

Interest Incongruence and Job Performance: Examining the Moderating Roles of Job Crafting and Positive Affect

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Junyi Li¹ , Hui Yang¹, Qingxiong Weng¹, and Wenyang Gao¹

Abstract

Interest incongruence between employees and work environments has been considered as an adverse working condition; however, the way employees cope with it has rarely been explored. Using the conservation of resources theory, the appraisal theory, and the broaden-and-build theory, this study aims to investigate the moderating roles of job crafting and trait positive affect, separately and interactively, in the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance. Data collected from 384 Chinese employees and their colleagues across two time periods supported our hypotheses. Specifically, findings indicated that the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance was weakened when employees were more engaged in job crafting, or for employees with high positive affect. More importantly, a three-way interaction suggested that the detrimental impact of interest incongruence on job performance was especially mitigated when both job crafting and positive affect were high. Future studies should consider the combined roles of employees' proactive behaviors and trait affectivity in improving job performance.

Keywords

interest incongruence, job crafting, positive affect, job performance, Chinese employees

Employees often find that the occupations they initially perceived to fit their vocational interests are not what they expected after their entry into jobs (Nye et al., 2012, 2017). This experience of *interest incongruence*, or the lack of fit between employees' vocational interests and their work environments, can be unpleasant and stressful, and predict higher turnover intention and lower job satisfaction and performance (e.g., Nye et al., 2012, 2017; Tsabari et al., 2005). Nowadays, the increasingly changing nature of work environments and work tasks (Follmer et al., 2018) and the poor labor market (Dobelhofer et al., 2019) have increased the prevalence of the phenomenon of interest incongruence. For instance, employees may be attracted to organizations due to their interests in

¹ School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China

Corresponding Author:

Junyi Li, School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, 96 Jinzhai Road, Baohe District, Hefei, China. Email: ljy2016@mail.ustc.edu.cn

developing interpersonal relationships. However, as organizations adjust their workforces to the turbulent environments (e.g., COVID-19) by fundamentally limiting physical interaction, the new-found misfit presents a potential disaster for employee productivity (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Moreover, the current weak labor market has made it difficult for many misfits to find alternative jobs despite their desire to quit (Doblhofer et al., 2019).

Although much is known about the prevalence of interest incongruence combined with detrimental consequences for employees and organizations, little attention has been paid to how employees cope with interest incongruence. Actually, not all employees with interest incongruence are bound to experience low productivity at work. From a broader perspective, previous research has demonstrated the differential correlations between person-environment (P-E) fit and work-related outcomes. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) reported strong correlations between P-E fit and job satisfaction ($\rho = .31$ to $.56$), moderate correlations with turnover intention ($\rho = -.25$ to $-.46$), and relative weaker relationships with performance ($\rho = .07$ to $.20$). Based on the belief that interest congruence is an important aspect of the broader P-E fit (Holland, 1997; Nye et al., 2012) and the decline in effect sizes between P-E fit and work-related outcomes, we may speculate that even if employees who experience misfit or interest incongruence tend to be dissatisfied and consider leaving, they may not fail to achieve high performance. More specifically, Nye et al. (2017) found considerable variability in the impact of interest congruence on performance, implying that there may be factors that mitigate its adverse consequences. Therefore, elucidating employees' interest incongruence and their respective buffering factors deserves more attention for further research.

We build our work on the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), the appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), and the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), and extend our knowledge from three different aspects. First, previous research has noted that employees have some control over whether their misfit experiences adversely affect their performance or not through reshaping their work environments (Parker et al., 2010; Vogel et al., 2016). Specifically, to buffer the misfit-induced tension, employees can redesign or rethink their jobs according to their interests and skills, a process named job crafting (Berg et al., 2013). Fit scholars have also shown job crafting to be an important proactive strategy in coping with misfit experiences, such as overqualification (Debus et al., 2019) and value incongruence (Vogel et al., 2016). However, a lack of research is available to understand how job crafting interacts with interest incongruence to influence employee outcomes. To fill this research gap, our first aim is to examine the moderating effect of job crafting on the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance. COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) suggests that individuals strive to invest resources to acquire new resources and protect against or recover from resource loss. Viewed from this perspective, interest incongruence represents a demanding and depleting context that requires employees to invest and conserve resources. We thus propose that employees can utilize job crafting as an investment strategy to proactively construct new resources and save resources to mitigate the resource depletion resulting from interest incongruence, thereby helping them accumulate more resources to perform well in their work.

Our second aim is to attend to positive affect as an additional moderator. Although employees' active coping strategies play an essential role in mitigating the effect of misfit (Doblhofer et al., 2019), there exist other possible personal factors, such as personality traits, that need to be explored. We choose positive affect because it has been identified as a crucial trait that can moderate the work stressor-employee outcome relationships (e.g., He et al., 2020; Reknes et al., 2019). This is in line with the COR theorizing that positive affect as an investment of personal resources can offset the ongoing loss of resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Combined with the appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), positive affect provides employees available personal resources that can determine their perception and appraisal of the work stressor. We thus propose that employees with high positive affect may appraise interest incongruence less negatively by regarding it as challenging work

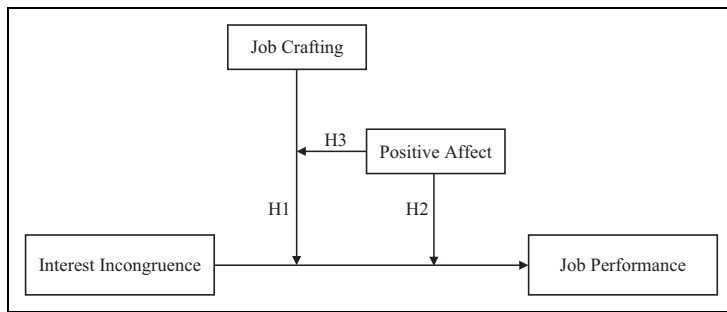


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

assignments and feel less resource depletion. In contrast, employees with high negative affect may appraise interest incongruence as a hindrance to work assignments and experience more resource depletion.

Third, we theorize a three-way effect of interest incongruence, job crafting, and positive affect on employees' job performance. Based on the combined rationales of the COR theory and the broaden-and-build theory, positive affect could be regarded as a personal resource that is valuable in helping to acquire other types of desirable resources (Hobfoll, 1989), including intellectual, psychological, and social resources that can replenish the depleted resources (Fredrickson, 2001). That is, employees with high levels of positive affect tend to have additional effective resources, such as confidence, determination, and energy (Janssen et al., 2010), which may improve the effectiveness of their coping strategies, such as job crafting, and make them less vulnerable to the resource depletion resulting from interest incongruence. We therefore propose that the strongest buffering effect on the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance occurs when both job crafting and positive affect are high. By considering the combined roles of job crafting and positive affect in the interest incongruence-job performance relationship, this study provides a more complete picture of elucidating the effects of interest incongruence. Our overall theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Interest Incongruence and Job Performance

Vocational interests reflect dispositional traits in one's preferences for certain work activities and environments (Mount et al., 2005), and are generally used to categorize both individuals and work environments into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Holland, 1997). Interest incongruence in which employees' vocational interests are mismatched with their work environments (e.g., an investigative type in an enterprising environment) is generally considered detrimental for employees (e.g., Furnham & Walsh, 1991; Nye et al., 2017). We use the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) to illustrate how interest incongruence can affect job performance. According to the core premise of the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), employees experience greater stress and anxiety when facing the threats of potential or actual resource loss. An inability to manage the situation of stress can lead to continued resource loss accompanied by adverse consequences, such as decreased job performance (Wheeler et al., 2013). Interest incongruence can be a source of stress, reflecting that a lack of the adequate resources in line with specific interests that employees need to satisfy the demands of their work environments (Wheeler et al., 2013). Because vocational interests are relatively stable and difficult to change (Mount et al., 2005), employees may feel the depletion of resources when suffering from the incongruence between their vocational interests and the work environments, and their performance may decline, as it requires sufficient

resources to invest in work activities (Wheeler et al., 2013). Previous studies also provide support for the negative relationship between interest incongruence and job performance (e.g., Iliescu et al., 2015; Nye et al., 2012, 2017).

The Moderating Effect of Job Crafting

When employees perceive a misfit between their vocational interests and work environments, they may take the initiative to change their work environment to make it more interesting and motivating (Iliescu et al., 2015). In accordance with the COR theory, individuals are motivated to invest personal resources to build new resources and stem future resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). We propose that employees can utilize job crafting as a coping strategy involving the investment of resources to buffer the negative effect of interest incongruence on job performance. According to Berg et al.'s (2013) job crafting theory, employees can introduce changes to tasks and social relationships at work, as well as the overall perception of their work. These changes, such as adding preferred tasks, building stronger connections with preferred colleagues, and attaching more meaning to their jobs, enable employees to feel more autonomous and competent at work and experience more work meaningfulness (Vogel et al., 2016). Job crafting may be a constructive way for employees with interest incongruence to align their work environments with their interests and improve their stressful situations.

We use an example of a history teacher with a strong artistic interest (e.g., performing music) to clarify our thinking further. To alleviate the resource loss resulting from interest incongruence, this teacher can incorporate music into his or her teaching, cooperate with colleagues who teach music, and discover the similarities between teaching behaviors and performing music (Berg et al., 2013). By crafting the current job, this teacher may gain new resources such as competence and meaningfulness and thus create an appropriate environment for him or her to accomplish performance-related activities. This means that for employees more involved in job crafting, the adverse impact of interest incongruence on job performance may be less influential than those less involved in job crafting. In other words, when employees with interest incongruence actively craft their jobs based on their interests, they can build a resourceful environment and conserve time and energy to keep productive in their jobs. However, those employees who are less willing to shape their jobs may spend more time and energy coping with interest incongruence and thus have limited resources that are necessary for their work effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Job crafting will moderate the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance, such that this negative relationship will be weaker for higher levels of job crafting.

The Moderating Effect of Positive Affect

In addition to employees' proactive strategies, employees' personality traits, especially the positive affect, can also play an important role in coping with work stressors (e.g., He et al., 2020). Consistent with the COR theory positing that employees can draw from several types of personal resources to counteract resource depletion and acquire other valuable resources, such as high levels of job performance (Hobfoll, 2001), we propose positive affect as a personal resource can mitigate the adverse effects of interest incongruence on job performance. Positive affect in this study refers to general happiness and includes general positive beliefs and feelings (Kaplan et al., 2009). Employees with positive affect tend to feel active, cheerful, enthusiastic, and alert (Kaplan et al., 2009). When confronted with interest incongruence, positive affect enables employees to think and act in

ways that facilitate both resource building and goal attainment and thus improve their job performance (Janssen et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

We use the appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984) to explain these relationships further. It posits that employees' responses to work stressors depend on their cognitive appraisal of their environment and resources. Following this perspective, positive affect can change the way employees think, help them enjoy their work, and give them the courage to overcome obstacles at work (He et al., 2020). Therefore, employees with higher levels of positive affect tend to perceive interest incongruence as challenging and believe that they have the ability to manage this situation. In this regard, employees may feel that they process more resources to perform their work at high levels, thus mitigating the resource loss due to interest incongruence. In contrast, employees with lower levels of positive affect tend to perceive interest incongruence as hindering, and thus feel lacking confidence, determination, attention, and the capability to meet the performance standards. In this regard, employees who experience interest incongruence may invest fewer resources into their jobs to achieve good performance. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Positive affect will moderate the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance, such that this negative relationship will be weaker for higher levels of positive affect.

Interaction of Job Crafting and Positive Affect

We finally propose that job crafting and positive affect may simultaneously with interest incongruence in predicting employees' job performance. This is consistent with the COR theorizing that employees with more available personal resources can better proactively deal with stressful situations and are less vulnerable to the detrimental consequences of work stressors (Hobfoll, 2001). As stated earlier, job crafting is likely to influence the negative relationship between interest incongruence and job performance, as it can adjust employees' work environments to match their interests and affect their overall perception of their jobs (Berg et al., 2013). Also, positive affect plays a crucial role in influencing how employees perceive and appraise the stress experiences of interest incongruence. Positive emotions can provide employees with the necessary resources, such as determination and courage, to cope with work stressors (Janssen et al., 2010). Considering their potential moderating roles, we expect that positive affect can be considered as a personal resource that is valuable in helping employees' job crafting behavior to obtain desired resources such as good performance.

We use the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) to explain the adaptive mechanisms of positive affect further. It posits that the positive emotions that employees with trait positive affect frequently experience can broaden their thought-action repertoires and help them build persistent personal resources, ranging from intellectual resources (e.g., expert knowledge) to social resources (e.g., social support) and psychological resources (e.g., optimism; Fredrickson, 2001), which in turn relate to more effective coping. This adaptive function of positive affect may become necessary when employees engage in job crafting activities to counteract the ongoing threat of resource loss and maintain delivering high performance levels. Employees with higher levels of positive affect can generate additional and valuable resources of energy, confidence, and optimism that may enable them to craft their jobs more effectively and persist in achieving good performance. Conversely, employees with lower levels of positive affect lack these resources that are constructive to their effectiveness of job crafting. Thus, job crafting may not affect the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: The negative relationship between interest incongruence and job performance will be buffered when both positive affect and job crafting are high.

Method

Participants and Procedures

We used a two-wave with a 3-month interval online survey from two sources (i.e., self and peers) to collect data in China. We first sent the links to our questionnaires through WeChat (a popular social network) to a big group of friends and relatives with a full-time job. We informed the purpose of the survey at the beginning of the study and asked participants to provide both their own WeChat ID and that of a colleague who can complete the follow-up survey on their behalf. To recruit more participants, we also encouraged them to forward the questionnaire to different WeChat groups, and promised that they and their colleagues could get 45 RMB and 35 RMB, respectively, when finishing the entire survey. This recruitment method of online self-report and peer-report has been used and validated in previous studies (e.g., Ferris et al., 2010; Ferris et al., 2015). At Time 1, we contacted 581 participants for the first survey, which assessed vocational interests, job crafting, positive affect, and control variables, and 482 surveys were returned. Three months later, at Time 2, we contacted their colleagues for the second survey, which assessed participants' job performance, and 398 surveys were returned. After matching Time 1 and Time 2 surveys and addressing missing values and outliers, the final sample included 384 usable pairs, for a response rate of 66.0%.

Of the respondents, 55% were female and 45% were male. The average age and organizational tenure were 37.35 years ($SD = 7.77$) and 11.89 years ($SD = 9.34$). Most of the participants had a higher education level: 40% had a bachelor's degree, 11% had a master's degree, and 2% had a doctor's degree. Participants mainly worked in education (19.0%), bank and finance (11.2%), healthcare (10.9%), sales (8.3%), and information and technology (6.0%). The occupation distribution of the participants was diverse, including 127 different occupations and 42 different Holland codes. Of the colleagues, 51% were female and 49% were male. The average age and organizational tenure were 35.96 years ($SD = 6.77$) and 7.69 years ($SD = 6.90$). The average time colleagues worked with the participants was 5.20 years. To ensure the colleagues were qualified to report the participants' work behaviors, we asked the participants to nominate a colleague who they work closely with and knew them well. Following previous studies (Ferris et al., 2015), we asked the colleagues to rate how well they knew the participants, and the results suggested that the colleagues knew the participants fairly well ($M = 4.04$ on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *very much*; $SD = 1.05$). We also collected the Alipay IDs (to whom the payments were sent) of the participants and their colleagues to ensure that the colleagues actually completed the survey and not the participants themselves.

Measures

The surveys included measures designed to capture our examined variables in this study: vocational interests, job crafting, positive affect, and job performance. Following the translation and back-translation procedure (Jones et al., 2001), two professional translation companies were asked to translate the English versions of the measures into Chinese and back-translate them into English. Then, three management scholars were invited to review the back-translated version, and it was found to be equivalent to the original, indicating that the Chinese version was acceptable for use.

Vocational interests. We used the 48-item RISEAC Market Scale Form A (Armstrong et al., 2008) to assess Holland's six types of vocational interests. Each type was measured by eight items, each rated

on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly dislike*, 5 = *strongly like*), based on the extent to which respondents like to do the types of work activities. Sample items are “Assemble products in a factory” (realistic) and “Teach children how to read” (social). Armstrong et al. (2008) reported that the reliabilities for six interest scales ranged from .79 to .93, and these scale scores were strongly related to the Strong Interest Inventory (Harmon et al., 1994). Moreover, this measure has been found to have satisfied validity in China, and more broadly, in Asia countries. For example, Liu (2013) demonstrated that the efficient α s for six interest scales ranged from .80 to .91. Hui and Lent (2018) focused on investigative and social interests, and indicated that the efficient α s ranged from .89 to .91 for investigative interests and .80 to .85 for social interests. In this study, the efficient α s of the six scales ranged from .86 (social) to .94 (conventional).

Interest incongruence. Following prior studies, we conceptualized interest incongruence as the opposite side of congruence on the fit-misfit spectrum (Furnham & Walsh, 1991; Harrison, 2007). We used the method of the first-letter hexagonal distance (Holland, 1973) to measure interest incongruence, which is based on the most dominant type of interests for both individuals and their work environments. Interest types for individuals were generated by the above measure of interests. Interest types for work environments were generated by participants’ declared occupations and O*NET occupational data. Occupations in O*NET were assigned a number of characteristics, such as vocational interests, which are regularly updated with data from the incumbents in the United States and the team of trained occupational judges (Peterson et al., 2001). As such, it is a relatively reliable and updated source of information on the correspondence of a wide of occupational titles and Holland codes. Empirical studies also indicated that O*NET occupational data could be applied to jobs outside the United States based on the similarity of work activities ratings and job requirements across countries, particularly in China (Taylor et al., 2008). According to Holland’s hexagonal structure, the incongruence index ranges from 1 (the types are identical) to 4 (the types are opposite). Recent studies have found that this method of this index was correlated with satisfaction and performance (Fu et al., 2019; Iliescu et al., 2015).

Although a lot of alternatives for calculating the congruence index have been proposed in the literature (e.g., Brown & Gore, 1994; Healy & Mourton, 1983; Iachan, 1984; Wolfe & Betz, 1981; Zener & Schnuelle, 1976), we chose to use the method of the first-letter hexagonal distance proposed by Holland (1973). The reasons are twofold. First, computational simplicity might be more instrumental in the context of our study. Holland et al. (1994, p. 22) emphasize that “the first letter of the occupational code is most important, most descriptive, and most reliable” and “the codes are approximate, not precise . . . the degree of discrepancy between SDS codes and occupational codes is rough, not precise.” Adopting complex calculations that utilize all three letters of a Holland code or six scales in a vocational profile could build on a certain degree of error variance between the profiles of individuals and environments, and might be more complex than it actually needs to be (Gore & Brown, 2006). In addition, empirical investigations cannot provide support for the hypothesis that more complex indices should have higher predictive validity when using job satisfaction as the criterion (Hoeglund & Hansen, 1999).

Second, the extent to which a particular interest type is relevant to an individual’s work attitudes and behaviors, such as job performance, is likely dependent on the relative importance of that interest type to that individual. Indeed, vocational scholars have acknowledged that the first letter of a vocational profile, which represents the most prominent interest, is generally stable over time and most effective for future career decisions compared with the second and third letters (O’Neil et al., 1978; Wiggins & Weslander, 1977). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the first letter of a vocational profile, which is considered most important to an individual, plays the most prominent role in explaining work attitudes and behaviors. Conversely, the second and third letters, which are less important, may have less explanatory power.

Job crafting. We used the 15-item Job Crafting Questionnaire (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013) to measure job crafting. Sample items include “Introduce new approaches to improve your work,” “Choose to mentor new employees,” and “Think about how your job gives your life purpose.” Each item used a 5-point Likert format (1 = *almost never*, 5 = *very often*). Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013) provided support for the construct and discriminant validity of this scale. Scale scores related to organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and work affect (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013). The efficient α was .95 in this study.

Positive affect. We used the 10-item positive affect scale of the PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) to assess positive affect. Respondents rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *always*), based on the extent to which they generally felt affective experiences. Sample items are “enthusiastic” and “determined.” Watson et al. (1988) demonstrated that this scale had expected convergent and discriminant validity, and produced scores with good internal consistency ranging from .86 to .90. In this sample, Cronbach’s α was .88.

Job performance. We used Williams and Anderson’s (1991) 7-item scale to assess peer-rated job performance. A sample item is “This employee adequately completes assigned duties.” The response format was a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly dislike*, 5 = *strongly like*). The reliability was .91 in the original study (Williams & Anderson, 1991), and was .89 in this sample.

Control variables. We controlled for four demographic variables including gender (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*), age (in years), organizational tenure (in years), and education level (1 = *no college*, 2 = *a 3-year college*, 3 = *bachelor’s degree*, 4 = *master’s degree*, 5 = *doctor’s degree*), because of their potential effects on job performance (e.g., Wright & Bonett, 2002). Moreover, the perception of person-job misfit also impacts job performance (e.g., Chi & Pan, 2012). Including this variable as a control enables us to show the unique effect of interest incongruence. Person-job misfit was assessed with 6 items (Cable & DeRue, 2002). An example is “The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills.” Items were reverse scored. The reliability ranged from .84 to .93 in the original study (Cable & DeRue, 2002) and was .93 for this sample. Finally, when examining the moderating role of positive affect, we controlled for negative affect as it may be related to interest incongruence and performance (Iliescu et al., 2015). Negative affect as a trait was assessed with the 10-item negative affect scale of PANAS (e.g., “upset” and “distressed”) developed by Watson et al. (1988). The reliability ranged .84 from .87 in the original study (Watson et al., 1988) and was .92 for this sample. We found that the addition of the demographic variables, including gender, age, organizational tenure, and education level, did not significantly change our results. Therefore, following the recommendation from previous research on the inclusion of redundant control variables (Becker, 2005; Carlson & Wu, 2012), we omitted these controls from subsequent analyses.

Results

Screening Data

Data screening was conducted using SPSS Version 23.0 across 482 cases. We used personal mean imputation for participants who missed one item on a scale but had available data for other items on that scale (Bernaards & Sijtsma, 2000), and excluded the cases of 91 participants who missed more than one item on a scale from our analysis. We further conducted the univariate and the multivariate analyses using z-score and Mahalanobis Distance for each case (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), and 7 cases were identified as potential outliers and removed. Finally, we screened the remaining

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study's Main Variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Person-job misfit	2.34	.74	(.93)					
2. Negative affect	2.67	.70	.17**	(.92)				
3. Interest incongruence	2.47	1.03	-.01	.12*	—			
4. Job crafting	3.34	.72	-.36**	.02	.09	(.95)		
5. Positive affect	3.30	.56	-.35**	.04	.02	.52**	(.88)	
6. Job performance	3.99	.67	-.24**	-.17**	-.21**	.22**	.26**	(.89)

Note. $N = 384$. Coefficient α s are on the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

384 cases for normality. The skewness ($-.49$ to $+.48$) and kurtosis (-1.13 to 1.35) values of the scale scores did not exceed thresholds of ± 2 , indicating the variables were considered as normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Dropping the cases reduced our sample size. We addressed the possibility of sample attrition effects by testing the differences between cases who were included and cases who were excluded from our analysis in terms of Time 1 variables in each group. T-tests revealed no significant differences between these two groups.

Descriptive Analysis and Correlations

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations of the study's variables.

Results showed that job performance was negatively related to interest incongruence ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$), and positively related to job crafting ($r = .22$, $p < .01$) and positive affect ($r = .26$, $p < .01$). This correlation patterns are in line with theory and prior studies.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Due to the strong correlation between the moderators. We conducted a two-factor model CFA (i.e., job crafting and positive affect) to test the discriminant validity of these measures. We also compared the two-factor model with one-factor model (i.e., combining job crafting and positive affect into one factor). We used Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) to assess the model fit. Results suggested that the two-factor model fitted the data better ($\chi^2 = 678.62$, $\chi^2/df = 2.55$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .06) than the one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1501.72$, $\chi^2/df = 5.62$, CFI = .78, TLI = .75, RMSEA = .11).

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses 1 and 2 posit that the moderating effects of job crafting and positive affect on the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance, while Hypothesis 3 posits a three-way interaction. We used PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to test our models. The results for regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

Model 1 shows the results of the analysis for tests of hypothesis 1. Job crafting did moderate the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance ($B = .16$, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$). Table 3 and Figure 2A presents the results for further interaction analyses of the simple slopes with low (1 SD below the mean) and high levels (1 SD above the mean) of the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991). The results indicated that interest incongruence was negatively related to job performance when job

Table 2. Results for Regressions Testing Moderation Effects.

Predictor Variables	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	B	SE	β	t	B	SE	β	t	B	SE	β	t
Controls												
Person-job misfit	-.15	.05	-.16	-3.17**	-.12	.05	-.14	-2.69**	-.11	.05	-.12	-2.39*
Negative affect	-.12	.05	-.13	-2.69**	-.13	.05	-.14	-2.91**	-.13	.05	-.13	-2.83**
Independent												
Interest incongruence	-.14	.03	-.21	-4.42***	-.14	.03	-.21	-4.43***	-.17	.03	-.27	-5.33***
Moderators												
Job crafting (JC)	.14	.05	.15	2.86**					.08	.05	.09	1.54
Positive affect (PA)					.24	.06	.20	3.93***	.14	.07	.12	2.11*
Two-way interactive effects												
Incongruence \times JC	.16	.04	.19	3.89***					.11	.05	.12	2.18*
Incongruence \times PA					.16	.05	.15	3.06**	.06	.06	.05	.89
JC \times PA									-.02	.07	-.02	-.35
Three-way interactive effect												
Incongruence \times JC \times PA									.16	.06	.17	2.92**
R^2	.18***				.17***				.21***			
F	16.31***				15.89***				11.38***			
ΔR^2	.03***				.02**				.02**			

Note. $N = 384$. JC = Job crafting; PA = Positive affect; B = Unstandardized estimate; SE = Standardized error; β = Standardized estimate.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Tests of Simple Slopes.

Moderation conditions		B (95% CI)	SE	t
Two-way interactions				
Job crafting	High	-.02 (-.11, .07)	.04	-.45
	Low	-.25 (-.33, -.17)	.04	-6.02***
Positive affect	High	-.05 (-.13, .04)	.04	-1.10
	Low	-.23 (-.31, -.14)	.04	-5.21***
Three-way interactions				
Moderators: Job crafting and positive affect				
Job crafting (high)	Positive affect (high)	-.00 (-.09, .09)	.05	-.01
	Positive affect (low)	-.19 (-.35, -.04)	.08	-2.43*
Job crafting (Low)	Positive affect (high)	-.28 (-.43, -.14)	.07	-3.92***
	Positive affect (low)	-.22 (-.31, -.12)	.05	-4.58***

Note. $N = 384$. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000.
 B = Unstandardized estimate; CI = Confidential interval; SE = Standardized error.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

crafting was low ($B = -.25, t = -6.02, p < .001$), and unrelated to job performance when job crafting was high ($B = -.02, t = -.45, p > ns$). Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

As shown in Model 2, the results suggested that the moderating effect of positive affect on the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance was positive and significant ($B = .16, t = 3.06, p < .01$). Simple slope analysis (see Table 3 and Figure 2B) suggested that interest incongruence was negatively related to job performance when positive affect was low

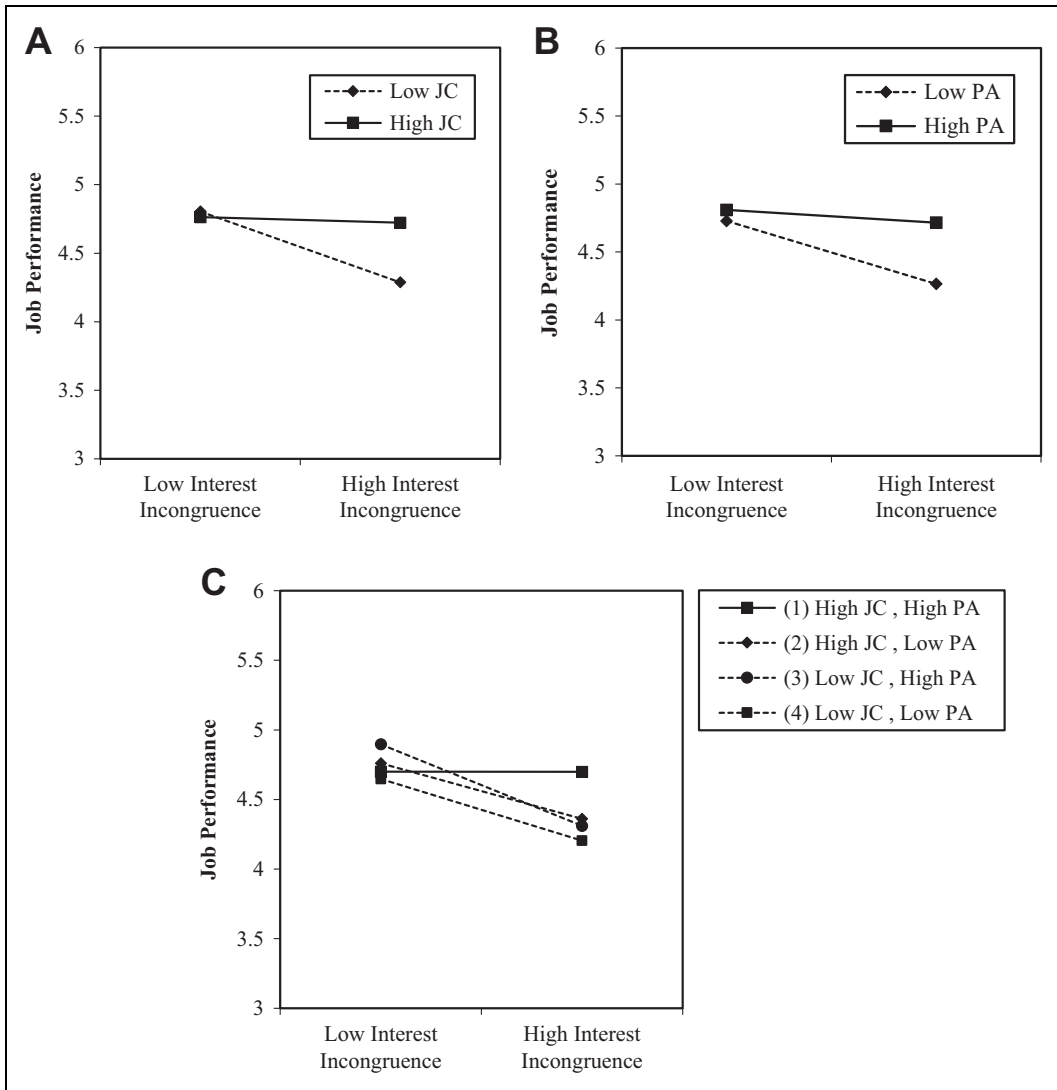


Figure 2. Plots of the moderating effects of job crafting and positive affect on job performance. *Note.* JC = Job crafting; PA = Positive affect.

($B = -.23, t = -5.21, p < .001$), but not when it was high ($B = -.05, t = -1.10, p > ns$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

In terms of Hypothesis 3, the three-way interaction among interest incongruence, job crafting, and positive affect produced a significant and positive effect on job performance ($B = .16, t = 2.92, p < .01$). To take a closer look at the three-way interaction, we also conducted simple slope analysis (see Table 3 and Figure 2C). Results indicated that the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance was non-significant when job crafting and positive affect were both high ($B = -.00, t = -.01, p > ns$). However, the slopes were negative and significant when job crafting was high and positive affect was low ($B = -.19, t = -2.43, p < .05$), when job crafting was low and positive was high ($B = -.28, t = -3.92, p < .001$), and when job crafting and positive affect were both low ($B = -.22, t = -4.58, p < .001$). This provides evidence that the relationship between

interest incongruence and job performance was buffered especially for both high job crafting and high positive affect. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Discussion

To uncover the buffering factors of the detrimental consequences of interest incongruence on employees' job performance, we combine the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) with the appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984) and the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and develop a model illustrating that this relationship can be moderated by job crafting and positive affect. Consistent with our hypotheses, our findings suggested that the relationship between interest incongruence and job performance was weaker when employees were more involved in job crafting, or for employees with high positive affect. Furthermore, the three-way interaction indicated that the negative influence of interest incongruence on job performance was especially buffered when job crafting and positive affect were both high. We believe our study has both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

For theoretical implications, at a global level, this study first contributes to Holland's (1997) theory and P-E fit literature. The vast majority of P-E fit studies have focused on the narrow P-E fit types, such as P-O fit (e.g., Doblhofer et al., 2019) and P-J fit (e.g., Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2020), and overlooked the broader framework of P-E fit, especially the interest congruence. Yet, the adverse consequences associated with interest incongruence (e.g., Nye et al., 2012, 2017) and the prevalence of interest incongruence in today's organizations make it necessary for us to understand this type of misfit experiences. In line with Holland's (1973, 1997) congruence assumption that the congruence between an individual's vocational interests and work environment will have a positive impact on work-related outcomes, our results show that employees who experience a lack of interest congruence will be less likely to perform well. Moreover, our study extends Holland's findings by highlighting the positive role that employees play in the face of the stressful situations of interest incongruence. It means that an important theoretical contribution from this study is that it provides evidence to the possible explanations for how to compensate for the negative impact of interest incongruence.

Second, this study contributes to illustrating the role of job crafting in mitigating the negative effects of interest incongruence on job performance. Job crafting has received considerable attention in the P-E fit literature (Zhang & Parker, 2019). For instance, Follmer et al. (2018) found that employees who experience misfit had a strong incentive to recraft their jobs to relieve stress and better adapt to their work environment. Consistent with previous findings, our results indicate that employees whose vocational interests are mismatched with their work environments are less likely to passively accept their situations, and instead become "active architects" who reshape their job boundaries (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In this way, our study emphasizes the proactive strategy of job crafting as a useful resource investment to suppress the resource depletion of interest incongruence and improve work experiences. Also, by introducing job crafting as a moderator of the interest incongruence-job performance relationship, we enrich recent studies on the role of job crafting in other forms of P-E misfit-outcome relationships (i.e., P-O and P-J misfit; Debus et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2016).

Third, by investigating the moderating effect of trait positive affect, our study responds to the call to explore how individual characteristics influence the fit-outcome relationships (Doblhofer et al., 2019; Follmer et al., 2018). Research on the interaction between P-E misfit, especially the interest incongruence, and personality traits is nascent, and our study offers an answer to the question of

which types of individuals are better at coping with interest incongruence. Our results indicate that employees with high levels of positive affect are less vulnerable to interest incongruence, whereas those with low levels of positive affect are more likely to be affected by interest incongruence. This pattern is in line with the theories of COR (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and appraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), suggesting that individuals differ in personal resources and thus might differ in the assessment and feelings toward the stress of interest incongruence. By recognizing positive affect as a valued personal resource that can mitigate the adverse consequences associated with interest incongruence, this study adds important and new knowledge to our understanding of how dispositional affectivity shapes the work stressor-job performance relationships.

Finally, this study further examines the interactive effects of job crafting and positive affect on shaping the interest incongruence-job performance relationship. Our findings suggest that the detrimental effect of interest incongruence on job performance is especially buffered when both job crafting and positive affect are high. In other words, positive affect as a personal resource has the potential use for aiding employees' job crafting behavior and allows them to more effectively manage the stressful situations of interest incongruence, providing support for the theories of COR (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and broaden-and-build (Fredrickson, 2001). Our argument is also in line with prior studies indicating positive relationships among job crafting, positive affect, and job performance (e.g., Bakker et al., 2012; Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013). Moreover, going beyond existing empirical findings, our results suggest that job crafting and positive affect not only directly relate to job performance but also interactively influence the interest incongruence-job performance relationship. As such, this study offers a more advanced and comprehensive examination of the boundary conditions by illustrating the importance of integrating both employees' proactive strategies and personality traits in coping with interest incongruence.

Practical Implications

This study also provides practical implications for both career counseling and organizations. First, considering the adverse effects of interest incongruence on job performance, we suggest that career counselors should help individuals accurately assess their vocational interests early in their careers to enhance their likelihood of interest congruence after their entry into the workplace. On the one hand, career counselors can utilize the inventories of vocational interests, and on the other hand, they can provide detailed explanations of various occupational alternatives emphasizing both the nature of occupations and the similarities and differences among these occupational alternatives based on existing classifications (Amit & Sagiv, 2009). In organizations, hiring managers should pay attention to interest incongruence in the process of recruitment and selection. To maximize the fit between new employees' vocational interests and their occupations, some practices can be taken. For example, the job advertisements can initially present clear information about vocational interests (Feldman et al., 2006), and the job interviewer can further evaluate the candidates' likelihood of interest incongruence.

Second, we found that job crafting mitigates the negative effects of interest incongruence on job performance. Career counselors can help employees decide whether they should craft their present jobs according to their interests and skills, or whether a different career path would be more appropriate (Oprea et al., 2020). If employees choose to craft jobs rather than to change jobs, counselors should further encourage them to take the initiative to maximize their personal potential by providing different types of job crafting strategies (e.g., task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting) and help them to bridge the performance-gap triggered by interest incongruence. For organizations, managers should provide opportunities for employees to proactively craft their jobs based on their preferences, which could contribute to improved employee work experiences and

performance. Moreover, organizations may use job crafting intervention to foster and help employees better fit personal interests and skills to their jobs (e.g., Gordon et al., 2018).

Third, our findings indicate that employees with high levels of positive affect are less likely to be affected by interest incongruence. Although trait positive affect is stable and difficult to change, career counselors can foster individuals' positive affect by asking them to review past achievements, identifying and analyzing their strengths, and helping them set attainable goals (Rottinghaus et al., 2009). Organizations may also use intervention programs to cultivate employees' state positive affect to facilitate their adjustment in their stressful situations. Specifically, organizations can create an atmosphere of positive affect by presenting seminars or courses on emotion management, maintaining continuous communication with employees, and offering psychological counseling and guidance (He et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Directions

This current research is not without limitations. First, we only used the first-letter hexagonal distance for the congruence index, which depends to a large extent on the underlying assumptions of Holland's structure of vocational interests. However, more complex indices are not necessarily better and may merely exacerbate the errors arising from the differences between the assumed and actual structure of vocational interests (Iliescu et al., 2015). Nevertheless, we encourage future research to use different indices to replicate our study and further examine the amount of interest congruence variance captured by different methods. In addition, we focus on the construct of interest incongruence in our research while we actually measured a lack of or low congruence between employees' vocational interests and their work environments. Although we adopted this approach from previous P-E fit studies (Furnham & Walsh, 1991; Harrison, 2007), we recognize that this operation has been somewhat questionable. To be specific, a lack of interest congruence might be qualitatively different from an actual interest incongruence (Follmer et al., 2018). However, as far as we know, there is no appropriate scale to truly measure interest incongruence. We suggest that future research should develop this measurement of interest incongruence and apply it to other areas of misfit.

Second, our dependent variable of job performance was measured by another source different from the study participants to reduce common method variance. However, unlike prior research examining the effects of interest congruence on employees' performance (Iliescu et al., 2015; Nye et al., 2017), we assessed the dependent variable through peer-report rather than supervisor-report. Therefore, future research may need to adopt supervisor-report to actually understand how employees' job performance is viewed and to further explore whether our examined relationships hold up when using supervisor-report of job performance.

Third, although our data were collected from employees in a range of industries and occupations, all of them were from China. This sample limits the applicability of our results to other cultural contexts. P-E fit theory is well recognized as contextualized; however, there is research showing that interest congruence exerts a stronger influence on job attitudes in individualistic cultures (e.g., Western culture) than in collectivistic cultures (e.g., East Asia culture; Tsabari et al., 2005). As people in individualistic cultures tend to have more abilities of independent thinking and greater personal choice, they may be more susceptible to the impact of interest incongruence and get lower job performance. We thus suggest that future studies should examine the relationships in our study across different cultural contexts to solve these questions.

Conclusion

Given the rising prevalence of interest incongruence in organizations and the adverse effects of interest incongruence, how to cope with interest incongruence at work therefore deserves more

attention for researchers, employees, counselors, and organizations. This study provides complete examinations of proactive strategies and personality traits that help to buffer against the detrimental consequences of interest incongruence on job performance. Our findings show that both job crafting and positive affect can aid employees experiencing interest incongruence in managing this stressful situation and stay productive at work. Moreover, the performance detriments of interest incongruence can be particularly weakened when both job crafting and positive affect are high. Therefore, counselors can coach individuals to cope with interest incongruence by using job crafting strategies and evoking positive affect, while organizations can help those employees maintain productive in their jobs by giving them opportunities to redesign their jobs in meaningful ways, and creating an atmosphere of positive emotions to foster their positive affect.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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ORCID iD

Junyi Li  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6233-8128>

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