

## The Use of Fit in Teacher Selection: Do Principals and Superintendents Think Alike?

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*Principals and superintendents were surveyed as to how they use concepts of Person-Job Fit (PJF) and Person-Organization Fit (POF) as they assess teacher applicants. An instrument was designed and a random sample of principals and superintendents was assessed. Results indicated that each group focuses on a different set of concepts in selection interviews and the two groups weigh different concepts differently. Implications and contributions of this work to HRD are also discussed.*

Key Words: Employee Selection/Recruitment/Hiring; Performance; Work/Life Issues

Education is a field that is very difficult to explain to the uninitiated. There seems constantly to be a “*teaching method de jour*” with new pedagogical theories being introduced into the classroom. Education may well be the only field of human endeavor where theory is put into practice without the benefit of being thoroughly tested through rigorous research. These perceptions have only added to the confusion about the direction of education. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002 has put accountability into the forefront of education, through the mandating of achievement testing throughout a child’s school life. However, another facet of the NCLBA that is not mentioned so frequently is the requirement that children will be taught only by “fully qualified” teachers.

### Problem Statement

Making certain that only the best teachers are brought into a school or district is the job of the district administrators and is “...one of the most difficult of all administrative responsibilities” (Harris & Monk, 1979). As stated by Harada and Bowman (2002), “In teacher selection, the personnel administrators (e.g., superintendents and principals) are most intimately involved in the process and in the decision-making.” Selection of teachers is critical to the educational process and to the successful preparation of students. If one thinks about the potential consequences of making a poor selection choice, the situation becomes clearer. A teacher who cannot perform up to expectations can lower the quality of education for an entire school, as every student who passes through his or her classroom will be ill-prepared for the next grade.

The process used to select teachers must be as efficient and effective as possible; however, in most instances it is not. In most districts, the major portion of the task of teacher selection falls to the building principal. S/he is responsible, generally for the initial screening of applicant documentation and the conducting of initial interviews. The principal recommends several finalists to the superintendent, who conducts the final interviews and makes the final hiring recommendation the district board of education. One question to consider is whether the principal and the superintendent are looking at applicant qualifications in the same way, in order to ensure the best applicants are recommended for hiring. This study attempts to answer that question, using a theory based on the business and management literature.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *The Selection Process*

The selection process is generally thought of as a series of steps or phases, with decisions being made at the end of each. The usual selection process for an organization consists of four steps/phases: (1) the recruitment phase, (2) the screening phase, (3) the interview phase, and (4) the final decision phase. Selection is very closely controlled by legislation, statutes, administrative guidelines, and legal precedents (e. g., Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Executive Order 11246, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973). These legal constraints prohibit discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, and sexual orientation against individuals, both as members of protected groups (e.g., women and minorities) and as individuals, in many facets of work life, such as hiring, promotion, and termination. In addition, court decisions have provided additional guidance in the selection process (Uniform Guidelines, 1968).

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The history of selection research, however, shows that in spite of the federal and state legislation, statutes, and administrative guidelines, selection processes are conducted with little regard for these requirements.

#### *Selection Research*

The history of research into the selection process spans nearly a century and many expansive reviews of the research have been conducted (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Mayfield, 1964; Wagner, 1949). The initial studies were conducted near the end of the First World War (Wagner, 1949). The authors considered the selection process as a single entity and were primarily interested in the relationships between interview ratings and other types of criteria (e.g., intelligence, friendship, social interaction, projected success as a pilot) (Wagner, 1949). These types of studies continued until the mid 1960s, and were later termed “macroanalytic”, as they looked at the entire selection process as a single macro-entity.

In 1964, Mayfield suggested that changes needed to be made in the approach being taken in selection research. He indicated that more and better information might be gained by breaking the selection process into its constituent parts and studying the parts separately. This was a revolutionary change in the way selection was studied, and was termed “microanalytic.” Since this shift in emphasis, the major thrust has been to better understand and improve the interview phase, particularly the validity of the interview.

Arvey’s and Campion’s (1982) review provided new insight into interview reliability and validity. Their data provided significant support for panel and structured interview formats, in terms of improved reliability and validity. The authors also concluded, however, that interviews were still not “truly valid”, but their use was so ingrained in organizational culture that they would still be used, due to practical considerations.

More recent reviews and individual studies have reinforced the notion that interview validity has continued to improve (Harris, 1989). These studies have assessed the validity of the interview from several perspectives, including the use of meta-analysis on data from related studies, continued use of the structured interview format, and continued interest and research into interviewer reliability. The structured interview, when combined with a thorough job analysis has proved to be an especially promising combination, resulting in improved validity (Harris, 1989).

Unfortunately, whether the studies were conducted using a “macroanalytic” or “microanalytic” format, selection research has shown that decision-makers use factors that cannot be legally considered in their decisions. Under the federal guidelines for selection, only job-related factors can be considered. Factors such as race, sex, age, physical disability, interviewer attitude, and interviewer mood have been identified as being used in decision making (Graves, 1993; Young & Fox, 2002; Young & Ryerson, 1986).

Various theories, including Social Distance Theory (Triandis & Triandis, 1967) and the Attraction-Similarity Paradigm (Byrne, 1971) have been used as frameworks to study the selection process and to try to explain the use of non job-related factors in decision-making. Recently, another theoretical framework has been recognized, in terms of selection. This framework was initially based in management research, but is applicable also to the educational selection field (Bowman & Harada, 2003; Harada & Bowman, 2002; Harada & Bowman, 2004). This framework employs the concept of “fit” between the applicant(s) and the employer (individuals and the organization).

#### *The Fit Concept*

The Fit Concept was first introduced in organizational selection studies (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). The concept utilizes two facets: Person-Job Fit (PJF) and Person-Organization Fit (POF). PJF is concerned with the specific job requirements for the position in question. It is operationalized through the matching of the applicant’s Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) and the job requirements. (Young & Ryerson, 1986).

As organizations and workplaces have become more complex, the POF facet has gained in importance and attention. Person-Organization Fit refers to how well the applicant’s personal values and beliefs match with the organization’s attributes and culture (Chatman, 1989). The simultaneous use of both facets of fit has proved to be very beneficial in the assessment of applicants, particularly when multiple levels of applicant consideration are used by the organization. Rynes and Gerhart (1990) found that applicants are evaluated at several levels within an organization as a part of the selection process. At the initial level (e.g., a job fair), the recruiter does an initial interview and makes recommendations related to how well the applicant meets the minimum qualifications for the position (PJF). If the applicant is acceptable at the recruiter level, s/he is usually invited to an organizational facility for further consideration. The higher-level decision makers tend to be more interested in how well the applicant will blend into the organization’s culture (POF).

In the educational arena, a similar process takes place. In most districts, a teaching position is advertised and applicants submit their required application documentation. The application materials are reviewed by the building principal, who prepares a list of applicants who meet the minimum requirements for the position and are worthy of an interview. Those applicants are notified and are interviewed by the principal, sometimes one-on-one and at other

times in a panel format. Following the interviews, the principal prepares a list of the top three or four finalists and submits the list to the superintendent. The finalists are interviewed by the superintendent (or the assistant superintendent) who makes the final recommendation to the district’s Board of Education.

The basic thrust of this study is to determine whether the principal, who performs the initial interview and the Superintendent who performs the final interview, consider the same factors in making their decisions as is seen in private sector organizations. This study looks at a set of factors that apply to teachers, from the perspectives of Person-Job Fit and Person-Organization Fit. (Bowman, 1998; R. A. Barnes, personal communication, July 15, 2002; R. Ludwig, personal communication, July 20, 2002; J. A. Zimmerman, personal communication, August 2, 2002).

**Hypotheses**

Based on these factors, the following hypotheses are developed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Principals and Superintendents follow different consideration patterns of PJF and POF factors in making selection decisions.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Principals and Superintendents give different amounts of consideration to each PJF and POF factor when making selection decisions.

**Methodology**

*Sample*

The population for this study consists of all current public school district superintendents and principals in a large midwestern state. The study sample was selected using a combination of systematic random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. The same procedure was followed for both the superintendents and the principals. The final sample consisted of equal numbers of principals and superintendents.

To determine an appropriate sample size for each category, a power analysis was performed, using the procedure described by Cohen (1988, pp. 19-74), which resulted in a recommended sample size of 58 for each category. However, due to past knowledge and experience concerning response rates, final sample sizes of 100 for each category were utilized (Bowman, 1998; I. P. Young, personal communication, April 23, 1997).

*Instrument*

The instrument was developed by the author, and consisted of twenty-eight (28) items related to Person-Job Fit and Person-Organization Fit, as well as demographic information (6 items). The twenty-eight items were divided between those that relate to Person-Job Fit (17 items) and Person-Organization Fit (11 items). Each item was measured on a four-point Likert scale, with 1=“Never” and 4=“Always”. The participants were asked to base their scores on “the extent to which they consider each concept and topic during an interview with an applicant for a teaching position in their school/district.” See Table 1 for a listing of the PJF and POF items.

*Table 1. Items in the FIT CONCEPT SURVEY Instrument*

<b>Items in Person-Job Fit</b>	<b>Items in Person-Organization Fit</b>
Competent	Values
Empathetic	Beliefs
Rapport-seeking	Norms
Input drive	Mission congruence
Stimulating	Traditions
Innovative	Policies
Objective	Principles
Focused (Goal-oriented)	Goals
Desire for self-improvement	Vision
Thorough subject knowledge	Strategic plans
Communication skills	Implicit rules
Character	
Ability to motivate	
Stay on task	
Efficient planning skills	
Disciplinary skills	
Inclusive	

### *Validity and Reliability*

Because the instrument was self-developed, content validity was required. Superintendents and principals (and personnel who had filled both positions) were asked to study the proposed survey and to determine the applicability of the items listed to either Person-Job Fit or Person-Organization Fit, based on their prior or current experience. The subject matter experts were asked to remove any items that were not applicable and to add any additional items that were applicable. After several iterations, an agreed on list was developed and became the final instrument.

To determine reliability of the final instrument, a pilot study was performed. A random sample of superintendents and principals was selected, using the same randomization process as was used for the actual study sample. A total of 40 participants were selected. Twenty-eight responses were received, for a response rate of 70%. The data were entered into a database and Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the combined data set. The value for Cronbach's Alpha for this data was 0.91. To make certain that each group of participants' responses also had an appropriate level of reliability, Cronbach's Alphas were calculated for the principals' data and the superintendents' data separately. The calculated values were: Principals = 0.89 and Superintendents = 0.90. All of these values were within the acceptable range for reliability of group comparisons suggested by Nunnally (1978).

## **Results**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the demographic information from the questionnaire. Data from each set of participants were analyzed separately. Both groups were relatively similar in age, with principals being slightly younger (principals:  $M = 47.6$ ,  $SD = 4.25$  years of age vs. superintendents:  $M = 51.9$ ,  $SD = 6.64$  years of age). Relative to years as an administrator, superintendents had considerably more years, which is logical, as superintendents nearly always serve as principals prior to becoming superintendents (principals:  $11.6$ ,  $SD = 7.32$  years vs. superintendents:  $M = 19.4$ ,  $SD = 7.12$  years).

The number of years the principals and superintendents had served in their current positions was almost identical (principals:  $M = 5.0$ ,  $SD = 3.71$  years vs. superintendents:  $M = 5.2$ ,  $SD = 3.74$  years). In addition, the data concerning the sizes of the principals' schools and the mean size of the schools in the superintendents' districts were also nearly identical (principals:  $M = 478.7$ ,  $SD = 277.90$  students vs. superintendents:  $M = 471.8$ ,  $SD = 174.90$  students).

### *Factor Analysis*

Hypothesis 1 stated that principals and superintendents follow different patterns of consideration of PJF and POF factors in making selection decisions. One way to test this is to perform an exploratory factor analysis. In this way, those items that are related in some respect will load separately into several factors and it will be possible to determine the differences between levels of consideration for those items between the two groups. Each group's (principals and superintendents) data for the 24 remaining items (4 items were removed due to significant mailing effects) were subjected separately to an exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, with the results presented in Tables 2 and 3.

As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3, the results supported Hypothesis 1. From Table 2, it can be seen that the principals' data yielded seven factors. The primary emphasis of principals was on organization-related items (POF). These seven factors explained a total of 67.75% of the total variance of the common model. Similarly, Table 3 shows that the superintendents' data yielded eight factors. In this case, the primary emphasis was on job-related items. The eight factors explained a total of 69.35% of the total variance of the common model.

### *Independent Samples t-Tests*

Hypothesis 2 stated that principals and superintendents give the different amounts of consideration to each item on the questionnaire. To determine whether this occurred, independent sample t-tests were conducted on each of the 24 remaining items. Of the 24 separate t-tests performed, only two items showed a significant difference in the level of consideration given between principals and superintendents. These items were: input drive (principals:  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 0.57$  vs. superintendents:  $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ),  $t(142) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$  (two-tailed) and beliefs (principals:  $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.79$  vs.  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ),  $t(142) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .04$  (two-tailed).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study was based on the premise that principals and superintendents use different factors as they make selection decisions, and that they might have differences in the level of consideration given to specific factors. This premise is based on a study from the business literature that found that human resource personnel at different levels within an organization emphasize different types of employment-related factors: (a) Person-Job Factors (PJF) and (b) Person-

Organization Factors (POF) when interviewing applicants for a position (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). In a school district, the principal is the individual normally responsible for the selection process in his or her school; with the superintendent entering the process only after the principal has selected several “finalists” for the superintendent’s final interview.

The study tested two hypotheses related to principals’ and superintendents’ use of these factors. The first hypothesis stated that principals and superintendents do not emphasize the same factors in the selection process. In order to test this hypothesis, an exploratory factor analysis was performed on the principals’ and superintendents’ data from the questionnaire. The results supported this hypothesis. As can be seen from the Table 2, principals tend to give more consideration to organizational level factors (POF) than do superintendents, based on the sets of factor loadings that resulted from the factor analysis. Although the full set of factors did not cleanly separate, it is clear that the most significant factor set dealt completely with organizational items. Principals primarily focus on factors that relate to the culture of the school and to their vision for the school. The factor sets that account for less of the explained variance are almost entirely composed of job-related items. It is logical that principals are interested in the smooth operation of the school and how well the staff work together and relate to one another. Principals appear to subordinate the job-related factors, detailing how well the applicant will meet the requirements for the specific teaching position, to the smooth operation of the building as a whole. This is particularly important, depending on the principal’s management and communication style and how well the staff follows the principal’s guidelines and decisions.

At the same time, superintendents tend to give more consideration to job-related factors (PJF) during the teacher selection process. Table 3 shows that the initial factor derived from the superintendents’ data includes only PJFs, and with the exception of one anomalous PJF item appearing in Factor 2, the factors separated cleanly. The items comprising the most significant factor set all relate to how well the applicant manages direct contact with students, in the performance of his or her job. The organizational factors are subordinated by the superintendents. It seems that at the district level, the decision makers are particularly interested in how well the applicant can meet the qualifications for the specific job under consideration. The superintendents realize that, while the teachers will be working for them indirectly, they will have little to no direct contact with the individual teacher on a daily basis. Therefore, the superintendent is interested in getting the position filled by a qualified applicant and is willing to let the principal, who will deal with the teacher daily, make the determination as to how well the teacher will fit in with the current staff and whether the addition of this applicant will affect the school’s organizational culture. These findings are in direct opposition to those found in the business-related study that was the inspiration for this research.

The second hypothesis stated that there was a difference in the level of consideration given each separate item between principals and superintendents. Independent t-tests were used to test this hypothesis. The results show that this hypothesis was partially supported. Of the 24 items tested, two were found to differ significantly in level of consideration between the principals and the superintendents. These items were: (a) input drive and (b) beliefs. In both cases, superintendents gave a higher level of consideration to the item. To explain these findings, one must take into account the effect that district resources have on the superintendent’s thought processes. A district has a finite amount of resources, particularly financial resources. The superintendent has the ultimate responsibility for the judicious use of these resources, so s/he must always factor them into decisions, particularly hiring decisions. Input drive in a teacher is that characteristic that causes him or her to continually seek “ideas, materials, and experiences” to use with students.

If a district’s financial position is weak, the superintendent will naturally look for the teacher who will make the best use of the available resources. Given this proposition, it is logical that a superintendent will give special consideration to a teacher who actively seeks ways to make the best use of resources. This will also be a consideration of the principal, but s/he will normally consider only the impact at the building level, not at the next level.

In terms of superintendents giving more consideration to an applicant’s beliefs, the same argument can be made as for input drive, namely, the best use of district resources. The applicant will work daily with the principal and the building staff and should “fit” into the school’s culture. However, the superintendent has to look at the larger picture, and attempt to determine whether the applicant’s personal values fit with the district’s, as a whole. The cost of hiring a teacher are considerable and hiring one who may work well with the school staff but creates problems at the district level can be enormous, in terms of both financial costs and district morale. Therefore, the superintendent must look beyond how well an applicant matches the values at the school level.

It is comforting to find that both principals and superintendents give approximately the same level of consideration to most of the items on the questionnaire. At least, all of the items are considered during the selection process, even though the items are considered differently at each level.

Table 2. Factor Analysis Factors and Descriptive Statistics for Principals

Final Factors for Principals	Factor Loading	Factor Type	N	Mean	SD
<u>Factor 1</u>					
Vision	.850	POF	63	2.92	0.73
Goals	.767	POF	63	3.49	0.56
Principles	.700	POF	63	3.49	0.56
Implicit rules	.686	POF	63	2.80	0.86
Traditions	.569	POF	63	2.52	0.67
Policies	.489	POF	63	2.76	0.78
<u>Factor 2</u>					
Empathetic	.810	PJF	63	3.16	0.60
Input drive	.763	PJF	63	3.17	0.57
Rapport-seeking	.733	PJF	63	3.28	0.54
Desire for self-improvement	.543	PJF	63	3.48	0.64
<u>Factor 3</u>					
Focused	.854	PJF	63	3.65	0.56
Stimulating	.705	PJF	63	3.44	0.61
Innovative	.682	PJF	63	3.44	0.59
Ability to motivate	.605	PJF	63	3.48	0.55
<u>Factor 4</u>					
Values	.848	POF	63	3.29	0.61
Beliefs	.751	POF	63	3.08	0.79
Norms	.556	POF	63	2.77	0.65
Character	.512	PJF	63	3.70	0.46
<u>Factor 5</u>					
Disciplinary skills	.681	PJF	63	3.56	0.53
Stay on task	.542	PJF	63	3.16	0.57
Efficient planning skills	.499	PJF	63	3.33	0.60
<u>Factor 6</u>					
Competent	.817	PJF	63	3.89	0.36
Communication skills	.687	PJF	63	3.76	0.47
<u>Factor 7</u>					
Mission congruence	.579	POF	63	3.00	0.68

Table 3. Factor Analysis Factors and Descriptive Statistics for Superintendents

Final Factors for Superintendents	Factor Loading	Factor Type	N	Mean	SD
<u>Factor 1</u>					
Stimulating	.696	PJF	81	3.34	0.57
Innovative	.674	PJF	81	3.43	0.57
Input drive	.645	PJF	81	3.36	0.58
Focused	.542	PJF	81	3.59	0.56
Ability to motivate	.525	PJF	81	3.57	0.59
Stay on task	.463	PJF	81	3.16	0.68
<u>Factor 2</u>					
Policies	.726	POF	81	2.76	0.66
Implicit rules	.714	POF	81	2.81	0.59
Principles	.617	POF	81	3.43	0.54
Disciplinary skills	.544	PJF	81	3.47	0.53
Traditions	.505	POF	81	2.64	0.61
<u>Factor 3</u>					
Beliefs	.874	POF	81	3.33	0.63
Values	.627	POF	81	3.48	0.64
Desire for self-Improvement	.611	PJF	81	3.64	0.48
Norms	.552	POF	81	2.87	0.62
<u>Factor 4</u>					
Empathetic	.741	PJF	81	3.31	0.60
Rapport-seeking	.737	PJF	81	3.30	0.57
Mission congruence	.454	POF	81	3.10	0.64
<u>Factor 5</u>					
Vision	.832	POF	81	2.95	0.74
Goals	.745	POF	81	3.43	0.55
<u>Factor 6</u>					
Efficient planning Skills	.703	POF	81	3.43	0.59
<u>Factor 7</u>					
Competent	.779	PJF	81	3.93	0.26
Communication skills	.701	PJF	81	3.81	0.39
<u>Factor 8</u>					
Character	.845	PJF	81	3.81	0.39

### Contributions of This Research to Knowledge in HRD

The use of the fit concept is new to the education field. This is the first study to look at specific items that are considered during the teacher selection process, from the fit perspective. This study has shown that principals and superintendents emphasize different types of items when they interview teacher applicants. Principals place more emphasis on items related to how well the applicant will fit into the school organization, while the superintendent emphasizes more job-related items, to make sure that the applicant is fully qualified for the specific teaching position.

In addition, this study showed that non job-related factors (POF) are indeed considered in the selection process for a teacher. How can this pattern of factor consideration continue, if the superintendent is violating federal statutes and guidelines, consciously or unconsciously? The findings from this exploratory study can be used for a more in-depth look at this phenomenon, perhaps nationally. If the results of a more widespread study are consistent with these findings, this information should be brought to the attention of policy makers. There might be a real need for changes in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines promulgated for the selection process. It might be necessary to allow some non job-related factors to be overtly considered.

At the same time, it would be wise to alert school districts to these findings, to make the administrators aware of the patterns of the findings from this initial study. Although organizations exist that train district personnel in interviewing and selection techniques, there is no evidence that they are aware of the use of POF and PJF factors in selection processes. These findings could also be integrated into the training provided by these organizations. This work provides fundamental information that is important in the teacher selection process.

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