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Summary

Misconceptions About Job Candidates Fitting In

About 80% of employers worldwide say it's a top hiring priority that new employees fit well into their organizations. But few take the right steps to make that happen, and instead reduce diversity and increase organization dysfunction, according to an *Academy of Management Perspectives* article.

"Determining whether prospective applicants' values match those of the organization and whether they will 'get on' with existing employees have always been vital components of personnel selection. Those advocating for it point to the positive associations between organizational fit and job satisfaction, organizational tenure, organizational commitment,

organizational citizenship behavior, learning, and performance, and to the desire of applicants to join organizations where they will not misfit," Jon Billsberry of the University of Wollongong and Wouter Vleugels of Deakin University wrote in "A Consolidation of Competing Logics on Selecting for Fit."

But "opponents of the paradigm see 'fit' as synonymous to 'cloning' and fear that the increased homogeneity of personalities and values in organizations through the cycle of attraction, selection, and the retention of people who fit will reduce diversity," the authors wrote. "There are concerns that selecting for fit perpetuates existing privileges and power structures and a worry that the practice is synonymous with employment discrimination and 'modern racism.'"

Part of the problem, according to Billsberry and Vleugels, is conflating "**organizational fit**" and "**interpersonal fit**."

Organizational fit "stems from psychology about people fitting into environments, and when they fit the environment they're in, it brings positive benefits. People try to recruit people who they think will fit in with the organization," Billsberry explained. "But it's always been known that it's dodgy. It's done subjectively, in this artificial environment of recruitment and selection, where everyone's pretending to be a different person. It's like a weird sort of speed dating. It's just completely impossible to be scientific about what's happening."

"The problem with organizational fit is that it tends to be amorphous, it tends to not be detailed, and it tends to be whatever people want it to be as a way of getting rid of certain job candidates. So what you need to work out as a recruiter is exactly what is it about the organization that people have to align with, to be able to work there."

Recruiters too often consider subjective, arbitrary factors in organizational fit, the authors wrote, such as "political orientation, hobbies, personality traits, attire, physical characteristics, use of leisure time, and even eating habits … resulting in a hiring approach more closely resembling the choice of friends or romantic partners than employers selecting new workers."

Interpersonal fit, by contrast, "is about getting along with people, feeling like you fit in, that you're not a misfit, and you can function on a daily basis with all the people around you," Billsberry said.

When organizational and interpersonal fit are considered separately, he said, "you can start to understand them better. For organizational fit, you could actually say, 'These are the qualities or the values that we need candidates to hold, and therefore we're going to assess them for that.' But for interpersonal fit, you start to realize it's impossible to determine based on what happens in a tense, superficial, and relatively brief selection process. Because everyone's pretending to be someone different."

Interpersonal fit should be addressed immediately after hiring, not while recruiting and assessing candidates, Billsberry said. "Think about how you're integrating people into an already integrated organization. And think about what's going to make someone feel comfortable and feel like they're actually welcome from day one."

Another type of fit is "**job fit.**"

"Job fit is the traditional approach to recruiting people. Basically, this is what we need the person to do," he said. When assessing job fit, recruiters consider the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to do the job compared to the KSAs applicants possess.

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AOM Scholar Jon Billsberry

The authors made these recommendations to make the hiring process more effective:

1. "**Organizations must both specify and restrict the organizational fit attributes upon which they wish to recruit.**"
2. "**During the attraction phase, organizations should provide clear and accurate information about the [knowledge, skills, and abilities] required to do the job and the qualities needed to fit the organization.**"
3. "**Screening decisions should be based on job fit and organizational fit.**"
4. "**Hiring decisions should be based on job fit rather than organizational fit.**"
5. "**Interpersonal fit should be developed post-entry.**"
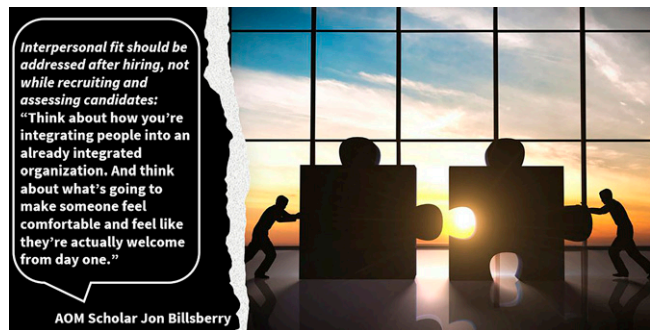
"If you try to recruit people based on fit, think two things," he said. "First, organizational fit and interpersonal fit are two different things. And then second, realize that it's so difficult to identify the two or three really crucial things without which you cannot be effective in the organization. On the interpersonal side, realize that although you might really want to choose the person you like, just remember, this process is a completely artificial situation. You're never going to know if you really will get along with that person once you get to know them properly. So try not to include selecting for interpersonal fit in when you're making hiring decisions—leave that for when they join the organization and then help them integrate into the organization."

The authors gave this example of how some companies avoid rejecting candidates who may superficially appear like misfits:

"A number of large technology firms are concerned they are excluding people with social communication disorders; people who are particularly susceptible to becoming interpersonal misfits, and therefore very likely to be cast out during the recruitment and selection process. People with social communication disorders are greatly disadvantaged in the intensely social environment of personnel selection partially explaining why people on the autism spectrum have the lowest employment rate of all mental disorders (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), despite possessing matching values and valuable skills and abilities such as strong detail, process, and computing skills. Companies including Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, SAP, and Vodafone have altered their personnel selection practices in order to

Breaking the Cycle	Attraction	Selection		Employment
	Recruitment	**Screening**	**Hiring decisions**	**Onboarding**
Intended outcomes	Attract diverse pool of job candidates with required knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs) and hold deep-level attributes that match key org features.	Select diverse pool of applicants who meet skill requirements and hold deep-level attributes that match key org features.	Select applicant with the strongest set of job-fit KSAs.	Increase socialization and reduce attrition by cultivating an inclusive sense of belonging.
Common mistakes	Inability to communicate search criteria. Releasing information about job and org fit that is not trusted.	Subjective assessment of org fit. Recruiters seek fit on surface-level attributes (demographic, lifestyle indicators).	Org fit carries more weight than job fit. Focus on interpersonal similarity, cohesion rather than productivity, performance.	Pressure toward norm-based stereotypes drives out diversity. Absence of strong diversity management, inclusion policies cause friction among employees.
Strategy	Establish demonstrable link between key org features and performance. Provide accurate information about key defining org features. Manage release of information in a way to build trust.	Identify job fit and org fit selection criteria through competency-based job analysis. Screen-in those holding required KSAs and personal attributes (values, personality) using standardized assessment methods, validated instruments.	Objective assessment of screened applicants against job-fit KSAs.	Unite employees on key values or work goals. Create inclusive environment by addressing difficulties in communication, different cultural norms, social undermining, and negative social categorization.

assess employees on their merits based on markers that truly matter to the organization and drive its competitive advantage. Their redesigned personnel selection processes for people with social communication disorders typically last a week to help the applicants get comfortable in the environment so they can show their skills to the best. In addition, these organizations have adjusted their social and physical working environments for those making it through the selection process to ensure people with autism spectrum differences embed among other workers and will become successful employees."

"Problems with selecting for fit arise when such practices result in a social closure of elite occupations by cultural signals, particularly lifestyle markers typically associated with the white upper-middle class," the authors wrote. "To help break this negative cycle of discrimination, we recommend disaggregating organizational and interpersonal forms of fit and removing interpersonal fit from screening and selection decisions given its inherent problems

Fit Selection Process

with diversity and discrimination. When organizational fit is included alongside job fit in screening decisions, it should be based on organizational, strategic, and future-focusing factors that are essential for effective functioning in the organization. Hiring decisions should be based on job fit. While it is fallacious to believe that interpersonal fit can be determined during personnel selection with any degree of accuracy, it has a major role to play in creating working environments in which everyone can thrive. In this way, organizations can leverage the benefits of both fit and diversity and make work meaningful, engaging, and inclusive."