



E-ISSN: 3108-4192

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies

2022, Volume 2, Issue 2, Page No: 54-63

Available online at: <https://apsshs.com/>

## Journal of Applied Organizational Systems and Behavior

# Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation

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### Abstract

Person–organization fit is commonly treated as a relatively stable correspondence between employee and organizational attributes. That framing is useful for comparison, but it underrepresents how misfit is noticed, interpreted, negotiated, intensified, repaired, or carried forward through interaction. This Original Relational Systems Article develops a non-empirical account of person–organization misfit as an evolving relationship rather than a fixed individual condition. The proposed Relational Misfit System links discrepancy-generating conditions, employee appraisal, identity relevance, employee adaptation, organizational interpretation, organizational response, and subsequent relationship states. It distinguishes episodic from accumulating misfit, employee agency from accommodation pressure, voice opportunity from consequential influence, and continued employment from successful repair. It further proposes adaptation-burden allocation as a relational construct describing who is expected to change, at what cost, and with what authority. The model allows trajectories of provisional repair, constrained persistence, escalation, productive difference, internal mobility, and exit without assuming a universal sequence. Its practical implication is not that organizations should maximize similarity, but that they should examine how difference becomes interpreted, whose adaptation is demanded, and whether responses alter enacted conditions. The synthesis remains conceptually bounded: most evidence concerns employee perceptions, local relationships, or observational associations, while reciprocal organizational adaptation is less directly established. Testing therefore requires intensive longitudinal, matched multilevel, qualitative-process, and quasi-experimental designs capable of separating temporal association, causal mechanism, and substantive organizational-level change.

**Keywords:** Moving beyond static person–organization fit, Relational misfit, Misfit emergence and identity threat, Employee adaptation and accommodation pressure, Relational misfit system, Theoretical propositions and temporal dynamics

**How to cite this article:** Anderson M, Wong L, Lee S. Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation. *J Appl Organ Syst Behav.* 2022;2(2):54-63. <https://doi.org/10.51847/IAgdAju1Bj>

**Received:** 07 October 2022; **Revised:** 10 December 2022; **Accepted:** 14 December 2022

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### Introduction

Person–organization fit remains a central explanation for attraction, identification, satisfaction, retention, and behavior, yet the field continues to face unresolved questions about construct definition, levels of analysis, measurement, and organizational consequences [1]. The dominant image is often comparative: a person possesses values, needs, capabilities, or preferences, while an organization possesses corresponding attributes, and fit reflects their degree of compatibility. This comparison is theoretically important, but compatibility cannot be reduced to a stable property of the employee alone because person and environment must be considered jointly [2]. A relational perspective extends that principle by asking how discrepancy



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becomes recognized, whose interpretation defines the problem, which actor is expected to adapt, and whether any response changes the conditions that produced the misfit.

Temporal scholarship further challenges a static account. Fit perceptions may fluctuate, follow heterogeneous profiles, and remain difficult to separate causally from concurrent affective and behavioral experiences [3–5]. Accordingly, a low fit score at one point may represent a short episode, a recurring pattern, an accumulating concern, or a consequence of dissatisfaction generated elsewhere. The same apparent discrepancy may also remain tolerable until an organizational event makes it identity-relevant. These possibilities make a single cross-sectional assessment insufficient for explaining emergence, persistence, repair, or departure.

This article therefore advances an Original Relational Systems Article rather than an empirical test or conventional review. Its objective is to integrate recent fit, misfit, identity, adaptation, leadership, human-resource, and turnover scholarship into a proposed Relational Misfit System. The contribution is threefold. First, it defines relational misfit as a recognized and consequential discrepancy repeatedly interpreted and modified through employee and organizational action. Second, it introduces adaptation-burden allocation to describe how responsibility for change is distributed. Third, it identifies alternative trajectory states without assuming that staying signals repair or that exit proves misfit. The synthesis is evidence-bounded and does not establish a validated causal model, universal organizational prescription, or readiness standard.

### *Theoretical foundations of relational misfit*

Relational misfit is proposed here as a recognized discrepancy between salient employee values, needs, identity claims, capabilities, or expectations and enacted organizational conditions, where meaning and consequence develop through interaction over time. This definition differs from treating misfit as merely the inverse of fit. Qualitative evidence shows that employees may pursue resolution, seek relief, or move toward resignation when they experience workplace misfit [6]. Those responses indicate that misfit is not only a measurement position; it is also an interpreted problem that invites action. Nevertheless, the categories describe reported pathways rather than exhaustive stages, and they do not establish their prevalence or causal ordering.

Temporal sensemaking provides the second foundation. Misfit may accumulate through repeated disappointments or emerge through a salient episode that threatens how an employee understands the self at work [7]. Retrospection can recast earlier events as evidence of a longer pattern, while anticipation can make an otherwise manageable discrepancy appear unsustainable. Subjective time therefore influences whether a mismatch is experienced as temporary, repairable, recurring, or definitive [8]. This interpretation remains distinct from clock time: two employees exposed to the same event may locate it differently within their personal and organizational histories.

A third foundation concerns the value of similarity itself. Fit scholarship should not assume that progressively greater correspondence always produces better outcomes, because curvilinear or outcome-specific relationships are possible [9]. Difference may sometimes support learning, challenge, or innovation, yet it may also generate exclusion, strain, or withdrawal. The proposed relational account therefore does not celebrate misfit. It asks which discrepancy is salient, how it is interpreted, what adaptation is possible, and whose interests define an acceptable resolution. Individual perception, supervisor judgment, team climate, and formal organizational policy must remain analytically separate because evidence at one level does not establish change at another.

### *Misfit emergence and identity threat*

Misfit begins neither with every objective difference nor with every unfavorable experience. It emerges when a discrepancy becomes noticeable, attributable, and consequential for the employee's relationship with the organization. Ideological incongruence offers one illustration: in a politically salient industry context, employee–organization political mismatch was associated with departure patterns, indicating that identity-linked discrepancy can become behaviorally consequential [10]. The finding supports salience as a mechanism but does not imply that all value differences produce identity threat or exit. Industry norms, labor-market alternatives, and the visibility of affiliation remain important boundaries.

Expectations also shape emergence. Pre-entry information influences what employees anticipate concerning work, relationships, and organizational conduct; later experiences may therefore be evaluated against an expected rather than purely objective environment [11]. A discrepancy may reflect changed conditions, unrealistic expectations, incomplete information, affective reinterpretation, or some combination. For this reason, misfit recognition should be treated as an appraisal process rather than direct proof that an organization possesses a stable incompatible attribute.

Identity motives broaden the construct beyond values congruence. Evidence among younger workers suggests that fit may involve whether organizational membership supports motives such as continuity, distinctiveness, esteem, belonging, and efficacy [12]. Identity threat is consequently proposed as one possible amplification pathway: a discrepancy becomes more consequential when it challenges a central self-definition or places belonging at risk. It is not a defining feature of every misfit episode.

**Table 1** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for person–organization misfit as an evolving relational system of mutual adaptation.

**Table 1.** Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation.

| Construct or component               | Definition                                                                  | Problem addressed                   | Distinction from adjacent concepts   | Proposed role               | Uncertainty                         | Boundary statement                           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Static perceived P–O fit</b>      | Current judgment of compatibility                                           | Compares person and environment     | Not a complete temporal process      | Baseline perception         | Sensitive to affect and timing      | A score does not reveal trajectory           |
| <b>Objective incongruence</b>        | Independently assessed attribute difference                                 | Separates conditions from appraisal | May exist without recognition        | Potential antecedent        | Measurement equivalence may fail    | Difference is not automatically misfit       |
| <b>Recognized relational misfit</b>  | Consequential discrepancy interpreted through interaction                   | Explains emergence and response     | More than low fit or dissatisfaction | Core proposed system state  | Requires operational validation     | Not a diagnosis                              |
| <b>Misfit episode</b>                | Temporally bounded recognition of discrepancy                               | Captures event-linked change        | Unlike persistent incompatibility    | Proposed trigger category   | Boundaries may be ambiguous         | Episodes require repeated evidence           |
| <b>Accumulating misfit</b>           | Repeated discrepancies interpreted as a pattern                             | Explains gradual escalation         | Not one isolated incident            | Proposed trajectory form    | Recall may reconstruct accumulation | One wave cannot establish persistence        |
| <b>Identity-threatening misfit</b>   | Discrepancy challenging central self-definition or belonging                | Explains heightened stakes          | Not equivalent to all misfit         | Proposed amplifier          | Identity centrality varies          | Threat does not ensure withdrawal            |
| <b>Employee adaptation</b>           | Reframing or changing self, work, or relationships                          | Explains active response            | Not necessarily freely chosen        | Response repertoire         | Costs and constraints differ        | Adaptation does not prove repair             |
| <b>Accommodation pressure</b>        | Expectation that the employee should bear change costs                      | Makes adaptation asymmetry visible  | Unlike voluntary development         | Allocates adaptation burden | Direct evidence remains limited     | Requires matched relational data             |
| <b>Organizational interpretation</b> | Attribution by supervisors, HR, teams, or leaders                           | Avoids reifying the organization    | Distinct from formal policy          | Shapes response selection   | Actors may disagree                 | Local action is not organization-wide change |
| <b>Repair</b>                        | Revised conditions or interpretations that reduce consequential discrepancy | Distinguishes change from endurance | Not synonymous with staying          | Possible trajectory state   | Durability remains uncertain        | Repair requires follow-up evidence           |
| <b>Persistence</b>                   | Continued consequential discrepancy over time                               | Explains unresolved continuation    | Not equivalent to commitment         | Possible trajectory state   | Dependence may suppress action      | Continued employment is not fit              |
| <b>Exit</b>                          | Separation from the organization                                            | Captures one possible endpoint      | Not identical to turnover intention  | Possible outcome            | Multiple rival causes remain        | Exit does not prove misfit causation         |

### *Employee adaptation and accommodation pressure*

Employees do not merely register misfit; they may attempt to change its meaning, its practical conditions, or their relationship to it. Job-crafting research provides a useful but bounded vocabulary for such action. Employees can alter tasks, relationships, cognitions, demands, or resources, and these changes may take approach-oriented or avoidance-oriented forms [13–15]. Within a relational misfit account, crafting is therefore one possible adaptation pathway rather than evidence that organizational incompatibility has been repaired. A person may redesign a role while the organization’s enacted values, authority structures, or recognition practices remain unchanged.

Employee adaptation can be organized into four proposed categories. Interpretive adaptation involves reframing expectations or redefining the discrepancy. Self-directed adaptation includes learning, emotional regulation, and identity work. Work-directed adaptation changes tasks, relationships, or resource use. Relationship-directed adaptation includes voice, negotiation, coalition building, and requests for accommodation. Distancing and mobility may follow when these pathways are inaccessible or ineffective. The categories are analytically useful but should not be treated as a universal sequence, and the same behavior may have different meanings across contexts.

Accommodation pressure is proposed as the perceived expectation that the employee should absorb the costs of restoring compatibility. It may appear as pressure to suppress identity claims, perform additional emotional labor, accept role expansion, reinterpret exclusion, or privately craft around organizational constraints. This concept separates employee agency from responsibility transfer: autonomy to adapt is not equivalent to legitimate authority or shared obligation. Its empirical

evaluation would require matched accounts of employee experience, supervisor expectations, formal policy, enacted practice, and material consequences. Until such evidence exists, accommodation pressure should be treated as a proposed relational mechanism, not a measured organizational property or validated predictor of performance, wellbeing, or exit.

### *Organizational interpretation and response*

Employee action becomes relationally consequential only when another actor notices, interprets, and responds to it. “Organizational interpretation” is therefore proposed as an attribution process performed by identifiable supervisors, human-resource specialists, teams, or senior leaders, rather than by an organization imagined as a unitary perceiver. Individually negotiated arrangements show that accommodations may arise through supervisor–employee relationships and may influence how flexibility is distributed locally [16]. Such arrangements can change duties, resources, schedules, or development opportunities, but they do not necessarily revise the organizational values or practices that generated misfit.

Leadership also conditions whether employee adaptation is treated as legitimate initiative, avoidable difficulty, or deviance. Evidence on proactive goal regulation indicates that leader conduct can model, amplify, or constrain employee-directed action [17]. The relevant inference is bounded: a supportive supervisor may alter a local relationship without producing organization-wide change, while formal permission to speak does not ensure substantive influence over decisions. Response consequentiality is therefore proposed as the extent to which employee expression produces observable changes in roles, resources, procedures, or authoritative interpretations.

Human-resource systems provide a possible bridge between local action and collective consequences. Evidence suggests that such systems can shape whether employee proactivity is supported and translated into group innovation [18]. In relational misfit, comparable processes may determine whether a reported discrepancy prompts inquiry, accommodation, role redesign, policy revision, assimilation pressure, delay, or denial. This transfer remains proposed because proactivity and innovation evidence does not directly demonstrate misfit repair.

Organizational response should also be distinguished from organizational intention. A policy may authorize accommodation while local workload, managerial discretion, or informal norms make its use costly. Conversely, a local supervisor may create a workable arrangement without changing formal policy. The proposed system therefore evaluates response at three levels: stated authorization, enacted action, and experienced consequence. Agreement across these levels would indicate stronger evidence of adaptation; divergence would identify an unresolved implementation boundary. This distinction prevents symbolic acknowledgement from being counted as repair and prevents one supportive relationship from being generalized to the organization as a whole.

**Table 2** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in person–organization misfit as an evolving relational system of mutual adaptation.

**Table 2.** Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation.

| Mechanism or relationship                      | Antecedent                        | Mediator or process                         | Moderator                       | Expected consequence            | Rival explanation                        | Validation requirement                |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Discrepancy recognition</b>                 | Changed or accumulated conditions | Appraisal and attribution                   | Salience; prior expectations    | Misfit becomes actionable       | Negative affect                          | Repeated event-level measures         |
| <b>Identity amplification</b>                  | Identity-relevant discrepancy     | Threat and identity work                    | Identity centrality; belonging  | Higher perceived stakes         | General dissatisfaction                  | Matched identity and event data       |
| <b>Employee crafting</b>                       | Perceived changeable mismatch     | Task, relational, or cognitive modification | Resources; discretion           | Local adjustment or avoidance   | Performance strategy unrelated to misfit | Establish discrepancy before crafting |
| <b>Accommodation-burden transfer, proposed</b> | Employee raises incompatibility   | Responsibility assigned mainly to employee  | Power; dependence               | Concealed persistence or strain | Voluntary development                    | Matched employee–manager accounts     |
| <b>Organizational attribution, proposed</b>    | Voice or adaptive behavior        | Legitimacy or deviance judgment             | Leader openness; climate        | Support, neglect, or sanction   | Prior performance judgment               | Multisource temporal design           |
| <b>Consequential response, proposed</b>        | Recognized discrepancy            | Material change to role or practice         | Authority; organizational slack | Repair or revised conditions    | Temporary exception                      | Document enacted change and follow-up |
| <b>Failed-repair accumulation, proposed</b>    | Repeated ineffective responses    | Retrospection and declining trust           | Alternatives; embeddedness      | Escalation, distancing, or exit | Workload or external shock               | Longitudinal process tracing          |

| Productive difference,<br>conditional | Nonconformity<br>without exclusion | Information use and<br>constructive<br>challenge | Inclusion; task<br>relevance | Learning or<br>innovation | Selection of high<br>performers | Multilevel<br>outcome evidence |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|

Note: Expected consequences are theoretical expectations, not established effects. Proposed mechanisms require empirical testing; evidence at employee or dyadic level does not establish organization-level adaptation.

### *Escalation, repair, persistence, and exit*

Relational misfit need not progress through a fixed sequence. Escalation denotes increasing salience, cost, or scope of discrepancy; repair denotes a change in conditions or interpretation that reduces the discrepancy's consequential force; persistence denotes continued consequential misfit; and exit denotes separation. These states may recur or coexist. An employee can experience local repair while broader identity conflict persists, or remain employed while withdrawing effort, voice, or attachment. Turnover theory accordingly treats departure as one endpoint within a longer and more complex decision process rather than as an automatic response to any single discrepancy [19].

Rival explanations are indispensable. Voluntary turnover has multiple attitudinal, contextual, relational, and opportunity-related antecedents [20]. A person may leave because of workload, leadership conflict, family demands, occupational mobility, external offers, or organizational restructuring even when misfit is also reported. Conversely, staying can reflect dependence, embeddedness, weak alternatives, anticipated improvement, or suppressed voice. Neither continued employment nor turnover intention should be treated as a direct measure of repaired or unresolved fit. The same observable outcome can also arise through different routes: continued employment may follow repair, resignation, or dependence, while departure may follow identity threat, opportunity, restructuring, or several causes acting together.

Exit processes may also involve shocks, comparison with alternatives, and unfolding interpretations that change over time [21]. Relational misfit may therefore escalate abruptly after a salient event or accumulate through repeated failed responses. The planned grouped inference is narrow: exit should be understood as a multiply determined and temporally unfolding decision rather than as an automatic behavioral expression of misfit [19–21].

Repair must be evaluated through observable change and follow-up. A discussion, acknowledgement, or individualized exception is not sufficient if the discrepancy remains consequential. Durable repair may require revised tasks, decision rights, resources, practices, or interpretations accepted as meaningful by affected actors. Even then, repair is provisional because organizational conditions and employee priorities can change. These definitions organize testable trajectory states; they do not establish their frequency, order, or causal effect.

### *Proposed relational misfit system*

The proposed Relational Misfit System begins with person conditions and enacted organizational conditions rather than abstract cultural labels alone. Organizational culture is reproduced through practices and interaction, so the relevant environment includes what organizational actors repeatedly authorize, reward, neglect, and sanction [22]. A discrepancy-generating event or accumulation becomes relational misfit only when it is recognized and appraised as consequential. Identity relevance, perceived controllability, prior history, and anticipated future conditions may then shape the employee response repertoire.

**Figure 1** presents the original conceptual synthesis for relational misfit system, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

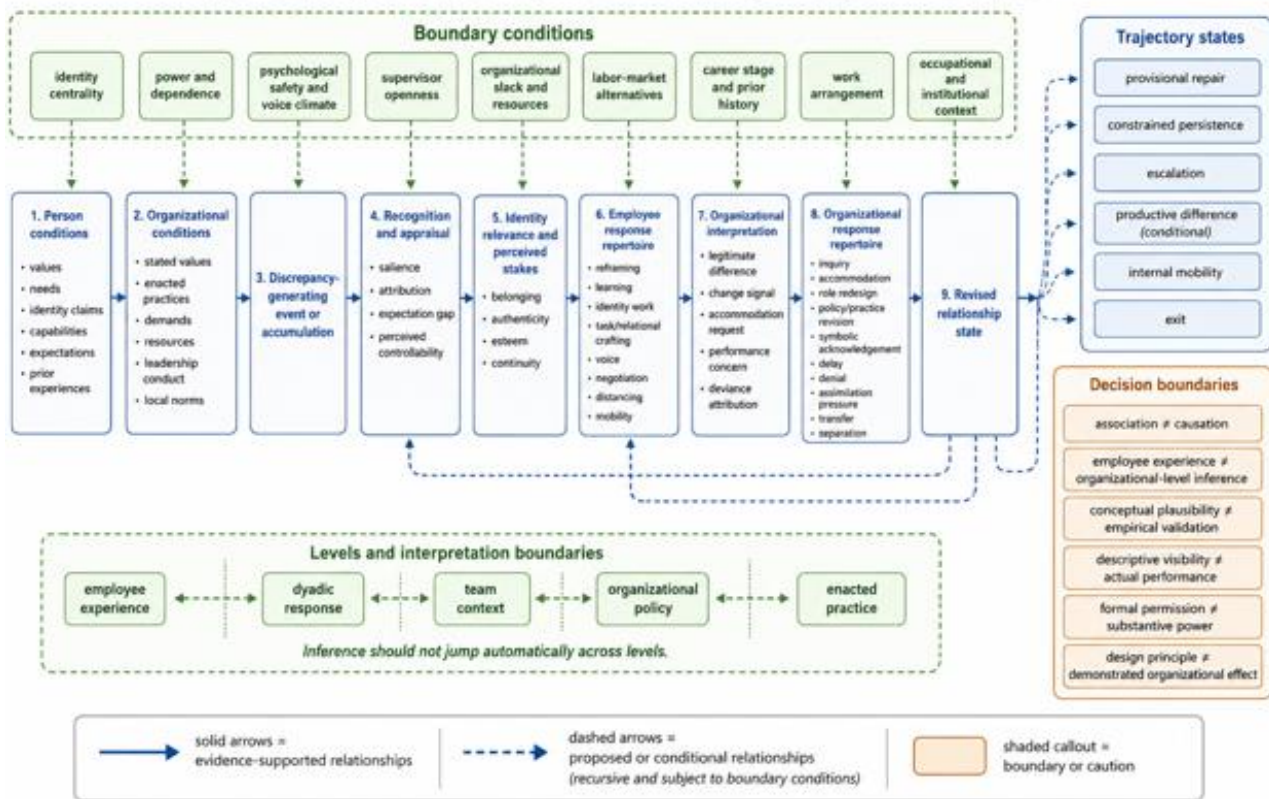


Figure 1. Relational Misfit System.

The figure is an original conceptual synthesis developed for “Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation.” Arrows and grouping indicate evidence-supported or proposed relationships rather than measured effect sizes. The figure does not represent a validated causal model, universal organizational prescription, regulatory determination, or deployment-ready system.

Work arrangements affect the resources through which employees can interpret and manage discrepancy. Research on fluid work highlights identity and continuity work under conditions of weaker organizational attachment and fewer stable structures [23]. This evidence does not generalize automatically to conventional employment, but it indicates that authority, dependence, and access to collective support alter the feasible adaptation repertoire.

Identity work offers one mechanism through which employees may maintain, repair, or revise work-related self-understandings [24]. Organizational interpretation can support this process or intensify discrepancy when others’ categorization conflicts with the employee’s self-definition [25]. The system therefore distinguishes employee response from organizational response and links them through proposed feedback rather than assumed reciprocity.

After interpretation, organizational actors may inquire, accommodate, redesign, deny, delay, assimilate, transfer, or separate. These responses modify the next relationship state and influence later appraisal. The possible trajectories are provisional repair, constrained persistence, escalation, productive difference, internal mobility, and exit. Adaptation-burden allocation and response consequentiality are original proposed constructs within this cycle. Solid conceptual links represent relationships supported directly by the selected scholarship; recursive and cross-level links remain proposed. The system is an organizing theory proposal, not a diagnostic tool or validated causal architecture.

### Theoretical propositions and temporal dynamics

Testing the system requires observations aligned with the timing of the proposed process. Misfit episodes may develop faster than annual surveys can detect, whereas accommodation, policy change, and exit may unfold across longer intervals. Intensive longitudinal designs can capture short-term fluctuation, event appraisal, and lagged response, provided measurement frequency follows theory rather than convenience [26]. Qualitative process data are also necessary where meaning, identity, or retrospective pattern construction cannot be represented adequately by scale scores alone.

Within-person change must be separated from between-person difference. An employee whose fit perception declines is not analytically equivalent to an employee who reports lower average fit than colleagues, and relationships observed at one level need not hold at another [27]. Tests should distinguish employee, dyadic, team, and organizational units and obtain matched evidence from employees, supervisors, human-resource actors, records, and enacted practices.

Temporal precedence remains insufficient for causal proof. Reciprocal paths, mediation estimates, and apparent organizational responses can reflect endogeneity, omitted events, selection, or affect-driven appraisal. Stronger identification may require randomized or quasi-experimental variation, credible instruments, comparative cases, or interrupted policy designs, each with explicit assumptions [28]. Propositions should therefore specify observable indicators and falsification conditions rather than merely predict favorable outcomes.

**Table 3** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

**Table 3.** Testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

| Proposition or criterion                                | Unit and context                      | Observable indicator                                        | Evidence required                                | Falsification condition                              | Organizational responsibility                  | Misuse risk                              | Readiness boundary                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Salience proposition, proposed</b>                   | Employee during discrepancy event     | Appraisal change after salient cue                          | Event sampling and independent cue record        | No appraisal change across salience levels           | Preserve traceable event information           | Treating perception as objective fact    | Research use only                    |
| <b>Identity-amplification proposition, proposed</b>     | Employee and relevant group           | Stronger response when identity centrality is high          | Repeated identity and threat measures            | Identity centrality does not moderate response       | Protect expression and nonretaliation          | Labelling difference as fragility        | No diagnostic threshold              |
| <b>Adaptation-differentiation proposition, proposed</b> | Employee–job relationship             | Distinct reframing, crafting, voice, or distancing patterns | Intensive longitudinal and qualitative data [26] | Responses are empirically indistinguishable          | Provide multiple response channels             | Celebrating unpaid adaptation            | No universal pathway                 |
| <b>Burden-asymmetry proposition, proposed</b>           | Employee–manager dyad                 | Change costs assigned disproportionately                    | Matched accounts and resource records            | Burden allocation unrelated to trajectory            | Record who changes and bears cost              | Blaming employees for incompatibility    | Requires validated measure           |
| <b>Consequential-voice criterion, proposed</b>          | Team or organization                  | Voice followed by authoritative material change             | Decision records and follow-up                   | Voice opportunity predicts no enacted change         | Track response and reasons                     | Counting invitation as influence         | Process evaluation only              |
| <b>Failed-repair proposition, proposed</b>              | Relationship across repeated episodes | Recurrent discrepancy after nominal response                | Sequence and process analysis                    | Repeated response does not alter escalation          | Review response durability                     | Equating acknowledgement with repair     | Longitudinal evidence required       |
| <b>Level-separation criterion</b>                       | Multilevel setting                    | Distinct within- and between-unit estimates                 | Multilevel repeated data [27]                    | Effects replicate identically across levels          | Avoid organization-wide claims from local data | Ecological inference                     | No aggregation without evidence      |
| <b>Causal-identification criterion</b>                  | Policy or intervention context        | Exogenous change and specified mechanism                    | Experimental or quasi-experimental design [28]   | Effect disappears under credible controls            | Preserve comparison conditions                 | Calling temporal association causal      | No causal readiness from observation |
| <b>Productive-difference proposition, proposed</b>      | Team and task context                 | Difference improves information use under inclusion         | Multilevel outcome and process evidence          | Difference adds no benefit under enabling conditions | Prevent exclusion while enabling challenge     | Using innovation claims to tolerate harm | Conditional testing only             |
| <b>Exit-boundary criterion</b>                          | Employee trajectory                   | Actual departure with competing causes assessed             | Repeated data and exit records                   | Misfit adds no explanatory value                     | Avoid attributing every exit to fit            | Post hoc simplification                  | Not an individual prediction tool    |

Note: The propositions are original and unvalidated. Organizational responsibilities identify accountable processes, not demonstrated interventions, performance guarantees, or readiness scores.

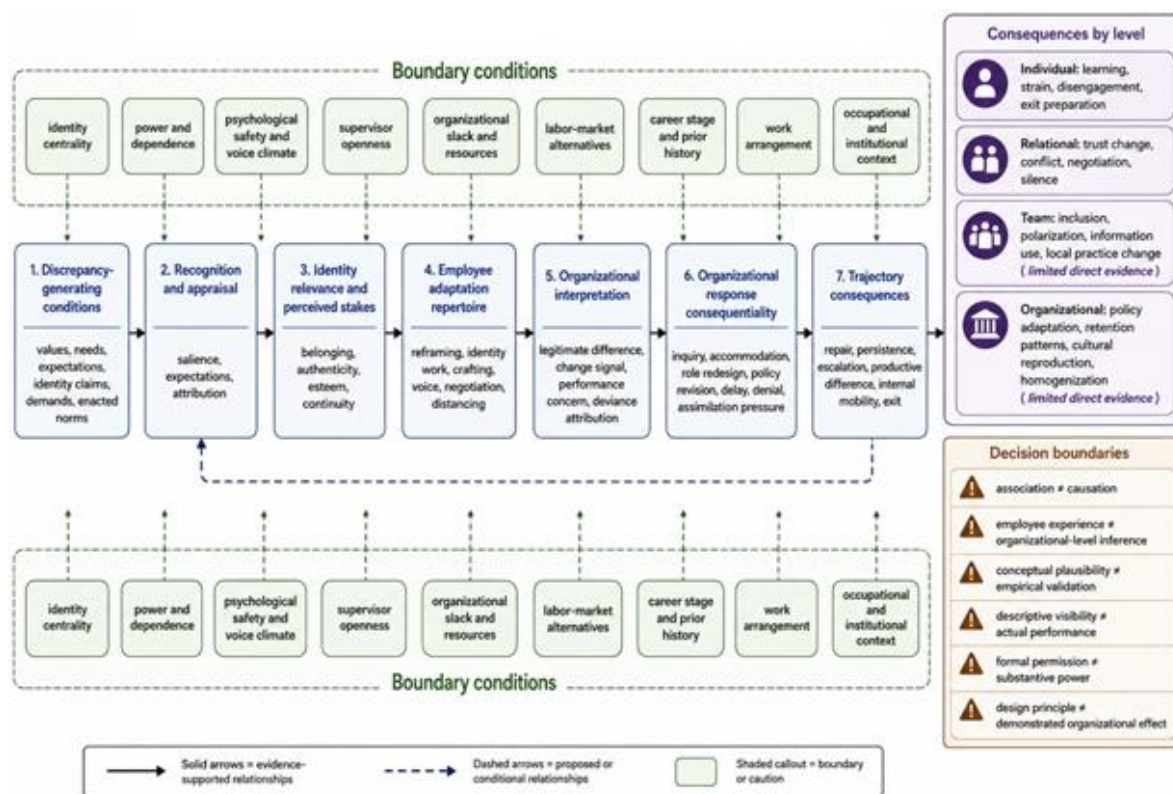
### *Implications for fit research and practice*

Fit research should move from asking only whether correspondence exists to examining how discrepancies acquire meaning, how responses redistribute adaptation costs, and whether local action changes organizational conditions. Leaders influence whether difference is interpreted as useful information, disruption, or deviance, although diversity and misfit are not interchangeable constructs [29]. Research should therefore measure leader attribution, employee interpretation, available authority, and actual consequences rather than infer organizational responsiveness from stated openness.

Formal practices also require multilevel analysis. Diversity-practice scholarship indicates that policy effects depend on implementation, climate, and employee experience [30]. The same distinction applies to misfit: a formal voice channel may coexist with low psychological safety, and an accommodation policy may coexist with inaccessible or stigmatizing enactment. Practical evaluation should consequently separate visibility from performance, permission from substantive power, and policy adoption from consequential response.

Difference may contribute to information elaboration or challenge only under enabling conditions such as inclusion and task relevance [31]. Productive difference is therefore a conditional possibility, not a justification for exposing employees to persistent strain or denying repair. Organizations should examine whether similarity is being protected at the cost of learning, while also recognizing that unresolved identity threat cannot be converted into innovation by assertion.

**Figure 2** presents the original conceptual synthesis for mechanisms, boundary conditions, and organizational consequences, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.



**Figure 2.** Mechanisms, Boundary Conditions, and Organizational Consequences.

The figure is an original conceptual synthesis developed for “Person–Organization Misfit as an Evolving Relational System of Mutual Adaptation.” Arrows and grouping indicate evidence-supported or proposed relationships rather than measured effect sizes. The figure does not represent a validated causal model, universal organizational prescription, regulatory determination, or deployment-ready system.

For practice, the proposed framework supports bounded responsibilities: identify who interprets reported discrepancy, document whose adaptation is requested, distinguish temporary exception from structural change, and evaluate whether responses remain consequential over time. These responsibilities are governance-oriented hypotheses. They do not prescribe maximum fit, guarantee retention, or establish that any accommodation will improve individual or organizational performance.

## Conclusion

Person–organization misfit is better understood as a potentially evolving relationship than as a fixed deficit located solely in an employee. The proposed Relational Misfit System connects discrepancy-generating conditions, appraisal, identity relevance, employee adaptation, organizational interpretation, organizational response, and revised relationship states. It adds adaptation-burden allocation and response consequentiality as proposed constructs for examining who changes, who bears costs, and whether voice produces material change.

The system also clarifies important non-equivalences. Difference is not automatically misfit; staying is not proof of repair; voice opportunity is not consequential influence; and exit is not proof that misfit was causal. Repair, persistence, escalation, productive difference, mobility, and exit are alternative or recurring trajectories rather than universal stages. The contribution

is therefore an evidence-bounded conceptual architecture, not an empirically validated model or managerial formula. Its value depends on future research capable of tracing events, interpretations, actions, and organizational changes across time and levels while testing rival explanations and conditions under which the proposed relationships fail.

**Acknowledgments:** None

**Conflict of interest:** None

**Financial support:** None

**Ethics statement:** None

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