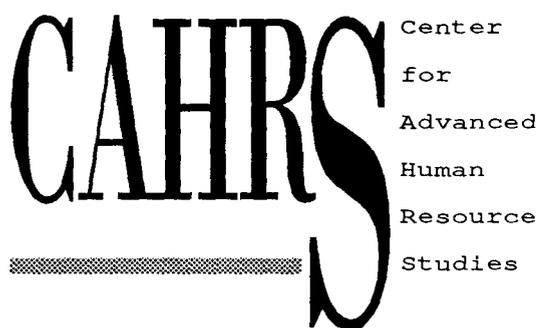


THE ELUSIVE
CRITERION OF FIT
IN EMPLOYMENT
INTERVIEW
DECISIONS

Working Paper 91-26

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The Elusive Criterion of Fit in Employment Interview Decisions

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This paper has not undergone formal review or approval of the faculty of the ILR School. It is intended to make results of Center research, conferences, and projects available to others interested in human resource management in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions.

Running Head: FIT AND THE INTERVIEW

Abstract

The employment interview has had an interesting history of being both widely condemned by researchers and widely used by practitioners. Little attention in past research has been directed at attempts to explain this apparent incongruity. It is proposed in this paper that part of the explanation may lie in the way researchers have defined the criterion when studying the validity of the interview. Namely, the construct of fit may lead to a reconsideration of the usefulness of the interview in personnel selection decisions. In support of this argument, a conceptual model of the selection process which incorporates fit as a central construct is proposed. Furthermore, fit is conceptualized as not simply a passive process, but rather the outcome of active influence attempts by candidates to manage impressions and meanings. Finally, implications for practice and research on the interview are discussed.

The Elusive Criterion of Fit in Employment Interview Decisions

Probably no personnel procedure has been as widely studied or as heavily criticized as the employment interview. Hundreds of studies have been published over the last eighty years investigating both the validity of the interview in selection decisions and the psychological processes that influence the outcomes. Ten comprehensive research reviews on the subject have been published, the first in 1949 and the most recent in 1989, each integrating many studies in order to arrive at some generalizations about the interview. The ten reviews reached similar conclusions, the most significant probably being: 1) the reliability and validity of the interview is low; 2) there are many psychological biases that cause the interviewer to make inaccurate decisions; and 3) the interview is often an inhibiting factor in the selection process.¹ Many have taken the unfavorable conclusions of these reviews and simply recommended against using the interview. For example, Howell and Dipboye (1982) stated, "...interviews as typically conducted are of limited practical value. They are subject to all sorts of biasing influences, and what information they do yield is irrelevant or could probably be obtained more efficiently in other ways" (p. 251). Heneman, Schwab, Fossum, and Dyer (1986) concluded, "In short, there is little reason to believe that the employment interview is efficiently accomplishing its selection purpose" (p. 320). While recent reviews (e.g., Harris, 1989) seem to have taken a more positive outlook than earlier ones, the general belief persists that the interview is not particularly valid (cf. Eder & Ferris, 1989).

Despite the condemnations of those researching the interview, it remains the most widely used selection procedure. Early work by Spriegel and James (1957) found that of 852 companies sampled, 99% used the interview in their selection decisions. Dipboye and Howell (1982) reported the results of a more recent study finding that 91% of the organizations surveyed required at least two interviews prior to a selection decision, and

¹ The ten studies are: Wagner (1949); Mayfield (1964); Ulrich and Trumbo (1965); Wright (1969); Schmitt (1976); Arvey and Campion (1982); Hakel (1982); Webster (1982); Eder & Buckley (1988); and Harris (1989).

that 62% of those responsible for the final hiring decision considered the interviewer's impression the most important factor. A survey conducted by the Bureau of National Affairs (1976) reported that 56% of companies surveyed considered the interview the most important component of their selection procedure. Thus, researchers have seen their pessimistic assessments largely disregarded, while the continuing use of the interview leads one to believe that the practitioners remained convinced that researchers' conclusions about the interview are either incorrect or inapplicable to themselves. This unfortunate disaccord has remained basically unchanged for almost fifty years. Noticeably absent from the selection literature are attempts to answer the obvious question: why does such an ostensibly poor measure continue to be used (Dreher, Ash, & Hancock, 1988)?

The purpose of this paper is to provide one possible answer to this question. It is proposed that one of the reasons behind the continuing use of the interview is that the interview is used for reasons other than identifying candidates with the highest productivity potential. It is argued that the notion of fit, elusive and ill-defined as it typically has been, may be a constructive way to understand the use, and usefulness, of the interview. Before discussing fit and its application to understanding the interview, past evidence of the problems with the interview is reviewed. Then, it is argued that criterion definition has been a central limitation in attempts to evaluate the usefulness of the interview.

Past Research on the Interview

The low validity of the interview suggested by past research has stimulated a great deal of interest in uncovering the factors that contribute to its poor reliability and validity. Sources of error identified by past research include: contrast effects (Carlson, 1970; Hakel, Ohnensorge & Dunnette, 1970; Rowe, 1967; Wexley, Sanders, & Yukl, 1973; Wexley, Yukl, Kovacs, & Sanders, 1972); primacy effects (Anderson, 1960; Crowell, 1961; McDonald & Hakel, 1985; Springbett, 1958); recency effects (Farr, 1973); early decisions (Springbett, 1958); stereotypes (Bolster & Springbett, 1961; Hakel, Hollman, & Dunnette, 1970; London & Hakel, 1974; Mayfield & Carlson, 1966; Rowe, 1963; Sydiaha, 1959, 1961);

hypothesis confirmation strategies (Snyder & Swan, 1978); negative information (Bolster & Springbett, 1961; Hollman, 1972; Rowe, 1963; Springbett, 1958); similarity effects (Baskett, 1973; Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wiback, 1975; Ledvinka, 1971, 1972, 1973; Peters & Terborg, 1975; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sattler, 1970; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1974); and nonverbal behavior (Dittman, 1962; Washburn & Hakel, 1973). The preponderance of factors and the sheer volume of research on decision errors in the interview is indirect testimony to the widespread belief among researchers that the interview is not a valid or useful selection measure.

That past research has identified errors existing in the interview has caused many to develop means to improve the conduct of, and decisions based on, the interview. These have included structured interviews (Carlson, Schwab, & Heneman, 1970; Grant & Bray, 1969; Jackson, Peacock, & Holden, 1982; Janz, 1982; Schwab & Heneman, 1969), situational interviews (Latham, Saari, Purcell, & Campion, 1980; Maurer & Fay, 1988), and interviewer training (Campion & Campion, 1987; Howard & Dailey, 1979; Maurer & Fay, 1988). However, it is not clear that these efforts to "build a better mousetrap" have made or will make the interview yield validity coefficients equal to those of more respected selection devices (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986).

A relatively few researchers have defended the validity of the interview on various grounds. Perhaps the most influential criticism of past validation studies on the interview was forwarded by Dreher et al. (1988). They argued that the validity of the interview has been underestimated by employing flawed methodologies in interview research. Specifically, Dreher et al. (1988) argued that studies that fail to take into account interviewer competence and rating style (which characterizes most research on the interview) has resulted in biased validity coefficients. Zedeck, Tziner, and Middlestadt (1983) have also argued that a focus on individual interviewers is important in evaluating the interview. Several criticisms by others also have focused on the role of study characteristics, including artificiality or so called "paper people" (Arvey, 1979; Gorman,

Clover, & Doherty, 1978; Landy & Bates, 1973; McGovern, James, & Morris, 1979), and use of student interviewers (Arvey, 1979; Barr & Hitt, 1986; Bernstein, Hakel, & Harlan, 1975; Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wiback, 1975). Cumulatively, it appears clear that past research methodologies have lead to an underestimate of the validity of the interview (Harris, 1989).

However, it is probably safe to assume that managers have at least some knowledge of the validity evidence on the interview (Dreher & Maurer, 1989). Thus, managers may continue to use the interview despite the past validity evidence. Past research investigating methods why interview validity is underestimated does not necessarily resolve the incongruity between research conclusions about the interview and its practical application in organizations.

Furthermore, while the validity of the interview may be improved when considering the above arguments, a different perspective is taken here. Researchers have implicitly assumed that the usefulness of the interview rests on the basis of a validity coefficient calculated between scores on the interview and job performance or productivity measures. While validity is indeed important, it is not the only means of evaluating the interview. It is proposed here that the inclusion of fit in the criterion is an important factor to consider in evaluating the interview, and may lead researchers to more positive conclusions about the usefulness of the interview.

Re-Evaluating the Criterion

The Nature of the Criterion

Much of the past efforts of performance appraisal researchers has been based on the assumption that the way performance is typically measured in organizations is fraught with problems. While many of these are measurement problems that deflate the obtained validity coefficients for all selection measures, there may be limitations in the use of performance information that influence judgments of the interview specifically. Consider the manner in which performance is typically evaluated. The attempt to improve

appraisals generally has been manifested in attempts to measure performance more objectively (Latham, Fay, & Saari, 1979; Latham & Wexley, 1977; Smith & Kendall, 1963). In essence, this attempt is to partial affective "biases" out of the appraisal, in order to obtain an accurate measure of employee's actual productivity.

While these efforts are laudable for their intentions, it is far from clear that efforts to improve the measurement of performance have resulted in much success (Landy & Farr, 1980). More important for the purposes of this paper, these efforts may have omitted some important criteria in organizations. The value of an employee in an organization may be assessed to a significant extent by supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers. The appraisal by these groups of the value of a particular employee to themselves or to the organization is unlikely to rest solely on an individual's production capabilities. Appraiser affect toward the subordinate has been found to influence judgments of subordinate performance (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1991; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Affect may influence evaluations for a reason -- that reason may be that it is important to the supervisor to have someone they like, and feel comfortable with, working for them. Thus, liking influences their evaluation of the subordinate. Attempts to partial affect out of performance evaluations is based on the assumption that affect represents error variance. However, it is possible that employees who are liked (or more likeable) deserve to receive higher evaluations in the sense that they are more valuable to supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers. Some employees are pleasant to be around, seem to think the way we do, and otherwise contribute to the interpersonal climate of the organization (James & James, 1989).

There is probably some value in this. Hostile organizational climates may lead to lower employee attitudes (Mitchell, 1982), which can lead to other costly behaviors that are not assessed in a performance evaluation (e.g., turnover, unionization, sabotage, etc.). Perhaps more importantly, when organizations select workers, while certainly they rely on technical qualifications, interpersonal dynamics often play a large role in the interview

process (Liden & Parsons, 1989). In fact, interpersonal similarity between interviewer and interviewee has been found to influence interviewer ratings of hirability (Dalessio & Imada, 1984; Orpen, 1984). Thus, if the interpersonal orientation of the employee is important beyond its ability to contribute to productivity, the way we measure performance as a representation of the value of an employee to an organization is deficient in this respect. As demonstrated later, this has direct implications for our evaluation of the interview.

Thus, the way performance is measured may be deficient in that it does not fully capture the perceived value of employees to the organization (i.e., value that extends beyond employees' possession of key knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the job). In fact, Dreher and Maurer (1989) have argued that the criteria used in evaluating the interview need to be expanded. Efforts to remove affect from evaluations may only result in removing fit from the criterion under the assumption that this is error variance. The position we are taking here is that affect and fit reflect valid, job-relevant variance with substantive implications for employment interview outcomes. This is crucial, because the conclusions researchers draw about the value of the interview may depend on the way the criterion is conceptualized. However, as we see next, the construct of fit has retained only anecdotal status until quite recently because of its lack of precision and definition.

The Notion of Fit

Most investigations of fit have been plagued by imprecision, emphasizing nebulous terms such as "right types" (Klimoski & Strickland, 1977; Schneider, 1987). Rynes and Gerhart (1990) have argued that such notions add little to understanding fit. An explicit definition of fit is needed to clear the conceptual ambiguity in the construct. Fit was defined by Chatman (1989) as the degree to which the goals and values of the applicant or employee match those of employees considered successful in the organization. It is possible to add to Chatman's definition a more global construct -- the degree to which the applicant is liked by the interviewer, co-worker, supervisor, or subordinate may be a direct outcome

of fit. Those who fit are liked by others, those who do not fit are not liked by organizational members. Because most interviewers and supervisors probably consider themselves successful employees, as applied to the interview this may actually translate into how closely the applicant resembles and is liked by the interviewer(s). Similarity effects have been a frequently mentioned source of variance in the performance evaluation process (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984). Perceived similarity between the interviewer and applicant appears to influence interviewer evaluations as well. Baskett (1973), Frank and Hackman (1973), Peters and Terborg (1975), and Schmitt (1976) all reported that similarity between interviewer and interviewee favorably affected interviewer evaluation of the applicant. Since managers may prefer individuals similar to themselves (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989b), similarity may be one way to construe fit. However, fit has not been explicitly included as a manifestation of this similarity.

Central to understanding the importance of fit to organizations lies in understanding what including fit in the criterion may accomplish for organizations. Four possibilities are suggested here: 1) Fit as a control mechanism, whereby selecting individuals with certain norms, beliefs, goals, and values, the organization imports control. Thus, rather than gaining control through socialization processes, control is achieved through the selection process; 2) Fit as workforce homogeneity, where selecting similar people creates, or maintains, a homogeneous, not heterogeneous, workforce. This leads to differing policy implications, as homogeneity can lead to groupthink (Schneider, 1983) and discrimination against members of the outgroup (Pfeffer, 1983); 3) Fit as a job-related criterion. With the growth in the service sector, hiring on the basis of fit to climate, values, or consumer orientation is indeed job-relevant, resulting in more effective employees being selected (Schneider & Bowen, in press); 4) Fit as an organizational image enhancer. If employees are selected who accurately reflect the preferences of management, the predictability of employee public behavior is increased, and thus consistent with the image the organization wishes to project. While we do not fully explore these organizational implications of fit,

these alternative definitions and uses of fit suggest some possible implications of fit for organizations depending on how one defines fit.

Using Fit to Re-Evaluate the Interview

If fit can reasonably be conceptualized as representing the goals and values of an individual and directly manifested by the degree to which the individual is liked by others, the interview would seem to be situated better than other selection measures to assess the goals, values, and perceived likability of the applicant. In fact, past research has indirectly supported this proposition by showing that interviewer judgments seem to predict subjective performance better than objective measures of performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984). Similarity effects have been demonstrated in both interviewer judgments (Keenan, 1977; Orpen, 1984) and performance evaluations (Ferris et al., 1991; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). If assessments of fit "contaminate" these judgments, this evidence would suggest that the interview will predict fit better than objective performance or productivity.

Removal of this affective component (a manifestation of fit) in an attempt to make the performance evaluation process more objective (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984), may particularly influence validity coefficients of the interview if the interview predicts supervisor affect toward the subordinate better than objective performance. Thus, removing affect (as an instrumental outcome of perceived fit) from performance evaluations may only insure that the interview does not predict the criterion, if the "true" criterion should include both interpersonal fit and objective performance. Yet, as has been argued here, affect is not irrelevant to judgments of employee value. Even if performance evaluations were totally free of affective processes, supervisor and co-worker affect toward the subordinate or fellow co-worker may be a legitimate criterion in itself.

Chatman (1989) has argued that organizations may continue to use the interview not to evaluate the technical qualifications of applicants, but rather to assess how well how the applicants' values and norms will fit in the organization. Thus, while some selection methods are suitable for judging technical qualifications (e.g., ability tests, work samples,

biographical information, and so on), the interview may be ideally suited to assess fit. If Chatman's arguments are true, it suggests re-evaluating the interview based on its potential to contribute to the fit of the worker in the organization.

Interpersonal Influence and Fit

Practitioners in the selection area have long recognized that there is a strong incentive on the part of applicants to actively manage the impressions selection decision-makers form of them. It has been a relatively recent development, however, that researchers investigating selection decisions, particularly the interview, have systematically examined the effect of impression management on selection decisions. Some theoretical works have appeared on the role of impression management in the selection process. For example, Jones and Pittman (1982) and Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) developed taxonomies regarding specific types of behaviors applicants engage in to manage impressions in the interview. It is clear that, in general, impression management by applicants influences interviewer judgments. In fact, in a recent study, impression management techniques were found to have a more powerful effect on interviewer judgments than objective qualifications (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989a).

The significant relationship between perceived similarity and interviewer evaluations was reviewed earlier. Perhaps one of the more important goals of those using influence tactics in the selection process is to increase the evaluator's perception of the fit between the applicant and organization. In concept, this transcends similarity between the interviewer and interviewee to similarity between the applicant and the organization's culture. It may be that the specific influence tactics used depend on the situation, but the overall goal of enhancing the perception of congruence between the characteristics one has to offer and what the organization values remains the same. Therefore, the notion of fit may hold the promise of explaining how and why individuals seek to manage impressions in the interview, and the extent to which they are effective in doing so.

Research has demonstrated that the extent to which an applicant is perceived to fit the job, culture, or organization substantially increases the applicant's likelihood of receiving a job offer (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Fit may be inherently vague, which allows it to take a number of forms and permits applicants to play upon this ambiguity and exercise a greater degree of influence over the selection process and outcomes. For example, fit has been viewed as attitude similarity between applicant and interviewer/evaluator, and such perceived similarity in attitudes has been associated with more favorable evaluations (e.g., decisions to hire) of job applicants (e.g., Peters & Terborg, 1975; Schmitt, 1976). Fit also has been interpreted with respect to appearance, personality, and values, and the extent to which each of these is consistent with some expected or desired level. Molloy (1975) elevated appearance and dress to a higher level in the role it is believed to play in interpersonal evaluations including personnel selection decisions. Recent research has shown that appearance affects interviewer judgments (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990).

The research on fit reviewed earlier suggested that assessments of fit typically have focused on the personality of the applicant. Organizations certainly differ in their strategic mission. Since differing strategic missions may require individuals possessing particular personality traits, it seems reasonable to expect that overall personality composition of employees significantly differs by organization. Several writers in the strategy literature have emphasized that the match between the characteristics of the individual and the strategic characteristics of the organization are of central importance in determining organizational success (Gupta, 1984; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Szilagyi & Schweiger, 1984). For example, an organization that has typically pursued an aggressive business strategy may be more likely to have aggressive employees. If so, the organization may desire to hire aggressive employees in the future. If the applicant perceived the personality desired, he or she might seek to manage the way in which his or her personality is perceived. If the interviewer, for example, presents the impression that cohesiveness and

cooperation is very important to the organization, the applicant may take particular care not to appear aggressive or stubborn.

It may be that personality of the interviewer alone is the dominant effect. The applicant may not be aware of the personality of the other organization members, only the interviewer's. If the interviewer displays certain attributes, the applicant may seek to match the actions that manifest the traits. The interviewer displaying certain actions makes it more likely that the applicant will act in a reciprocal fashion. Thus, in such cases, the applicant has effectively managed the shared meaning of personality similarity and the interviewer may well recommend hiring due to perceived fit to the job (when it is actually perceived similarity to himself or herself). Research on personality and fit has shown that job applicants who possess personality characteristics congruent with the job for which they are being evaluated tend to be judged as more suitable for that job (Paunonen, Jackson, & Oberman, 1987).

Influence Dynamics and Affect

Whereas some research to date has demonstrated that applicant influence tactics affect interviewer judgments, we need to more carefully consider the intermediate linkages or processes by which such effects operate. Essentially, the argument we make here is that particular types of influence behaviors demonstrated by applicants are more effective than others in conveying an image of fitting the employment context, which leads to increased affect by the interviewer, which, in turn, leads to evaluations of increased suitability of the applicant. A more focused examination of each of these linkages follows.

Research on information processing and social cognition has suggested that individuals attempt to conform to situational norms in the behavior they demonstrate (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The notion of "situated identities" suggests that in every social setting, a pattern of social interaction exists which conveys the best identity for that situation (Alexander & Knight, 1971; Gergen & Taylor, 1969). People can use their knowledge of situated identities to demonstrate behavior patterns which can prove

personally beneficial. Such behavior patterns likely incorporate aspects of both form and substance, since it has been argued that both play a role in the effectiveness of influence attempts (Drake & Moberg, 1986). Indeed, one can imagine how both aspects must be critical to the effectiveness of particular influence attempts. For example, an influence tactic exhibited in an inappropriate situation, or to an inappropriate degree, might be construed as manipulative by the target and fail to achieve its objectives (Jones, 1964). Godfrey, Jones, and Lord (1986) found that ingratiation and self-promotion are quite different behaviors with different consequences, and some recent employment interview research has demonstrated the differential effectiveness of particular influence tactics (Dipboye & Wiley, 1977, 1978; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1990; Tullar, 1989).

Perceived similarity between interviewer and interviewee is believed to lead to increased affect and subsequently higher evaluations of the applicant by the interviewer, drawing from the theoretical work on interpersonal similarity and attraction (Byrne, 1969). Similarity on some characteristics, such as the demographic characteristics of gender and age, defies applicant manipulation (unless they are quite creative). Although such demographic similarity has been found to favorably affect decision maker evaluations (Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Tsui & O' Reilly, 1989), it is a result of objective characteristics, and thus falls into the category of passive fit mentioned above. In addition, assessments are made of the extent to which applicants reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and interpersonal characteristics which are similar to some evaluative standard (e.g., the job, the organization, or the interviewer). Such characteristics and resulting determination of fit are indeed susceptible to active manipulation by applicants (Ferris et al., 1991).

The similarity - affect - evaluation linkages can be better understood by considering theory and research on social cognition. Motowidlo (1986) has developed a cognitive model of personnel decisions in which he argues that behaviors of the actor can be virtually simultaneously observed by the target and transformed and stored as evaluative and affective reactions. That is, an observed behavior of an applicant can be affectively and

evaluatively perceived by the interviewer as connoting something favorable or unfavorable about the applicant. Furthermore, positive affect presumably increases cognitive flexibility which is the ability to perceive associations among stimuli and dimensions not normally connected (Isen & Baron, 1991). Positive affect also stimulates a search for (and recall of) information consistent with the positive state, thus contributing to higher evaluations of the individual applicant. It needs to be noted that this process may well operate regardless of the extent to which the applicant is "actually" qualified, competent, and so forth for the job in question. A further complicating factor is the type of fit assessment used. As we noted before, different determinations can be made based on to what extent the applicant is perceived to fit the job, the group, or the organization, realizing that fit or similarity to the interviewer may cloud all three of these assessments.

Model of Fit in the Selection Process

In order to summarize our propositions in hope of stimulating future research, a model of fit in the selection process is presented in Figure 1. First, it is hypothesized in Figure 1 that similarity, in terms of goals and values, will lead to higher assessments of applicant fit. This similarity is defined in terms of a match between goals and values of the applicant and those of the interviewer(s). It is then hypothesized that this match, defined as fit, will lead to interviewer liking of the applicant. Applicant interpersonal fit and interviewer liking of the applicant, in turn, are hypothesized to lead to higher evaluations of the applicant's hirability by the interviewer. The dimensions (as goals and values) used to categorize fit and affect or liking as the most immediate outcome of fit are by no means conclusive. However, they are dimensions of fit that have figured prominently in discussions of the construct. Judge and Bretz (1991) have discussed fit in terms of Ravlin and Meglino's (1987, 1989) four value classifications. Chatman (1989) also has discussed fit in terms of goals and values. Furthermore, drawing from the well established similarity - attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1969), it has been suggested that fit probably operates on selection decisions through its influence on liking (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Ferris, King,

Judge, & Kacmar, 1991). Figure 1 also shows that influence behavior, based on the previous discussion, is expected to affect both perceptions of fit and liking.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The model does not assume that fit exclusively leads to a hire or reject decision. The match between the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the applicant and the technical requirements of the position are also hypothesized to influence the hiring decision. Further, the model predicts that fit can best be assessed by the interview. Conversely, the match between the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the applicant and the technical requirements of the position is hypothesized to best be predicted by less subjective measures (e.g., ability tests, work samples).

Understanding of the construct of fit also depends on the benchmark or reference point against which the individual is compared in order to assess fit. That is, one could assess the degree of fit to the group (Ferris, Youngblood, & Yates, 1985), the job (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990), or the organization (Schneider & Bowen, in press). One would expect some degree of similarity between these sources (i.e., employees who fit in the job are more likely to fit in the group and the organization). For example, Rynes and Gerhart (1990) found that interviewers within the same organization gave more similar evaluations of job candidates' firm- or job-specific employability than did interviewers from different organizations. However, it is quite possible that some differences would be observed between these sources. Our model does not attempt to make a distinction between these sources. We assume that all may operate on interviewer judgments of fit. However, it would be useful for future research to investigate possible differences when considering fit at the job, group, and organizational levels.

Implications for the Interview

Implications for Research

Clearly the construct of fit needs further investigation. Rynes and Gerhart (1989) and Bretz, Rynes, and Gerhart (1991) have offered data in support of the construct. The model proposed here is one attempt to capture the implications of the construct for selection decisions. This model needs to be tested. Fundamental to supporting the model is that matches between goals and values of the interviewer(s) and interviewee lead to higher interviewer evaluations of the interviewee, and that interviewer liking of the interviewee results from this match and subsequently leads to higher evaluations. This would support the existence of a fit construct influencing interviewer evaluations.

Perhaps more central to this paper, research would need to demonstrate that the interview predicts fit better than other selection measures predict fit. This might be done by relating interviewer evaluations of applicant hirability to both interviewer and interviewee assessments of goals, values, and interviewer liking of the applicant. Subsequently, hirability ratings could be related to fit and job performance once the individual is on the job. If interviewer evaluations did not predict these assessments of fit better than measures of objective performance, the framework presented in this model would be incorrect. However, caution needs to be exercised in how such research is conducted and thus the interpretations made. For example, as noted by Ferris and Judge (1991) and Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989), frequently operating managers conduct interviews and make final decisions on those to be hired who will work for them. If a manager hires a candidate, he or she is implicitly making a statement that they expect the person to succeed, which will likely influence the subsequent performance evaluations they will give the worker. So, such inherent bias may cloud the accurate interpretation of the true predictor - criterion relationship.

If these hypotheses were supported, it would suggest that many researchers have erred in condemning the interview. By construing the criterion too narrowly, researchers

may have ignored the principal contribution of the interview in selection decisions. Further research on fit is also merited. For example, do those organizations that have a closer overall fit between their employees and management realize better overall performance and organizational effectiveness? If not, but if the construct influences evaluations nonetheless, managers may be sacrificing company profits/organizational effectiveness in order to meet their own personal desires.

Also needed is research mapping the construct of fit. To date, we only have a nebulous idea of its nature. We need to more precisely articulate the nature of the fit construct as well as intermediate steps which characterize the dynamic process through which it operates. Work by Bretz et al. (1991) is helpful in that regard.

Implications for Practice

If the central thesis of this paper is correct, it suggests that use of the interview should depend on the staffing strategy of the organization -- what is the relative trade-off of technical qualifications versus interpersonal fit issues? Further, selection procedures should be matched to the criterion they are trying to predict. If one wants to predict productivity potential, why use the interview? We know ability tests, work samples, and the like do a better job of that than the interview probably ever will. However, organizations who also want to examine fit should use the interview to assess it. A multi-measure procedure, using different methods to achieve different predictions, would seem to be the ideal strategy.

Research on the role of the interview in assessing fit holds the promise of increasing our knowledge regarding the utility of the interview in organizations and the usefulness of the concept of fit. If the principal hypotheses are supported, it will suggest that human resource practitioners have not been as errant in their use of the interview as we have been led to believe. Further, calls for structured interviews as a way to improve the validity of the interview (Latham, Saari, Purcell, and Campion, 1980; Schwab & Heneman, 1969; Carlson, Schwab & Heneman, 1970) may be misplaced if the true goal, and utility, of the

interview lies not in selecting the most technically qualified, but the individual most likely to fit into the organization. If this is the case, organizations might well be advised to use procedures other than the interview to assess overall qualifications, and use the interview to assess fit. However, structured interviews may still play an important role. To the extent that we can situationally define fit, we will want to insure that interviewers are accurately and reliably measuring applicant fit, and that might best be accomplished by structuring the interview in light of fit-related issues and dimensions.

The inclusion of fit as a criterion in the selection process also may have strategic implications for organizations. By selecting individuals consistent with overall business strategies, organizational performance may be enhanced. Writers in the strategy area have argued this to be the case (Gupta, 1984; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Szilagyi & Schweiger, 1984). A way to implement strategy is by designing an organization's culture to enhance strategic objectives (Butler, Ferris, & Napier, 1991). Firms may select employees who manifestly fit the existing culture. Schein (1990) contended that culture is perpetuated by the selection of new employees who already have the "right" set of beliefs and values. Similarly, others have contended that in order for a corporate culture to flourish, it is important that applicants fit into the existing value system of the organization (Fombrun, 1983). Thus, while using the interview to assess fit may not improve organizational performance through selection of employees with enhanced productive abilities, it may influence organizational effectiveness in the long run by matching the goals and values of the employee to those of the organization.

Conclusions

In a real sense, both the construct of fit and the use of the employment interview in organizations can be characterized as enigmas. Both are popular and have considerable intuitive appeal, yet neither has had a history of support in the research literature. In this paper, we have argued that evaluating the usefulness of the interview without considering fit may have lead to overly harsh judgments of the interview. The model proposed is an

attempt to stimulate research regarding the role of fit in interview decisions, and whether consideration of fit will lead to more positive conclusions about the interview.

A central assertion made in this paper is that fit is not a purely static concept. While fit has traditionally been viewed in a passive sense, as a match between person and organization characteristics, it was argued that fit also is a dynamic process, where impressions of fit are actively manipulated by the candidate. It would be useful for future research to investigate this proposition as well. The challenges that these issues pose for theory, research, and practice on the employment interview are nontrivial ones. The interview needs to be selectively utilized where it is most appropriate, as noted above. Additionally, interviewers must be well-prepared for their selection task by focusing on appropriate decision criteria in a way which will maximize decision outcomes.

Indeed, the fit construct has been an elusive one for both researchers and practitioners. We believe that fit can be a quite useful criterion, but not until it is more precisely defined and it is applied systematically and appropriately. In this paper, we have proposed some potentially useful steps which should both increase our understanding of fit and improve the effectiveness of the interview.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1: Model of employee fit in the selection process.

