The person-environment fit & employee outcomes: 
the contribution of Human Resource Management in schools

T. Janssen, MSc. (PhD student) 
Dr. L. den Dulk 
Prof. dr. A.J. Steijn 
Erasmus University Rotterdam 
The Netherlands 2
**Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this research is to determine to what extent the PE fit of teachers influences employee outcomes and how HRM can contribute to that relationship. The underlying assumption is that these outcomes will affect organizational performance positively. This will however not be tested in this paper.

The person-environment fit (PE-fit) is described as one of the most dominant concepts in the research field of work related behavior (Schneider, 2001). The PE-fit is defined as the match between an individual and its environment when their characteristics are alike (Schneider, 2001; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee & Erez, 2001; Van Vianen, Pater & van Dijk, 2007; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005). The basic assumption is that behavior, attitude and other employee outcomes are the result of a combination of the individual itself and its environment (Lewin, 1951; Murray, 1938; Pervin, 1989; Edwards, 1996). Insights from the PE-fit can be of practical use for managers (Ahmad, 2011). For example, the extent of strain employees perceive is positively related to the extent of misfit employees perceive between themselves and their work environment (Van Harrison, 1978). This strain can affect the health and performance of employees (Pithers & Soden, 1999). On the other hand, a good fit between the employee and its work environment is positively related to self-respect, self-efficacy and competences (Caplan, 1987). A lot of research on the PE-fit focuses on a relation between the PE-fit and employee outcomes. For example, Kieffer, Schinka and Curtus (2004) found that PE-fit has a positive effect on performance and quality of work. Lyons & O’Brien (2006) and Vogel & Feldman (2009) found a link between PE-fit and turnover intentions. There are also indications that the PE-fit can mediate relationships between organizational concepts and employee outcomes. Huang, Chen and Chou (2005) found a mediating role of PE-fit between CEO charismatic leadership and affective commitment. Peng and Chiu (2010) found a mediating role between communication and organizational citizenship behavior. Boon (2008) describes in her dissertation the mediation role of PE-fit between HRM practices and job satisfaction, turnover intentions, commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. In 2011 Boon, Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe also found a mediating role of PE-fit between HRM practices and employee outcomes.

In search for better employee outcomes and better performance, HRM can be used as an instrument to facilitate a better fit between individuals and their jobs or organizations (Boon et al., 2011). Moreover, the PE-fit can reveal the success of HRM practices through its effect on employee outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). As mentioned above, good fit and positive employee outcomes can lead to better performance (Kieffer et al., 2005; Pithers et al., 2012). HRM is also positively linked to better performance (Gould-Williams, 2003; Bowen en Ostroff, 2004, Boselie, Dietz & Boon, 2005; O’Toole & Meier, 2008 and Paauwe, 2009). The central assumption in the HRM and performance literature is that HRM practices influence employee outcomes, which influence in their turn organizational performance (Paauwe and Richardson, 1997; Paauwe, 2009).

PE fit is about employees fitting in their work environment and HRM is about putting the right man in the right (work) place. It is therefore remarkable that little research has been done on the combination of PE-fit and HRM. In this research we focus on to what extent the PE-fit influences employee outcomes and how HRM can contribute to that. We build on the research of Boon et al. (2011). We differ from them because they focus on the person-job fit and the person-organization fit. In this research we take those fits into account, but we also focus on the person-team fit and the person-supervisor fit as parts of the PE-fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).
Further, we focus on primary education in the Netherlands. There is still little research on PE-fit in schools. Research that is available indicates already that the PE-fit is important for the wellbeing of teachers. A misfit increases the chance of burnout, while on the other hand a good fit leads to satisfaction, engagement and a positive attitude (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Cable, 2009). Other research shows that a good fit leads to more commitment and better performance. Further, a perceived misfit by teachers is an indicator for turnover and early retirement (Barnett, Gareis, & Brennan, 1999; Goodman & Svyantek, 1999; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006).

Another important contribution of this study is to contribute to the growing body of research on measuring PE-fit with quantitative research methods. For a long time research on the PE-fit had a qualitative research design (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

**Research question**

Based on the literature mentioned above, we formulated the following research question: *To what extent does the PE-fit of teachers influence employee outcomes and in what way can HRM contribute to that?*

Kieffer et al. (2004), Lyons et al. (2006) and Vogel et al. (2009) already found a link between PE-fit and employee outcomes. To contribute to the above mentioned growing body of research on measuring PE-fit with quantitative methods, we therefore formulated our first hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** The PE-fit of teachers has a positive effect on their employee outcomes (satisfaction, motivation, commitment and turnover intentions).

Further, several researchers found also a mediating effect of PE-fit (Huang et al., 2005; Peng et al., 2010; Boon, 2008; Boon et al., 2011). Boon (2008) en Boon et al. (2011) found a mediating relationship between HRM and employee outcomes. Because it is our aim to build on this research, our second hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** PE-fit mediates the relationship between HRM practices and employees outcomes (satisfaction, motivation, commitment and turnover intentions).

**Methodology**

For analyses data is collected on 28 primary schools in the Netherlands. The data used in this paper is conducted through an in-depth study with a survey for teachers. 254 teachers filled in the survey.

The person-environment fit is measured by four types of fit. The person-organization fit is measured with four items based on Bright (2007) (Ca= .859). An example is: the goals and values I have in life, correspond with the goals and values of my school. The person-job fit is also measured with four items based on Brkic et al. (2002). An example is: All by all, this job fits me. Cronbach’s alpha is .823. The person-group fit is measured with eight items (CA= .782). The items are based on Vogel and Veldman, (2009) and Karasek & Theorell (1990). An example is: I can get along well with my colleagues. The person-supervisor fit is measured with five items (CA=.904) based on Baard, Desi & Ryan (2004), one of the items is: I feel understood by my supervisor.

HRM is measured with 12 items (Cronbach’s alpha .706) based on Vermeeren, 2010. We measured the perception of employees of the HRM practices. HRM is operationalized by using AMO theory (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000). This theory argues that employees experience more positive HRM outcomes when the 4
HRM system includes instruments in the three domains of ‘Ability’, ‘Motivation’ and ‘Opportunity to participate’. An example is: At our school teachers are stimulated to follow trainings.

Four different kinds of outcomes are measured in this study. Motivation is measured with six items based on Gagne et al (2010) (CA=.662). One of the items is: I work harder than is expected of me. Satisfaction is measured with one item based on Nagy (2002): Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? Commitment is measured with four items based on Meyer and Allen (CA=.788). An example is: I feel emotional attached to this school. And the intention to retention is measured with one item: do you have the intention to find a new job?

For this study correlations and multiple regression analyses are used.

**Results**
The first results show that the PE-fit has a positive effect on commitment, satisfaction and motivation of teachers. The person-job fit and the person-team fit have a positive effect on the motivation of teachers. The person-job fit is important for the satisfaction of teachers. We also found that the more teachers fit in their team, the more they are committed to their organization. We did not found a relationship with turnover. Therefore, hypothesis 1 can be partly confirmed. Further, the more HRM practices are used, the better the PE-fit of teachers. At last, there is a mediating relationship of PE-fit between HRM and the employee outcomes satisfaction, motivation and commitment. There is no mediating relationship with turnover intentions. Hypothesis 2 can also partly be confirmed.

**Main conclusions**
Overall, this study shows that the better teachers fit in their work environment, the better their satisfaction, motivation and commitment. And when teacher perceive more HRM policies, their person-environment fit is better. In short, HRM can be used to facilitate a better PE-fit of teachers in their work environment which will lead to better employee outcomes.

**Literature**


