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The Impact of Person–Supervisor Value Incongruence on Newcomers' Work Alienation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore how person–supervisor value incongruence affects newcomers' emotional exhaustion and their work alienation, and whether self-verification striving can moderate the relationship between them. An online questionnaire survey on newcomers from north-China finally produced 214 valid cases. The results show that person–supervisor value incongruence leads to newcomers' work alienation through their emotional exhaustion. This paper extends the current research in terms of value fit and newcomers' work alienation, and also emphasizes the importance of newcomer's emotional exhaustion and self-verification striving in workplace and discusses the practical implications of these findings.

Keywords: *person–supervisor value incongruence, self-verification striving, emotional exhaustion, newcomers' work alienation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this current competitive market environment, the labor market has become more competitive, and the labor force has experienced increased job mobility. The job mobility reflects that employees have a certain sense of job detachment from their jobs (Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007). In the current competitive market environment, in order to survive and grow, organizations are demanding more and more from their employees, expecting them to love and devote themselves to their work, but employees are increasingly showing indifference and distancing from their work, which is called work alienation (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015;).

New employees have a different characteristic from past employees in that they are highly mobile, may change four or five jobs in a year, and are less loyal to the company than older employees. These new employees pay more attention to the psychological satisfaction compared to the old employees, such as whether the leaders have enough respect for the employees, which may have an impact on their sense of detachment (Gursoy, Chi & Karadag, 2013; Queiri, Yusoff & Dwaikat, 2014; WongWan & Gao, 2017). The emergence of work alienation originates from the employees' dissatisfaction with the resources provided to

them by their jobs, which may be material or psychological. For example, a mismatch between personal and leadership values may affect the employee's socialization, and may lead to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion, as a typical stress response, is a state of fatigue that results from overuse of individual resources and often leads to employees' negative reactions to others and negative evaluations of themselves (CropanzanoRupp & Byrne, 2003). Emotional exhaustion is often accompanied by impaired self-esteem and depression, which can lead to negative behaviors such as reduced work engagement and lower performance. In doing so we hope to advance the knowledge of newcomers' work alienation, and provide some empirical findings that support future researches on influences of person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion on this effect, as well as the impact of self-verification striving.

2. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Linking person–supervisor value incongruence to emotional exhaustion

Value matching, also known as value congruence, refers to the congruence between the organizational view model and the individual employee's value model (Cable & Judge, 1997). Person–supervisor value congruence

refs to the extent to which an employee's values and those of his immediate supervisor are similar or mutually inclusive (Byza, Dörr, Schuh, & Maier, 2019; Edwards & Cable, 2009).

Emotional exhaustion, a typical stress response, is a state of fatigue that results from the overuse of individual resources and often leads to negative reactions to others and negative evaluations of oneself. Emotional exhaustion is often accompanied by impaired self-esteem and low mood, which can lead to negative behaviors such as reduced work engagement and lower performance (Edmondson, Matthews & Ambrose, 2019; Seidler et al., 2014).

Values are an overall evaluation of behavioral styles or end-state preferences. When new employees' values do not match those of their immediate supervisors, it is likely to result in insufficient support and assistance from the supervisor, making the supervisor's evaluation of the new employee low. These will make the new employee receive relatively insufficient work resources and social support, and the resulting social interaction pressure and interpersonal stress will lead to emotional exhaustion of the new employee. Research suggests that job stress and role load are direct drivers of emotional exhaustion, while high demands and low control are the basis for stress generation, and that the conceptualization of stress depends heavily on the individual's unique perception of stress (Balducci et al., 2021; Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009).

H1: Person–supervisor value incongruence is positively correlated to employee's emotional exhaustion.

2.2 *Linking emotional exhaustion to newcomers' work alienation*

Work alienation is a state of psychological perception that separates employees from their jobs because their jobs do not meet their needs or expectations (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015). Emotional exhaustion reflects the extreme lack of psychological resources of new employees (Seidler et al., 2014). When the level of emotional exhaustion is high, new employees are reluctant to spend more energy on interpersonal and social activities with unfamiliar colleagues, which leads to poor interactions with colleagues and lack of social

support in the company. In addition, employees with high levels of emotional exhaustion may cause a lack of work engagement, which can affect the performance of the entire team, lead to dissatisfaction among colleagues, and result in poor interpersonal relationships (Ferreira, Da Costa Ferreira, Cooper, & Oliveira, 2019; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). If employees feel inadequately supported by the organization, their autonomy at work will gradually decrease, which will result in employees being less able to realize their potential, i.e., they will not be able to appreciate their value at work, so their sense of job alienation will gradually increase.

H2: Emotional exhaustion has an impact on newcomers' work alienation, and mediates the relationship between person–supervisor value incongruence and newcomers' work alienation.

2.3 *The moderating effect of self-verification striving*

Swann (1987) developed self-validation theory based on a series of studies on self-motivation. The central proposition of this theory is that "people want others to see themselves in the same way that they see themselves" (Xu, Huang & Robinson, 2017). Self-verification striving means bringing others to know you for who you really are, which can be difficult during organizational entry. Self-validation effort acts as a moderator between new employee-leader value mismatch and new employee emotional exhaustion. When new employees have a high level of self-validation effort, they are eager to show their true selves in the organization, to match their behavior to their values and goals, and to join a company that matches their values. When they encounter a direct supervisor who does not match their values, the leadership-subordinate relationship does not meet the new employee's self-validation needs, and new employees with high levels of self-validation effort will have a worse relationship with their direct supervisor, be more dissatisfied, feel less support from the organization, and experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

H3: Self-verification striving moderates the relationship between person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion, such relationship is stronger when self-verification striving is high rather than low.
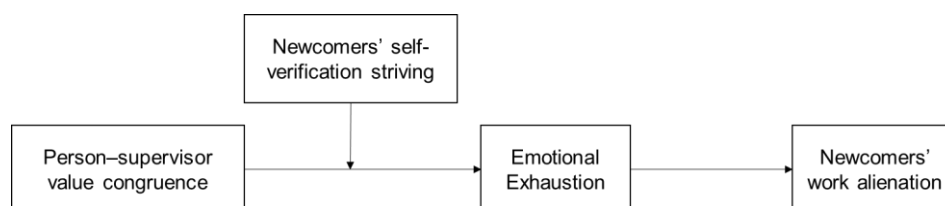

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample and procedures

We collected 217 online questionnaires to newcomer staffs from North-China during three weeks, after removing the invalid questionnaires, we obtained a total of 214 cases for testing and analysis of hypotheses for subsequent research. The questionnaire is divided into five parts, including personal information, person–supervisor value incongruence, emotional exhaustion, newcomers' work alienation, and self-verification striving. In the description of the questionnaire, we have informed the respondents that the data will be used for scientific research only and their personal information will be kept confidential.

Among the 214 cases, 75 are male, accounting for 35%; the average age of newcomers was 23.5 years; the average tenure of newcomers was 6.90 months; in terms of education, 70 people are with a high school education or less degree (32.7%), 136 are with a bachelor degree (63.6%), and 8 are with a master degree (3.7%).

3.2 Measures

All variables except for emotional exhaustion in this study was used Likert's five-point scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".

(1) Person–supervisor value incongruence: The measurement of person–supervisor value incongruence adapted the scale of Cable, David, and DeRue (2002), which contains 3 items. A sample item was "My personal values match my supervisor's values and ideals." In this study, the Cronbach's coefficient on this scale was 0.93.

(2) Self-verification striving: As for the measures of self-verification striving, we used 8 items developed by Cable & Kay (2012). A sample item was "It's worth it to be truthful with others about my habits and personality so that they know what they expect from me." In this study, the Cronbach's coefficient of this scale was 0.96.

(3) Emotional Exhaustion: The measure was adopted from Watkins et al.'s (2014), which contains 3 items. A sample item was "I feel emotionally drained from my work." We used Likert's five-point scale to measure the newcomers experience of the emotional exhaustion, where 1 means "never" and 5 means "always". In this study, Cronbach's a coefficient of this scale was 0.85.

(4) Work alienation: newcomers' work alienation was measured using 8 items originating from Nair & Vohra (2010). A sample item was "I don't enjoy work; I just put in my time to get paid." The Cronbach's a coefficient of this scale was 0.94.

(5) Control variables: the results of empirical analysis show that gender, age, education, and tenure were related to work alienation. Therefore, we choose them as control variables in our study.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Confirmatory factor analyses

We first conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to ensure that our measures had satisfactory discriminant validity. The CFA results indicated that the hypothesized 4-factor measurement model fit the data well, supporting the discriminant validity for the measured variables. The details of the confirmatory factor analyses can be found in Table 1.

TABLE I.   RESULTS OF CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSES

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
4-factor model	217.43	203	.02	.99	.99
one-factor model	315.16	209	.15	.50	.45

Note. N = 214.

4.2 Descriptive Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all variables in this study are presented in Table 2. As expected, newcomers' work alienation was significantly correlated with person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion.

TABLE II.   MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND CORRELATIONS OF THE FOCAL VARIABLES

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Gendera	.65	.48							
2.Age	23.5	1.16	.00						
3.Education	1.17	.53	-.05	-0.09					
4.Tenure (months)	6.90	2.54	-.08	.31**	-.08				
5.Person–supervisor value incongruence	2.68	1.03	-.01	-.13	-.01	.01			
6.Self-verification striving	3.36	.93	-.01	.08	.01	-.04	-.93**		
7.Emotional exhaustion	2.49	.77	-.01	-.26**	.02	-.04	.82**	-.82**	
8.Work alienation	2.40	.77	.02	-.14*	-.00	-.02	.89**	-.92**	.88**

Note. N = 214. a Dummy variable (0 = male, 1 = female).
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

4.3 Hypotheses tests

We tested our hypotheses using the PROCESS tool, a statistical software package developed by Hayes (2013). The results of these analyses are shown in Table 3.

As shown in table 3, we found that person–supervisor value incongruence has a positive effect on emotional exhaustion (β =.60, p < .01, see model 1). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test hypothesis 2, which predicted the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationships between person–supervisor value incongruence and newcomers' work alienation, we used the PROCESS tool by a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure (5000 resamples). As shown in table 3, person–supervisor value incongruence is positively related to newcomers' work alienation (β = .67, p < .01, see model 3). In addition, when person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion were simultaneously entered into model to predict newcomers' work alienation, emotional exhaustion was significantly related to newcomers' work alienation (β = .50, p < .01, see model 4). The bootstrapping analyses (5000 resamples) revealed a significant mediated effect of person–supervisor value incongruence on newcomers' work alienation through emotional exhaustion. The bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (CI) of the mediated effects did not include zero (95% CI [.21, .40]), indicating support of hypothesis 2.

In hypothesis 3, we predicted self-verification striving to amplify the positive relationship between person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion. In our analyses (Table 3, model 2), however, the interaction between person–supervisor value incongruence and self-verification striving was not significantly related to emotional exhaustion (β = .03, *p* =n.s., see model 2). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

TABLE III. RESULTS OF HYPOTHESIS TESTS

Variable		Emotional exhaustion		Work alienation	
		Model1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender		.00	-.01	.04	.04
Age		-.10**	-.11**	-.01	.04*
Education		.01	.01	.01	.00
Tenure		.00	.00	.00	-.01
Person–supervisor value incongruence		.60**	.24**	.67**	.37**
Emotional exhaustion					.50**
Self-verification striving			-.43**		
Person–supervisor value incongruence× Self-verification striving			.03		
F		93.93	79.71	158.71	225.86
R2		.69**	.73**	.79**	.87**
Bootstrap results for mediated effect					
	Effect	Boot SE	LL 95% CI		UL 95% CI
Emotional exhaustion	.30	.05	.21		.40

Note. N = 214. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the person–supervisor value incongruence can significantly affect the emotional exhaustion of newcomers. When newcomers often feel that their supervisors are at odds with their values, they will tend to have emotional exhaustion. That is in line with study by Doblhofer et al, (2019) that person–supervisor value incongruence can promote newcomer's negative emotion and attitude. Besides, this paper demonstrates that newcomers' work alienation markedly be affected by the newcomers' emotional exhaustion and indirectly be influenced by person–supervisor value incongruence through mediator of such emotional exhaustion.

Theoretically, the findings extend the results of previous researches to some extent, many of them have demonstrated the impact of value fit on newcomers' attitudes and behaviors. From a perspective of psychological resources, this study pointes out the importance of emotional exhaustion in newcomer socialization. As for self-verification striving, it theoretically plays a moderating role between the two variables of person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion in our hypothesis. Unfortunately, our data didn't support this moderating effect. Since such trait has a strong impact on newcomers' emotional exhaustion, it still provides valued research ideas for future studies to explore or build a reasonable model.

This research has practical implication. The effective management of newcomers' work alienation is crucial to the development of modern companies. Based on our research, the emotional exhaustion is crucial to induce newcomers' work alienation. It is effective for leaders to

show more value recognition to newcomers, concern about the development of newcomers.

In conclusion, this study profoundly reveals the factors that account for newcomers' work alienation, which indicates the effect of person–supervisor value incongruence and emotional exhaustion.

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