



The Relationship between Interests – Occupation Congruence and Job Satisfaction

Nada Krapić

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Rijeka, Croatia

Abstract

Based on Holland's model (1997), the main aim of this research was to investigate the relationships of the congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace, the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace, as well as total congruence with job satisfaction. Additionally, this study aimed to explore whether the age and gender of participants influence the effects of overall congruence between workplace requirements and vocational interests on job satisfaction. The study was conducted on a convenient sample of 350 employed participants. Their mean age was 41 years, ranging from 19 to 65 years. The Croatian version of Holland's Self-Directed Search was used to measure vocational interests (Šverko & Babarović, 2006) and the Job Satisfaction Scale from the Gregson's short form of the Job Descriptive Index (Gregson, 1987) was used to measure job satisfaction. Job requirements for each occupation were derived from the O*NET online database. The results show a moderate overlap between vocational interests and workplace demands, particularly for realistic, social, and artistic interests. Job satisfaction can be predicted by the congruence of most interests. Hierarchical regression analyses indicate that the congruence of dominant vocational interests with job requirements is a stronger predictor of job satisfaction than the congruence of non-dominant, non-required interests. Additional analyses reveal that gender and age do not significantly moderate the effects of congruence on job satisfaction. The practical implications of the results emphasize enhancing job satisfaction by aligning employees' dominant vocational interests with job requirements.

Keywords: job requirements, O*NET database, RIASEC, vocational interests, work attitudes

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction represents an individuals' general attitude toward the work they perform, and until now, this is most frequently examined attitudes toward work (Judge et al., 2017). The interest in this area stems from its significant effect on various organisational outcomes, such as the health and well-being of employees (Faragher et al., 2005), work performance (Katebi et al., 2022), organizational citizenship behavior (LePine et al., 2002), and so on.

To identify its determinants, many authors have explored the congruence between individual vocational interests and the tasks individuals perform in the workplace (Hoff et al., 2019), a concept termed occupational congruence (Gati, 1998). The interest in this area has been derived from theoretical models seeking to explain this relationship, with the most important model being proposed by Holland (1997). This model predicts that employees whose vocational interests are congruent with the needs of their workplace will be more motivated, resulting in greater work efficiency, higher job satisfaction, as well as staying at one job for longer time. According to Holland's model (1997), also known by the acronym RIASEC, individual vocational interests and the working environments are divided into six basic domains – Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E) and Conventional (C). Realistic is characterised by practical work using machines and tools, investigative focuses on discovering the unknown, artistic focuses on creative expression in one of the artistic domains, social involves working with people such as in caregiving roles and/or teaching, enterprising involves the start-up and realisation of various projects, and conventional working with data.

Evidence suggests that many employees experience a mismatch between their vocational interests and work environments due to initial misperceptions of interest congruence before accepting job offers (Dickson et al., 2008). There are several mechanisms underlying the relationship between (in)congruence of interests and job satisfaction. For instance, individuals whose interests do not align with job requirements may apply different standards for guiding actions and interpreting situations, leading to communication and collaboration issues with colleagues. Furthermore, such individuals may experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance as they are compelled to behave in ways that do not align with their interests and values. Additionally, these individuals are likely to have a lower sense of belonging and identification with the organization (Erdogan et al., 2005).

It is important to distinguish the effects of the congruence between vocational interests and the work requirements on job satisfaction from the effects of the congruence between unexpressed vocational interests and those not required by the work environment, which researchers have not yet explored. Namely, it is possible that the latter congruence also contributes to job satisfaction because it reduces potential interference and conflict between an individual's personal interests and the interests required by the job.

Several meta-analyses have explored the effects of congruence between vocational interests and the work environment on job satisfaction, although these findings are inconsistent. While earlier research (Tranberg et al., 1993, Tsabari et al., 2005) has shown that this congruence is only weakly related to job satisfaction, more recent research (e.g. Hoff et al., 2020) confirms Holland's theory. One possible explanation for this difference is that earlier analyses did not account for key moderators that might influence the strength of the relationship between congruence and job satisfaction, such as the extent to which people evaluate their own interest in their work, job complexity, income, prestige, and so on (Hoff et al., 2020).

Gender and age are also potentially important moderators in the relationship between congruence of vocational interests and the needs of the workplace with job satisfaction, but they have not been sufficiently explored. Earlier research has shown that job satisfaction in younger participants is more influenced by the congruence between workplace requirements and vocational interests, whereas in older individuals, it is more influenced by factors such as income, skills and experience, burnout, promotion opportunities, etc. (Tsabari et al., 2005). On the other hand, some findings show that work congruence increases with age (Wilk et al., 1995), which suggests a greater effect of congruence on job satisfaction for older subjects.

Gender differences can affect job satisfaction due to different gender concentrations across individual RIASEC categories (Fricko & Beehr, 1992). It is well known that women are more

focused on family (Moore, 1990) and inclined to enter professions where they can work with people and help others, such as those in the social domain (Tao et al., 2022), whereas men are more inclined to work in professions dominated by dealing with things, such as those in the realistic domain. However, in the few studies conducted in this domain, gender differences have not moderated the effects of congruence on job satisfaction (e.g. Tranberg et al., 1993, Weaver, 1977), whereas some recent research still found different patterns of relationship between congruence and job satisfaction in male and female subjects (e.g. Su & Rounds, 2020).

Many different criteria have been proposed so far for determining the congruence between the interests an individual possesses and those required for a particular job, as well as many different indicators of congruence (Spokane et al., 2000). The effects of congruence between vocational interests and working environments on job satisfaction could be influenced by differences in approaches to calculating congruence (Tranberg et al., 1993). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out here that some researchers have argued that similar findings are obtained regardless of the index used (Hoeglund & Hansen, 1999).

Congruence is often measured by experts aligning vocational interests with the demands of the workplace, analysing the descriptions of each occupation to choose the most suitable RIASEC domain from Holland's typology. The online occupational profiles of the O*NET database (Occupational Information Network) are an example of this kind of assessment, and have been used in this research. Namely, this database provides interest codes for a wide range of occupations, thereby allowing for their comparison with an individual's interests.

Based on this database and vocational interests of participants measured by the Questionnaire for the Self-Assessment of Vocational Interests, we calculated the congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace, the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace, as well as total congruence, operationalized as the sum of the two aforementioned congruences.

Therefore, the main aims of this research are to examine, using a Croatian sample of participants, the congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace, the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace, as well as total congruence. Based on research already conducted in this area, it is expected that there will be moderate congruences, highest for congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace (H1).

The second aim was to investigate the relationships between the congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace, the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace, as well as total congruence, with job satisfaction. We expected that all three types of congruence would be positively related to job satisfaction. Specifically, congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace was anticipated to be more strongly associated with higher job satisfaction than the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace (H2).

The third aim of this study was to explore whether age and gender of participants influence the effects of total congruence between workplace requirements and vocational interests on job satisfaction. Due to inconsistent results of previous research, the investigation of the moderator effect of gender on the relationship between the total congruence of workplace requirements and vocational interests can be seen as exploratory. However, it is expected that there will be a difference regarding age due to the greater alignment of vocational interests and job requirements in older participants, where their job satisfaction could be higher (H3).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The research was conducted on a convenience sample of 420 employed participants. Only participants who properly filled out the questionnaires and whose occupations contained the RIASEC codes in the O*NET were included in the analysis. Out of the final 350 participants, 179 (51%) were male and 171 (49%) were female. Their ages ranged from 19 to 65 years ($M=41$, $SD=11.14$). The majority of participants had completed secondary education (44.8%), followed by those with a university degree (40.3%). A smaller percentage held a master's degree or above (12.0%) and the fewest had completed primary school (2.9%). At the time of the study, participants were employed in 99 different occupations, with years of service ranging from 1 to 43 years ($M=17.80$, $SD=12.86$).

The investigation was carried out in the participants' homes by trained assistant researchers. It was voluntary, participants gave informed consent and were able to withdraw at any time. The order of the questionnaires was rotated, the time to complete was not limited, and assistant researchers were available if the participants had any questions.

2.2. Measures

Vocational interests were measured by the Questionnaire for the Self-Assessment of Vocational Interests (USPI, Šverko & Babarović, 2006), the Croatian version of Holland's Self-Directed Search questionnaire (Holland, 1994). This questionnaire consists of 228 items, 38 for each of the six groups of vocational interests, where each interest is measured in four areas: work activities, occupations, competences, and personal abilities and skills. Different work activities and occupations were assessed on the dichotomous scale "I like it" – "I don't like it", competences on the dichotomous scale "I could" – "I couldn't", while personal abilities and skills for individual domains were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 – "my abilities/skills are low", 7 – "my abilities/skills are high"). The total score for each group of vocational interests was obtained by adding the rating on all four parts of the questionnaire. The scales had satisfactory metric characteristics (Holland, 1997, Šverko & Babarović, 2006), with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients on this sample of participants ranging from .76 for investigative interests to .84 for artistic interests. Correlations between different groups of vocational interests ranged from $-.29$ ($p < .01$, between social and realistic interests) to $.54$ ($p < .01$, between social and artistic interests).

Job satisfaction was measured by the Job Satisfaction Scale, which is a part of the short form of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI, Gregson, 1987). The scale consists of 6 items that measure the job satisfaction of participants, and for the Croatian language was validated by Krapić et al. (2006) (an example of the item is: "The work I do provides me with a sense of fulfilment."). Participants were rated how much they agreed with each item on 5-point Likert-type scale (1 – "I disagree at all", 5 – "I completely agree"), and the total score was obtained by adding up all the answers. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient on this sample is .90.

In addition to the above data, for the purposes of this research, information about the characteristics of the working environments was collected. This information is available in the occupational descriptions of the American online platform O*NET, which was created under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor and provides a range of useful information related to the professions and the world of work (Peterson et al., 1999). The database for describing working environments uses Holland's model (Holland, 1997) where there is a characteristic RIASEC code for each occupation that is usually made up of two to four dominant domains of interest that are required by a particular occupation. In this way, the codes of vocational interests related to each workplace were identified for each participant. For example, the work

requirements of economists are associated with research (I), conventional (C) and enterprising (E) interests. This is because it is expected that in these occupations people work with new ideas, solve problems, follow standardised procedures, conduct routine tasks, create new projects, make important decisions, and engage in managerial tasks.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all the questionnaires used.

Table 1: Arithmetic mean, standard deviations and reliability coefficients for all measures used

VARIABLES	M	SD	Cronbach's alpha
VOCATIONAL INTERESTS			
Realistic	26.39	11.26	.82
Investigative	21.77	10.61	.76
Artistic	21.92	11.88	.84
Social	29.39	10.57	.78
Enterprising	26.37	11.13	.78
Conventional	23.87	10.94	.79
Job Satisfaction	21.85	4.69	.82

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of individual RIASEC characteristics of the workplaces where participants were employed at the time of the research, based on the data from the O*NET database. It also displays the frequency and percentage of participants' self-rated dominant vocational interests derived from the Questionnaire for the Self-assessment of Vocational Interests. Depending on the number of codes provided by the O*NET database, two to four of the most prominent interests were included. The last column contains ϕ correlation coefficients, as a measure of the congruence of vocational interests obtained by the USPI questionnaire with those required by the workplace according to the O*NET database.

*Table 2: The frequency and percentage of individual interests in workplaces according to the O*NET database, frequency and percentage of interests expressed according to the USPI questionnaire and their congruence*

VOCATIONAL INTERESTS	Frequency and percentage of workplaces which require individual vocational interests (according to the O*NET database)		Frequency and percentage of vocational interests rated by participants (according to the USPI Questionnaire)		Correlation of the interests from the USPI questionnaire and workplace requirements according to the O*NET database
	f	%	f	%	ϕ
Realistic	159	45.40	182	52.00	.37***
Investigative	142	40.60	127	36.30	.18*
Artistic	68	19.40	132	37.70	.21***
Social	103	29.40	267	76.30	.24***
Enterprising	170	48.60	222	63.40	.14**
Conventional	258	73.70	155	44.30	.19***

ϕ – phi correlation coefficient

According to Table 2 it is evident that most workplaces require conventional interests, with a significant number require enterprising, realistic and investigative interests, while social and artistic interests are the least required. Conversely, most participants exhibit social and enterprising interests, to a lesser degree realistic and conventional interests, and the least artistic and investigative interests. Furthermore, all correlations between the participants' rated interests and the expected theoretical interests from the O*NET database are positive and statistically significant. The highest association is obtained for realistic interests ($\phi = .37$, $p < .001$), while the lowest is for enterprising interests ($\phi = .14$, $p < .05$).

If, according to the ONET database, the respondent's occupation requires one of Holland's interests, and if, according to his result on the Questionnaire for the Self-Assessment of Vocational Interest, that interest was among the three dominant ones, it is considered that there is a match between that interest and the job requirements, which is called "Congruence of interests with those required by the workplace". Similarly, if according to the ONET database a certain interest is not needed for the respondent's occupation and it is not among his three most prominent interests, it is also considered to be a match, but in this case, it is called "Congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace". Total congruence is the sum of both previously mentioned alignments. Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of congruence between vocational interests and those required by the workplace, as well as the congruence between unexpressed interests and those not required by the workplace, along with the frequency and percentage of total congruence.

Table 3: The frequency and percentage of the congruence of vocational interests with the requirements of the workplace, the congruence of the non-expression of interests with those that are not required by the workplace, and total congruence

VOCATIONAL INTERESTS	Congruence of interests with those required by the workplace		Congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace		Total congruence	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Realistic	115	72.32	124	64.92	239	68.28
Investigative	66	46.47	147	70.67	213	60.86
Artistic	40	58.82	190	67.37	230	65.71
Social	95	92.23	75	30.36	170	48.57
Enterprising	120	70.59	78	43.33	198	56.57
Conventional	129	50.00	66	71.74	195	55.71

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In line with H1 we obtained moderate congruences, somewhat higher for congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace ($M = 65.07\%$) than for congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace ($M = 59.28\%$). Table 3 shows that the highest congruence of participants' interests with those required by the workplace occurs in the social, realistic, and enterprising domains, while the lowest congruence is observed in the investigative and conventional domains. The congruence of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace is highest for conventional and investigative interests and lowest for social interests. The greatest total congruence is observed for realistic interests, whereas the lowest is for social interests.

To test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and the congruence of individual vocational interests with those required by the workplace, as well as the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that the workplace does not require (H2), correlations were computed first. This data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The correlation of congruence of the expression and lack of expression of vocational interests (according to theoretical expectations) with job satisfaction

VOCATIONAL INTERESTS	The correlation of the congruence of participants' interests with those required by the workplace with job satisfaction	The correlation of the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that the workplace does not require with job satisfaction
Realistic	.07	.01
Investigative	.14**	-.14*
Artistic	.16**	.03
Social	.21***	.03
Enterprising	-.18**	.10
Conventional	-.10	.14*

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

The results presented in Table 4 are in line with the H2. Namely, Table 4 shows that there is a significant correlation of the congruence between participants' vocational interests and those that the workplace requires with job satisfaction for social interests ($r = .21$, $p < .001$), artistic interests ($r = .16$, $p < .01$) and investigative interests ($r = .14$, $p < .01$), whereas the correlation for enterprising interests is also significant, but negative ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$). When analysing the relationship between the congruence of participants' unexpressed interests and those not required by the work environment with job satisfaction, significant correlations were found only for conventional ($r = .14$, $p < .05$) and investigative interests ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$), with the latter being negative.

The possibility of predicting job satisfaction from the overlap of vocational interests with those required by the workplace, as well as the overlap of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace, was examined by two hierarchical regression analyses. In the first analysis, six variables related to the congruence of vocational interests with those required by the workplace were included in the first step, whereas six variables related to congruence of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace were included in the second step. In the second analysis, the inclusion of predictor variables was reversed in order to examine the incremental validity of each group of predictor variables after controlling for the effects of the previous group. The results of the first hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: The results of the first hierarchical regression analysis with congruences as a predictor variables and job satisfaction as a criterion variable

PREDICTOR VARIABLES	R	R ²	F-change	F	β
Congruence of vocational interests with the interests required by the workplace	.31	.10		5.99***	
Artistic					.16**
Social					.18**
Enterprising					-.13**
Congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace	.35	.13	1.91	3.99***	
Artistic					.18**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, only significant predictors are shown.

The results show that the congruence of vocational interests with those required by the workplace accounted for 10% of the variance of job satisfaction ($R^2 = .10$, $F = 5.99$, $p < .05$). Significant individual predictors are the congruence of artistic ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), social ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) and enterprising interests ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$). Predictors included in the second step of the analysis explained 3% variance of job satisfaction beyond and above of the predictors included in the first step ($R^2 = 0.13$, $F = 3.99$, $p < .05$). However, this increase is not statistically significant

($\Delta F=1.91$, $p>.05$), although the congruence of unexpressed and unrequired artistic interests is a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction ($Beta=.18$, $p<.01$).

When the order of the variables included in the hierarchical regression analysis was reversed, the congruence of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace accounted for 5% of the variance of job satisfaction ($R^2=.05$, $F=3.21$, $p<.05$), whereas the congruence of vocational interests with those required by the workplace explains an additional 8% of the variance of job satisfaction, which is a statistically significant increase ($\Delta F=4.58$, $p<.001$). Thus, the congruence of vocational interests with those required by the workplace is more powerful predictor of job satisfaction than the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that the workplace does not require.

Additionally, correlations between the total congruence of each vocational interests and job satisfaction were computed. The results showed that the total congruence of realistic ($r=.19$, $p<.01$), artistic ($r=.14$, $p<.05$) and social interests ($r=.16$, $p<.05$) were positively related to job satisfaction.

To determine the extent to which the total congruence of vocational interests predicted job satisfaction, a regression analysis was computed with the total congruences of all interests as predictor variables and job satisfaction as the criterion variable. Table 6 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 6: Results of a regression analysis with total congruences as a predictor variables and job satisfaction as a criterion variable

PREDICTOR VARIABLES	R	R ²	F	β
Total congruence	.29	.08	5.16***	
Realistic interests				.19**
Artistic interests				.15**
Social interests				.16**

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, only significant predictors are included.

The overall congruence of vocational interests explains 8% of the variance of job satisfaction. Significant predictors of job satisfaction are the total congruence of realistic, artistic and social vocational interests. As expected in H2, all three types of congruence are positively related to job satisfaction. Moreover, congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace exhibits a stronger positive association with job satisfaction compared to the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace.

To examine whether gender and age moderate the effects of the total congruences of vocational interests on job satisfaction (H3), two hierarchical regression analyses were performed. The first step of both analyses included the total congruence for all six vocational interests, with gender in the first analysis, and age in the second. The second step of the first analysis included six interaction terms of total congruence of all vocational interests and gender, while the second step of the second analysis included six interaction terms of total congruence of each interests and age. Interaction terms were calculated as products of centered variables. The results of the first hierarchical regression show that the variables included in the second step do not significantly increase the amount of explained variance beyond and above of the variables included in the first step ($\Delta R^2=.02$, $F=.97$, $p=.45$) and that all interaction terms were not statistically significant. Similar results were obtained in the second hierarchical regression analysis, where the variables included in the second step also do not significantly increase the amount of the variance explained by those included in the first step ($\Delta R^2= 0.02$, $F=0.94$, $p=0.47$). Thus, the hypothesis regarding age and gender as moderators between total congruence of vocational interests and job satisfaction (H3) is not confirmed.

4. Discussion

The main aim of this research was to explore the congruence between the vocational interests of participants and the requirements of their workplaces in a Croatian sample, using several operationalisations of congruence. The first operationalisation computed the congruence of two to four of the most pronounced vocational interests of participants with interests that are required by their current workplace according to the O*NET database. The second operationalisation determined the congruence of participants' unexpressed interests with those not required by their workplace, while the third operationalisation, which is similar to Gati's Sb method (1985), covered both of the above-mentioned congruences, and is named "total congruence". We anticipated that the three operationalizations would result in moderate congruences, with the highest congruence being between expressed interests and those required by the workplace (H1).

The first operationalisation showed that the congruence between all vocational interests obtained by the USPI questionnaire and workplace requirements according to the O*NET database is highest for social, realistic and enterprising interests and lowest for investigative interests (Table 3). Concerning the congruence of participants' vocational interests with those not required by their workplace, conventional and investigative interests have the highest congruences, social interests have the lowest, whereas total congruence is highest for realistic and lowest for social interests (Table 3). Generally, the alignment of vocational interests and working environments is somewhat higher concerning the congruence of expressed rather than unexpressed interests. This higher congruence could be explained by the fact that there are probably more people interested in professions that require realistic, social and enterprising interests (Table 2), so it is possible that the selection criteria for these jobs are greater. Findings indicating a moderate congruence between the vocational interests of participants and their workplaces according to Holland's typology were obtained in numerous previous studies (e.g. Wille et al., 2014), while unexpressed interests were almost never addressed in previous research. Hence, the obtained results align predominantly with H1. This finding is consistent with Holland's theory (Holland, 1997), which views interests as a motivational force that directs individuals towards activities they find interesting. Therefore, it is logical to expect significant congruence between professional interests and those required by the job, as well as congruence between unexpressed interests and those not required by the job.

Another aim explored in this research was the relationship of congruence between workplace requirements and vocational interests with job satisfaction. We anticipated that all three types of congruence would exhibit a positive relationship with job satisfaction. Additionally, we expected that congruence between expressed interests and those required by the workplace would show a stronger association with higher job satisfaction compared to the congruence between unexpressed interests and those not required by the workplace (H2). In addition to the correlational analysis (Table 4), this hypothesis was tested through hierarchical regression analysis. This analysis included the congruence of vocational interests with those required by the workplace, as well as the congruence of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace, as predictor variables, with job satisfaction as the criterion variable (Table 5). Using this method, the aim was to examine the extent to which certain types of congruences are important for explaining job satisfaction as a criterion variable. The results showed that the congruences of vocational interests with those required by the workplace explain more variance of job satisfaction than congruences of the unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace, which is in line with H2. Significant individual positive predictors are the congruence of social and artistic vocational interests, whereas the congruence of enterprising interests is negative predictor. Additionally, the congruence of unexpressed artistic interests with those not required by the workplace is also a significant positive predictor

of job satisfaction. This finding aligns with Holland's (1997) assumptions that it is important for an individual to express their own interests in their working environment. Furthermore, the results indicate that the congruences of unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace do not significantly increase the coefficient of multiple correlation after controlling for the effects of the congruence of vocational interests and the workplace requirements (Table 5).

Correlations between the total congruence of vocational interests and the characteristics of the workplace with job satisfaction showed that the total congruences of realistic, social, and artistic vocational interests were positively related to job satisfaction. A regression analysis showed that the total congruences of these three vocational interests explain 8% of the variance of job satisfaction (Table 6). Therefore, the results obtained are largely consistent with H2 and in line with the findings of recent studies on large samples (Tracey et al., 2012) and meta-analyses (Hoff et al., 2020) that show moderate positive correlations between the congruences of vocational interests and workplace requirements with job satisfaction, confirming Holland's hypotheses about this connection. It should be pointed out that although job satisfaction can be significantly influenced by other characteristics of individuals such as personality traits and attitudes and by the conditions related to the working environment such as the attractiveness of the workplace, the system of rewarding, and so on, the results of this study showed that the overlap of vocational interests and the working requirements also plays a significant role. This is an important finding for researchers and practitioners who continue to recommend analysing candidates' interests as a useful tool both in professional advisory procedures and as part of selection procedures. For example, this implies that organizations should enhance their selection processes to ensure new employees' interests closely match the organizational requirements.

According to the findings of this research, it seems that there are some specifics related to job satisfaction in people who express a certain type of interest, which is also obtained in some previous research (e.g. Tranberg et al., 1993). When investigating the connection between congruence and job satisfaction for each type of Holland's vocational interests, these authors found that people with higher investigative interests are most satisfied when engaging in research jobs, while individuals with higher artistic interests are more satisfied when engaging in non-artistic types of work. Furthermore, in their research, the association between job satisfaction and the congruence of vocational interests and workplace requirements was highest for social interests and lowest for realistic interests, which is almost entirely consistent with the results of this study related to the congruence of vocational interests with the requirements of the workplace. The highest level of job satisfaction in persons with higher congruence in social interests (Table 4) may be explained by the social skills that such individuals possess. It seems that such individuals use more appropriate ways to resolve conflicts in organisations and express emotions in socially appropriate situations, resulting in greater job satisfaction (Wampold et al., 1995).

In general, the obtained findings are consistent with Holland's theory (Holland, 1997), according to which job satisfaction is a key outcome of the congruence between vocational interests and the work environment. Holland and Gottfredson (1976) explain this relationship through positive reinforcement that occurs when an individual finds themselves in a job congruent with their own interests. According to these authors, in such situations, reinforcement occurs both through formal rewards (such as better job performance) and through informal rewards (such as positive emotions from doing interesting work). Regarding the relationship between the congruence of an individual's unexpressed interests with those not required by the workplace and job satisfaction, it should be noted that according to Holland's model (1997), it can be expected that this relationship will also be significant. The mechanism

behind this relationship may be less interference with performing a job that is congruent with the individual's expressed interests.

The final aim of this research was related to gender and age differences in the relationship of the congruence of vocational interests and the requirements of the workplace with job satisfaction. While we did not formulate specific hypotheses regarding gender, we anticipated that older participants would demonstrate higher job satisfaction (H3). The results obtained do not confirm this hypothesis. Gender does not moderate the effects of congruence on job satisfaction, similar to the findings of other studies (e.g. Tranberg et al., 1993, Weaver, 1977). It is evident, therefore, that men and women, although they prefer and choose somewhat different occupations, are equally successful in finding employment in jobs aligned with their vocational interests. Regarding age differences, previous research has shown that older employees are somewhat more satisfied with their jobs than younger employees (Ng & Feldman, 2010). This can be caused by more competence, higher status due to longer work experience, better wages, better ways of coping with stress, and a greater alignment of their vocational interests and the work activities they perform than in younger workers. Younger workers often spend the earlier part of their working lives searching for work and activities that suits them. The perspective that over the years employees enter a working environment that is more suited to their vocational interests is confirmed by proponents of gravitational theory (e.g. Wilk et al., 1995). However, since the results of this research show that age does not moderate the effects of congruence on job satisfaction, it is possible that this finding is due to the adequate compensation of younger employees, who reimburse for the poor congruence with work by engaging in hobbies and socialising more with people who have similar interests and similar strategies. It is also possible that due to the significant labor shortage in Croatia, a larger number of young people are able to quickly find jobs aligned with their vocational interests, which results in greater job satisfaction among the younger population than is usual.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study shows that all three types of congruence are moderate, with the strongest congruence observed between expressed interests and those demanded by the workplace. Additionally, all three types of congruence exhibit mainly positive, low to moderate relationships with job satisfaction, with the congruence of expressed interests with those required by the workplace emerging as a better predictor of job satisfaction than the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace. The effects of total congruence between workplace requirements and vocational interests on job satisfaction are not influenced by the age and gender of participants. These findings are valuable for practitioners in human resource management as they highlight the predictive utility of professional interests in job satisfaction. Emphasizing the alignment of expressed interests with job requirements remains crucial. Furthermore, creating an appealing work environment is essential for enhancing employee satisfaction. Strategies for achieving this include aligning job tasks with dominant vocational interests and supporting employees' career development in alignment with their interests.

Finally, some contributions of this paper should be highlighted, as well as its limitations and recommendations for future research. One contribution of this study is that it was conducted on a relatively large sample of participants, with an equal number of women and men. It also examined not only the predictive power of the congruence of vocational interests and the requirements of the workplace, but also the congruence of unexpressed interests with those that are not required by the workplace as well as total congruence, which has so far rarely been examined. Regarding limitations, it should be noted that although the congruence of vocational

interests and the requirements of the workplace is an important determinant of job satisfaction (Hoff et al., 2020, Wiegand et al., 2021), individuals can satisfy their vocational interests through different channels outside the world of work, such as family activities and hobbies, which can offer adequate compensation. Future research should, therefore, examine the above assumptions, especially the moderators of this relationship as well as the mechanisms underlying them. Possibly significant moderators could include factors such as income, prestige, job complexity, education level, workplace autonomy, perceived job importance, and job security, while underlying mechanisms may involve various motivational, emotional, and cognitive processes.

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