



How to include me: incorporating impression management into the person-organization fit framework

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Abstract

The identification of the factors that facilitate employee inclusion in the workplace is of great importance to both scholars and practitioners. However, our knowledge of the antecedents of perceived workplace inclusion is limited to employee demographic backgrounds and workplace contextual factors according to social identity theory or social exchange theory, neglecting the fact that perceived inclusion develops from the interactions between the individual employee and the environment. This study aims to offer a new account based on the person-environment (P-E) interaction perspective. Using two waves of data on 306 employees, we find that both person-organization (P-O) supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit are positively associated with employees' perceived inclusion. Furthermore, two impression management strategies—self-promotion and ingratiation—separately moderate these effects. These conclusions enrich the literature on perceived workplace inclusion from the perspectives of P-E interactions and motivational behaviors.

Keywords Perceived workplace inclusion · P-O supplementary fit · P-O complementary fit · Impression management

Workplace inclusion is highly important for employees, as feelings of inclusion reflect the extent to which they are appreciated in the workplace and involved in critical organizational processes (Mor Barak, 2017; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Perceived workplace inclusion (PWI) not only enhances employee task performance and creativity (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008) but also fosters employee perceptions of justice and job satisfaction (Brimhall et al., 2014; Bortree & Waters, 2014; Jansen et al., 2014; Mor Barak, 2017). Moreover, excluded employees find it difficult to obtain support and resources, fail to identify with their organization, and ultimately exhibit more counterproductive work behaviors compared to their included counterparts (Ferris et al., 2015).

Compared to the extensive area of research on the outcomes of perceived inclusion, adequate discussions on how perceived inclusion can be improved or negatively affected are lacking (Chen & Tang, 2019). In addition, the limited

research findings leave two unresolved issues. First, current studies either take the belongingness viewpoint (for example, utilizing social identity theory to argue that the majority group or people in higher social classes are more included; see Bortree & Waters, 2014, Cho & Mor Barak, 2008) or the uniqueness viewpoint (for example, proposing organizational climate or leadership that recognizes individual values; see Chung et al., 2020) in empirical examinations. These empirical results lack consensus with optimal distinctiveness theory, which states that individuals attain perceived inclusion by simultaneously balancing the need for belongingness with that for uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011; Shore et al., 2017). Second, the current literature views inclusion as a result of how individuals are “passively” treated in the workplace. However, according to the literature on motivation, individuals are prompted to seek basic need fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). Hence, employees are motivated to use coping strategies to achieve an inclusionary balance in the workplace. Unfortunately, the current literature fails to depict how employees “proactively” seek inclusionary status from this perspective.

To fill these research gaps, we propose a model of the antecedents of PWI to test both the belongingness and uniqueness foundations of perceived inclusion and shift the research focus from “passively perceiving” to “proactively

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adapting” from the perspectives of person-organization(P-O) fit and impression management. Scholars utilize P-O fit to depict the interactions between individuals and the environment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). There are two types of fit: one focuses on similar characteristics and values between an employee and an organization, and the other focuses on the unique characteristics of an employee, such as skills or abilities that compensate to the organization, i.e., P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit (De Cooman et al., 2016). This segmentation coincides with optimal distinctiveness theory in discussing how employees perceive their interactions with given certain contexts. Hence, we propose that both P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit are positively associated with employees’ perceived inclusion.

Both similarity and uniqueness are double-edged swords because a high degree of similarity makes an individual feel replaceable, while a high degree of uniqueness can make an individual feel isolated (Brewer, 1991); therefore, we further propose that employees taking certain impression management strategies can further stress their strength and improve weaknesses in person-environment (P-E) interaction. An individual takes advantage of impression management tactics to “create, maintain, protect, or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience” (Bolino et al., 2008: 1080). Here, we focus on two tactics—self-promotion and ingratiation. Self-promotion involves an individual displaying abilities or accomplishments to demonstrate competence to observers (Bolino et al., 2008). Ingratiation includes doing favors or using flattery to be considered likable by observers (Bolino et al., 2008). By linking these two tactics with P-E interaction, we argue that by emphasizing one’s strength and value, self-promotion amplifies the positive relationship between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion because it highlights the importance of similarity and prevents individuals from being replaced. By showing individuals’ willingness to be included, ingratiation enhances the relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion because it prevents individuals from being isolated. We collected a two-wave sample consisting of 306 employees from various industries to test our hypotheses.

This study makes three contributions. First, it enriches the literature on PWI by introducing the P-E interaction perspective. Leveraging the framework of supplementary and complementary fit, we empirically test how inclusion perceptions simultaneously stem from the satisfaction that comes with belongingness and uniqueness. Second, this work sheds light on the P-E interaction paradigm by examining the role of individual impression management. We contend that certain impression management strategies can amplify the effectiveness of P-E interaction, indicating that both the characteristics and behaviors of a person are important for the effectiveness of P-E fit. Third, the extant research

on impression management focuses largely on recruitment stages (Zhao & Liden, 2011), but our empirical sample is not limited to new employees. Thereby, we extend the implication of impression management to more general employee-organization relations. This study also provides practical suggestions for employees to enhance their inclusion status.

Theories and Hypotheses

Perceived Workplace Inclusion (PWI)

The current literature depicts PWI as employees’ perception of being accepted and appreciated in the workplace (Jansen et al., 2014; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Pearce & Randel, 2004; Shore et al., 2011). An employee can feel included when participating in critical organizational processes (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Extant studies have revealed that individual attributions and management contexts play a critical role in fostering employees’ perceived inclusion. First, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), employees with minority backgrounds perceive less feelings of inclusion than do majority members because minority groups have been historically marginalized in the workplace and obtain fewer resources and investments from their organization (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). For instance, empirical studies report that male employees perceive a higher level of inclusion than do female employees and, in addition, that employees’ length of tenure, position level, and even their age are positively associated with their perceived inclusion (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). Second, according to social exchange theory, contextual factors, such as effective leadership or employee-oriented organizational practices, help organizations establish long-term reciprocal relationships with employees, thereby enhancing their feelings of insider perceptions, which contribute to the sense of workplace inclusion (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). For instance, studies show that authentic leadership (Cottrill et al., 2014), leader-member exchange (Brimhall et al., 2017), and diversity climate or ethical climate (Brimhall et al., 2014) are positively associated with perceived inclusion.

However, extant studies develop the antecedents of perceived inclusion based on either social identity theory or social exchange theory, seldom combining individual attributions with contextual factors to discuss the formation of employees’ perceived inclusion. As perceived inclusion is derived from psychological need fulfillment processes (Shore et al., 2011), which occur within organizations, we believe that employees’ interactions with the working environment are critical for perceived inclusion. The P-E fit paradigm argues that employees’ attitudes and behaviors should be affected by the congruence between the attributes of the individual and those of the environment (Cable & Edwards,

2004). Drawing from this notion, in this study, we choose P-O fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) to investigate how different P-E interactions affect employees' perceived inclusion.

P-O Supplementary Fit and P-O Complementary Fit

P-O fit represents the compatibility between the individual and the organization. Empirical studies support the role of P-O fit in predicting employee attitudes and performance. Employees with high P-O fit develop stronger organizational commitment, achieve better performance, exhibit more citizenship behaviors (Gabriel et al., 2014; Hamstra et al., 2019), and are less likely to leave the organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). There are two traditions or types of fit in the literature: supplementary fit and complementary fit (Cable & Edwards, 2004; De Cooman et al., 2016; Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Employees experience P-O supplementary fit when they perceive themselves "to be similar to existing organizational characteristics." P-O complementary fit refers to occasions when employees' differences "serve to complement organizational characteristics" (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007: 342). Specifically, P-O supplementary fit can occur if an employee and an organization share similarities in values or characteristics. Moreover, P-O complementary fit can occur when employees perceive that their dissimilarities with the organization are valuable and indispensable to the environment. For example, if an employee shares the same values or characteristics with an organization, then the employee is considered similar to the organization. If an employee has a skill required by an organization but that is lacking among other members, then the employee fits the organization in a complementary manner. These two fit dimensions indicate that compatibility between an employee and an organization can be achieved through similarity, uniqueness, or a combination of both (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Empirical evidence supports that employees can perceive supplementary fit and complementary fit simultaneously and that both fit types contribute to outcome variables, such as commitment and team cohesion (De Cooman et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2011).

On the basis of the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), human beings believe that it is more predictable and comfortable to make acquaintances with those with whom they share similarities. An employee is attracted to an organization with which the employee shares values or characteristics; thus, P-O supplementary fit can predict employees' positive attitudes and favorable behaviors toward their organization (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Empirical studies support the positive relationships between supplementary fit and positive outcomes, such as affective commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Guan et al., 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The benefit of complementary fit occurs through the psychological fulfillment process.

When an employee's differences, especially skills or capabilities, complement the characteristics of the organization, the employee brings competence to the organization (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Besides, Snyder and Fromkin's (1977) theory of uniqueness states that maintaining differences and uniqueness is important for individuals to feel psychological satisfaction and a sense of self-worth, so human beings feel satisfaction when their competencies match what is supplied by the environment. Hence, employees' attitudes and behaviors are affected when their needs are met in a complementary fit manner (Cable & Edwards, 2004; De Cooman et al., 2016). Empirical studies also support the positive relationships between complementary fit and positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organizational identification (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Piasentin & Chapman, 2007).

P-O Supplementary Fit, P-O Complementary Fit, and PWI

Shore et al. (2011) apply optimal distinctiveness theory to propose a conceptual model in which satisfying the need for belongingness and uniqueness simultaneously are vital for perceived inclusion. According to optimal distinctiveness theory, an individual seeks to balance the need to affiliate with others with that to maintain a unique identity (Brewer, 1991). Affiliating or belonging to others stems from similarity with others, while uniqueness is based on differences with others. Optimal distinctiveness theory further states that too much similarity makes an individual feel replaceable, threatening the identity as an important insider in certain groups. Conversely, too much uniqueness makes one isolated and difficult to obtain acceptance from others (Brewer, 1991).

Based on optimal distinctiveness theory, we contend that both P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit are positively associated with employees' perceived inclusion. P-O supplementary fit satisfies individuals' need for belongingness or affiliation, which is vital for individuals in perceiving workplace inclusion. First, P-O supplementary fit enhances employees' feelings of belongingness by reinforcing their connections with their organization. An employee who shares the values of other organizational members finds the communication process comfortable and experiences a high level of cohesion and coordination during tasks (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Hence, such predictable interactions help an employee reduce uncertainty and improve interpersonal relations (Cable & Edwards, 2004), thereby satisfying an employee's need to belong to the environment and ultimately resulting in high levels of PWI. Second, P-O supplementary fit satisfies employees' need for belongingness by further fostering the value congruence process (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Such fit also occurs beyond value congruence. For example, supplementary fit can occur

when an employee shares an ability with other organizational members. Aligning with the organization makes employees further internalize other types of organizational values into their self-concept. From the social identity perspective, value congruence reinforces an employee's perception as an insider (Cable & Edwards, 2004); therefore, P-O supplementary fit makes employees more easily accepted and recognized in the working environment, increasing their PWI.

In addition to belongingness or affiliation need fulfillment processes, organizations proactively embrace employees with P-O supplementary fit. According to the attraction-selection-attrition framework (Schneider, 1987), organizations tend to establish long-term relationships with employees who share similarities, invest more resources in them, and ultimately retain them (Schneider et al., 1995; Stamper & Masterson, 2002). Therefore, if an employee shares similarities with an organization, then the employee is likely to be more involved in critical tasks and treated as an insider, which constitutes perceived inclusion (Mor Barak, 2017; Pearce & Randel, 2004). Similarities with other members enhance the quality of the relationships among colleagues; therefore, P-O supplementary fit helps an individual obtain recognition and appreciation through tasks.

In addition to the fulfilling the need for belongingness, fulfilling the need for uniqueness is also crucial for individuals in perceiving inclusion in the working environment according to optimal distinctiveness theory (Shore et al., 2011). As complementary fit contributes to an individual's psychological need fulfillment (Cable & Edwards, 2004), we argue that P-O complementary fit can further explain the additional variance in perceived inclusion beyond that which can be explained by P-O supplementary fit. P-O complementary fit occurs when an individual employee possesses characteristics, such as abilities, knowledge, or personality traits, that are unique to the organization. When an employee has characteristics that are different from those of other members and when these differences complement the characteristics of the organization (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007), being different makes the employee unique and valuable to the organization. These differences compensate for what the organization lacks; therefore, the employee is more easily appreciated and accepted by the organization. In addition, according to Snyder and Fromkin's (1977) theory of uniqueness, an individual can obtain psychological satisfaction and a sense of self-worth by finding self to be unique, special, and distinguishable from others. Optimal distinctiveness theory also indicates that de-individuation threatens one's self-esteem as a distinct and valuable individual (Brewer, 1991). Therefore, employees with high P-O complementary fit feel that their intrinsic needs are satisfied in the workplace (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977), which fosters their perceived inclusion. Moreover, an organization seeks employees with unique but valuable characteristics to acquire valuable and

indispensable strategic human resources. P-O complementary fit signals that retaining such individuals increases organizational competitiveness. As a result, an employee whose skills or capabilities complement the weaknesses or shortcomings of an organization receives more investment and recognition in the workplace; thus, the employee should feel more positive treatment and appreciation from the organization. In summary, P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit promote a strong sense of belongingness and uniqueness for employees, increasing their PWI. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: P-O supplementary fit is positively associated with PWI.

Hypothesis 2: P-O complementary fit is positively associated with PWI.

Impression Management and PWI

People differ in terms of the salience of various aspects of fit (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). Individual attributes, such as employees' work experience, traits, self-construal, and exchange ideology, affect the influence of P-E fit on their work-related behaviors and attitudes (Guan et al., 2011). It has also been proposed that environmental differences, such as those in terms of cultural strength, size, and degree of hierarchy, affect an individual's assessment of fit salience (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). However, studies on boundary conditions that depict how an individual proactively copes with P-E interactions are lacking. According to optimal distinctiveness theory, individuals are motivated to maintain a balance between fulfilling their need for belongingness and fulfilling that for uniqueness (Brewer, 1991). This notion prompts us to especially consider how individuals take coping strategies in adapting or even changing environmental constraints. For example, for employees sharing high level of similarities with the organization, what can they do to strengthen their value and avoid being regarded as replaceable? Moreover, for employees possessing high level of uniqueness to the organization, what can they do to get along well with others and avoid being isolated because of the differences?

In general, individuals are sensitive to the image of themselves as perceived by others. Moreover, individuals generally wish to be seen positively and to avoid being seen negatively (Takeuchi et al., 2015). To achieve their desired image and ensure that others continue to perceive them in good way in interpersonal encounters, people often choose impression management strategies (Bolino et al., 2008; Tetlock & Masteed, 1985). Evidence shows that people are motivated to use impression management tactics to achieve their desired aims, enhance their value as perceived by others, or dismiss any contradictions between the present image of themselves

and their desired image (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Takeuchi et al., 2015). Appropriate impression management is associated with interview performance and employee socialization (Gross et al., 2021; Robie et al., 2020) and is effective in providing social support and helping employees cope with work stressors (Bande et al., 2019). Inspired by this phenomenon, we introduce two specific impression management strategies into the P-E fit paradigm.

Jones and Pittman (1982) classify five basic impression management strategies: self-promotion, ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, and exemplification. In this paper, we focus on two of these tactics—self-promotion and ingratiation. Self-promotion involves individuals displaying their abilities or accomplishments to demonstrate their competence to observers. Ingratiation includes doing favors or using flattery to be perceived as likable by observers. Self-promotion is usually labeled a “self-focused” strategy, whereas ingratiation is classified as an “other-focused” strategy (Bolino et al., 2008; Zhao & Liden, 2011). Empirical studies have found that self-promotion can make target individuals perceive another person as being competent (Rudman, 1998), whereas ingratiation is effective in improving or maintaining good interpersonal relationships (Liu et al., 2009). Some scholars argue that impression management can be categorized into automatic or controlled processes (Peck & Hogue, 2018). In this manuscript, we regard both self-promotion and ingratiation as controlled processes since people who engage in these two tactics exhibit conscious and purposeful behaviors (Bolino et al., 2016).

On the one hand, extreme assimilation threatens an individual’s need for uniqueness. De-individuation may decrease organizational vitality (Schneider et al., 1995). On the other hand, extreme differentiation makes an individual feel isolated and detached from a group (Brewer, 1991). In addition, not every difference adds value to organizations; a difference does so only if it is recognized by organizations (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Hence, optimal inclusionary status should be achieved when both belongingness based on similarity and value uniqueness based on individual characteristics are balanced (Shore et al., 2011). Therefore, to maximize inclusionary status, an individual who shares similarities with an organization should consider how to prevent assimilation, whereas an individual who exhibits differences with an organization should avoid being isolated when showing uniqueness. By further incorporating optimal distinctiveness theory into the P-E fit paradigm, we argue that impression management tactics help employees achieve a balance in terms of meeting their psychological needs.

As self-promotion is effective in displaying their competence by showing their personal abilities or accomplishments, employees who highly engage in this strategy frequently and actively exhibit their advantages and abilities to make others realize that their own characteristics are

highlighted within the organization. In this situation, the characteristics and strengths of employees are more easily observed according to the context and by other coworkers. We contend that in this situation, the importance of P-O supplementary fit in terms of perceived inclusion is more prominent. When employees with high P-O fit engage in self-promotion, they proactively display their strength and characteristics. Since employees with high P-O fit share similarities with the organization, they are more likely to exhibit these similarities. These characteristics are emphasized, valued, and appreciated by other organizational members, instead of being considered common or dispensable to the organization. Thus, the dilemma that high P-O supplementary fit leads to employees facing the threat of a lack of unique value in the workplace (Brewer, 1991) can be solved, resulting in a higher level of perceived inclusion. In contrast, employees with low P-O supplementary fit share less similarities but more incompatibilities with the organization. When employees exhibit self-promotion behaviors to accentuate their characteristics, they face the threat of showing too much differentiation, which increases their risk of exclusion or alienation from others. Hence, the relation between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion should be more prominent in high self-promotion situations.

The characteristics of employees with high P-O supplementary fit who engage less in self-promotion are not emphasized or highlighted as being indispensable; thus, their similarity advantages are less obviously displayed to their coworkers. As a result, these individuals find themselves among average employees with a moderate level of perceived inclusion in the organization. Moreover, the incompatibility of employees with low P-O supplementary fit who engage less in self-promotion with the organization is concealed; thus, the negative side of the low P-O supplementary fit in alienating individuals from the organization should also be weakened. In summary, self-promotion boosts the advantage of high P-O supplementary fit with regard to perceived inclusion but deteriorates the disadvantage in the case of low P-O supplementary fit. Hence, the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion is more significant under a high self-promotion condition. We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Self-promotion moderates the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and PWI such that the relationship is stronger when self-promotion is high and weaker when self-promotion is low.

Although we propose a positive direct relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion, we caution that P-O complementary fit entails potential threats. Due to the well-known in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination effects (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), individuals

tend to be unfriendly or even hostile toward others who are different from themselves (Brewer, 1991). Hence, we argue that although P-O complementary fit implies the importance of an employee to the organization, it does not always guarantee that other colleagues also recognize and show kindness to the employee in their daily work. In addition, a distinct employee who is valuable to an organization may arouse envy among colleagues, leading to negative affect and social undermining (Tai et al., 2012), which are detrimental to the employee's involvement in tasks. However, the impression management literature suggests that an individual can use ingratiation to improve interpersonal relationships with target people (Bolino et al., 2008). Thus, we believe that the strength of the P-O complementary fit is boosted, while the potential negative side is mitigated through this strategy. First, when an employee performs proactive favors and shows kindness, target people more easily perceive or regard the employee as being friendly and easy going. As a result, the distinct value of a high P-O complementary fit is more easily recognized and appreciated by others, thereby leading to a higher level of perceived inclusive experience from the organization. Second, ingratiation enables employees to have close contact with and obtain more social support from target colleagues (Bande et al., 2019; Wayne & Green, 1993). Being different is linked to loneliness, which represents a psychological burden on employees. Ingratiation enhances an individual's likable image, brings about more social support that protects the employee from pressure and depression during work (Bande et al., 2019), and enables those employees with complementary skills or abilities to more proactively involve in organizational activities instead of remaining alienated from others, further enhancing their engagement in critical organizational processes and, in turn, their perceived inclusion. However, when employees with high P-O complementary fit engage less in ingratiation behaviors, their skills and abilities may also raise criticism from other people because their lower level of engagement in favors and social interactions makes other people consider them cold or selfish. Therefore, ingratiation behaviors increase the positive side of P-O complementary fit with regard to perceived inclusion and mitigate its negative influence. In conclusion, the positive relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion is stronger under a high ingratiation situation than under a low ingratiation condition. Empirical studies have found that an effective ingratiation strategy can weaken the relationships between abusive supervision and employee emotional exhaustion due to its role in helping employees obtain social support from other colleagues (Liu et al., 2009). In contrast, when distinct employees engage less in ingratiation, they leave other colleagues with a prideful image of them, evoking prejudice against out-group members. Their unique image becomes more incompatible, weakening their value, as perceived by

others, and restricting their involvement in organizational activities. Therefore, the relationship between P-O complementary fit and PWI is buffered.

In this study, we do not hypothesize that self-promotion moderates the relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion or that ingratiation moderates the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion. Referring to the distinction between “self-focused” and “other-focused” strategies in impression management (Bolino et al., 2008), we believe that different strategies work well under different fit situations. We argue that there should be a double-edged-sword effect of self-promotion on the relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion. As a strategy that focuses on personal characteristics, self-promotion increases the strength of distinctive values from P-O complementary fit and magnifies its weakness by increasing avoidance or even antipathy behaviors from others, leading to an ambiguous relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion. Similarly, because it focuses on others, ingratiation does not emphasize individual characteristics and is less effective in amplifying the power of P-O supplementary fit. Hence, we propose our last hypothesis. The overall model is presented in Fig. 1:

Hypothesis 4: Ingratiation moderates the relationship between P-O complementary fit and PWI such that the relationship is stronger when ingratiation is high and weaker when ingratiation is low.

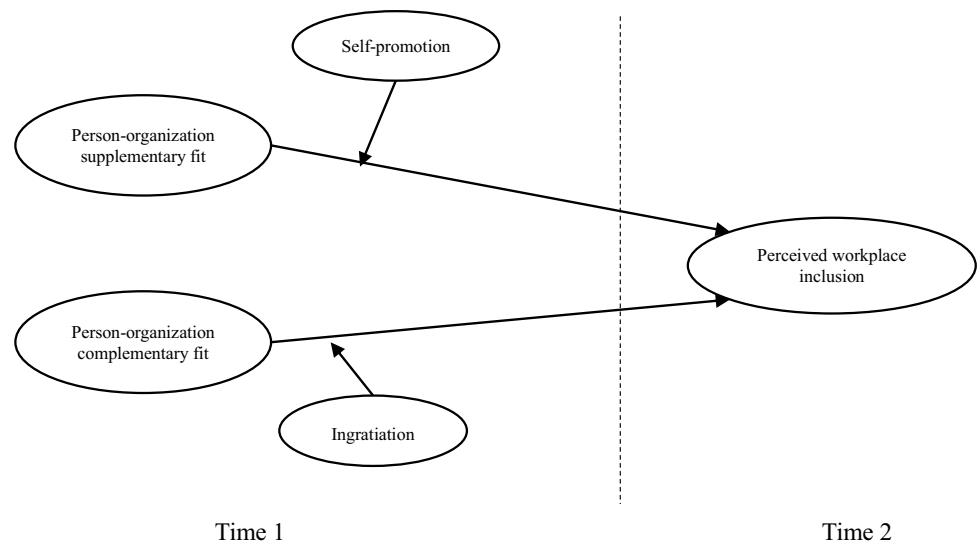
Methods

Participants and Procedures

In this study, we collected data on employees from various industries with a multiwave approach via the online survey platform WJX.cn, which follows strict sample collection procedures to guarantee valid responses. In the first-round questionnaire, we collected background information and data on the P-O supplementary fit, P-O complementary fit, self-promotion, and ingratiation of 410 employees. We collected second-round data on the PWI of employees after fifteen working days. Finally, 306 valid data points were obtained from two survey rounds, for a response rate of 74.63%.

The sample in this study was composed of employees from various industries and occupations. Participants came from industries such as manufacturing, information technology, services, transportation, wholesale and retail, construction, and financial accounting industries. Their occupations included management, research and development, administration, sales, and human resource management occupations. In total, 23.53% of the subjects worked

Fig. 1 Research Model



in state-owned enterprises, 51.96% worked in private enterprises, 12.42% worked in joint ventures, 8.82% worked in foreign enterprises, and 3.27% worked in government institutions. Moreover, a total of 41.18% were male, and 80.72% were married. Furthermore, 7.19% of the participants were 21–25 years old, 36.27% were 26–30 years old, 29.41% were 31–35 years old, 14.38% were 36–40 years old, 11.44% were 41–45 years old, 0.33% were 46–50 years old, and 0.98% were 56–60 years old. Additionally, 12.42% of the participants had worked less than 3 years in the organization, 24.51% had worked for 3–5 years, 34.64% had worked for 5–8 years, 11.44% had worked for 8–10 years, and 16.99% had worked for more than 10 years. A total of 3.59% were high school graduates, 14.38% had an associate degree, 73.86% had a bachelor's degree, and 8.17% had a master's degree or above. In addition, 25.49% were employees, 42.81% were line managers, 29.74% were middle managers, and 1.96% were top managers. A total of 68.95% held local hukou (local household registration), 15.69% changed hukou to their current place of residence (new residences), and 15.36% held nonlocal hukou.

Measures

A five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 “strongly inconsistent” to 5 “strongly consistent” was used for all measures unless otherwise indicated below. Two bilingual individuals conducted the back-translation process for the scales that were originally written in English.

PWI We used the 12-item PWI scale developed by Chen and Tang (2019). PWI contains four subdimensions: participation, interaction, recognition, and feedback. Example items include the following: “I participate in workgroup discussions,” “I join in activities with colleagues in my leisure

time (e.g., having lunch),” “My differences are appreciated by my colleagues,” and “My colleagues offer me feedback and suggestions for improvement.” Cronbach's α of the 12 items reached 0.84, and the reliability values of the participation, interaction, recognition, and feedback subdimensions were 0.84, 0.83, 0.82, and 0.81, respectively. The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the second-order four-factor dimensional model has good fit ($\chi^2 = 78.65$, $df = 50$, $p = 0.006$, $RMSEA = 0.043$, $NNFI = 0.96$, $CFI = 0.97$, $IFI = 0.98$, $SRMR = 0.049$).

P-O Supplementary Fit We used the 4-item scale of P-O supplementary fit developed by De Cooman et al. (2016). The following is an example item: “My skills and abilities match the skills and abilities this company looks for in members.” We averaged the 4-item scores to create a total scale score (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$).

P-O Complementary Fit We used the 5-item scale of P-O complementary fit developed by De Cooman et al. (2016). The following is an example item: “I feel that I am important to the company because I have such different skills and abilities compared to my colleagues.” We averaged the 5-item scores to create a total scale score (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$).

Self-Promotion We used the 4-item self-promotion strategy scale developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). The following is an example item: “I talk loudly about my experience or education” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$).

Ingratiation We used the 4-item ingratiation strategy scale developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). The following is an example item: “I compliment my colleagues so they will see me as likeable” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$).

Control Variables We controlled for age (with 1 to 9 representing age categories from “21–25 years old” to “above 60 years old”), marital status (married = 1, unmarried = 2), gender (male = 1, female = 2), educational background (1 = high school/technical secondary school and below, 2 = associate degree, 3 = bachelor’s degree, 4 = master’s degree and above), organizational tenure (1 = less than 3 years, 2 = 3–5 years, 3 = 5–8 years, 4 = 8–10 years, 5 = more than 10 years), and position (1 = employee, 2 = line manager, 3 = middle manager, 4 = top manager). Empirical studies have shown that in China, hukou is important for employees’ well-being and career development. For instance, citizens with local hukou enjoy better social welfare and career development than do nonlocal citizens. In addition, the ownership structure of a Chinese company determines its managerial style (Tang et al., 2015). We controlled for household registration by creating two dummy variables (labeled “hukou 1” and “hukou 2”) for three categories (i.e., local hukou, new residences, and nonlocal hukou) and controlled for organizational ownership by creating four dummy variables (labeled “company 1” to “company 4”) for five different kinds of ownership structures (i.e., state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, joint ventures, foreign enterprises, and government institutions) in our analysis.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities are presented in Table 1. Correlation analysis showed that PWI was positively associated with P-O supplementary fit ($r=0.49$, $p<0.01$), P-O complementary fit ($r=0.39$, $p<0.01$), self-promotion ($r=0.36$, $p<0.01$), and ingratiation ($r=0.41$, $p<0.01$). We conducted CFA to assess the discriminant validity of our measures. The CFA results showed that the eight-factor model fit well ($\chi^2=545.97$, $df=349$, $p<0.001$, RMSEA = 0.043, NNFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.059) and was better than the competing three-factor model (one factor for PWI, one for self-promotion and ingratiation, and one for P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit; $\chi^2=1219.01$, $df=374$, $p<0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2=673.04$, $\Delta df=25$, $p<0.01$), the two-factor model (one factor for measures at time 1 and one for measures at time 2; $\chi^2=1246.92$, $df=376$, $p<0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2=700.95$, $\Delta df=27$, $p<0.01$), and the single-factor model ($\chi^2=1514.19$, $df=377$, $p<0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2=968.22$, $\Delta df=28$, $p<0.01$). We conducted two additional analyses to assess whether the common method bias of the four variables measured at time point 1 was serious. An exploratory Harman’s single-factor test showed that the first factor accounted for 19.60% of the total variance explained, which was less than the criterion of not exceeding 0.50 (Hair et al., 1998).

A confirmatory Harman’s single-factor test showed that the single-factor model had significantly worse fit than did the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2=188.22$, $\Delta df=6$, $p<0.01$). Both results indicate that no serious common method bias existed among the variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Before analyzing the data, we centered two independent variables and two moderators to create the interaction terms for model analysis. Table 2 shows the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression results. The results of Model 2 showed that P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit were positively associated with PWI ($b_{\text{supplement}}=0.28$, $p<0.001$; $b_{\text{complement}}=0.12$, $p<0.01$, $\Delta R^2=0.25$, $p<0.001$) when they were in the regression together; thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are supported. In Model 3, we entered four interaction terms (P-O supplementary fit \times self-promotion, P-O supplementary fit \times ingratiation, P-O complementary fit \times self-promotion, and P-O complementary fit \times ingratiation) into one regression. The interaction term of P-O supplementary fit and self-promotion was positively associated with PWI, the interaction term of P-O complementary fit and ingratiation was negatively associated with PWI ($b_{\text{supplement} \times \text{promotion}}=0.15$, $p=0.026$; $b_{\text{complement} \times \text{ingratiation}}=-0.24$, $p=0.001$, $\Delta R^2=0.04$, $p<0.01$), and the other two interaction terms had no significant relations with PWI ($b_{\text{supplement} \times \text{ingratiation}}=0.002$, $p=0.983$; $b_{\text{complement} \times \text{promotion}}=0.08$, $p=0.163$). The results support Hypothesis 3 but fail to support Hypothesis 4.

We further plotted these relationships and conducted simple slope tests. Figure 2 shows that P-O supplementary fit was more positively associated with PWI in terms of the presence of a high self-promotion strategy ($b=0.42$, $t=5.26$, $p<0.001$) than with a low self-promotion strategy ($b=0.22$, $t=3.57$, $p<0.001$); additionally, the slope difference was significant ($\Delta b=0.20$, $p=0.02$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is further supported. Figure 3 shows that P-O complementary fit was more positively associated with PWI in terms of the presence of a low ingratiation strategy ($b=0.26$, $t=4.09$, $p<0.001$) than with a high ingratiation strategy ($b=-0.02$, $t=-0.37$, $p=0.651$); additionally, the slope difference was significant ($\Delta b=0.28$, $p=0.001$). Although Hypothesis 4 is not supported, the results demonstrate that ingratiation can negatively moderate the positive relationship between P-O complementary fit and PWI.

General Discussion

Leveraging the P-E interaction perspective, we propose and examine several new antecedents of employee inclusion perceptions. Our empirical results showed that both

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1.age	2.92	1.24	–																
2.gender	1.59	0.49	–.16**	–															
3.marriage	1.19	0.40	–.33*	.04	–														
4.Hukou1	0.69	0.46	.07	–.03	.02	–													
5.Hukou2	0.16	0.36	.00	–.04	–.05	–.64**	–												
6.education	2.87	0.59	–.26**	–.02	.01	–.03	.07	–											
7.position	2.08	0.79	.11*	–.17**	–.26*	–.08	.17**	.09	–										
8.tenure	2.96	1.24	.57**	–.18**	–.35**	.09	–.01	–.05	.23**	–									
9.company1	0.24	0.42	.17**	–.19**	–.00	.12*	–.01	.06	.00	.32**	–								
10.company2	0.52	0.50	–.11	.15**	–.01	–.08	–.02	–.09	–.06	–.18**	–.58**	–							
11.company3	0.09	0.28	.10	.07	–.06	–.07	.02	–.03	.01	.07	–.17**	–.32**	–						
12.company4	0.12	0.33	–.10	–.01	–.01	.02	.00	.09	.07	–.15**	–.21**	–.39**	–.12*	–					
13.PW1 (T2)	3.81	0.45	–.07	.13*	–.13*	–.03	.10	.11	.17**	.02	–.09	.02	.11	.00	0.84				
14.SuppleFit (T1)	3.75	0.49	–.09	.12*	–.16**	.03	.07	.20**	.09	.04	–.00	.01	.09	–.01	.49**	0.77			
15.CompleFit (T1)	3.61	0.58	–.02	.00	–.16**	–.03	.05	.04	.21**	.11*	–.05	.07	–.02	–.01	.39**	.35**	0.80		
16.promotion (T1)	3.25	0.70	–.07	.02	–.11*	.08	.01	.06	.15*	.05	–.01	–.03	.06	.06	.36**	.42**	.49**	0.84	
17.ingratiation(T1)	3.80	0.58	–.17**	.02	–.11	–.01	.07	.15**	.11	–.01	.01	–.05	.13*	.04	.41**	.42**	.40**	.43**	0.79

Note: N = 306; PW1 = perceived workplace inclusion; SuppleFit = P-O supplementary fit; CompleFit = P-O complementary fit; promotion = self-promotion; Cronbach's alpha coefficients are represented in parentheses along the diagonal; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; Two-tailed tests

Table 2 OLS Regression Results

Variable	Model1 B(SE)	Model 2 B(SE)	Model 3 B(SE)
intercepts	3.45(0.28)***	3.76(0.24)***	3.81(0.24)***
age	-0.04(0.03)	0.00(0.02)	0.01(0.02)
gender	0.13(0.05)*	0.09(0.05)†	0.09(0.05)*
marriage	-0.13(0.07)†	-0.02(0.06)	-0.03(0.06)
Hukou1	0.08(0.07)	0.01(0.06)	0.02(0.06)
Hukou2	0.15(0.09)†	0.06(0.08)	0.09(0.08)
education	0.05(0.05)	0.01(0.04)	0.00(0.04)
position	0.08(0.03)*	0.05(0.03)	0.04(0.03)
tenure	0.01(0.03)	-0.00(0.02)	-0.00(0.02)
company1	-0.07(0.15)	-0.24(0.13)†	-0.30(0.13)*
company2	-0.01(0.14)	-0.19(0.13)	-0.23(0.12)†
company3	0.14(0.17)	-0.13(0.15)	-0.20(0.15)
company4	-0.04(0.16)	-0.21(0.14)	-0.26(0.14)†
P-O supplementary fit		0.28(0.05)***	0.32(0.05)***
P-O complementary fit		0.12(0.05)**	0.12(0.05)*
Self-promotion		0.03(0.04)	0.03(0.04)
ingratiation		0.15(0.05)**	0.12(0.05)**
SuppleFit×Promotion			0.15(0.07)*
SuppleFit×Ingratiation			0.00(0.10)
CompleFit×Promotion			0.08(0.06)
CompleFit×Ingratiation			-0.24(0.07)**
R^2	0.10	0.35	0.39
ΔR^2	0.10*	0.25***	0.04**
F	2.69**	9.75***	9.09***

Notes: N=306; The dependent variable is perceived workplace inclusion; SuppleFit=P-O supplementary fit; CompleFit=P-O complementary fit; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$; Two-tailed tests

Fig. 2 Moderation Effect (supplementary fit×self-promotion)

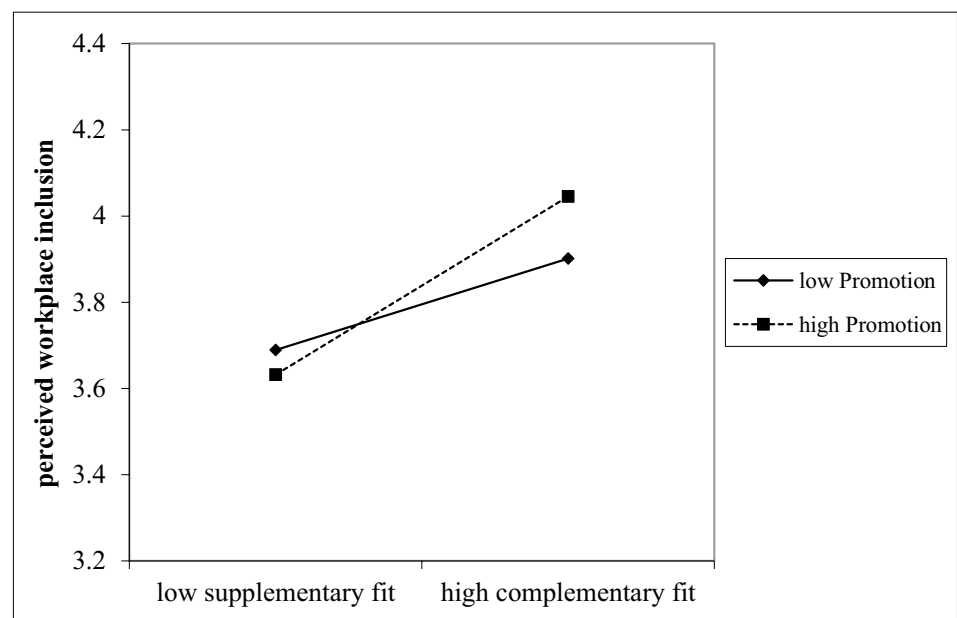
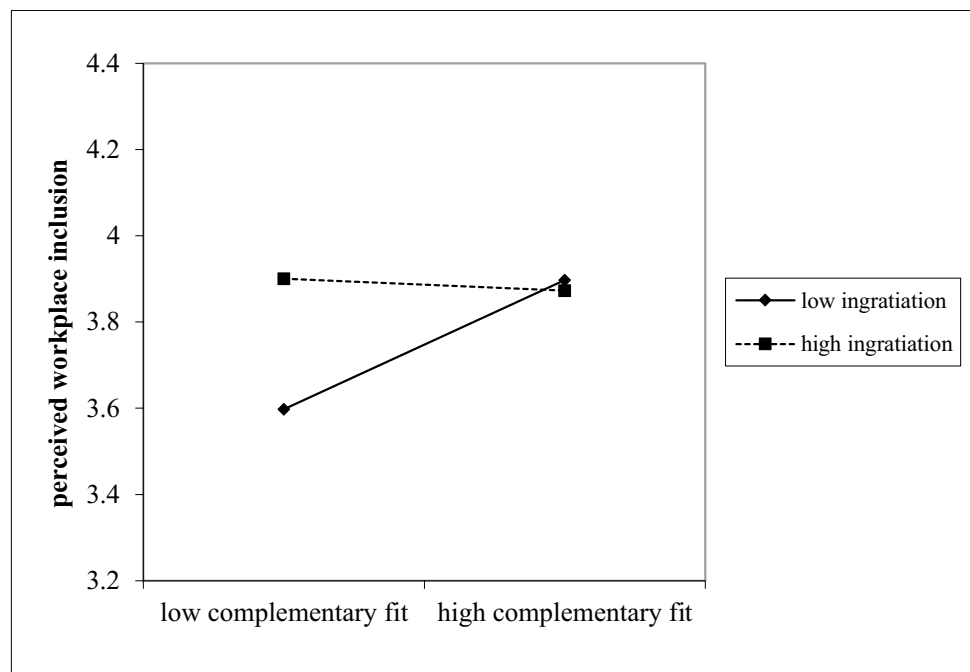


Fig. 3 Moderation Effect (complementary fit \times ingratiation)



P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit are positively associated with PWI. Furthermore, different impression management strategies serve as either an amplifier of or a hindrance to such relationships. Self-promotion further amplifies the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion. Contrary to our expectation, ingratiation weakens rather than strengthens the relationship between P-O complementary fit and perceived inclusion. Several reasons may help explain such results. First, PWI is strongly affected by the main effect of ingratiation, which can compensate for a lack of fit with the organization; therefore, a negative instead of a positive multiplicative effect is observed. The extant literature also supports the idea that people are more willing to accept and appreciate those who show kindness and proactively embrace others (Chen & Tang, 2019). Hence, we infer that the strong main effect of ingratiation on perceived inclusion shadows the proposed positive moderation hypothesis. Second, we infer that ingratiation has a double-edged-sword effect. Under high ingratiation, the relationship between P-O compensatory fit and PWI is not significant. However, under low ingratiation, P-O compensatory fit is positively associated with PWI. We infer that ingratiation helps an individual employee build a likable image but masks shining characteristics and uniqueness. When employees engage in ingratiation, even though they complement an organization, their uniqueness loses its strong signaling effects as a result of de-individuation. This interesting result demonstrates a paradox: the likable image created by impression management strategies causes an employee to lose unique characteristics. In addition, our exploratory analysis shows that the positive

relationship between ingratiation and perceived inclusion may be more prominent among male employees than among female employees and more prominent among employees of local hukou than among employees whose hukou is in their hometown. These exploratory results indicate that there may be boundary conditions for different cohort groups in exhibiting impression management tactics.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, to the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to examine the antecedents of workplace inclusion from a P-E interaction perspective. Previous studies focus largely on the influences of individual attributions and organizational context on perceived inclusion. According to optimal distinctiveness theory, extant studies have examined either belongingness need satisfaction or uniqueness value satisfaction, but few studies have integrated these two concepts. We incorporate the P-E fit paradigm (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) into the literature on perceived inclusion and propose that both P-O supplementary fit and P-O complementary fit are beneficial for employees' perceived inclusion. These conclusions provide a new account through which to verify the componential framework of perceived inclusion based on optimal distinctiveness theory (Shore et al., 2011).

Second, we enrich the literature on both P-E fit and perceived inclusion by introducing impression management strategies (Bolino et al., 2008). The impression management literature discusses how individuals enhance their self-image as perceived by others (Grant & Mayer, 2009), indicating

that individuals are motivated to change the P-E interaction situation. However, previous studies depict largely passive results of P-E fit instead of exploring how individuals “actively” cope with P-E interactions. We contribute to the P-E fit framework by arguing that employees can take advantage of impression management strategies to advance their interactions with their organizations and to further improve their inclusionary status. Hence, our study contributes to both the P-E fit paradigm and the literature on the antecedents of perceived inclusion from the motivation perspective.

Third, we discuss how different impression management strategies influence different P-E fit situations, providing more empirical evidence for impression management studies. Empirical research has examined the effectiveness of impression management strategies in helping employees obtain more job opportunities, better performance evaluations, and higher promotions (Bolino et al., 2008; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Takeuchi et al., 2015; Zhao & Liden, 2011), but few studies have explored their role in affecting the results of P-E interactions. Drawing on optimal distinctiveness theory, we argue that self-promotion strengthens an individual’s characteristics, whereas ingratiation facilitates the belonging process; therefore, these factors moderate the relationships between different types of fit and perceived inclusion. In the empirical analysis, we find that self-promotion is effective in amplifying the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and perceived inclusion, whereas P-O complementary fit is associated with perceived inclusion only under conditions of low ingratiation. These results verify the effectiveness of a self-focused impression management strategy and reveal that other-focused impression management strategies may lead to unexpected outcomes. In addition, most studies on impression management focus on new employee socialization or recruitment stages (Gross et al., 2021; Robie et al., 2020; Zhao & Liden, 2011), but our explanation of the role of impression management is not limited to new employee settings. Thus, we extend the implication of impression management to more general employee-organization relations.

Practical Implications

Our study also has some practical implications. How can employees’ perceived inclusion be enhanced in the workplace? Previous studies have offered suggestions from the perspective of leadership and the development of organizational culture (Shore et al., 2017), but we further note that organizations can take advantage of employee-oriented HRM approaches to enhance employees’ perceived inclusion. We agree with the notion that value congruence is important for employees to achieve career success in the organization (Anglim et al., 2022), in addition, we further recommend that employees themselves take proactive

actions to facilitate others’ acceptance and recognition of them. The main effect of P-E fit on perceived inclusion indicates that to promote employee perceived inclusion, organizations should invest in value congruence programs and equip employees with diverse skills and abilities, thus enhancing their perceptions of both supplementary fit and complementary fit. Organizations can also develop training programs to enhance employee interpersonal skills in the workplace. Employees should be encouraged to engage in self-promotion behaviors that can facilitate their feelings of inclusion. Given that ingratiation directly influences employees’ perceived inclusion but weakens the feelings of inclusion generated from perceived uniqueness, organizations should also prevent employees from experiencing extreme de-individuation during the socialization process.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations, which offer possible directions for future research. First, we focus mainly on the antecedents of PWI. Future research should further consider examining the results of PWI to extend this model. Second, we examined only two specific impression management strategies, leaving the other three types of strategies for future examination. In addition, impression management behaviors can be classified into controlled or automatic processes (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Our study depicts mainly the controlled situation, but one interesting question remains: Is controlled impression management more efficient than automatic impression management in facilitating an individual’s perceived inclusion in the workplace? We encourage future studies to compare such effectiveness from the perspective of controlled and automatic processes. Third, we also recommend that future studies focus on the inclusion perceptions of new employees who face the socialization process and are more likely to engage in impression management to enhance their desired images. Our exploratory analysis also shows that the direct relationship between ingratiation and PWI varies across different groups (for example, we conducted exploratory analysis and found that the direct relationship between ingratiation and PWI existed only in the male group and not in the female group). Thus, there should be boundary conditions for the effectiveness of impression management tactics. Future studies can benefit from linking the literature on diversity to that on impression management to examine the effectiveness of impression management tactics among different social groups. Fourth, although we used a two-wave data collection approach, we cannot draw causal conclusions regarding the relationships among P-E fit, impression management strategies, and PWI. The interval between two time points is 15 days, which is above the minimum criterion to reduce the risk of common method variance, but the concern of whether 15 days is sufficient for observing the variance in

inclusion perceptions remains. We highly recommend that future studies consider designing a time-lagged study with an interval of 3 months. In addition, our Chinese sample may limit the external validity of our model. Hence, future research can use samples from other countries and design longitudinal studies to further examine this model.

Conclusions

Drawing on the P-E fit paradigm and impression management strategies, this study explores the antecedents of PWI from a P-E interaction perspective. First, we proposed and tested whether both P-O supplementary fit and complementary fit were positively associated with PWI. Second, we found that self-promotion amplified the relationship between P-O supplementary fit and PWI, whereas ingratiation weakened the relationship between P-O complementary fit and PWI. This study contributes to the literature on perceived inclusion and the P-E fit paradigm by shifting the focus from the passive influence of the workplace to the proactive adaptation to the environment.

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Data Availability The data can be required by connecting with the authors.

Code Availability (Software Application or Custom Code) Not applicable.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval Not applicable.

Consent to Participate Not applicable.

Consent for Publication Not applicable.

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