

2.7: 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.

As we have seen in the earlier sections of this chapter, human beings bring in their personality, values, attitudes, perceptions, 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 questions we pose here are misleading. While human beings bring their traits to work, every organization is also different, and every job is 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 he or she is very interested in the subject, knows the answers to the questions, feels comfortable within the classroom environment, and knows that class participation is 30% of the course grade, this person may speak up in class regardless of his or her shyness. Similarly, the behavior you may expect from someone who is proactive, creative, and willing to take risks will depend on the situation.

The fit between what we bring to our work environment and the environmental demands influences not only our behavior but also our work attitudes. Therefore, person-job fit and person-organization fit are positively related to job satisfaction and commitment. When our abilities match job demands, and when our values match company values, we tend to be more satisfied with our job and more committed to the company we work for.

When companies hire employees, they are interested in assessing at least two types of fit. Person-organization fit refers to the degree to which a person's personality, values, goals, and other characteristics match those of the organization. Person-job fit is the degree to which a person's knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics match the job demands. (Human resources professionals often use the abbreviation KSAO to refer to these four categories of attributes.) 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 puts a high priority on routine and predictable behavior, such as a nuclear power plant. Similarly, this proactive and creative person may be a great fit for a field-based job such as marketing manager but a poor fit for an office job highly dependent on rules such as accountant.

When people fit into their organization, they tend to be more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to their companies, are more influential in their company, and remain longer in their company. One area of controversy is whether these people perform better. Some studies found a positive relationship between person-organization fit and job performance, but this finding was not present in all studies, so it seems that only sometimes fitting with a company's culture predicts job performance. It also seems that fitting in with the company values is important to some people more than to others. For example, people who have worked in multiple companies tend to understand the effect of a company's culture better and therefore pay closer attention to whether they will fit in with the company when making their decisions. Also, when they build good relationships with their supervisors and the company, being a misfit does not seem to matter as much.

Key Takeaway

While personality, values, attitudes, perceptions, and KSAOs 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. Therefore, managers need to consider the individual and the situation when making Organizing decisions about the job or when engaging in Leadership activities like building teams or motivating employees.

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