of unique research avenues. There are at least three. First, the distinction enables us to explore the psychological mechanism through which latent traits are manifested into actual behaviors. The interactionist perspective

1 An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the 2002 American Psychological Society 14th Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA. We thank Richard Darlington and Daryl Bem for their helpful comments. We also owe thanks to anonymous reviewers for their guidance and wisdom. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shinichiro Watanabe, Graduate School of Systems & Information Engineering, Department of Quantitative Finance & Management, University of Tsukuba, 1-1-1 Tenmodai, Ibaraki, 305-8573, Japan. E-mail: atanabe@sk.tsukuba.ac.jp
suggests that when a person enters a situation, he or she evaluates the level of fit between his or her dispositional orientation and the situation’s characteristics and then, guided by his or her self-presentational style, expectancy calculation, and the strength of the situation, adjusts his or her own dispositions to respond to the situation (Watanabe & Hammer, 2004).

Second, crossing separately each version of the traits with situational conditions, we can designate latent (or potential) and manifest (or actual) modes of person-situation relations. This distinction has never been addressed in the person-situation congruence literature to date and enables us to explore the relative importance of the latent vs manifest person-situation fit or discrepancy in determining job satisfaction and performance, work withdrawal behaviors, extrarole behaviors, and other important psychological variables.

A third research avenue, which is also interesting to explore, concerns a person’s self-adjustment in a situation or across situations. Past research on self shows that people often enact multiple selves or identities to meet situational conditions (see, e.g., Hart, 1988; Harter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986; Smollar & Youniss, 1985), and that those individuals who gave themselves more unified self-images across situations are likely to perform better (e.g., Gilly et al., 1971-1972) and report better psychological adjustment (see, e.g., Braun, 1988; Eunkook, 2002; Journard, 1965; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1951; Spanos, 1994) than those who tend to give themselves diversified self-images. For indexing the levels of self-adjustment, those studies generally look at the levels of consistency or variability of self-images across such various situations as being with fathers, mothers, teachers, peers, strangers, romantic partners, and so forth.

Self-adjustment in person-situation relations

The present study belongs in the third line of research mentioned above. The specific unit of inquiry consists of dyadic working relationships between supervisors (professors) and subordinates (graduate assistants), where the supervisors represent significant situations sending work roles for the subordinates. A unique point is that we define self-adjustment in terms of the difference between latent and manifest personality traits in a single situation, while the extant research looks at the consistency of one’s overt self across different situations. Specifically, we define the construct as subordinates’ laten-to-manifest behavioral modifications to fit the demands of the interpersonal situations with their supervisors. Behavioral requirements the supervisors place on their subordinates for maintaining the working relationship represent the situational conditions here. Moreover, associating the situational conditions with the subordinates’ manifest personality traits, we have manifest interpersonal relations between the supervisors and the subordinates.

The specific focus of interest in this study concerns whether and how the subordinates’ self adjustments to accommodate to the social situations and their manifest mode of interpersonal relations with their supervisors interact with each other in determining the strength of their intention to continue to work for their supervisors. In other words, we are particularly interested in how the effect of person (subordinate) -situation (supervisor) relations on situational commitment changes as the level of self-adjustment increases.

As stated earlier, the present study examines the interaction sequences in academic settings between professors and their graduate assistants. We regard this person-person relations as a prototypic set of person-situation relations. Any individual comes into existence on the basis of a relation to other individuals. This is an assumption that most social psychologists would find acceptable. From this assumption follows the proposition that the study of person-person interactions, where the behavior of one individual is described in functional relationship to the behavior of the other, represents the study of a prototypic set of person-situation relations. According to Peterson (1977), person-person interactions, a restricted but particularly interesting prototypic set of person-situation relations, may place the more general issues in sharper relief than would any attempt to study all possible human behaviors in reference to all possible influences.

A growing body of person-situation congruence research consistently suggests that a good person-situation fit leads to a variety of consequences including affective, behavioral, and cognitive functioning (see, e.g., Caplan, et al., 1980; Chatman, 1991; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Early, 1989; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Furnham & Schaeffer, 1984; Holland, 1985; Meglino, et al., 1988; O’Reilly et al., 1991). A question that remains
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FIGURE 1. Hypothesized model concerning the interaction of manifest person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment

unaddressed, and therefore untested, in the literature concerns whether and how self-adjustment, which transforms latent person-situation relations into manifest person-situation relations, affect the effect of the overt person-situation relations on various psychological outcome variables. Thus, we believe that a study that explores this problem will add an important theoretical contribution to the literature.

It should be noted that a series of research projects that explore the first and second research streams mentioned in the previous section are currently ongoing by the present authors. The detailed contents of the projects and findings obtained thus far, however, are too voluminous to present in a single paper. Therefore, they will not be reported in this manuscript.

Hypothesized Model

People enact multiple selves when interacting with different situations. For example, one’s self with friends may be caring, cheerful, or outgoing; the self may be depressed, rowdy, or sarcastic with parents; and with strangers, the self may be shy, businesslike, or introverted. It is also possible that an inherently lazy individual behaves in a conscientious fashion when faced with certain interpersonal situations.

In this study, we call this discrepancy between those different selves as ‘interpersonal adjustment.’ And we would like to examine a model that investigates how this self-adjustment affects the relationship between manifest person-situation discrepancy and situational commitment. Figure 1 depicts the model.

Person-situation discrepancy refers, in this study, to the level of misfit between subordinates’ manifest personality traits and supervisors’ behavioral requirements. Said differently, this construct concerns the levels of congruence between actual behaviors the subordinates typically elicit in interacting with their supervisors and behavioral profiles the supervisors draw to characterize ideal subordinates to work with.

Interpersonal adjustment refers to the levels of discrepancy between the subordinates’ latent personality traits that are relatively consistent across situations and their manifest personality traits that are expressed in surface behavior and are not likely to be trans-situationally stable. To put another way, this construct represents the magnitudes of behavioral modification made by the subordinates to accommodate to their supervisors’ behavioral requirements.

Situational commitment was defined as the subordinates’ intentional orientation toward staying with their current supervisors, rather than leaving to take different work roles from other supervisors. This definition would capture the essence of what some call “organizational commitment” (e.g., Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1985; Steers, Mowday, & Porter, 1982), but is more neutral and clear in that it is not colored by affective connotations (e.g., acceptance of situational values and willingness to exert effort on behalf of the situation). By “commitment,” we simply mean the subordinates’ likelihood of choosing to stay with the current supervisors or to initiate a job separation.

How are these constructs related to each other? An extensive review of past research was not so fruitful. To our best knowledge, no research exists that investigated the effect of manifest interpersonal relations on situational commitment in the context of the supervisor-subordinate dyadic working relationship. However, aggregating the large body of person-situation fit
research to date, we can expect that the predictor would have a negative association with the criterion (see Watanabe, 1994).

Few studies exist either that examined the effect of a subordinate's interpersonal adjustments to his or her supervisor on the subordinate's intention to continue to work for the supervisor. Only a handful of studies have been conducted that seem relevant to the present study. For example, Swann de la Ronde & Hixon's (1994) study revealed that people tended to prefer to interact with partners who provided feedback that was congruent with their existing self-views. Roberts & Donahue (1994) found that people who view themselves differently across different situations were more depressed and neurotic than others. These studies suggest that if a subordinate enters an interpersonal situation with his or her supervisor and evaluates the level of fit between his or her dispositions and the situation's characteristics to be low, then the subordinate will try to adjust the dispositional orientation to respond to the situation. It seems a reasonable argument that the magnitude of the interpersonal adjustment concerns the amount of psychological energy the subordinate expends to accommodate to the interpersonal situation, and that the level of energy exerted represents the level of psychological tension or stress experienced by the subordinate.

Base on the small number of past studies that seem relevant to the present study, we expect that just as person-situation discrepancy in terms of the supervisor-subordinate interpersonal relations would negatively affect situational commitment, interpersonal adjustment should also have a negative association with the criterion. This leads to a prediction that interpersonal adjustment would enhance the negative effect of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment; it is our assumption that the negative effect of one factor would enhance the negative effect of the other. Thus, we propose to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis.** The greater the level of interpersonal adjustment, the stronger will be the negative effect of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment.

As stated earlier, there are not many studies that examined the effect each of the constituent elements of the hypothesized interaction has on the criterion variable. Therefore, the examination of the hypothesis is exploratory in nature.

The hypothesized relationships need to be tested after having taken out from situational commitment variance due to other possible exogenous factors. Specifically, the model incorporates the following variables that might affect the level of the criterion: interpersonal satisfaction, work satisfaction, ease of movement, length of service, job importance, work load, wage rate, age, and dummy variables coding the difference in gender within supervisor-subordinate pairs.

*Interpersonal satisfaction* refers to the level of affection exchanged between supervisors and subordinates. *Work satisfaction* refers to the level of positive feelings the subordinates experience in the task-related exchanges with theirs supervisors. Past research indicates that various facets of job satisfaction are negatively linked to work withdrawal behaviors (see e.g., Mobley, 1982; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1970). Thus, we expect that these two versions of satisfaction are positively associated with situational commitment. *Ease of movement* concerns the subordinates' alternative sources of income. Past research shows that those individuals who are in favorable labor markets are more likely to initiate job separations than their counterparts (see, e.g., March & Simon, 1958; Mobley, et al., 1978; Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979; Price, 1977). *Length of service* refers to the subordinates' job tenure or experience. It is generally known that the probability of initiating voluntary job separation decreases as the duration of tenure on the job increases (see, e.g., Mobley, 1982). *Job importance* means an individual's concerns with "bread and butter" issues. We expect that subordinates who regard their jobs as necessary to support themselves will be less likely to quit their present jobs. Since the subordinates' (graduate assistants') primary goal objects typically lie in their own course work or research, rather than in their assistantships, we predict that work load is negatively linked to situational commitment. *Wage rate* should have a positive association with the criterion variable (see, e.g., Bartel, 1979). *Age* should also have a positive effect on the criterion (see, e.g., Bartel, 1979; Porter & Steers, 1973). *Gender-related dummy variables* coding the difference in gender within supervisor-subordinate pairs are included on an exploratory basis.
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An important point to note is that this is the first study in the literature that defines interpersonal adjustment as the discrepancy between latent and manifest personality traits. Its moderating effect for the relationship between person-situation discrepancy and situational commitment has never been examined either.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participants in the present study were professor-assistant pairs at a major eastern research university in the U.S. The study required that responses be collected from both members of the person-situation pairs to form usable sets of person-situation data. All surveys designed for the study were sent through the on-campus mail service to 565 professor-assistant pairs that were identified on the assistantship lists constructed by graduate offices at the research site.

To assure the respondents that their responses would be kept confidential, we requested that they return the surveys to a director of student services in the second author's college, explaining that the director would identify the participants by their names on the questionnaires, assign code numbers and then erase their names before sending the questionnaires to us. Respondents received return envelopes addressed to the director.

Of the 565 person-situation dyads, 142 (25%) completed the surveys. The supervisors ranged in position from assistant professor to full professor; they ranged in age from 30 to over 70 years. The subordinates ranged in class from MS to Ph.D.; they were between 22 and 41 years of age. The average age for the supervisors was 45 years (sd = 9.70); for the subordinates, it was 28 years (sd = 4.25).

**Measurement**

**Personality traits and behavioral requirements.** The present study considered the following dimensions as descriptors of personality traits: (a) Openness to experience, (b) Conscientiousness, (c) Extraversion, (d) Agreeableness, and (e) Neuroticism. Importantly, these five descriptors of personality seem sufficiently general so that a wide variety of person and situation characteristics are covered, a criterion suggested by Bem and Funder (1978) as important for assessing both persons and situations. The five descriptors are often referred to as the "OCEAN" of personality (John, 1990) or "Big Five" (Norman, 1963).

In this study, twenty personality measures were extracted from McCrae and Costa's (1985) eighty bipolar adjective scales on the basis of the results of their factor analytic study. The four trait descriptors with the highest factor loadings were selected to represent each of the five factors. Specifically, the adjective groups O (creative, imaginative, original, and broad interest), C (careful, conscientious, hardworking, and reliable), E (affectionate, friendly, fun loving, and sociable), A (courteous, good-natured, selfless, and soft-hearted), and N (emotional, high strung, nervous, and worrying) represented the factors of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, respectively.

Next, we converted those twenty adjective scales into a list of alphabetically arranged personality adjectives with their antonyms presented, for explanation, in parentheses (e.g., HARDWORKING [as opposed to lazy]). This modified version of McCrae and Costa's personality measures, if employed through the use of the ipsative (or comparative) rating method, should be a useful instrument to combine both nomothetic and idiographic points of view. Higgins (1990) suggests that assessment of person and situation be made, such that both nomothetic and idiographic psychological processes interrelating persons and situations should be accounted for.

Based on this line of thinking, which originates in the Q-sort methodology (see, e.g., Block, 1978), we employed procedures where personality traits were measured ipsatively. To describe subordinates' latent personality traits, we asked them to rank the twenty personality adjectives into seven categories according to how each is descriptive of the aspect of their personality that they believe is relatively stable over time and relatively
consistent across many different situations. First, they were asked to select two personality adjectives: the one that is most characteristic (coded as 7), and the one that is most uncharacteristic (coded as 1), of themselves. The participants were then requested to choose four additional adjectives: two that are quite characteristic (coded as 6), and two that are quite uncharacteristic (coded as 2), of themselves. Then, the participants were instructed to select eight more descriptors: four that are fairly characteristic (coded as 5), and four that are fairly uncharacteristic (coded as 3), of themselves. The remaining six trait descriptors were treated as neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic (coded as 4) of the participants.

As for the subordinates’ manifest personality traits, we asked the participants to characterize, by rank-ordering the same twenty personality descriptors, the way they feel they typically behave in interacting with their supervisors. To measure situational characteristics, on the other hand, we requested the supervisors to draw, via the same ipsative rating procedure, a personality profile of an imaginary subordinate who they think would be easy to get along with.

Discrepancy-indices. Cronbach and Gleser (1953) discussed several types of indices of profile similarity, such as sum of squared differences between profile elements ($D^2$), square root of $D^2$ or Euclidean distance ($D$), index of combined scatter and shape ($D'$), and index of shape ($D''$). An important point to note is that each of these different types of fit indices can produce different research results when related to some criterion variable (Cronbach, & Gleser, 1953; Rounds, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1987). How one measures fit or correspondence must therefore be determined based on fit with regard to what is going to be investigated.

As for the discrepancies between subordinates’ manifest personality traits and supervisors’ behavioral requirements (person-situation discrepancy) and between latent and manifest personality traits of the subordinates (interpersonal adjustment), the answer to the question “Similarity in what?” should be the shape of the profiles. As explained previously, the configurations of personality traits and behavioral requirements were assessed by using a forced distribution technique where the elevation and scatter were equated for all the participants. Since the elevation is 4.0, and the scatter is 1.45, for all the participants, it is not necessary to include the information on elevation and scatter to index the degree of profile discrepancy. The inclusion of this information might lead to an exaggerated emphasis on larger discrepancies between the profiles. The same consideration holds true for the $D^2$ index because the distinction between the $D^2$ and $D''^2$ indices vanishes when the elevation is equated. Thus, we would regard the shape index, $D''^2$, as more appropriate than the $D^2$ and $D^2$ indices. Going a step further, it should be noted that the $D''^2$-based Euclidean distance index (i.e., a square root of $D''^2$) will, in general, provide a better metric than $D''^2$, since large distances are much magnified in squaring. Also, $D''$ is less skewed than $D^2$. For these reasons, we employed as an appropriate discrepancy index the Euclidean distance with the conversion treatment of $D$ into $D''$.

Situational commitment. Two items were formulated, and their scores were summed, to record the level of situational commitment ($\alpha = .80$). The first item assessed a subordinate’s likelihood of seeking a new assistantship with another supervisor. The subordinates were asked how likely they were to make a serious effort to find a new assistantship with another professor. A seven-point response format was employed that ranged from very likely (coded as 1) to not at all likely (coded as 7). A question such as this is recognized as a reasonable indicator of workers’ mobility orientation, and hence commitment, because job search not only signals impending mobility (Black, 1981) but also is itself a mobility strategy (Black, 1980; Kahn & Low, 1982).

The second item assessed the subordinates’ interests in continuing their assistantships with their current supervisors. Specifically, they were asked to respond to the following item: “Suppose that the professor with whom you are working as an assistant asked you to continue to work for him or her next semester. Indicate the degree with which you are interested in accepting the offer of continued employment with this professor.” Five response alternatives were provided ranging from I would definitely reject the offer (coded as 1), to undecided (coded as 3), to I would definitely accept the offer (coded as 5).

Control variables. Interpersonal satisfaction scale was constructed based on French and Caplan’s (1973) and Kahn et al’s (1964) studies that contained such
dimensions as liking, respect, supportiveness and communication between supervisors and subordinates. Regarding the facet of "liking," for instance, subordinates were asked the following question: "How well do you like your supervisor personally?" The response alternatives were: 1 = I dislike him/her; 2 = I don't like him/her very much; 3 = I don't have much feeling about him/her one way or the other; 4 = I like him/her fairly well; 5 = I like him/her a lot and would like to know him/her better; 6 = He/she is a good friend of mine; 7 = He/she is one of my best friends; 8 = He/she is my best friend. With regard to the facet of "respect," the following question was asked: "We all respect the character of some people more than others. To what extent do you have this kind of respect for your supervisor?" The response alternatives consisted of: 1 = Not at all; 2 = To a very little extent; 3 = To some extent; 4 = To a considerable extent; 5 = To a very great extent. The participants' overall interpersonal satisfaction scores were computed by summing their responses over all the facets of interpersonal outcomes (8 items). The coefficient alpha for the composite scale was .93.

Work satisfaction was measured by a modified version of the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Ten items were selected from the MIQ that represent the following facets: (a) ability utilization, (b) achievement, (c) activity, (d) creativity, (e) independence, (f) recognition, (g) responsibility, (h) employment security, (i) status, and (j) task variety. Also, one item relating to ability enhancement was newly added, resulting in a total of 11 items. The subordinates were requested to indicate, on a 7-point scale, the level of satisfaction with each of those eleven work facets, and the sum of the scores of all the items provided a single overall measure of work satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the composite scale was .93.

Job importance was operationalized by asking the subordinates the following question: "How important is your current assistantship in terms of your ability to support yourself?" The response alternatives for the question were arranged on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). Ease of movement was estimated by asking the participants the following question: "Please give your best estimate of your alternative employment opportunities for assistantships next semester." The participants were instructed to respond to the question on a 5-point scale ranging from no alternatives (coded as 1) to many alternatives (coded as 5). Wage rate was indexed by the dollar amounts paid to the participants per month for services they provide. Work load was recorded by the subordinates' reactions to the following question: "How many hours per week do you usually work at your assistantship this semester?" The respondents' age was recorded at the time of the survey. Two gender-related dummy variables were created to index the gender difference between supervisors and subordinates, D1 and D2. D1 was coded as 1 if both members of a person-situation pair were male. Otherwise, it was coded as 0. D2 was coded as 1 if a pair consisted of a female supervisor (or subordinate) and a female subordinate (or supervisor). Otherwise, it was coded as 0. Pairs consisting of members of the opposite sex were treated as a base category.

Analysis
The hypothesis proposes a causal model predicting situational commitment directly from the interaction between person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment. Following procedures outlined in Cohen and Cohen (1983) and in Darlington (1990), we employed a hierarchical regression analysis to test the hypothesized model. Specifically, we first entered into a regression equation the constituent linear terms of the hypothesized interaction (i.e., person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment), and the covariates mentioned above that might affect the level of situational commitment. We then added the hypothesized cross-product term into the equation and assessed its unique contribution (i.e., increase in $R^2$) to the total variance in the criterion variable. An incremental F statistic (Neter & Wasserman, 1974; Cohen & Cohen, 1983) was computed to test the significance of the unique contribution.

Results
Now, we will report the results of the explorative investigation. Table 1 presents scale coefficient alphas, means, standard deviations, ranges, and correlations among the variables used for testing the hypothesis. Although it suggests that there are some real associations among the variables (Bartlett $x^2 = 280.359$, $df = 103$, $p < .0001$), the table provides little information
TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables used for testing the hypotheses of the psychological variables that determine the success of the psychological therapy.
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TABLE 2. Interaction of person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment for situational commitment $a,b,c,d$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$ (s.e.)</td>
<td>$b$ (s.e.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X1: Person-situation discrepancy</td>
<td>.01 (.10)</td>
<td>-.06 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2: Interpersonal adjustment</td>
<td>-.10 (.10)</td>
<td>-.13 (.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$b$ (s.e.)</th>
<th>$b$ (s.e.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal satisfaction</td>
<td>.36*** (.09)</td>
<td>.33*** (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work satisfaction</td>
<td>.40*** (.10)</td>
<td>.35*** (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job importance</td>
<td>-.01 (.08)</td>
<td>-.02 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of movement</td>
<td>-.27* (.11)</td>
<td>-.21* (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage rate</td>
<td>-.04 (.10)</td>
<td>-.03 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week</td>
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<td>-.06 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-male (D)</td>
<td>.27 (.19)</td>
<td>.27 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-female (D)</td>
<td>.21 (.22)</td>
<td>.27 (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.13 (.09)</td>
<td>-.13 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of service</td>
<td>-.02 (.11)</td>
<td>.02 (.10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction

$X1 \times X2$

| $R^2$                  | .506      | .553      |
| Adjusted $R^2$         | .414      | .463      |
| Overall $F$            | 5.490***  | 6.114***  |
| [df]                  | [12,77]   | [13,76]   |
| $\Delta F$            | 7.838**   |          |
| [df]                  | [1,76]    |          |

$^a$ N is 90 due to missing data.

$^b$ (D) indicates dummy variable.

$^c$ Standardized slopes are reported except for dummy variables.

$^d$ Two-tailed tests are used for all control variables and interaction terms. One tailed tests are used for all key variables.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (Levels of significance are not shown for variables also included in the cross-product term.)

on the hypothesized interaction effect of person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment for situational commitment.

The hypothesized model presented schematically in Figure 1 predicts that person-situation discrepancy and interpersonal adjustment interact with each other to affect situational commitment negatively. The hypothesis was tested through the use of the hierarchical analysis with two regression models. Table 2 reports the results of the analysis testing the hypothesized interactive effect for situational commitment; $X1$ (person-situation discrepancy) $\times$ $X2$ (interpersonal adjustment). Tolerance's in the two models ranged from .427 to .880, suggesting that each model does not suffer from harmful colinearity (Kennedy, 1989).

Step 1 of the regression analyses shows the estimates of a model that does not include the cross-product term under study ($R^2 = .506, F_{12,77} = 5.490, p < .001$). Significant positive effects were found for interpersonal satisfaction ($\beta = .36, p < .001$) and for work satisfaction ($\beta = .40, p < .001$), and a significant negative effect was obtained for ease of movement ($\beta = -.27, p < .05$). Higher situational satisfaction and fewer situation alternatives strengthen a person's bond to his or her current situation.

Steps 2 examined whether the hypothesized
interaction would make a unique contribution to situational commitment above that made by the block of variables specified in Step 1. An incremental F-test revealed that the hypothesized interaction explained an additional 4.7 percent ($\Delta F = 7.838, \text{df} = 1,76$) of the variance, significant at the .01 level.

It is important to note that the significant increase in $R^2$ accounted for by the interaction under study does not provide support for the hypothesis. The sign of beta obtained for the interaction was positive ($\beta = .30, p < .01$), the direction opposite of our prediction. This indicates that the negative effect of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment decreases, as the level of self-adjustment increases. Figure 2 graphically represents the interactive effect.

**Discussion**

As noted earlier, self-adjustment to meet situational requirements concerns any way we try to control person-situation relations, which seems conceptually equivalent to what stress psychologists generally call *coping behaviors*. We assumed that the level of interpersonal adjustment made by a person represents the level of psychological tension or stress experienced by the person. We derived from the assumption a hypothesis about the interactive effect of self-adjustment and person-situation discrepancy for situational commitment. Specifically, it predicted that the sign of the interaction would be negative because the constituent independent factors were expected to have negative associations with the criterion variable, and we thought it likely that the negative effect of one factor would enhance the negative impact of the other. However, the hypothesis was not supported; the sign of the interactive effect turned out to be positive.

In sum, there is no evidence that interpersonal adjustment enhances the negative impact of person-situation discrepancy on situational commitment. The data indicate that the negative effect of poor person-situation relations becomes less pronounced, as the level of self-adjustment increases. Though not supportive of the hypothesis, the results are intriguing enough to arouse curiosity about the underlying psychological processes that generated the data.

Failure to support the hypothesis reminds us of a famous theory in the area of social psychology. It is the *cognitive dissonance theory* formulated by Festinger (1957) and elaborated by Cooper and Fazio (1984). Cognitive dissonance refers to a state of psychological discomfort that occurs when one cognition a person holds follows from the obverse of another (Festinger, 1957).

The elaborated version differentiated the concept of dissonance into the concepts of *dissonance arousal* and *dissonance motivation*. According to Cooper and Fazio (1984), cognitive dissonance is aroused when a
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counterattitudinal course of action causes an aversive feeling. Dissonance motivation (aversive pressure to change one’s attitude) occurs when an individual labels the dissonance arousal negatively and attributes that arousal to the individual’s having freely produced the aversive consequences.

Now, based on the theories of Festinger (1957) and Cooper and Fazio (1984), we would like to make an attempt at providing a cognitive dissonance explanation of the positive interaction effect found between self-adjustment and person-situation discrepancy. When faced with a situation, a person makes a cognitive appraisal about the level of imbalance between the situational demand and his or her response capability. If the person perceives that the balance is poor, he or she tries to adjust himself or herself. Because human behaviors are rarely under the perfect control of the environment alone, this self-adjustment usually occurs partly of the person’s own free will and can cause psychological tension or stress within the person. A separate regression analysis predicting interpersonal satisfaction from self-adjustment and person-situation discrepancy indicated that high levels of self-adjustment caused interpersonal dissatisfaction ($R^2=.12$, $F_{2,87} = 5.819$, $p < .001$). The possible reason for this negative link is that self-adjustment itself is a stressful experience, in that it requires the person to expend psychological energy. There arises in the person’s mind a motive to validate the energy exertion. The validation is made possible by discounting the role of person-situation discrepancy in producing negative effects on situational commitment.

Research on cognitive dissonance has been typically conducted in experimental conditions where various factors are experimentally manipulated, such as the magnitudes of incentive, decision freedom, personal responsibility, and foreseeability of unwanted events. Such manipulations were not made in the present study. Besides, although it revealed that those subordinates who adjusted their selves more to fit their social situations experienced greater interpersonal dissatisfaction than those who went through less self-adjustment, the study did not record the degrees of change in satisfaction before and after the self-adjustments were made. Moreover, the present study did not assess the subordinates’ perceptions of their social situations. The perceptions may not coincide with the behavioral profiles their supervisors drew to characterize an ideal interaction partner to work with.

For these reasons, applying the cognitive dissonance theory to account for the hypothesized interaction might be too bold to be appropriate. It might be even bolder to assume that a similar psychological mechanism operates in recovering a cognitively consonant psychological state by dissonance motivation to change one’s attitude and in increasing person-situation fit by expending psychological energy to change one’s behaviors. Therefore, the cognitive dissonance explanation set forth above, though quite convincing, should be viewed with some skepticism. Thus, future studies are needed that investigate this problem with a variety of methodological procedures.

What would be the implication of this study? Although the present study is mute as to whether the cognitive dissonance explanation of the findings is theoretically valid, it seems fair to discuss its implication based on the results. First, we would like to contend that the dissonance explanation would provide a better way to explain or forecast the levels of subordinates’ interpersonal satisfaction with their supervisors and the strength of their intention to continue to work for the supervisors. The prediction based on the conventional person-situation congruence framework is that a good fit will lead to high satisfaction and strong situational commitment. With the additional information of self-adjustment a person makes in interacting with the situation, we can give another explanation about the predictor-criterion relationships. That is, the level of self-adjustment, if low, would indicate a good person-situation fit or weak motivation to continue to interact with the situation; on the other hand, the level of adjustment, if high, would indicate a poor person-situation fit or strong motivation to continue the interaction. The implication is that a good person-situation fit, if acquired through great self-adjustment, might increase the person’s commitment to the situation, as the effort-justification paradigm of the cognitive dissonance theory predicts. However, because the person tends to perceive the self-adjustment as an aversive and stressful experience, the person’s satisfaction with the situation should be low. Given that the lack of satisfaction has been seen as a precursor to
work withdrawal behaviors, such as turnover, absenteeism, and lateness (see, e.g., Adler & Golan, 1981; Hulin, 1990; Locke, 1976), it is likely that the positive effect of the good person-situation fit acquired through self-adjustment on situational commitment will not extend over a long period of time.

A final word

The uniqueness of this study is two-fold. One is the way we define self-adjustment. Specifically, we operationalized the construct by taking a distance measure between latent and manifest personality traits. Another uniqueness concerns the inclusion of the notion of self-adjustment in the person-situation relations framework. We believe that the present study made important theoretical contributions to the self literature and to the person-situation congruence literature. An important point to note is that despite those unique features, the time may not be quite ripe to discuss how the results of this study are applicable to management practices. This study is not of much practical value until its findings are proven to be valid and true in future studies. We hope that our study serves as a starting point of efforts to advance our understandings about self, self-adjustment, and person-situation relations.

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