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# Multilevel homology and discontinuity of person–group fit on individual and team creativity

Jee Young Seong <sup>a</sup> and Jin Nam Choi <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Jeonbuk National University; <sup>b</sup>Seoul National University

## ABSTRACT

We develop a multilevel framework that proposes the main and interactive effects of person–group (PG) fit in values and abilities on creativity at the individual and group levels. Our analysis of field data collected from 738 members comprising 108 work teams provides empirical support for our multilevel model of PG fit. Specifically, ability fit and collective ability fit exhibit consistent positive effects on individual and team creativity, respectively (i.e., multilevel homology). By contrast, at the individual level, value fit suppresses the positive effect of ability fit on individual creativity, while at the group level, collective value fit accentuates the positive effect of collective ability fit on team creativity (i.e., multilevel discontinuity). This study highlights the significance of multilevel interactive perspective on person–environment fit.

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## KEYWORDS

Person–environment fit; multilevel homology; collective value fit; collective ability fit; creativity

In capturing the interaction between person and environment, the literature on person–environment (PE) fit has considered the characteristics of the two entities simultaneously and demonstrated the benefit of congruence or fit between them (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). The increasing reliance on teams for most organizational functions highlights the significance of person–group (PG) fit over and above other aspects of fit, such as person–organization (PO), person–job (PJ), and person–supervisor (PS) fit. PG fit refers to the compatibility or congruence between a person and his/her group environment, which includes other members and group tasks (Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Although less explored than other types of fit, PG fit has been found to predict key attitudes and performance metrics of team members as well as team processes and outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The present study enriches the PG fit literature by theorizing and empirically investigating the interactive effects of the different types of PG fit on creativity at multiple levels of analysis.

In line with the well-established and validated distinction, two types of PG fit are identified: (a) *value fit*, which represents a supplementary fit or similarity of important characteristics between a person and the environment and (b) *ability fit*, which reflects the complementary fit or the extent to which environmental demands are fulfilled by a person or vice versa (Kristof-Brown & Jansen, 2007; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Value fit is beneficial for team members' attitudes and performance because people respond positively when they perceive that others in their work environment share their values (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). Similarly, ability fit can promote the performance of members because task-related demands from the team environment are addressed by their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Although meta-analytic findings indicate that value fit and ability fit promote positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, the way these types of fit representing supplementary and complementary fit work together has yet to be examined. The literature on PE fit, not PG fit alone, centers on the main effects of the varying

types of fit and is silent on how different types of fit reinforce or neutralize one another's effects. This study investigates the interaction between value fit and ability fit in predicting creative performance.

Studies on PE fit have focused on its effects on affiliative or status-maintaining outcomes, such as organizational commitment, citizenship, and in-role performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014), and largely neglected its effects on status-challenging outcomes, such as creativity or innovation. However, creative performance has become an increasingly important performance domain in contemporary organizations that operate in constantly changing, highly competitive environments (Christensen-Salem et al., 2020; Tierney & Farmer, 2011). The limited number of studies on the effect of PE fit on creativity provides inconsistent patterns, reporting both positive and negative effects (Saraç et al., 2014; Wang & Wang, 2018), which demonstrates the need to consider moderators and conduct further empirical investigation (Seong & Choi, 2019; Spanjol et al., 2015). We extend this emerging literature and resolve the puzzling empirical patterns by theorizing how the effect of one type of PG fit on creativity is moderated by another type.

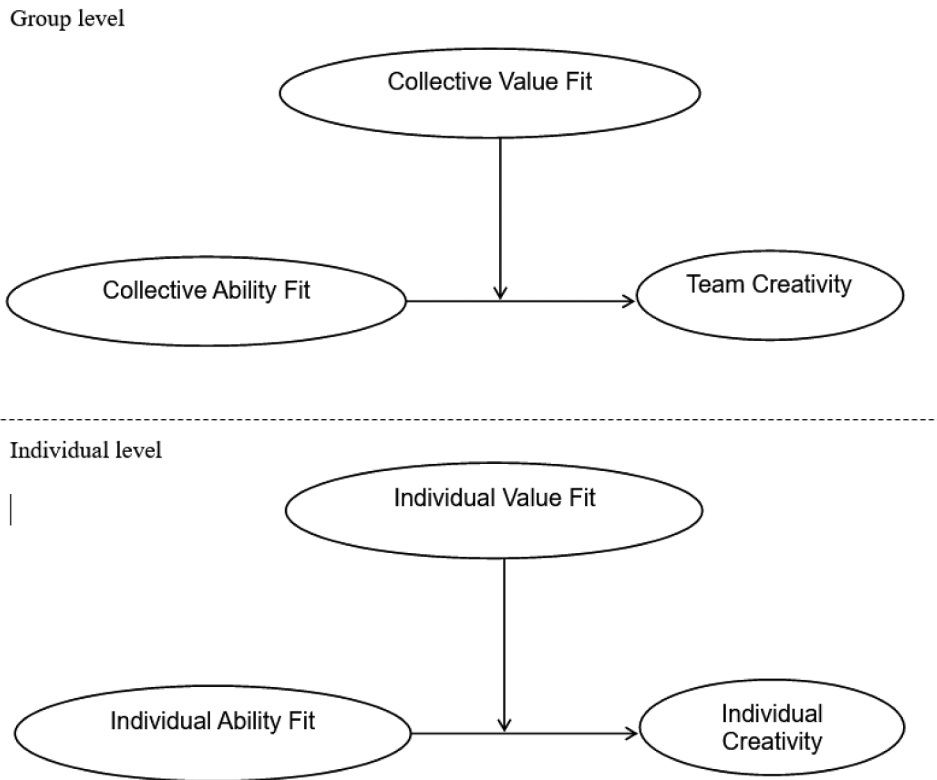
This study also enriches the PE fit literature by exploring the interactive effects of ability fit and value fit at multiple levels of analysis. In line with the dominant focus on the individual-level processes of PE fit (Ostroff & Schulte, 2007), we theorize and validate the interactive effect of ability fit and value fit on creativity at the individual level. At the same time, we explore the group-level effects of such an interaction in predicting team creativity. Group-level fit has often been referred to as "collective fit." Group members tend to develop similar perceptions regarding the extent to which they share common values and possess adequate KSAs as a team to meet task demands through social interaction and normative processes in a team (Ostroff et al., 2003; Shin & Choi, 2010), resulting in collective perceptions of group-level fit (Seong et al., 2015). Based on the fit literature, we identify two types of fit at the group level: (a) *Collective value fit*, which refers to the group-level perceived value congruence distinct from individual-level value fit, and (b) *collective ability fit*, which indicates the team's assessment of whether they, as a whole, possess an appropriate and complete skillset (Kristof-Brown et al., 2011). Expanding the current research question to the group level, we investigate the interactive effects of collective ability fit and collective value fit in predicting team creativity.

In sum, to advance the PE fit literature, we explore the effects of two types of PG fit (i.e., ability fit and value fit) on creativity by examining their interactive effects on creativity at multiple levels. To specify level-dependent effects of PG fit, we further elaborate and explore the intriguing possibility that the interactions between ability fit and value fit exhibit different patterns at the individual level versus the group level because of the different psychological and collective dynamics involving fit at different levels of analysis. This study empirically validates these theoretical propositions by analyzing multilevel field data collected from 738 employees and their supervisors working in 108 teams. The multilevel theoretical framework proposed and tested in this study is summarized in Figure 1.

## Theory and hypotheses

### *Creativity and the interaction between person and environment*

Researchers have defined creativity at work as generating novel ideas on the processes and outcomes of the organization to develop new and improved ways of practices and performance (Amabile, 1996; Anderson et al., 2014; Shalley et al., 2004). Creativity involves multiple stages or facets, such as problem identification, idea generation, and idea elaboration and selection (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Individual creativity refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas by an employee (Gong et al., 2013). Team creativity refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas by a team of employees working together (Shin & Zhou, 2007). With the increasing importance of creativity as a performance domain in most organizations and various functions, intensive streams of research have emerged using different perspectives to identify facilitators of creativity.



**Figure 1.** Multilevel theoretical model of PG fit and creativity.

The classic three-component model of creativity from the social-psychological approach focused on individual properties, such as intrinsic motivation, domain-relevant skills/expertise, and creative thinking processes (Amabile, 1988). Cognitive perspectives identified pertinent information-processing strategies or mental operations that promote creativity, such as intuitive thinking, cognitive flexibility, and perspective-taking (De Dreu et al., 2008; Shalley et al., 2004). Recent developments related particularly to creativity in organizations highlight contextual or situational factors, such as task complexity, leader support, team psychological safety, and organizational culture (Anderson et al., 2014). Thus, the creativity literature has appreciated the person–situation interaction that considers both aspects involving individual and contextual characteristics instead of either one aspect to understand the complex phenomenon of creativity (Woodman et al., 1993). In this regard, the PE fit perspective based on the simultaneous consideration of person and environment has a unique value toward understanding creativity. Accordingly, we theorize the interactive functions of different types of PG fit toward the creativity of individuals and teams in organizations.

### ***PE fit as a multilevel construct***

Previous PE fit studies have mostly examined a person’s fit to his/her team or organization to predict individual-level outcomes, without paying much attention to the idea of fit at the team level (Ostroff & Schulte, 2007). Therefore, the fit literature is filled with repeated but largely unanswered calls to investigate fit at higher levels of analysis (e.g., Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Group-level fit refers to shared and collective constructions of fit among team members. For

example, Seong and Hong (2020) examined personality fit at the group level by labeling it as *collective personality fit*, which involved the congruence of personalities among group members that develop through interpersonal interactions over time.

According to Kristof-Brown et al. (2011), collective fit indicates a shared and collective construction of the perception of fit, which should be distinguishable from a simple aggregation of its lower-level counterparts. Thus, collective fit follows a referent-shift consensus model (Chan, 1998) in which each individual's view of a given team-level attribute is related to but conceptually and operationally distinct from the corresponding individual-level construct (Kristof-Brown et al., 2011). The emergence and level-dependent effects of group-level or collective constructs from corresponding individual-level constructs have been demonstrated through the referent composition model for many constructs, such as collective efficacy, group affect or moods, team goal orientations, and collective motivation (DeRue & Hollenbeck, 2007; Kim & Shin, 2015; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). This study investigates group-level fit as a multilevel construct by applying the referent shift composition model that has been employed in theorizing those multilevel phenomena.

### **Multilevel homology of individual-level ability fit and collective ability fit for creativity**

Various conceptualizations of PG fit predict the attitudes, behavior, and performance of team members. In this study, ability fit is identified as the main predictor of individual creativity because of its direct implications toward performance compared to value fit, which is related primarily to members' attitudes toward the team (e.g., team commitment, satisfaction) (Choi, 2004; Seong & Kristof-Brown, 2012). Ability fit, or more specifically, *demands-abilities fit*, occurs when a person has KSAs that meet the environmental demands (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Accordingly, as a form of PG fit, ability fit represents a situation in which a team member possesses abilities and other resources required by the team task.

Creativity is a performance domain that can be promoted by ability fit because it involves solving task problems and challenging the status quo or pushing the boundaries of existing practices and ways of doing things, which require a comprehensive understanding and command of the task and situation (Woodman et al., 1993). According to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), ability fit can enable a person to develop self-efficacy beliefs to engage in proactive and risk-taking behaviors, such as sharing knowledge and providing creative ideas (Lee & Antonakis, 2014). Individuals with high ability fit may be confident about their competence to help others and contribute to their team because they believe their KSAs fulfill the requirements of the team task (Seong & Kristof-Brown, 2012). The three-component model of creativity also highlights the significance of domain-relevant knowledge or expertise to promote creativity (Amabile, 1988). Ability fit implies that a member has KSAs and other capabilities needed to accomplish the team task goals; thus, it should enable the member to feel confident of the merit of his/her ideas and express them to others. Therefore, we advance the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Ability fit will be positively related to individual creativity.*

Although PE fit and its specific aspects, such as PO, PJ, and PG fit, have been examined at the individual level as a congruence between a person and various environmental entities, it can also be conceived at the group level as a collective phenomenon (e.g., Shin & Choi, 2010). Similar to other emergent group properties (e.g., team goal orientations, group affective tone), demands-abilities fit can emerge at the group level when team members work together regularly and develop a shared perception that the team in its entirety has the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfill the team task demands (Chan, 1998; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Actual and vicarious experiences among members provide an informational basis for developing and sharing perceptions regarding whether the team is equipped with the requisite capabilities (Bandura, 1997).

Similar to individual-level ability fit predicting individual creativity, group-level collective ability fit may predict team creativity (i.e., multilevel homology, Chen & Bliese, 2002; Chen et al., 2005). As an emergent group property based on shared experiences, collective ability fit may serve an input function to promote collective creative efforts of the team. When team members recognize that they possess appropriate KSAs, they are likely to develop positive attitudes toward the team task and collectively engage in proactive behavior, such as sharing knowledge and generating new ideas to improve team processes and outcomes (DeBus et al., 2020). Collective ability fit may also mobilize member resources to address inefficiencies and overcome obstacles through collaborative and creative efforts as a team (Kristof-Brown et al., 2011). Previous studies showed the significance of collective efficacy beliefs and the possession of knowledge stock among members in promoting team-level creative efforts, risk-taking, and experimentation (Kim & Shin, 2015). Thus, collective ability fit may urge team members to exploit opportunities with creative solutions rather than remain passive and stay with the status quo. Thus, we hypothesize that collective ability fit is conducive to team creativity.

*Hypothesis 2: Collective ability fit will be positively related to team creativity.*

### **Multilevel discontinuity of moderating functions of individual-level value fit and collective value fit**

Thus far, we theorized the positive effects of ability fit and collective ability fit on individual creativity and team creativity, respectively, thereby endorsing multilevel homology for the given relationship (De Cooman et al., 2016). To further elaborate the multilevel effects of ability fit, we specify value fit as a moderator of the ability fit–creativity relationship. Unlike the multilevel homology for the main effects of ability fit, we propose that the moderating effects of value fit may take different forms at the individual versus group level of analysis (cf. multilevel discontinuity, Chen & Bliese, 2002).

At the individual level, value fit may suppress the positive relationship between ability fit and individual creativity, thereby operating as a negative contingency. In line with the notion of similarity attraction, a member who perceives high-value congruence may feel attached to other members, and thus, would be motivated to satisfy their needs (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Tajfel, 1982). By presenting such a reinforcing social environment, high-value fit generates an inclination to conform rather than disrupt the status quo to maintain membership and receive social approval from others, thereby forcing a member to comply with existing rules, norms, and procedures (Powell, 1998). Therefore, although a member with a high ability fit is capable of introducing creative solutions, he/she will be hesitant to do so or will not be motivated when experiencing high-value fit. Value fit may discourage a member from expressing ideas that can clash with those of others, and possibly generate conflicts or psychological tension, even when he/she can come up with creative solutions based on the KSAs that fit the task demands (Schneider et al., 1995). Therefore, if a high level of value fit exists, the positive effect of ability fit on individual creativity will less likely materialize to avoid the potential social risk associated with being different from others.

By contrast, the positive potential of ability fit toward creativity is more likely realized for a member with a low-value fit who is not strongly constrained by normative pressures to comply (Seong & Choi, 2019). This situation permits a member to take social risks and deviate from extant routines and rules (Ashmore et al., 2004). Janssen and Huang (2008) underscored the significance of individuality because it allows members “to feel idiosyncratic and different from other team members in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors . . . This divergent and challenging attitude feeds the aptitude to seek, construct, and define problems, to generate and combine new ideas for solutions” (p. 72). Moreover, according to the discrepancy-arousal theory (Capella & Greene, 1982), a discrepancy between personal needs and supplies from the environment (e.g., low-value fit) instigates a person to seek tactics that fulfill his/her own needs, which promotes motivation to improve or change the status quo. People devote more attention to negative information than to positive information (Peeters & Czapinski,

1990). Thus, misfit is more salient than fit, and the negative state of misfit may elicit considerable attention and motivation to address the deficiency by changing the situation and voicing suggestions, which may accentuate the effect of ability fit on individual creativity (e.g., Moynihan & Peterson, 2001). These considerations lead to the following moderation hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 3: Value fit will negatively moderate the relationship between ability fit and individual creativity, such that the relationship will be more positive when value fit is low than when it is high.*

At the group level, we propose an opposite-moderating effect for collective value fit from what was hypothesized for individual-level value fit, thereby expecting a multilevel discontinuity for the interaction between the two types of fit. Specifically, collective value fit is expected to strengthen the positive effect of collective ability fit on team creativity. When members share a collective belief that their values are similar to each other at the group level, they tend to develop a sense of social identity and define themselves as members of the same group (cf. social identity theory, Hogg & Abrams, 1988). The social identity based on the shared belief regarding value congruence among members could engender positive interpersonal perceptions, such as trust toward one another and collective motivation to benefit the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Accordingly, teams with high collective value fit can easily reach a consensus on what matters to them and how to accomplish it, which enables them to develop shared goals and expectations on appropriate behavior (cf. shared mental models, Mathieu et al., 2000). Trust and shared expectations among members facilitate open communication and collaboration (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). This team context may represent climates of psychological safety that allow the free flow of thoughts and ideas among members. Such trusting and open climate based on collective value fit could further strengthen the positive effect of collective ability fit on team creativity, in which members can also trust the team's competence and appreciate each other's contributions and ideas. Thus, unlike value fit at the individual level causing a member's eagerness for social approval and anxiety of potential rejection, collective value fit can provide a psychologically safe environment that motivates team members to express their ideas freely with collectively shared mutual trust (Smith-Jentsch et al., 2005).

In addition to such motivational benefit, collective value fit may also generate interpersonal benefits that diminish the social risk of expressing creative ideas. Such interpersonal context can accentuate the positive effect of collective ability fit on team creativity by releasing the fear of evaluation among members, which often is the biggest barrier blocking creativity (Cole et al., 2013). In teams with collaborative relationships to pursue shared goals, members are tolerant of dissenting ideas from others because they attribute such deviation and potential conflict to the shared constructive intention to improve collective performance (Bray, 2004). With such interpersonal advantages associated with collective value fit, members with collective ability fit are eager to contribute and likely to share task-related ideas, even when others disagree. Thus, collective value fit can activate or accentuate the positive effect of collective ability fit on team creativity.

*Hypothesis 4: Collective value fit will positively moderate the relationship between collective ability fit and team creativity such that the relationship will be more positive when collective value fit is high than when it is low.*

## Method

### *Sample and data collection procedure*

Data were collected from a commercial bank in South Korea. In cooperation with the HR team, employees and managers were invited to participate in online surveys. Among the total of 1,575 employees invited, 1,080 (68.6%) participated in the survey, and 162 (96.4%) out of 168 team leaders



completed the online survey. Given that the offices or departments in the headquarters performed quite different tasks and showed different response patterns from local branches, only the data from local branches were analyzed. Thus, the final sample for the current analysis included 738 employees at the individual level and 108 teams (branches) at the group level (individual-level response rate = 46.86%; team-level response rate = 64.29%).

The size of the teams in the current sample ranged from 2 to 22 ( $M = 7.5$ ,  $SD = 3.27$ ) with an average team tenure of 2.15 years ( $SD = 2.25$ ). The average age of team members was 34.48 years ( $SD = 8.78$ ). Females comprised 52.7% of the sample. The education levels were high school (6.6%), two-year college (11.4%), bachelor's degree (77.1%), and graduate degree (4.5%). The data used for the current analysis is available from the first author upon request. All research materials used for collecting the current data and two original data files (one for individual level, and another for group-level analysis) are available at <https://osf.io/c3edw/>.

## Measures

To test the current multilevel hypotheses, we employed comparable scales at individual and group levels of analysis by using items developed and validated in previous studies (Seong et al., 2015). To avoid the potential threat of common source bias, members reported on their individual and collective fit perceptions, and leaders rated creativity of their followers and team they manage. Participating team members and leaders rated the items on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

### Ability fit

Ability fit was evaluated using three items based on prior measures employed in Cable and DeRue (2002). To capture ability fit in a team setting, we replaced the term “my job” with the term “my team task.” Employees reported their ability fit by responding to the following three items ( $\alpha = .85$ ): “The match is very good between the demands of my team task and my personal skills,” “My abilities and training are a good fit with the requirements of my team task,” and “My personal abilities and education provide a good match with the demands that my team task places on me.”

### Value fit

Adapting the items used in Cable and DeRue (2002) to the PG fit domain, we used a three-item measure to assess the degree of value congruence between a focal member and the team. This scale included the following three items: “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my team members value,” “My personal values match my team's values and culture,” and “My team's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value.” The reliability of the scale was indicated by Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

### Individual creativity

Individual-level creativity was measured using four items adopted from Zhou and George (2001). The leaders evaluated the creativity of each member by rating the following items ( $\alpha = .96$ ): “This member comes up with creative solutions to problems,” “This member comes up with new and practical ideas to improve team performance,” “This member suggests new ways to increase performance quality,” and “This member exhibits creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.”

### Collective ability fit

For collective ability fit, we modified the three-item scale used for individual-level ability fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Shin, 2008). The following items ( $\alpha = .98$ ) were included: “Our team members' knowledge, skills, and abilities are a good fit with the requirement of our team's task,” “Our team members' abilities and training provide a good match with the demands that our team's task places on them,” and “The match is very good between the demands of our team's task and our skills.”



We calculated within-group agreement index ( $r_{wg}$ ) to evaluate the sharedness of team members' collective fit perceptions (James et al., 1993). We also computed ICC(1), an index of within-group variability, and ICC(2), which represents between-group variability (Bliese, 2000). For collective ability fit, the aggregation statistics were as follows: 0.93 ( $r_{wg}$ ), 0.06 (ICC1), and 0.32 (ICC2) with a statistically significant test statistic ( $p < .05$ ). We proceeded with aggregation to the group level.

### Collective value fit

To measure value fit at the team level, we modified the items used to assess individual-level value fit according to the referent shift to the team level (Chan, 1998; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). Specifically, the following three items ( $\alpha = .98$ ) were used to assess collective value fit: "The things our team members value in life are very similar to each other," "Our team members' values match each other," and "Our team members' values are compatible with each other." For collective value fit, these aggregation statistics were as follows: 0.86 ( $r_{wg}$ ), 0.04 (ICC1), and 0.24 (ICC2). Although ICC values were modest, due perhaps to relatively small sizes of the teams in the current sample, the test statistic ( $F$  value) associated with the values was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), which justifies the group-level aggregation.

### Team creativity

Team creativity was assessed by team leaders using the same four items of individual creativity modified to the team level (Zhou & George, 2001). The four items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) were "Team members come up with creative solutions to problems," "Team members come up with new and practical ideas to improve team performance," "Team members suggest new ways to increase performance quality," and "Team members exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to."

### Control variables

Our analysis for hypothesis testing included age and gender as control variables at the individual level because these demographic factors can affect the relationship between fit perceptions and individual creativity (Spanjol et al., 2015). Similarly, team size and average team tenure of members were controlled in our group-level analysis because of their implications for the relationship between group-level fit and team performance (Shin & Choi, 2010).

## Results

We first performed confirmatory factor analyses to examine the distinctiveness of our individual-level scales for value fit, ability fit, and individual creativity as well as our group-level scales for collective value fit, collective ability fit, and team creativity by using AMOS 23.0. The three-factor model was compared with plausible alternative models at individual and group levels of analysis (Tables 1 and 2, respectively). Overall, these results demonstrate that the expected three-factor model at both levels provides a significantly better fit over those alternative models. Tables 3 and 4 present the descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables at the individual and group levels, respectively.

**Table 1.** Confirmatory factor analysis at the individual level.

Model	Description	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Change from Model 1	
									$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$
1	Three-factor model <sup>a</sup>	157.54***	32	4.92	.98	.98	.073	.037		
2	Two-factor model <sup>b</sup>	756.21***	34	22.24	.90	.87	.170	.077	598.66***	2
3	One-factor model	4314.71***	35	123.28	.56	.40	.23	.292	3984.02***	3

CFI = Comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation;

SRMR = Standardized root mean squared residual.

<sup>a</sup>Hypothesized three-factor model.

<sup>b</sup>Value fit and ability fit combined as one construct.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis at the group level.

Model	Description	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Change from Model 1	
									$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$
1	Three-factor model <sup>a</sup>	45.38***	32	1.41	.99	.99	.06	.04		
2	Two-factor model <sup>b</sup>	419.76***	34	12.34	.74	.66	.32	.13	374.37***	2
3	One-factor model	797.69***	35	22.79	.49	.34	.45	.23	752.30***	3

CFI = Comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation;

SRMR = Standardized root mean squared residual.

<sup>a</sup>Hypothesized three-factor model.

<sup>b</sup>Collective ability fit and collective value fit combined as one construct

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables at the individual level.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	34.48	8.78	-				
2. Gender	1.53	.50	-.47**	-			
3. Ability fit	5.65	.87	.26**	-.24**	(.94)		
4. Value fit	5.37	1.15	.16**	-.22**	.62**	(.85)	
5. Individual creativity	5.51	.98	.05	.05	.08**	.10**	(.96)

*N* = 738. The internal consistency reliability coefficients appear in parentheses along the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables at the group level.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team size	7.5	3.27	-				
2. Team tenure	2.15	2.25	-.07	-			
3. Collective ability fit	5.49	5.40	.02	-.08	(.98)		
4. Collective value fit	5.37	5.98	-.10	-.13	.68**	(.98)	
5. Team creativity	5.67	.91	.12	.22	.30**	.24*	(.90)

*N* = 108. The alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients appear in parentheses along the main diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Main effects of individual-level ability fit and collective ability fit on creativity

Given the multilevel data structure in which members are nested in teams and rated by the same supervisor, we employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis to take into account the non-independence of the individual-level observations. Table 5 provides a summary of the HLM results of testing individual-level hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 poses a positive relationship between ability fit and

**Table 5.** Hierarchical linear modeling results for individual-level relationships.

Variables	Individual Creativity		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Step 1: Controls			
Intercept	5.51*** (.07)	5.51*** (.07)	5.51*** (.07)
Age	.01**(.00)	.01*(.00)	.01*(.00)
Gender	.16*(.06)	.18**(.06)	.18**(.06)
Step 2: Main effect			
Ability fit		.06 <sup>+</sup> (.04)	.34*
Step 3: Interactive effect			
Value fit			.32*(.15)
Ability fit × Value fit			-.06*(.03)
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.00	.01	.01

*N* = 738. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 6.** Regression results for group-level relationships.

Variables	Team Creativity		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Step 1: Controls			
Intercept	5.39(.24)	2.57(.89)	1.85(.96)
Team size	.04(.03)	.03(.03)	.06(.03)
Team tenure	.01(.04)	.02(.04)	.03(.04)
Step 2: Main effect			
Collective ability fit		.51***(.16)	.37 <sup>†</sup> (.21)
Step 3: Interactive effect			
Collective value fit			.22(.20)
Collective ability fit × Collective value fit			.49*(.24)
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.11**	.15**

N = 108. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses.

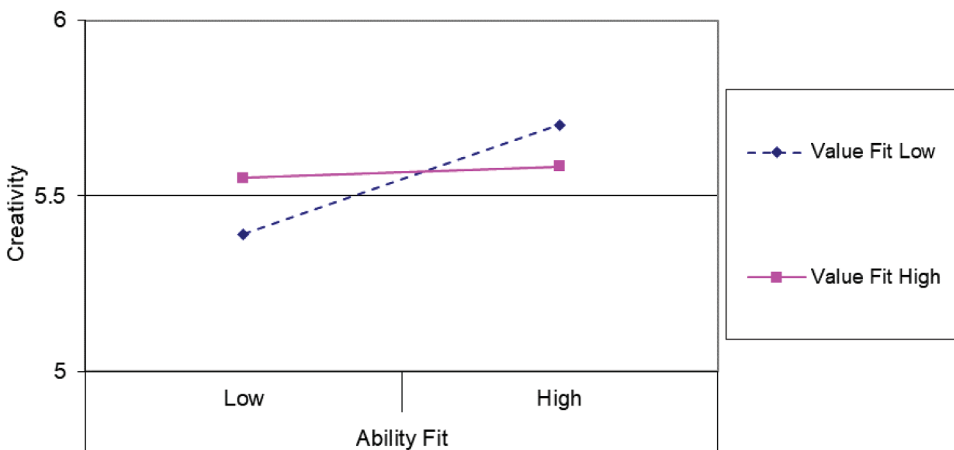
<sup>†</sup>p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

individual creativity. As shown in Model 2 of Table 5, after controlling for age and gender, we found that ability fit was positively related to individual creativity with a marginal significance ( $\gamma = .06, p < .10$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is marginally supported.

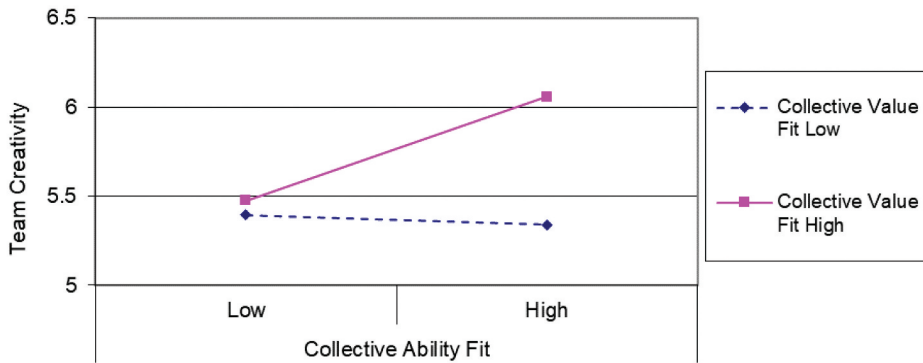
Hypothesis 2 posits a group-level relationship between collective ability fit and team creativity. To test this group-level hypothesis, we used ordinary least-squares regression equations by using group-level aggregated data. The results reported in Model 2 of Table 6 show that collective ability fit is a significant positive predictor of team creativity ( $b = .51, p < .001$ ). Thus, the result supports Hypothesis 2.

**Moderating effects of individual-level value fit and collective value fit**

Hypothesis 3 states that value fit will negatively moderate the relationship between ability fit and individual creativity. As expected, Model 3 in Table 5 indicates a statistically significant negative interaction between ability fit and value fit in predicting supervisor-rated creativity ( $\gamma = -.06, p < .05$ ). This significant interaction is further probed using simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). The interaction pattern plotted in Figure 2 is consistent with our theoretical arguments. This interaction plot shows the simple effects of ability fit on individual creativity at high and low levels ( $\pm 1$  SD) of value fit. The effect of ability fit on individual creativity is more positive when value fit is low than high, therefore supporting Hypothesis 3.



**Figure 2.** Interaction between ability fit and value fit in predicting individual creativity.



**Figure 3.** Interaction between collective ability fit and collective value fit in predicting team creativity.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that collective value fit will positively moderate the relationship between collective ability fit and team creativity. In Model 3 of Table 6, the interaction effect between collective ability fit and collective value fit on team creativity is statistically significant and positive ( $b = .49, p < .05$ ). Following simple slope analysis (Aiken & West 1991), we graphed the group-level interaction effect in Figure 3. Consistent with our theoretical expectation, the pattern depicted in the figure indicates that team creativity is significantly improved when both collective ability fit and collective value fit are high compared to other conditions. These patterns support Hypothesis 4.

## Discussion

The objective of this study is to investigate how ability fit, as a type of PG fit, and its interaction with value fit predict creativity at the individual and group levels of analysis. To this end, we hypothesize the positive main effects of ability fit across the two levels in predicting individual and team creativity. By contrast, the interaction between ability fit and value fit is proposed to take different forms depending on the level of the given phenomenon, thereby predicting creativity either at the individual or group level of analysis. The empirical results support these multilevel theoretical propositions regarding the main and interaction effects of differing types of PG fit that lead to creativity at different levels. Below we discuss theoretical implications and limitations of the current study along with the directions for further research.

### Theoretical implications

The present analysis provides meaningful theoretical insights into PG fit and creativity in several important ways. First, this study clarifies the significance of PG fit in relation to creativity, a criterion that has been largely neglected. The extensive body of empirical studies on PE fit and its sub-constructs, such as PO, PG, and PS fit, have demonstrated the validity of these PE fit constructs in relation to criteria such as commitment, motivation, citizenship, and general performance (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Shin et al., 2017). The prevailing focus on overall morale and job demands fulfilled by employees seems natural or even inevitable given that the benefits of PE fit are theorized on the basis of the similarity attraction paradigm and social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Byrne, 1971; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Accordingly, creativity or the generation of deviant ideas as a potential outcome has been overlooked, and a small number of recent studies suggest that the effect of PE fit on creativity is ambivalent and depends on moderating contingencies (Seong & Choi, 2019; Spanjol et al., 2015). Using a relatively large field sample of individuals and work teams, our analysis

shows that ability fit and value fit have significant positive effects on creativity at the individual and group levels. These empirical patterns establish the creative performance of individuals and teams as a meaningful criterion that can be predicted by PG fit, particularly ability fit.

Second, the present focus on the interaction between ability fit and value fit departs from and complements extant PE fit literature that concentrates on main effects (De Cooman et al., 2016). Meta-analytic studies demonstrate distinct and significant implications of the two types of fit for individual outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). However, the literature remains silent regarding the combined, potentially synergistic effects of these fit constructs. The two fit constructs represent disparate ways through which individuals achieve compatibility with the environment (i.e., complementarity and supplementarity, Cable & Edwards, 2004; Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Hence, exploring how the two fit constructs work together to shape important performance domains, such as creativity, seems necessary and critical in advancing the PE fit literature, which becomes mature and saturated with confirming empirical studies on the main effects of various fit constructs. In this respect, the current theoretical development and empirical validation of interactive effects of ability fit and value fit enrich the literature and offer new insights into the way different fit dimensions are combined to predict creativity.

Third, the most significant and notable contribution of this study lies in the multilevel theory development and empirical investigation. With regard to the main effect of PG fit, we theorize and empirically validate the multilevel homology of ability fit and collective ability fit in predicting individual and team creativity, respectively. The empirical results confirm this theoretical expectation, though the pattern seems much stronger at the group level for collective ability fit than at the individual level for ability fit ( $b = .51, p < .001$  and  $\gamma = .06, p < .10$ , respectively). With regard to the interaction between two fit constructs, we propose multilevel discontinuities by proposing suppressing and synergistic interactions at individual and group levels, respectively. The results again exhibit a stronger support for the opposite interaction hypotheses at the group level than at the individual level ( $b = .49, p < .05$  and  $\gamma = -.06, p < .05$ , respectively), with a clear synergistic interaction at the group level (Figure 3) versus a somewhat weak suppressive interaction at the individual level (Figure 2).

The current multilevel findings indicate that the main and interaction effects of two fit constructs on creativity are generally stronger for groups than for individuals. Thus, groups are as plausible as (if not more plausible than) individuals as the target or referent for theorizing and examining the phenomenon and dynamism involving PE fit. The present analysis comparing the same fit-related hypotheses at the individual and group levels offers rare and unique information regarding an appropriate and meaningful level of theorizing and studying PE fit. Although the PE fit literature has focused on individual-level processes and outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014), scaling up to the group level may generate new insights and opportunities for further expanding the literature. Exploring the group-level, collective processes and outcomes driven from various fit constructs, such as PO, PJ, PG, and PS fit, seems adequate and promising given that the theoretical foundations of PE fit, such as social identification and social exchange, tap into social relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As shown in the current analysis, PE fit at different levels may invite distinct level-dependent dynamics that lead to multilevel homology or discontinuity, thereby instigating distinct main and interaction patterns across levels. In this respect, further theoretical and empirical endeavors are promising directions for PE fit researchers.

### **Practical implications**

This study provides several practical implications to those who seek ways to enhance creativity of individuals and teams in organizations. The current analysis demonstrates that ability fit is a meaningful predictor of creativity for individuals and teams. Accordingly, organizations can improve employee creativity by promoting individual-level perceptions of the match between one's own competence and team task requirements through various training and coaching efforts. Similarly, members' collective ability fit perceptions can be strengthened through team learning, mutual

encouragements, and skill development, which should increase team creativity. The multilevel homology of PG fit in member abilities toward individual and team creativity, indicating the value of individual and team learning and perceived competence in the workplace.

More importantly, we have explicitly identified interactive mechanisms that ability fit and value fit work together in work teams and found opposing patterns. At the individual level, a member with high ability fit may exhibit less creativity when he/she feels greater value congruence with other members. In this case, individual-level value fit can operate as a source for social harmony or an indication of interpersonal intimacy, which constrains the link between ability fit and individual creativity. By contrast, when value fit is low, high ability fit produces greater individual creativity. Perhaps, a limited exchange relationship with the team may induce a member to think and work more creatively to overcome such barriers (Zhou & George, 2001). Accordingly, team leaders should cautiously manage individual members' sense of value congruence, such that those with high ability fit can feel free to deviate from others' expectations and present ideas that others may not agree or endorse.

At the team level, the best condition for team creativity involves high collective ability fit combined with high collective value fit. Given this opposite interaction pattern observed for team creativity, managers should carefully evaluate the task-related demands for individual versus team creativity. If collective team creative performance is deemed more important, then managers may promote team-level collective value congruence among members; in this manner, members with high collective ability fit feel comfortable or psychologically safe in tasking risks and developing unconventional ideas together without worrying about others' evaluative judgments (Smith-Jentsch et al., 2005). Thus, managers are encouraged to identify a critical driver of creative performance to better achieve task goals and manage the two aspects of PG fit for individual members and the entire team.

### **Limitations and future research directions**

The present findings must be interpreted subject to several limitations. First, the current measurement of fit at the individual and group levels is based on individual members' perceptions or direct assessments of the congruence between them and the team or other members. Perceived fit measures tend to be more strongly related to various outcomes than alternative approaches, such as objective fit or indirect fit (Cable & Judge, 1997; Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Kristof, 1996). In addition, the current measures of collective ability fit and value fit represent internal fit between entities within work teams. The conceptual and operational approaches to PG fit can address both internal and external fit (DeRue & Hollenbeck, 2007). Thus, future studies may expand the current work by investigating the fit between a team and its external environment, such as other teams, top management, or external business partners. Finally, PG fit can be assessed across multiple characteristics beyond abilities and values, such as task goals, personality, and collective norms, by using internal and/or external PG fit (DeRue & Hollenbeck, 2007; Hollenbeck et al., 2002). In sum, the current multilevel investigation of PG fit based on perceived fit must be further elaborated and replicated using various alternative measures of PG fit.

Second, although the multilevel hypotheses are largely supported by the current sample, the empirical setting and the group-level data patterns need to be considered. The branches of a commercial bank where the data were collected perform similar tasks with similar goals and performance indicators. Thus, while the current data collected from a single organization are advantageous in removing extraneous sources of confounding, the relatively high homogeneity across branches in our analysis sample may reduce variations across teams. This homogeneity of the teams in their task, skill sets, and personal backgrounds across branches seems responsible for the current group-level data patterns of relatively low between-group variability with high within-group agreement, as shown in the  $r_{wg}$  and ICC values for collective ability fit and value fit. Additional studies are needed to determine whether the main and interaction effects of PG fit are influenced by empirical settings, such as teams performing different functions or industries other than banking.

Third, we used supervisory ratings to assess individual and team creativity, which are the most common operationalization employed in the literature (George & Zhou, 2001). Although various employee, team, and organizational outcomes can be captured in different ways using supervisors and managers as informants, the method of supervisory performance ratings has often been criticized because of the likelihood of its own unreliability and bias (Bommer et al., 1995). For example, subjective evaluations by supervisors often cover a broader range of employee behaviors than intended or specified (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Thus, future research should consider alternative measurement strategies using objective indicators of creativity, such as the number of patents and suggestions, or third-party creativity ratings obtained from external experts or senior managers outside the team (Shin & Zhou, 2007; Zhou & Shalley, 2003).

Finally, the current sample represents Korean employees and managers, who are believed to be more collectivistic than Western individuals. In general, collectivistic culture places more importance on interdependence and harmonious relationships among people, while individualistic culture emphasizes the independent roles and functions of individual human beings (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 2001). Our results that value fit suppresses the positive effect of ability fit on individual creativity could be driven by conformity pressure based on the collectivistic values held by the current sample. In this respect, future research may also explore the main and interactive effects of PS fit involving supervisors or leaders across different cultures. The relationship with the supervisor is more likely to be an important factor in determining employee outcomes, such as creativity in Asian societies characterized by high power distance than is the case with their Western counterparts. Comparative research encompassing other cultures is needed to test the cross-cultural generalizability of the current findings.

Despite these limitations, this study enriches our understanding of ability fit, value fit, and their interaction effects on creativity at the individual and group levels. The findings of multilevel homology of the main effect of ability fit and multilevel discontinuity of the interaction between ability fit and value fit suggest that different mechanisms are activated at different levels to predict individual and team creativity. Further research efforts should be directed to theorize and validate underlying psychological mechanisms that explain these disparate level-dependent functions of various aspects of PG fit and their interactions toward creativity. Hence, additional research in this area seems not only warranted but also critical to advance the literature of PE fit based on the multilevel, interactive framework.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/c3edw/> and <https://osf.io/c3edw/>.

## Open scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data and Open Materials through Open Practices Disclosure. The data and materials are openly accessible at <https://osf.io/c3edw/> and <https://osf.io/c3edw/>.

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## Notes on contributors

**Jee Young Seong** is an associate professor in the Department of Business Administration at Jeonbuk National University, South Korea. Her research interests include person-environment fit and diversity in the organization. Her research has appeared in *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *Group and Organization Management*, and *Human Performance* among others.

**Jin Nam Choi** is Professor of Management at Seoul National University, South Korea. He earned his PhD in Organizational Psychology from the University of Michigan. His research interests include innovation implementation, organizational creativity, and multilevel processes of human behavior in organizations.

## ORCID

Jee Young Seong  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8924-9109>

Jin Nam Choi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7890-3195>

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