

Testing a Model of Employee Selection: A Contextual Approach

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The study examined selection practices applied to education. The selected contextual factors were tested to see whether school administrators took consideration of person-organization fit (POF) factors when they select applicants during the selection process. The results showed that POF factors affected selection when school size was under consideration and person-job fit factors affected selection when socio-economic status was under consideration.

Keywords: Selection Model, Contextual Approach, Model Testing

Selection has three critical functions for the organization; (1) supplying human resources, based on human resource planning, (2) allocating human resources to specific divisions, departments, and/or assignments, and (3) identifying and selecting high performers for future business leaders (Okubayashi, 2003). In other words, it pertains to supply, allocation, and utilization of human resources for the purpose of attaining organizational goals and objectives. Therefore, having productive human resources is imperative to any organization for overall performance. Consequently, selection focuses on how accurately one can select a potential high performer. One of the challenges that an organization faces today is a rapidly changing work environment, due to technological advancement, pressures under knowledge economy, and global competition. Therefore, keeping up with a changing work context and identifying desirable high potential performers in the organization has been of great interest (Kehoe, 2000).

Problem Statement

In selection, organizations are interested in high potential performers, who are expected to make significant contributions. In contrast, job applicants focus on working for excellent organizations where they can stay long and have opportunities to grow. Both parties have to come to mutual decisions; hiring and entering, to attain different goals. One of the selection issues relates to criteria and instruments: what to look for and measure in order to identify a potential high performer. The organizations focus heavily on job-related criteria that help separate those who meet job requirements and those who do not. This is known as person-job fit (PJF). However, as the work environment changes, work becomes more complex and demanding (Kehoe, 2000). For instance, information technology and knowledge-based work require employees to have highly specialized knowledge, and to increase their learning ability as well as adaptability to changes. In addition, flexibility and agility are constantly required of an organization and its employees (Pearlman & Barney, 2000). These work context pressures could influence selection criteria. Consequently, focusing heavily only on the job-related criteria may not be sufficient.

A study shows that as the selection process advances, human resource managers become more interested in how well job applicants fit to the existing work context, which is influenced by changes from inside and outside of the organizations (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Job applicants are also interested in how well they can fit to the existing organizational context. This is known as person-organization fit (POF), concerning matching between organizational and individual attributes. Those attributes are not directly related to selection criteria; however, these factors might influence any decisions during the selection process (Harada & Bowman, 2003). More importantly, POF factors tend to take on a significant role before and after employment. For instance, before employment, job applicants use attributes to make their selection decision (Bowen, Ledford, & Richman, 2000; Chatman, 1989; Lyon, 2001). However, if a mutual selection decision by both an organization and a job applicant is not made, due to a lack of congruence in POF factors, the organization might lose high potentials. After employment, when employees find inconsistency in attributes between the employees and the organization, issues of work motivation, retention and job satisfaction could become major concerns for the organization. These issues influence individual performance in a short run; however, they will undermine organizational performance in a long run. Therefore, it is very critical to make the case where both an organization and a job applicant make a mutual selection decision. In this respect, work

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context, which might relate to PJF factors, should be given more attention in order to identify the most promising high potential performers. However, the work context that is influenced by changes inside and outside organizations may not be given enough attention, in terms of how the work context and POF factors might influence selection. Therefore, it is important to investigate the work context and POF factors to select high potential performers.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to test the proposed model of employee selection to see whether POF factors are taken into consideration in the selection process by focusing on contextual factors. Specifically, the study focused on selection criteria for K-12 educators where PJF factors are applied rigidly by school administrators who are responsible for the selection of teachers. The selected contextual factors include: (a) size of school, (b) characteristics of the district, and (c) socioeconomic status. These factors were included in research questions as indicated below.

Research question #1. Do school administrators take consideration of POF factors in teacher selection?

Research question #2. Do school administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently when school size, characteristics of districts, and socioeconomic status are under consideration?

Research question #3. Under what levels of the contextual factors do school administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently in selection?

Research Framework

The concept of “fit” has been used in selection research. It is concerned with the fit between job requirements and organizational attributes, as they apply to job applicants. Selection studies using the fit concept have indicated the improvement of employee attitudes and job performance (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Person-job fit (PJF) refers to matching an applicant’s knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and the requirements of a specific job. Person-organization fit (POF) refers to matching an applicant’s personal attributes and broader organizational attributes, which evaluate how well a person fits with existing organizational members and the overall culture of the organization (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). The assumption is that factors in PJF and POF play important roles in identifying and selecting good employees. It implies that both types of “fit” help employees maintain high performance and produce quality work. Therefore, the PJF and POF factors are very important to take into consideration during the selection process. However, the recent nature of work has been changing and it requires employees to perform more knowledge work and a new type of work collaboration, such as within and outside networking and project teams (Kopp, 2003; Morishima, 2002). As a result, human resource managers look for more than matching job requirements and applicants (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Business organizations are often first interested in PJF to see if job applicants can meet the job requirements. If the applicants meet the job requirements, the managers then become interested in how well the job applicants fit into the culture of the company and the existing members with whom they will be working. In other words, while managers use the job-related criteria, they also use non-job-related factors to evaluate potential employees.

A model of employee selection was proposed (Figure 1), derived from the fit concepts, which have been applied to a series of selection studies (Bowman & Harada, 2003). The assumption of the proposed employee selection model is based on mutual selection decisions made by both an organization and a job applicant. It is a premise that mutual decisions are important to bring high potential performers into an organization. When mutual selection decisions are made, the organization obtains high potential performers, while the high potential employees will produce quality work through increased work motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction. In order to reach mutual selection decisions, the organization takes consideration of both job-related factors and non-job-related factors to see how PJF and POF can be attained. Therefore, factors relating to POF should be given more consideration in the selection process, to obtain promising high potential performers.

Fit concepts and School Administration

Studies in employee selection focus on business organizations rather than non business-related organizations. However, a school can be seen as one form of an organization where their product is educational services. Like business organizations, they have multiple customers, such as students, parents, business organizations and industries. In this regard, in order to provide high quality services, schools rely on teachers who are responsible for educating students. Therefore, selecting high potential performance educators is very critical for schools to provide quality education. However, K-12 education has faced tremendous pressures from parents and society due to lower student educational attainment and a lack of reliability in their education (Gross, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996; National Center for Excellence in Education, 1983). At the same time, the environment surrounding K-12 school administration has become increasingly demanding. For instance, budgets do not to increase as much as needed. Consequently, school administrations face a lack of educational resources available for educators, and insufficient support from the community. These problems, associated with the context of school

administration, create other problems, such as difficulty in attracting and retaining potential high performance educators, lower job satisfaction and commitment, and increased job stress (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Hirsch, 1999). Due, in part, to these reasons, potential high performance teachers tend to leave (Corwin, 2001) and fewer people want to become educators. In this regard, it is very important to focus on the administrative role in the selection system, where job-related criteria have been rigidly applied in education.

Figure 1. Proposed Model of Employee Selection & Focus of Selection Factors

Job-related Factors	Knowledge, Skills, & Abilities Experiences, Qualifications	Values & Beliefs Vision, Goals, strategic planning Opportunity for improvement Characteristics of Workplace Policy, Leadership
	Factors in PJF & POF	Factors in PJF & POF
Non Job-related Factors	Age, Race, Gender, Religion, & Disability	Personal Values & Beliefs Needs and Expectations Individual Characteristics Needs and expectations
	Factors in PJF	Factors in PJF

In education, while job-related criteria have been rigidly applied in teacher selection, a continuing problem has been associated with personal factors entering decision-making. Personal factors include sharing similarities, such as educational backgrounds, personal values and belief in education, interests in life, job experiences and qualifications. At the early stage in the selection process, school administrators focus heavily on PJF factors to separate those applicants who meet job requirements and those who don't. However, as the selection process advances, administrators are interested in how well their applicants can merge to an exiting school environment. At that time, if school administrators perceive similarities in job applicants, they feel close to the applicants. Such similarity might interfere with selection decisions (Baron & Byrne, 1984; Young & McMurry, 1986). School administrators also deal with other factors, which are not immediately related to a teaching job, such as schools' goals and objectives, beliefs and norms of the community and administrators' educational policies. These factors can be thought of as non-job-related and they relate to person-organization fit (POF). In addition, there are other factors, contextual factors that relate to where education is taking place. The contextual factors can be overall characteristics of schools or districts where educational communities are located. These contextual factors relate to the educational needs of students and to the overall characteristics of educational communities and the needs for educational resources. Therefore, the contextual factors may be taken into consideration in the selection process.

Selected Contextual Factors and Hypotheses Development

POF factors include not only personal values and individual personality traits, but also a job applicant's needs and expectations for a job, strategic needs, norms, and characteristics of workplaces (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996; Adkins, Russell & Werbel, 1994; Bowman & Harada, 2003). This is based on the notion of changing workplace context and issues in management of human resources (e.g., retention, job satisfaction and commitment). The contexts of a teaching job vary, depending on the overall characteristics of the workplaces. This paper focuses on selected contextual factors; (a) school size, (b) characteristics of districts, and (c) socioeconomic status. These factors are used to: (1) discuss how contextual factors are related to PJF and POF in selection and (b) test each contextual factor by setting up each hypothesis.

Size of Schools

The size of an organization affects various aspects of the organization, such as resource availability, ways of getting work done, communication, values, policies and strategic plans. In other words, these factors could affect business operation and practices, which in turn are also related to school operation and practices. In this regard, it is assumed that school administrators might take consideration of factors associated with their school size during the

selection process. The size of a school in this study is defined by the number of students in the school. It is categorized into three levels; large, medium, and small. The size of school could relate to working conditions. A study by Lee, Alfeld-Liro and Smerdon (2000) showed that face-to-face communication is required more often in small schools than in large schools. Consequently, working conditions in a small school require employees to work closely with each other and to be merged into the existing teaching community. Therefore, commitment to interpersonal relationship building may be expected more in small schools than as is required in large schools. Furthermore, school administrators with small size schools might effect to build a desirable school atmosphere, based on their educational values and beliefs and use less rigorous policies and rules. On the other hand, administrators in large size schools deal with a large numbers of teachers. Consequently, building a desirable school atmosphere and keeping it coherent would be challenging for school administrators. School size also relates to availability of administrative resources. Educational resources in small schools may be limited due, in part, to a limited amount of monetary resources. If this is the case, educators are sometimes asked to perform additional work with less administrative assistance. In this regard, school administrators should be aware of the educational needs, required of newcomers. As a result, the size of schools could affect the condition of the workplace for educators. If the working conditions are under taken consideration when administrators select high potential educators, they may need to consider the school size factor in the selection process. Based on this notion, a hypothesis is stated below:

Hypothesis 1. School administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently, depending on the different sizes of schools.

Characteristics of District

Characteristics of school districts have not been defined in the selection literature. It depends on how characteristics can be operationalized in a particular study. For instance, socioeconomic status, size, and locations of schools have been used as definitions (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Alspaugh, 1998; Sommers, 1997). In this study, characteristics of school districts are defined as (1) location, categorized into three areas; (a) urban, (b) rural, and (c) suburban and (2) socioeconomic status; (a) high, (b) medium, and (c) low.

Locations. According to Alspaugh (1998) and Esposito (1999), the locations can have an impact on educational needs. For instance, a study found that rural areas tended to be lower in the number of dropouts than urban areas (Alspaugh, 1998). School districts in urban areas tend to deal more frequently with behavioral problems, such as drugs, violence, and teenage gangs (Alspaugh, 1998; Esposito, 1999). These problems require teachers to have disciplinary skills and interpersonal communication skills when they deal with problematic students. As a result, there would be additional educational needs and efforts that are required of teachers. In this regard, teachers have to give a great amount of attention to these students with family backgrounds, to respond to their educational needs. The teachers in an urban area often face challenges in classroom management and lower learning motivation. All of these issues describe demanding working conditions. If this is the case, school administrators want to have teachers who are willing to put in additional efforts and to have higher work motivation. At the same time, school administrators may need to set educational goals and plans aiming from the bottom up to a certain level of educational attainment. In this regard, they might focus on contextual factors of the school and the educational needs. To discipline students, administrators might reinforce the use of rules and principles. If this is the case, school administrators are interested in how well job applicants would agree with these policies and educational plans. Characteristics of suburban areas tend to be relatively moderate, in terms of students' behavioral problems and school dropouts. Parents would be interested in education and its quality; therefore, they tend to be willing to take part in school activities. If this is the case, school administrators would be interested in factors relating to PJF throughout selection. Based on such notions, a hypothesis is stated below:

Hypothesis 2. School administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently, depending on locations of school districts.

Socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the significant factors differentiating characteristics of school districts. It relates to the overall level of lifestyle and financial resources of communities. SES in this study is defined at three levels: high, medium, and low. The level of SES relative to education often relates to educational achievement (Alspaugh, 1998; Esposito, 1999; Griffith, 1998). For instance, schools in high SES areas focus more on the quality of education given to their children. Those parents often have higher educational attainment. They have high expectations of their children and support educational attainment. Consequently, parents expect schools to provide quality in various aspects of education. Therefore, school administrators in wealthy districts would be interested in improving the level of educational achievement. In this regard, establishing schools' missions and values that call for higher educational attainment would be responding to parents and the community expectations. As such, they would focus more on how well applicants meet job requirements and the degree of congruence with applicants' beliefs in high educational attainment. At the same time, teachers are expected to have a certain level of subject matter expertise. As a result, PJF factors, including experience, qualifications, training, and specialty in

teaching are stressed in these situations (USA Today, 2002). Characteristics of medium SES districts could be similar to the high SES areas, in terms of parental interest in education and student achievement. In this regard, school administrators tend to focus on PJF factors to see how well an applicant fits the job requirements. In contrast, schools in the low SES areas often have lower student achievement. Parents tend to be interested in their own daily lives rather than their children's educational attainment (Griffith, 1998). At the same time, these working class parents may not have enough time to provide parental support. In this regard, school administrators would like to have those teachers who believe in and have values in the potential ability of students and understand the importance of education. Another issue relative to schools in the low SES areas is limited financial resources. Those schools most likely may not have adequate educational resources (e.g., teaching materials, facilities, equipment, etc). Like schools in the urban area, low SES school districts also tend to have community problems, such as violence, teenage gangs, and drugs (Alspaugh, 1998; Esposito, 1999). These problems require teachers to respond supportively and to provide additional help for their students. Responding to such educational needs, they may focus on goals and objectives as a way of keeping school operation as cooperative and coherent, as it can be by using rules and policies. In this regard, selection criteria for teachers might apply differently. The following hypothesis is stated below:

Hypothesis 3. School administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently, depending on the socioeconomic status of the school districts.

Methodology

The research design was casual-comparative with three independent variables; (a) school size, (b) location of district, and (c) socioeconomic status. Each variable has three levels; large, medium, and small and/or high medium and low. The two dependent variables were summated scores on PJF and POF.

Sample

The population for this study was all public school administrators, who were superintendents and principals, in a large Midwestern state. Systematic random sampling was used to select school and school district administrators, which were listed in a statewide school district phone directory. The sample size, based on a power analysis with medium effect size (.80) and an alpha level of .05 was calculated (Cohen, 1988). The final sample size was 100 school administrators. Regarding response rates, a total of 200 questionnaires were sent. Of these, final response rate was 53%.

Instrument

The instrument was developed, based on several fit concept studies (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000), by the researcher. It was designed to measure perceptions of both PJF and POF. PJF factors were derived from studies dealing with teacher selection (Hopkins, 2003; Kansas State University, 2003) and from interviews with school administrators. Items included communication skills, planning skills, motivation, goal orientation, etc. POF factors were taken from the Teacher Perceiver Interview (Clifton & Hill, 1952; Delli, 2000; Warner, 1969; Winesman, 1969), a commercially available selection process, and contain 11 items, including policies, goals, strategic plans, etc. Contextual factors included: school size (Small, Medium, Large) and district location (Urban, Rural, Suburban). In addition, from median family income data furnished by the State Department of Education, a district socioeconomic contextual factor was also created (Low, Medium, High) for each participant. A pilot study (Cronbach's Alpha = .92) was conducted. A total of 28 items were included in the questionnaire, which asked the level of consideration given each item during the teacher selection process, and were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale. Participants were asked to mark their responses on a four-point Likert Scale, which was anchored at: "1 = Never," "2 = Infrequently," "3 = Frequently," and "4 = Always".

Descriptive statistics were used to provide overall information for the demographic data. To test the hypotheses, multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs), were performed on the contextual factors (school size, district location, socioeconomic status), to determine whether PJF and POF consideration differed on each of the contextual factors. One-way analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were performed to answer Research Question #3.

Results

The final usable data was 105 responses (53%). The average age of the participants is 49.7 years old (S.D =7.4) and average years of experience is 15.9 years (S.D. = 7.3). Overall average school size is 468 students (S.D. = 240), showing high variability. The median income for the districts is \$32,544 (S.D. = \$6,689). Research Question #1 asked about school administrators taking consideration of POF factors in teacher selection. The results of the MANOVAs, show that school administrators took consideration of POF factors when school size is under consideration ($F(2, 102)=4.470, p<.05$). However, school administrators did not indicate use of POF, regarding the

characteristics of district and socioeconomic status POF factors (See Table 1)

Table 1. *Multiple Analysis of Variance for School Size vs. PJF & POF*

Source	df	F	p
School Size vs, PJF	2	1.40	0.252
School Size vs. POF	2	4.47*	0.014
S within-group error (PJF)	102	(29.27)	
S within-group error (POF)	102	(22.64)	

Note: Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

S = subjects. * $p < .05$. (The values for p are based on Wilkes Lambda)

Research Question #2 asked whether school administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently when school size, characteristics of districts, and socioeconomic status are under consideration. To respond to this question, three hypotheses were developed and statistical tests were performed. Hypothesis 1 tested whether school administrators took consideration of POF factors and PJF factors, differently, depending on a different size of schools. The three size of schools were operationalized as: large size school (n=6) with > 850 students, medium size school (n=46) with 441-849 students, and small size school (n=53) with < 440 students. The result shows that factors in POF have a significant effect on teacher selection ($F(2, 102) = 4.470, p < .05$) when school administrators take consideration of their school size. Hypothesis 2 tested whether school administrators took consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently, depending on locations of school districts. The locations were categorized into three levels: urban (n=13), rural (n=44), and suburban (n=48). The result shows there are no differences in POF factors and PJF factors when the school location is under consideration in teacher selection.

Table 2. *Multiple Analysis of Variance for Socioeconomic Status (SES) vs. PJF & POF*

Source	df	F	p
SES vs. PJF	2	3.92*	0.023
SES vs. POF	2	0.14	0.866
S within-group error (PJF)	102	(27.92)	
S within-group error (POF)	102	(24.55)	

Note: Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

S = subjects. * $p < .05$ (The values for p are based on Wilkes Lambda)

Hypothesis 3 tested whether school administrators took consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently, depending on SES, based on income. High SES (n=16) was more than \$40,000, medium SES (n=75) was between \$25,001 and \$40,000, and low SES (n=3) was less than \$25,000. The result (Table 2) shows that Socioeconomic Status (SES) has a significant affect on administrator consideration of PJF factors in teacher selection ($F(2, 102) = 3.928, p < .05$). Based on these findings, it can be said that school administrators take consideration of POF factors differently from PJF factors when SES is under the consideration. Research Question #3 asks about under what levels of the contextual factors do school administrators take consideration of POF factors and PJF factors differently in selection. To answer this question, One-way ANOVAs were performed on each contextual factor. Using Tukey's HSD post-hoc test, it was found that the significant difference found in the level of consideration of PJF factors relating to SES, was due to the influence of wealthy districts. The result also shows that a significant difference is found in the consideration of POF factors with a large size school.

Discussions and Implications

The purpose of the study was to test a proposed model of employee selection, based on the fit concept. The study focused on selected contextual factors. Specifically, the proposed model applied to teacher selection where

job-related criteria have been rigidly applied. The assumption of this model is that when a mutual selection decision is made, an organization is able to obtain high potential performers. One way to do so is not only matching between job requirements of PJF factors and job applicants' KSAs, but also by matching between school attributes as the POF factors and individual attributes that are important. The study results show that POF factors can have a significant impact in teacher selection. Based on these notions, school administrators with large schools should pay attention to matching between their POF factors and individual applicants' factors relating to POF. In other words, prior to advertising a vacant position in their schools, it would be better if they take consideration of the characteristics of their POF factors. They should use these factors in identifying desirable characteristics of individual applicants they are interested in for their schools. The applicants' POF factors should be in congruence with their POF factors. At the same time, administrators in high SES districts should pay the same type of attention to matching their PJF factors and individual applicants' PJF factors. In business organizations, human resource managers are first concerned about matching job requirements with a job applicant's KSAs and work experience, which could be done during the recruitment and screening phases. Once those applicants who meet the requirements are identified, they are invited for an interview during the final selection decision phase. Like selection processes used among business organizations, at the initial phase, school administrators have a certain picture of desirable applicants, and they can provide a series of interview questions to see how well PJF or POF factors can be congruent with those of job applicants. In this regard, selection of high potential educators would be most likely made while the applicants also self-select their schools.

Contributions to Knowledge in HRD

Most selection studies focus on PJF factors, such as job-related factors rather than POF factors. In contrast, this study focused on POF factors and treated them as contextual factors as they apply to selection of high potential educators. Based on the findings of this study, the proposed employee selection model can be useful in identifying and selecting such educators when school principals are in large schools and school administrators, including school principals and superintendents are in high socioeconomic status areas. In addition, a practical implication based on this study will help individual performance among school administrators by improving their knowledge and awareness of the importance of POF factors when they practice teacher selection. Regarding research contributions, a selection study is a relatively new area for HRD. Consequently, the study expands the HRD research domain to show broad HRD perspectives. Potential HRD research areas include not only individual performance improvement of school administrators, but also the selection process and the fit concept used in educational settings. Based on the proposed employee selection model, individuals who are responsible for selection can improve the human resource system through identifying and selecting high potential performers, based on the human resource planning of the organization. Reliable high potential employees can be allocated, according to needs and requests of departments in the organization. Finally, the most promising high potential performers who have the abilities to become future business leaders can be selected.

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