

3.2: The Interactionist Perspective: The Role of Fit

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between person–organization and person–job fit.
2. Understand the relationship between person–job fit and work behaviors.
3. Understand the relationship between person–organization fit and work behaviors.

Individual differences matter in the workplace. Human beings bring in their personality, physical and mental abilities, and other stable traits to work. Imagine that you are interviewing an employee who is proactive, creative, and willing to take risks. Would this person be a good job candidate? What behaviors would you expect this person to demonstrate?

The question posed above is misleading. While human beings bring their traits to work, every organization is different, and every job within the organization is also different. According to the interactionist perspective, behavior is a function of the person and the situation interacting with each other. Think about it. Would a shy person speak up in class? While a shy person may not feel like speaking, if the individual is very interested in the subject, knows the answers to the questions, and feels comfortable within the classroom environment, and if the instructor encourages participation and participation is 30% of the course grade, regardless of the level of shyness, the person may feel inclined to participate. Similarly, the behavior you may expect from someone who is proactive, creative, and willing to take risks will depend on the situation.

When hiring employees, companies are interested in assessing at least two types of fit. **Person–organization fit** refers to the degree to which a person’s values, personality, goals, and other characteristics match those of the organization. **Person–job fit** is the degree to which a person’s skill, knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics match the job demands. Thus, someone who is proactive and creative may be a great fit for a company in the high-tech sector that would benefit from risk-taking individuals, but may be a poor fit for a company that rewards routine and predictable behavior, such as accountants. Similarly, this person may be a great fit for a job such as a scientist, but a poor fit for a routine office job. The opening case illustrates one method of assessing person–organization and person–job fit in job applicants.

The first thing many recruiters look at is the person–job fit. This is not surprising, because person–job fit is related to a number of positive work attitudes such as satisfaction with the work environment, identification with the organization, job satisfaction, and work behaviors such as job performance. Companies are often also interested in hiring candidates who will fit into the company culture (those with high person–organization fit). When people fit into their organization, they tend to be more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to their companies, and more influential in their company, and they actually remain longer in their company (Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, 2008; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1990; Chatman, 1991; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). One area of controversy is whether these people perform better. Some studies have found a positive relationship between person–organization fit and job performance, but this finding was not present in all studies, so it seems that fitting with a company’s culture will only sometimes predict job performance (Arthur et al., 2006). It also seems that fitting in with the company culture is more important to some people than to others. For example, people who have worked in multiple companies tend to understand the impact of a company’s culture better, and therefore they pay more attention to whether they will fit in with the company when making their decisions (Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002). Also, when they build good relationships with their supervisors and the company, being a misfit does not seem to lead to dissatisfaction on the job (Erdogan, Kraimer, & Liden 2004).

Key Takeaways

While personality traits and other individual differences are important, we need to keep in mind that behavior is jointly determined by the person and the situation. Certain situations bring out the best in people, and someone who is a poor performer in one job may turn into a star employee in a different job.

Exercises

1. How can a company assess person–job fit before hiring employees? What are the methods you think would be helpful?
2. How can a company determine person–organization fit before hiring employees? Which methods do you think would be helpful?
3. What can organizations do to increase person–job and person–organization fit *after* they hire employees?

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