

# How Does Person-Environment Fit Relate to Career Calling? The Role of Psychological Contracts and Organizational Career Management

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**Purpose:** The formation of one's career calling involves endowing work with meaning and realizing oneself in work, and it has become a focus of organizational behavior research in the past decade. Although there are many studies on the outcome variables of career calling, research on the antecedents of career calling formation is relatively scarce, and its mechanisms are unclear. Based on fit theory and social exchange theory, we analyzed the data of 373 employees and explored the relationship between person-environment fit (focusing on person-organization fit and person-job fit), psychological contract, career calling and organizational career management.

**Methods:** We adopted a multi-timepoint data collection method to analyze data from 373 employees from an internet technology company. A mediated moderation model and hypotheses were tested using Mplus 8.3 software.

**Results:** The results showed that person-organization fit and person-job fit were positively related to career calling, and the psychological contract played a partial mediating role. The moderating effect of organizational career management on person-organization fit, person-job fit and the psychological contract was also confirmed. Moreover, the mediating effect of the psychological contract was stronger when organizational career management was higher.

**Conclusion:** We examined the important influence of individual-level and organizational-level factors on the formation of career calling. The findings highlight the important role and mechanism of person-environment fit in the formation of career calling through psychological factors, which has managerial implications for how to develop employees' career calling.

**Keywords:** person-environment fit, person-organization fit, person-job fit, psychological contract, organizational career management, career calling

## Introduction

The new generation of employees combines their work with their interests and wants to find deeper values in their work, which is exactly how career calling is reflected in the workplace.<sup>1</sup> If they cannot find this sense of purpose and meaning in their work, they will have a sense of boredom and emptiness and will face their work with a negative attitude.<sup>2</sup> According to research, new employee burnout and turnover rates are currently very high, which poses a challenge to employee career growth and organizational sustainability.

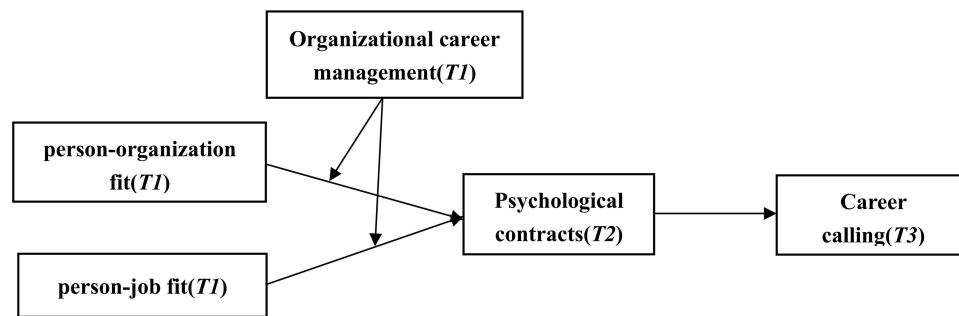
Thus, exploring the antecedent variables that have a significant impact on the formation of career calling in the current context provides an important theoretical basis for how to develop the career calling of the new generation of employees. Career calling is an individual's strong passion and feeling of power regarding the work they do,<sup>3</sup> emphasizing the process of discovering the meaning and value of the work,<sup>4</sup> and is a very beneficial orientation toward work.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, we have seen a wave of research on work as a calling in organizational psychology, positive

psychology, and career development. This growth coincides with what some consider a generational trend toward emphasizing meaningful work and living one's calling.<sup>4,5</sup> There has been a wealth of empirical research examining the positive effects of career calling on employees' positive work outcomes, namely, well-being,<sup>6,7</sup> job satisfaction,<sup>8</sup> and lower absenteeism,<sup>9</sup> yet research on the antecedents of career calling formation is relatively lacking. Thus, this study contributes to this current deficiency of antecedent variables of career calling by examining which factors may facilitate career calling in an organizational context.

Person-environment fit remains one of the most enduring and compelling paradigms in the field of organizational psychology and organizational behavior, and it serves as a conceptual cornerstone for understanding career calling.<sup>10,11</sup> Some scholars tend to believe that the fit between individual values, interests, abilities and careers is conducive to facilitating career callings.<sup>8,12</sup> Person-environment fit theory is grounded in the attraction-selection-depletion (ASA) model, which states that people are attracted to environments composed of similar people, selected by these environments, and likely to remain in them.<sup>13</sup> People are more motivated and feel a sense of belonging when they work in a rewarding environment that fulfills the fundamental preference or desire that they jointly hold.<sup>13</sup> As a result, they are more likely to develop an intrinsic love. Among several dimensions of person-environment fit, the concepts of person-organization fit and person-job fit have received considerable attention in practice and research.<sup>14-16</sup> Person-organization fit focuses on "how an individual matches an organizations' values, goals, and mission".<sup>16</sup> The concept of person-job fit, by contrast, is described as the match "between the abilities of a person and the demands of a job or the desires of a person and the attributes of a job".<sup>17</sup> Person-organization fit and person-job fit, as important job resources, have been significantly associated with important organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance, across a large number of studies.<sup>13,15,18</sup> Researchers believe that this sense of fit not only provides temporary satisfaction but also helps employees find a sense of meaning and purpose in work,<sup>13</sup> which ultimately helps them achieve their career calling. Therefore, this study focuses on the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit in person-environment fit and career calling.

The literature is silent on the nuanced mechanisms underlying the possible linkage between person-environment fit and career calling, making it difficult to find in-depth knowledge of the function of person-environment fit. Indeed, previous studies have implied that if employees realize that there is a good fit between themselves and their workplace, it means that the organization is able to meet their needs and desires, and the employees are automatically willing to work there.<sup>15</sup> These results can be converted into a sense of belonging or a psychological contract.<sup>19</sup> The psychological contract is an informal mental contract between the employee and the organization, which is the commitment, understanding and perception of the exchange between the employee's external and internal personal contributions and organizational inducements.<sup>20</sup> According to social exchange theory, positive interactions are formed between individuals and organizations, not only at the economic level but also at the abstract level, such as professional identity and a higher level of values.<sup>21,22</sup> The psychological contract leads employees to become more focused on their work, and over time, individuals tend to develop an autonomous love for their work, both emotionally and cognitively. This helps employees experience a sense of calling to the work they do.<sup>23,24</sup> That is, we cast the psychological contract as a key mediating mechanism that facilitates the positive impact of person-environment fit on employees' career calling experience.

Rousseau<sup>24</sup> argues that the organizational environment is an important external context for the satisfaction of the employee's psychological contract. In particular, organizational human resource management practices play an important role.<sup>25</sup> Organizational career management is a specific management activity carried out by human resource management for employee career development. It can stimulate the potential of employees, help the organization to retain them and promote their self-actualization.<sup>26-28</sup> Currently, employees face a more complex, ambiguous and uncertain external career environment. Organizational career management practices provide employees with appropriate career opportunities and career development resource support, which enhances employees' identification with the organization and their reliance on it.<sup>26,29</sup> The organizational literature shows a strong relationship between organizational career management and employees' psychological contracts.<sup>30</sup> Social exchange theory, as the theoretical basis of this paper's research, provides a sufficient theoretical basis for employees to develop a psychological contract in a highly matched environment supported by organizational human resource management measures, and thus change their intrinsic perceptions of work. Therefore, in combination with our overarching framework, we further argue that organizational career management for



**Figure 1** Theoretical model.

employees is a prominent moderator that shapes the direct effect of person-organization fit and person-job fit on their psychological contract and, in turn, indirectly enhances the mediating role of the psychological contract prior to person-organization fit, person-job fit and career calling.

By empirically testing the theoretical model (see Figure 1), we make several contributions to the literature. First, our study empirically reveals that employee-environment fit, mainly in terms of person-organization fit and person-job fit, fosters employees' psychological contracts and further promotes their career calling. Our findings provide new theoretical insights into which organizational factors may increase an individual's career calling. Second, our study provides a more nuanced explanation of person-organization fit and person-job fit and reveals a career calling linkage by identifying the psychological contract as an intervening mechanism. In doing so, we essentially elucidate the mechanisms inherent in the generation of employees' career calling in the context of an organization. The establishment of the psychological contract is influenced by organizational contextual factors; finally, we examine organizational career management as a critical boundary condition to examine the important impact of organizational career development support measures on the generation of the psychological contract under person-organization fit and person-job fit and their transformation into career callings.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

### Person-Environment Fit and Career Calling

Consistent with the modernist view of calling, we define career calling as a strong inner passion that individuals experience while at work<sup>3,30</sup> and a subjective experience of work as both purposeful and intrinsically meaningful.<sup>31–34</sup> As a measure of subjective career success, career calling leads to positive behaviors and outcomes in organizations, namely, job satisfaction,<sup>8</sup> work engagement,<sup>35,36</sup> and job performance.<sup>37</sup> Much is known about the correlates and consequences of calling, but relatively little is known about its antecedents.<sup>38</sup> Researchers point out that individuals having jobs that match their values and skills can lead to a calling.<sup>8,35</sup> Person-environment fit theory effectively explains our research model. Person-environment fit broadly refers to the degree of match between the values, norms, and other attributes held by both the person and the environment,<sup>10,13</sup> and it has always been regarded as an important factor in explaining and studying employee attitudes and behaviors within organizations.<sup>15</sup>

Person-environment fit theory holds that individuals' attitudes and cognitions are influenced by the degree of consistency between employees' internal characteristics and the characteristics of their organizations.<sup>10,15</sup> When there is a good fit between employees and their organizations, employees take the initiative to engage in positive psychological constructs that change their perceptions of the organization or their jobs at a deeper level. In particular, if employees realize that there is a good fit between themselves and their workplace, which means that the organization is able to meet their needs and desires, they will have more trust in the organization and will be more engaged in their work. These positive states can convert into a passion and love for their work over time, which in turn will encourage employees to experience a sense of calling in their work.<sup>19</sup> Kristof-Brown et al<sup>15</sup> reported that person-organization fit and person-job fit in particular have received the most interest in research among several types of person-environment fit and have shown the most practical relevance.<sup>39</sup> Thus, this study focuses on the possible effects of person-organization fit and person-job fit on career calling.

Person-organization fit has been defined as the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons.<sup>40</sup> Personal values are abstract beliefs about desirable, cross-situational goals that are central to an individual's self-concept and directly influence his or her attitudes and behaviors at work.<sup>41</sup> According to the self-concordance model, pursuing organizational goals that are aligned with one's core values and interests leads to greater sustained effort.<sup>18</sup> When a person adapts to his or her environment, it creates more positive results for him or her than when he or she does not.<sup>13</sup> Previous studies have shown that a higher person-organization fit leads to higher job involvement,<sup>42</sup> higher organizational commitment,<sup>43</sup> better work attitude and greater identification with the organization.<sup>44</sup> This is because people feel comfortable and at ease when they work in an environment that provides rewards that fulfill fundamental preferences or desires they jointly hold, thus enhancing their interest in their work.<sup>17,18</sup> This consistent environment also facilitates a tacit understanding between employees and the organization, providing not only temporary satisfaction and promoting their intrinsic motivation but also allowing them to find a sense of meaning and satisfaction in their work.<sup>13</sup>

Person-organization fit is related to the fit between an employee and the environment at a macro level, whereas person-job fit is related to the fit between an employee and the job at a micro level.<sup>10</sup> Person-job fit describes the extent to which the job requirements match an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities.<sup>11,40</sup> The basic assumption of fit theory is that the higher the congruence between an individual's attributes and the characteristics of the job, the more effective the interaction of an individual and the job.<sup>45</sup> First, the fit between a position and an employee is reflected in the individual's ability to perform the job's needs. If an employee's skills and abilities match the requirements of the job, he or she is more likely to meet his or her own competency needs and thus be intrinsically interested in the job.<sup>11</sup> Second, the fit between position characteristics and an employee stimulates individual initiative and develops the employee's sense of control in his or her work. When person-job fit is high, job characteristics, organizational demands, and resource availability are matched with the employee's ability and internal demands.<sup>15,46</sup> This leads the employee to find a sense of meaning and purpose from his or her work, thus inspiring him or her to develop an inner passion for his or her work. Research shows that, similar to person-organization fit, person-job fit leads to higher demand satisfaction among employees and promotes organizational citizenship behavior and job performance.<sup>14,39,47</sup> Person-job fit is an important source of meaningful work.<sup>48</sup> When an employee can consistently experience satisfaction in his or her work, he or she will be more likely to experience a sense of calling from his or her work over time.<sup>35</sup> Based on the above analysis, we speculate that person-organization fit and person-job fit may be important influencing factors that affect the generation of career calling. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis H1a: Person-organization fit has a significant positive impact on career calling.

Hypothesis H1b: Person-job fit has a significant positive impact on career calling.

## The Mediating Role of the Psychological Contract

The psychological contract is a mental model or schema that encompasses an employee's subjective understanding of a reciprocal commitment-based exchange between him or herself and the organization.<sup>49,50</sup> It has been hailed as "one of the best concepts" for understanding what is at the heart of the employee-employer relationship.<sup>51</sup> Organizations and employees working together to build a healthy psychological contract can have a positive and far-reaching impact. Social exchange and the norm of reciprocity provide the conceptual basis for explaining individuals' evaluations and perceptions of their psychological contracts.<sup>52</sup> According to social exchange theory, the exchange between organizations and individuals is based not only on the mutual exchange of economic components but also on the exchange of future development and social emotions.<sup>53,54</sup> Individuals tend to develop contractual beliefs with more abstract or higher-order cognitive content in line with their personal identity and values.<sup>23,24</sup> During the mutual exchange of resources, the specific needs of employees, such as emotions and development, are more likely to be fulfilled in similar organizations if there is a higher level of compatibility between people and their environment. In turn, employees develop a desire to give back to the organization and make a voluntary effort to focus on their work.<sup>39,53</sup> In contrast, if there is incompatibility between the person and the environment, there may be psychological stress, which may reduce psychological security and have a negative impact.<sup>19</sup>

Values are considered to be relatively stable over time; they are measurable attributes of both individuals and organizations, and they are meaningful because they help shape behavior.<sup>41</sup> A better match of person-organizational values means that there is less of a gap between the individual and the organization in terms of values and that the organization brings less uncertainty to the employee and provides more opportunities for the individual to meet his or her needs. A matched environment brings employees a sense of comfort and ease.<sup>55</sup> Organizations that uphold values such as fairness and integrity are attractive to employees, and employees feel a greater sense of belonging in organizations where such values are aligned.<sup>56,57</sup> Better person-organization fit leads to greater identification with the organization.<sup>58</sup> Studies have shown that person-organization fit is positively associated with trust, communication, high levels of psychological safety, psychological capital and work engagement.<sup>13,18,56</sup> When an intrinsic mutual exchange is formed between the employee and the organization, following the rules of reciprocity, over time, the individual develops a commitment of trust and loyalty to the organization.<sup>59</sup> If there is a clear mismatch between the individual and the organization in terms of value, employees will not stay with the organization for the long term and will leave the job if a better opportunity is available.<sup>11</sup> Thus, considered from this perspective, person-organizational shared values might provide good grounds for such an unspoken psychological contract.<sup>18</sup>

The establishment of an employee's psychological contract also involves another matching model: person-job fit. Person-job fit can be understood in the following two forms.<sup>60</sup> The first type of fit is demand-ability (DA) fit, which focuses on the compatibility between the employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities and the job requirements. The second type of fit is demand-supply (NS) fit, which mainly refers to the extent to which the job meets the needs and preferences of employees.<sup>48,61</sup> When the match between the two types is relatively high, job characteristics and personal requirements have a high degree of consistency. This not only helps employees better adapt to their work and environment but also enables them to experience a sense of competence and autonomy in their work so that their psychological needs are satisfied.<sup>48,62</sup> Putting the right people in the right positions is an optimal job design. Employees will interpret this as a resource provided to them by the organization, adding a sense of meaning to their work and enhancing their psychological commitment to the organization.<sup>63,64</sup> The psychological contract is based on the existence of a sense of mutual obligation between the employee and the organization.<sup>49</sup> Individuals may feel obligated to repay the organization if they perceive that their organization has fulfilled their commitments in the employment relationship.<sup>54</sup> Thus, person-job fit may be a key resource to facilitate the fulfillment of the psychological contract. Although some studies have examined the link between person-organization fit and person-job fit and important psychological mechanisms such as psychological safety, organizational commitment, organizational identity and organizational citizenship behavior,<sup>15,47</sup> we have not found any studies that have examined the relationship between both person-organization fit and person-job fit and the psychological contract. Hence, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis H2a: Person-organization fit has a significant positive impact on psychological contract.

Hypothesis H2b: Person-job fit has a significant positive impact on psychological contract.

The psychological contract can be understood as a belief system in the form of a cognitive schema or mental model that guides work-related thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Previous research on the psychological contract has mostly focused on the effects on employee outcome variables, such as job performance and organizational citizenship behavior.<sup>65</sup> These behavioral outcomes are from a perspective that is beneficial to the organization. Based on social exchange theory, employees will be more intrinsically motivated as long as both parties meet each other's requirements.<sup>66</sup> Employees initially work hard to fulfill their commitments to the organization. When employees are dedicated to their work for a long time, with the dynamic development of the psychological contract, they will find the pleasure and meaning brought by the work itself. This will evolve into individuals working hard not only for the organization but also for the love of the work itself.<sup>67</sup> With the establishment of the psychological contract, individuals have a more comprehensive and complete perception of the work, as well as a deeper definition of the job. They connect the meaning of work with the meaning of life and see work as an effective way to achieve personal development and a more complete life. From this perspective, individuals have fully integrated work as part of their inner growth and are therefore more likely to experience passion,<sup>68</sup> well-being<sup>6</sup> and job satisfaction<sup>69</sup> in their work rather than burnout.<sup>70</sup> Consistent with the psychological contract view of careers, we believe that the fulfillment of the psychological contract increases individuals' love for their careers.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the psychological contract may be an important internal



mechanism to explain the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and career calling. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis H3a: Psychological contracts positively mediate the relationship between person-organization fit and career calling.

Hypothesis H3b: Psychological contracts positively mediate the relationship between person-job fit and career calling.

## The Moderating Role of Organizational Career Management

Organizational career management is a set of human resource management practices designed to facilitate and promote the career development of employees.<sup>71,72</sup> This set of management practices mainly consists of a variety of programs and interventions, such as individual assessments, career development planning, and job feedback mechanisms.<sup>72</sup> Organizational career management highlights employees' subjective perceptions of the organization's support for their career development and the extent to which they have access to these career development opportunities.<sup>73,74</sup> Organizational career management provides employees with resources and opportunities for career development, which not only helps promote employees' career development but also strengthens the connection between employees and the organization, which can effectively enhance their sense of belonging and organizational support.<sup>28,72</sup>

Organizational career management is part of the organization's commitment to fulfillment and affects the relationship between the employee and the organization.<sup>26</sup> Individuals are drawn to the organization by similar values and by work content that interests them, which is a prerequisite for developing an inner sense of belonging.<sup>13,56</sup> However, the establishment of the employee psychological contract also depends on a series of positive management measures carried out by the organization to value the professional growth of employees.<sup>73</sup> We thus identified organizational career management as a key contextual factor in the person-environment fit influencing psychological contract establishment. Organizational career management, as a career development input provided by the organization, facilitates employees' long-term career growth through training, promotion and other measures and conveys the importance the organization places on employees' long-term career development.<sup>27</sup> This is the kind of feedback and communication that the organization makes to encourage employees to stay with the company for the long term,<sup>28</sup> thus not only attracting the type of employee who is highly compatible with the organization's values and positions but also increasing their trust in the organization.<sup>26</sup>

With the emergence of boundaryless careers, the psychological contract between employers and organizations has changed.<sup>75</sup> In the new career environment, employees are more proactive than ever in managing their careers and want to create more opportunities to pursue their career goals.<sup>76</sup> Especially when employees are in high-match organizations, they are more likely to achieve subjective or objective career success.<sup>77</sup> They are more likely to expect the organization to provide appropriate career development measures to help and guide them in their career development.<sup>27</sup> When there is a high level of career management in an organization, employees are in a work environment that matches their values and abilities, and they know that the organization will recognize their abilities and efforts at work. They believe that the organization will have a long-term plan for career development and will give guidance and advice on career development. As a result, they are more likely to establish a higher level of commitment to such an organization.<sup>25</sup> If the level of career management in the organization is low and the organization does not give enough support to employees' career development, it will bring the opposite result. When employees lose confidence in their career growth and do not receive a sense of self-fulfillment from the organization, their initial enthusiasm will recede, and eventually their trust and commitment to the organization will fade.<sup>71,72</sup> Based on the above analysis, we believe that the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and the psychological contract may be stronger among employees with higher levels of organizational career management. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 4a: Organizational career management positively moderates the relationship between person-organizational fit and psychological contracts such that person-organizational fit is more positively related to psychological contracts when organizational career management is high.

Hypothesis 4b: Organizational career management positively moderates the relationship between person-job fit and psychological contracts such that person-job fit is more positively related to psychological contracts when organizational career management is high.

As we argued above, psychological contracts play an indispensable role in the mechanism through which person-organization fit and person-job fit impact career calling. Herein, together with the moderating role of organizational career management, we further propose the following:

Hypothesis 5a: Organizational career management positively moderates the indirect relationship between person-organizational fit and career calling via psychological contracts such that the indirect relationship is more positive when organizational career management is high.

Hypothesis 5b: Organizational career management positively moderates the indirect relationship between person-job fit and career calling via psychological contracts such that the indirect relationship is more positive when organizational career management is high.

## Methods

### Sample and Procedures

The survey was conducted with full-time employees of a large internet technology company to control for the potential impact of industry characteristics, organizational culture, and other organizational differences on the study results.<sup>78</sup> To avoid the effect of common method bias, this study collected data at three time points (*T1*, *T2*, and *T3*), with one month between time point *T1* and time point *T2* and two months between time point *T2* and time point *T3*. This is because we believe that employees' career calling requires a relatively long period of time to be nurtured.<sup>79</sup> With the support of the company's senior management and human resources department, the formal implementation of the survey was preceded by a research kick-off meeting, in which all department managers participated to confirm the survey process and considerations. For those who could not be present in person, the HR manager communicated with them in detail to ensure that the operation process was accurate before proceeding. We coded each participating employee, and each employee had a unique code to match with different points in time. In the first round of the survey, employees reported on their own person-organization fit and person-job fit scales, as well as demographic variables (gender, age, length of service, and education). In the second round of the survey, employees completed the psychological contract scale; in the third round of the survey, employees rated their career calling.

In the first round, 486 employee questionnaires were distributed, and 436 valid questionnaires were returned, with a valid return rate of 89.7%. In the second round of the survey, questionnaires were distributed to 436 employees who provided valid questionnaires in the first round, and 398 valid questionnaires were obtained, for a valid return rate of 91.3%. In the third round of the survey, 398 employees who provided valid questionnaires in the previous round were issued questionnaires, and 373 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, with a valid return rate of 93.7%. Of the 373 participants, 61.4% (*N*=229) were male, and 38.6% (*N*=144) were female. The average age of employees is 22.8 years, and the average organizational tenure is 1.13 years. Regarding the education level, the highest percentage of college degree was 86.6% (*N*=323), and the percentage of bachelor's degree was 13.4% (*N*=50).

## Measures

We used well-established scales from national and international studies. To confirm the accuracy of the translation, we invited two doctoral students in management to translate the English scales in the study in both directions. Preinterviews with line managers before the scale was distributed ensured that the content of the questionnaire could be accurately and easily understood by frontline employees. All variables were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### Person-Organization Fit

To measure person-organizational fit, we used Cable and DeRue's<sup>61</sup> 3-item scale, which emphasizes employees' perceived alignment of personal and organizational values. Items included "The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values", "My personal values match my organization's values and culture", and "My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for this scale was 0.86.

## Person-Job Fit

We used the three-item questionnaire developed by Singh and Greenhaus<sup>80</sup> to measure person-job fit. The following items are included: “(1) ‘I am a good fit for my new job’, (2) ‘The requirements of my new job match my specific talents and skills’, and (3) ‘I fit in well with my work environment.’ The Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was 0.87.

## Organizational Career Management

We used the Organizational Career Management Scale developed by Sturges et al,<sup>72</sup> which is a unidimensional structured questionnaire with 9 items. Sample items include the following: “I have been given training to help develop my career”; “My boss has made sure I get the training I need for my career” and “I have been taught things I need to know to get on in this organization”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this measure was 0.93.

## Psychological Contract

We reviewed the psychological contract scale developed by Rousseau,<sup>54</sup> Li<sup>81</sup> and others, considered the limitation of questionnaire length, and finally formed a scale containing three dimensions (ie, transactional dimension, relational dimension and developmental dimension) with a total of 17 items. Sample items include “Compared with colleagues, the reward received and the price paid are quite fair” and “the company provides a quiet and comfortable environment for employees to work in”. In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.95.

## Career Calling

Career calling was assessed with Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas’s<sup>3</sup> 12-item scale. Sample items include “The first thing I often think about when I describe myself to others is my job” and “My job is always on my mind in some way”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient for this scale was 0.95.

## Control Variables

According to previous studies, organizational tenure may influence employees’ psychological contracts through adaptability and acceptance of the environment.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, education level, age and organizational tenure may influence employees’ career calling by offering employees more occupational experience.<sup>83</sup> Hence, to reduce potential confounding effects, we controlled for gender, age, education, and organizational tenure in this study.

## Analytic Strategy

In this study, a three-step method was used for the statistical analysis of the empirical data. In the first step, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the variables and the reliability and validity of the measurement model were preliminarily verified. In the second step, we examine the direct effects of person-organizational fit, person-job fit and career calling, as well as the mediating indirect effects played by the psychological contract between them. Finally, in Step 3, we examined whether the mediating effect of psychological contracts in Step 2 was moderated by organizational career management. We used SPSS 22 for descriptive analysis of all variables in the study. Since our model involved mediating and moderating effects, we applied Mplus 8.3<sup>84</sup> for testing. Before the data were analyzed, all explanatory variables were standardized before being entered into regressions.

## Results

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Common Method Variance Test

Before testing our hypothesis, we first performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of each variable. The standardized factor loading of each index on its latent variable was higher than 0.60. Then, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the five latent variables (ie, person-organization fit, person-job fit, organizational career management, psychological contract and career calling) to examine their discriminant validity. The confirmatory factor analysis results are shown in Table 1. The CFA of a hypothesized five-factor model indicated that the five-factor model had a better degree of fit than other competing models. The fitting parameters of the five-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 1196.393$ ,  $df = 892$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.03$ ,  $CFI = 0.97$ ,  $TLI = 0.97$ ) were better than those of the hypothetical four-factor model (combined person-



**Table 1** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results (N=373)

Variables	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
POF+PJF+PC+OCM+CC	5799.181	902	6.429	0.121	0.539	0.516
POF+PJF+PC+OCM, CC	3949.994	901	4.384	0.095	0.713	0.698
POF+PJF+PC, OCM, CC	2117.860	899	2.356	0.060	0.885	0.879
POF+PJF, PC, OCM, CC	1757.139	896	1.961	0.051	0.919	0.914
POF, PJF, PC, OCM, CC	1196.393	892	1.341	0.030	0.971	0.970

**Abbreviations:** POF, Person-organization fit; PJF, Person-job fit; PC, Psychological contract; OCM, organizational career management; CC, Career calling.

organization fit and person-job fit into one factor ( $\chi^2 = 1757.139$ ,  $df = 896$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ,  $CFI = 0.92$ ,  $TLI = 0.91$ ), the hypothetical three-factor model (combined person-organization fit, person-job fit, and psychological contract into one factor,  $\chi^2 = 2117.86$ ,  $df = 899$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.06$ ,  $CFI = 0.88$ ,  $TLI = 0.88$ ), and the hypothetical two-factor model (combined person-organization fit, person-job fit, psychological contract, and organizational career management into one factor,  $\chi^2 = 3949.99$ ,  $df = 901$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.09$ ,  $CFI = 0.71$ ,  $TLI = 0.70$ ).

Although we obtained the data at 3 different time points, all scales were derived from employee evaluations and thus remain at risk of common method variance (CMV). Thus, we used the following two methods to examine CMV. First, we performed a potential common method factor test to assess the possible threat of common method bias.<sup>85</sup> The results show that there is almost no difference after the introduction of a new common method factor ( $\chi^2 = 1196.30$ ,  $df = 891$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.03$ ,  $CFI = 0.97$ ,  $TLI = 0.97$ ) compared to the five-factor model (see Table 1). Second, we use Harman's single-factor test, which is a routine method to examine common method bias. The results show that the first factor explains 34.25% (less than 40%) of the total variance, indicating that there is no significant problem with homogeneity variance.<sup>86</sup> Taken together, these results suggest that CMV was not a serious threat to the validity of our results.

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among all variables. The reliability of all scales was above 0.70, meeting the recommended level of reliability. As we expected, the results showed a positive association between person-organization fit and psychological contract ( $r=0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and career calling ( $r=0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, there was a positive correlation between person-job fit and both psychological contract ( $r=0.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and career calling ( $r=0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results preliminarily supported our hypotheses.

## Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 depicts the coefficients of the direct and mediating effects used to test the hypotheses. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the variables more directly in the form of a graph. In Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we propose that person-organization fit

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N= 373)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.39	0.49	—								
2. Age	22.85	1.18	-0.05	—							
3. Edu	2.87	0.34	-0.11	-0.15**	—						
4. Tenure	1.13	0.63	-0.03	0.73**	0.00	—					
5. Person-organization fit	4.57	1.30	-0.08	0.02	0.02	-0.04	(0.86)				
6. Person-job fit	4.64	1.26	-0.01	-0.00	-0.03	-0.05	0.27**	(0.87)			
7. Organizational career management	4.95	1.20	0.05	0.07	-0.08	-0.01	0.17**	0.22**	(0.93)		
8. Psychological contract	4.83	1.12	-0.00	-0.23	-0.07	0.25	0.43**	0.39**	0.26**	(0.95)	
9. Career calling	4.80	1.27	-0.01	-0.17	0.03	0.13	0.43**	0.38**	0.25**	0.53**	(0.95)

**Notes:** \*\* $p < 0.01$ . Values in parentheses are alpha coefficients. Gender: 1 = Male; 2 = Female. Education: 1 = master; 2 = bachelor; 3 = degrees below junior college (include); 4 = below high school (include).

**Table 3** Results of Mediating Hypotheses (N = 373)

Variable	B	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Mediator: PC					
Intercept	2.24	0.23	9.75	0.000	0.26***
POF	0.30	0.04	7.01	0.000	
PJF	0.26	0.04	6.24	0.000	
Dependent variable: CC					
Intercept	6.50	1.71	3.81	0.000	0.31***
POF	0.17	0.06	2.86	0.004	
PJF	0.18	0.06	2.87	0.004	
PC	0.53	0.08	6.62	0.000	
Direct effect	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
POF→CC	0.17	0.06	0.054	0.285	
PJF→CC	0.18	0.06	0.059	0.306	
Indirect effect	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
POF→PC→CC	0.16	0.04	0.10	0.24	
PJF→PC→CC	0.14	0.03	0.09	0.21	

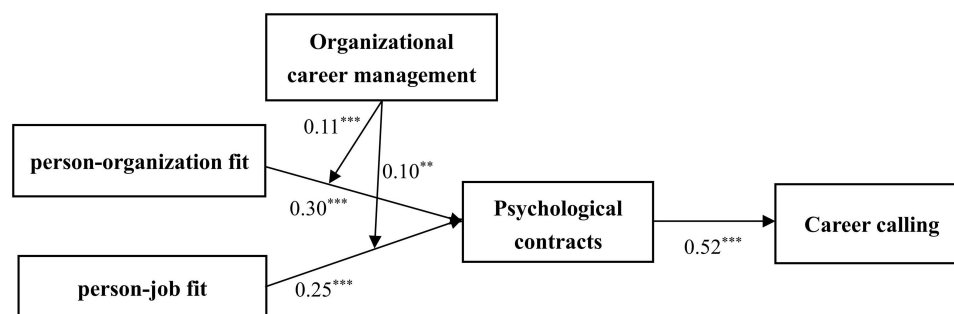
**Note:** \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed). Bootstrap sample size = 5000.

**Abbreviations:** POF, Person-organization fit; PJF, Person-job fit; PC, Psychological contract; OCM, organizational career management; CC, Career calling.

and person-job fit are positively related to career calling, respectively. As shown in Table 3, person-organization fit was significantly related to career calling ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, the results suggested a significant relationship between person-job fit and career calling ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. In Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we predicted positive relationships between person-organization fit and person-job fit and the psychological contract. Our results suggested a significant relationship between person-organization fit and the psychological contract ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and person-job fit was also positively associated with the psychological contract ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

In Hypothesis 3a, we expected that the psychological contract would mediate the relationship between person-organizational fit and career calling. In Hypothesis 3b, we expected that the psychological contract would mediate the relationship between person-job fit and career calling.

To test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, we calculated the confidence intervals (CIs) for this indirect effect by using Mplus software as suggested by McNeish<sup>87</sup> and following the guidelines of Zyphur and Oswald.<sup>88</sup> The 95% CI of the indirect effect of person-organizational fit on career calling through psychological contracts was significant ( $\beta = 0.16$ , 95% CI = [0.10, 0.24]), and the 95% CI of the indirect effect of person-job fit on career calling through psychological contract was also significant ( $\beta = 0.14$ , 95% CI = [0.09, 0.21]). Neither contains zero, which verifies the mediating role of psychological contract. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported.



**Figure 2** The path coefficients of the theoretical model (\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis 4a proposed that organizational career management moderates the relationship between person-organization fit and career calling, and Hypothesis 4b proposed that organizational career management moderates the relationship between person-job fit and career calling. Table 4 shows that the interaction of organizational career management and person-organization fit was positively related to the psychological contract ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $SE=0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); the interaction of organizational career management and person-job fit was likewise positively correlated with the psychological contract ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $SE=0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). To provide further support for the above hypothesis, we plotted a simple slope. The first simple slope test (see Figure 3) revealed that for employees with higher organizational career management (one standard deviation above the mean), person-organization fit was positively related to the psychological contract. The second simple slope test (see Figure 4) showed that person-job fit was positively associated with the psychological contract for employees with higher organizational career management (one standard deviation above the mean). Thus, Hypotheses 4a and 4b were supported.

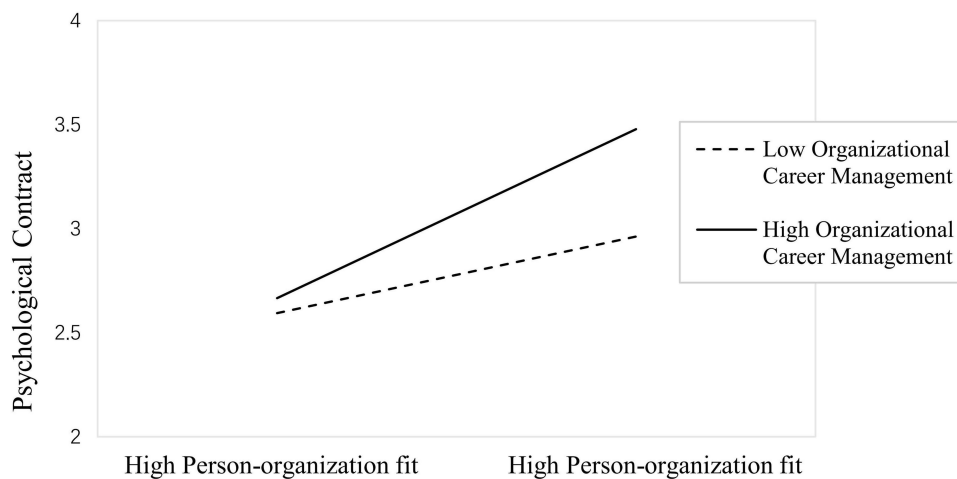
Hypothesis 5a depicted a positive moderating role of organizational career management for the indirect effect of person-organization fit on career calling (via the psychological contract); Hypothesis 5b depicted a positive moderating role of organizational career management for the indirect effect of person-job fit on career calling (via the psychological contract). We used Mplus 8.3 to obtain the 95% CI of this conditional indirect effect. Regarding Hypothesis 5a, the results (in Table 4) revealed that the indirect relationship between person-organization fit and career calling via the psychological contract was significant at the 95% confidence interval ( $\beta = 0.22$ , 95% CI= [0.161, 0.301]) under conditions of high organizational career management (one standard deviation above the mean). The results of hypothesis 5b also support that the indirect relationship between person-job fit and career calling through psychological contracts is significant ( $\beta = 0.19$ , 95% CI= [0.131, 0.268]) when organizational career management is high (one standard deviation above the mean). These results supported Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

**Table 4** Moderation and Moderated Mediation Effects (N = 373)

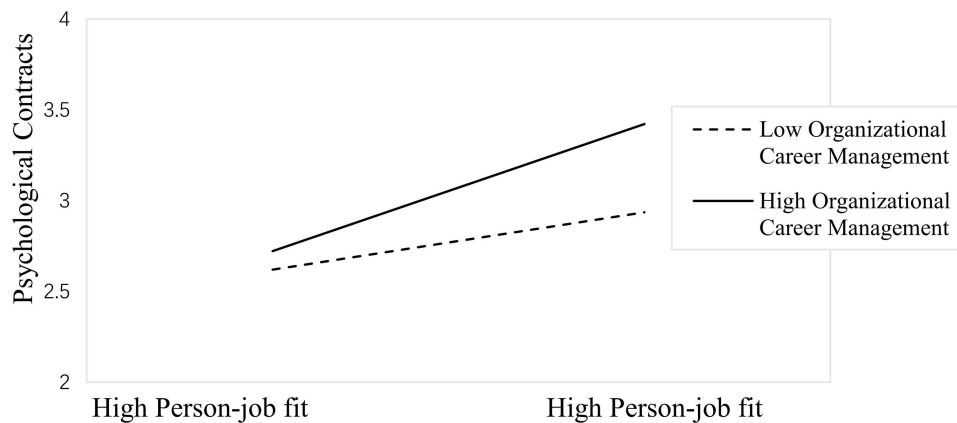
Variable	B	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Mediator: PC					
Intercept	2.93	1.39	2.11	0.035	0.415***
POF	0.30	0.04	7.64	0.000	
PJF	0.25	0.04	6.57	0.000	
OCM	0.15	0.04	3.82	0.000	
POF × OCM	0.11	0.03	3.50	0.000	
PJF × OCM	0.10	0.03	3.13	0.002	
Dependent variable: CC					
Intercept	8.06	1.44	5.60	0.000	0.432***
POF	0.19	0.04	4.39	0.000	
PJF	0.15	0.04	3.41	0.001	
PC	0.52	0.05	9.62	0.000	
Conditional indirect effect: POF × OCM	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
Low OCM (−1 SD)	0.08	0.03	0.028	0.151	
Med OCM	0.15	0.03	0.108	0.214	
High OCM (+1 SD)	0.22	0.04	0.161	0.301	
Conditional indirect effect: PJF × OCM	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
Low OCM (−1 SD)	0.07	0.03	0.014	0.127	
Med OCM	0.13	0.02	0.089	0.185	
High OCM (+1 SD)	0.19	0.04	0.131	0.268	

**Note:** \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).

**Abbreviations:** LLCI, lower limit of 95% CI; ULCI, upper limit of 95% CI; POF, Person-organization fit; PJF, Person-job fit; PC, Psychological contract; OCM, organizational career management; CC, Career calling.



**Figure 3** Interaction effect of organizational career management on the relationship between person-organization fit and psychological contracts.



**Figure 4** Interaction effect of organizational career management on the relationship between person-job fit and psychological contracts.

## Discussion

Based on fit theory and social exchange theory, this study examines how person-organization fit and person-job fit, psychological contracts, and organizational career management work together to influence employees' sense of career calling. Some researchers have suggested that much is known about the correlates and consequences of career calling, but relatively little is known about its antecedents.<sup>38</sup> Much of the extant literature on antecedent variables of career calling has focused on the unique experiences or spirituality of individuals<sup>4</sup> or individual characteristics such as self-confidence and self-awareness.<sup>30</sup> However, an individual's career calling essentially involves other people and environments, which are important contributors to the construction of meaning.<sup>89</sup> Thus, this study looks for antecedent variables in the organization that influence the generation of calling and promotes a more comprehensive understanding of the process of calling formation and the relationship with related variables.

## Theoretical Implications

Our empirical study extends the literature in at least three ways. First, the results of this study support the researcher's view that there is a strong link between person-environment fit and career calling.<sup>90</sup> Fit theory suggests that when people choose a job, they are usually attracted to organizations that have values similar to their own.<sup>56</sup> Because values are both the core of the self-concept and the distillation of the organizational culture, they are relatively stable across situations and over time.<sup>11</sup> When the individual and the organization are highly compatible in terms of values, the foundation is laid for a sense of career calling to emerge. The match between the person and the job stimulates the employee's interest in the job itself, which is the condition

for the career calling to arise.<sup>11</sup> The person-organization fit influences the employee's values level from the macro level, the person-job fit influences the employee's work experience from the operational level, and both levels play an equally important role in the formation of a career calling. Thus, by examining the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and employees' sense of calling, we fill the gap in research on the antecedents of calling in organizations<sup>38</sup> and note that different types of matching are important for the generation of career calling.

Second, the findings support the hypothesis that the psychological contract mediates the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and career calling. Some researchers have suggested that person-environment fit leads to the psychological contract,<sup>19</sup> while others have pointed to a strong relationship between the psychological contract and career calling,<sup>21</sup> but no current study has included these key variables in the same model for testing. The present study makes this attempt for the first time, confirming the theoretical speculations of previous scholars and providing a basis for the process mechanism of career calling generation. When a high degree of fit can be achieved between person-organization and person-job, employees' basic psychological needs, such as their sense of competence and belonging, are satisfied, resulting in a stronger commitment and higher level of exchange with the organization. Our study provides an empirical basis for Meckler's<sup>66</sup> view that "the integration of psychological needs into the psychological contract process is necessary to fully explain employees' intrinsic motivation". Our findings not only enrich social exchange theory but also add to the literature in the area of psychological contracts and career calling.

Third, this study also provides strong evidence of the impact of organizational career management on the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and the psychological contract. That is,

the higher the level of organizational career management, the stronger the direct effect of person-organization fit and person-job fit on the psychological contract.

Our findings of this study both enrich the theory related to organizational career management and expand the applicability of organizational career management in specific contexts. As a supportive HRM practice, the organization's well-developed career management further increases its attractiveness to highly matched employees.<sup>91</sup> Through measures such as employee career guidance planning, employees build a psychological contract as they gradually adapt to their environment.<sup>22</sup> The organization's initiatives in career management will not only enable them to adapt to their new positions as soon as possible and increase their sense of belonging but also enhance their responsibility and intrinsic motivation.<sup>21</sup> The current research confirms the moderating effect of organizational career management on this relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and the psychological contract and provides a strong explanation for the mechanism of the role played by the psychological contract between person-environment fit and career calling, as well as the boundary conditions.

## Practical Implications

Currently, the external market environment of organizations is highly competitive, and internal staff turnover is frequent. The new generation of young people no longer receive a sense of satisfaction from work through material rewards but hope to find a sense of value and meaning in their work. In this context, career calling has attracted scholarly attention.<sup>92</sup> Career calling is influenced by a variety of individual and organizational factors, and a single factor cannot guarantee the creation of a sense of calling for employees. This study found that the higher the level of organizational career management, the more likely person-organization fit and person-job fit are to lead to a psychological contract, which is ultimately important for the formation of employees' sense of calling.

This study found that two types of person-environment fit, namely, person-organization fit and person-job fit, have important influences on employees' psychological contracts and career calling. These results also have some practical implications for managers. In particular, managers should not only be concerned about employees' perceptions of both person-organizational and person-job fit but should also try to improve these two fits as much as possible in the recruitment and selection process.<sup>16</sup> Once a candidate is successfully hired, managers should make a reasonable match between the person and the job. In training sessions, managers should place more emphasis on organizational culture, organizational norms and strategic planning to help them have a more comprehensive understanding and thus improve their suitability for the job afterward. Only when employees feel a match with the organization in terms of values and job



content will it be more conducive to the establishment of a psychological contract. The establishment of an employee's psychological contract means that the employee will be more focused and engaged in his or her work, and over time, this will translate into an inherent love and interest in their work, leading to career calling.

The study found that organizational career management plays an important moderating role in the relationship between person-environment fit and the psychological contract. Based on this finding, several suggestions can be given for the construction of organizational career management in organizations. First, managers should help employees discover their career goals, assist them in establishing career plans that are consistent with the organization's development goals, and determine the direction of their work, which is conducive to the stability of employees. Second, managers should strive to promote the development of employees' professional abilities and foster their career competitiveness. Managers can arrange challenging work tasks for employees and take the form of a master to apprentice so that employees can improve and exercise their abilities while completing their work tasks. Finally, the study points out that organizational career management is an important situational factor that managers should pay attention to and do their best to improve, which is the basis for creating a good and stable talent team.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the current study has yielded informative results, there are several limitations that might be addressed by future research. First, based on social exchange theory, this study examined the relationship between the person-environment fit type and career calling and its mediating mechanism, with the psychological contract playing a partially mediating role. This suggests that there may be other variables that play a dominant or mediating role, such as career adaptability and goal clarity, so future research could further explore the direct or indirect effects of other factors on career calling. Second, although this study used two representative categories of person-environment fit types, namely, person-organization fit and person-job fit, there are other potential classifications of person-environment fit (eg, person-team fit, person-career fit, person-leader fit). Follow-up studies can incorporate these different types of fit into one research framework to possibly yield more comprehensive and clearer findings. Third, to avoid common methodological bias, we collected data from employees at three different time points. However, the current study is essentially a cross-sectional study, meaning that causality cannot be inferred. Future cross-lagged analyses and longitudinal investigations would help to fill this gap. Finally, although we emphasized authenticity and confidentiality during the reporting process, the scales are self-assessed by employees and are still subjective to factors such as social desirability and employee concerns. Future researchers could try to obtain data on variables such as fit consistency and organizational career management in combination with secondary data, manager evaluations, etc.

## Conclusion

Based on fit theory and social exchange theory, the current research has extended the literature on person-organization fit and person-job fit and career calling by (a) identifying the psychological contract as the mechanism underlying the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit and career calling and (b) investigating the key boundary condition for the above mediating path. Empirical findings reveal that person-organization fit and person-job fit enhance the psychological contract and in turn promote career calling, particularly when they work with high levels of organizational career management. Our findings have important theoretical and practical implications for person-environment fit and career calling.

## Data Sharing Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are included in the article/[Supplementary Material](#), and further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Chongqing University. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants provided informed consent. We declare that participants in our research study allow us to use their data for academic research and publication. All the participants were anonymous, and their data were protected.

## Author Contributions

M.F. contributed resources, data curation, conceptualization and supervision of the paper. Y.X. contributed to writing the original draft, conceptualization, formal analysis, editing and methodology; K.L. contributed resources, formal analysis, methodology and data collection for the paper. K.C. participated in the planning of the paper, formal analysis and contributed to the data collection. All authors contributed to data analysis, drafting or revising the article, have agreed on the journal to which the article will be submitted, gave final approval of the version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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## Disclosure

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this work.

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