

Commentary

Addressing employee misfit—A crucial HR concern for organizational success

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Abstract: In the rapidly evolving landscape of contemporary business, the strategic alignment of employees with their designated roles is a pivotal determinant of organizational success. Employee misfit, characterized by a misalignment between employees' skills, interests, and assigned roles, poses formidable challenges to individual and collective performance. This comprehensive research report delves into the intricate implications of employee misfit, explores evolving trends in career consciousness among job seekers, outlines the multifaceted challenges HR managers face, and fervently advocates for implementing a comprehensive selection process to address this prevalent issue effectively. The report underscores the proactive role of management in cultivating a supportive work environment, fostering diverse career pathways, and embedding an inclusive selection framework to confront and mitigate the persistent issue of employee misfit.

Keywords: employee misfit; job boredom; job crafting; HRM

In the rapidly evolving and fiercely competitive business milieu, the seamless alignment of employees with their designated roles has risen to paramount importance in pursuing organizational excellence. Employee misfit, typified by incongruence between employees' competencies, interests, and designated tasks, ushers in many challenges. These span from compromised individual job satisfaction to diminished performance and even the disruption of organizational cohesion. This comprehensive research report endeavors to explore the multifaceted implications of employee misfit, chart the unfolding trends in career consciousness among job seekers, elucidate the intricate challenges encountered by HR managers, and advocate resolutely for the widespread adoption of a comprehensive selection process that stands unwavering in the face of this pervasive concern. The report emphasizes the pivotal proactive role that management must undertake to foster a nurturing work environment, cultivate a landscape of diverse career trajectories, and embed an all-encompassing selection framework to navigate the labyrinthine issue of employee misfit effectively.

In the quest to unravel the determinants of business success, management scholars have extensively explored two distinct variants of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) framework. One school of thought emphasizes external market dynamics, viewing competitive advantage as an outcome primarily shaped by factors beyond the organization's immediate control. This "outside-in" approach, as articulated by Porter (1985), compels management to grapple with pivotal questions such as market selection and the strategic positioning of the business. Concurrently, another perspective delves into the internal strengths and weaknesses residing within the organization's purview. This perspective, famously known as the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, underscores the significance of an "inside-

out” approach. It directs attention to the management of resources within the firm’s domain, including human resources, thereby shaping the competitive advantage. The RBV forms the theoretical foundation that underscores the notion that Human Resource Management (HRM) can, in and of itself, serve as a source of sustained competitive advantage, transforming HR costs into strategic investments capable of yielding economic returns.

Acknowledging that workplace learning manifests in a myriad of settings extending beyond formal training, it is evident that learning is not confined to structured educational programs. Learning often arises incidentally through the daily demands and challenges of work, as well as through social interactions with colleagues, clients, and customers. However, the contours of learning experiences are significantly molded by the demands of the job itself. Certain roles broaden employees’ horizons, expose them to new perspectives, and encourage experimentation, fostering what can be described as “expansive” learning. In contrast, other jobs stress adherence to set procedures and well-defined boundaries, resulting in a more “restrictive” form of learning.

Recognizing the critical role that qualified employees play in ensuring organizational sustainability and competitiveness, organizations must create an environment conducive to their growth and development. The design of job roles, as proposed by Hackman and Oldham in their Job Characteristics Model, should encompass factors such as skill variety, job identity, and job significance, to render jobs both meaningful and motivating (De Sousa Sabbagha et al., 2018; Erdogan and Bauer, 2021). Notably, the concept of overqualified employees has gained attention in the realm of Human Resource Management (HRM), with some researchers suggesting that such employees can be seen as a form of human capital (Sesen and Ertan, 2020). Research underscores the significance of employee development programs as valuable tools for efficiently leveraging overqualified staff to achieve organizational objectives. However, the attainment of harmony between employee qualifications and job requirements, given exogenous factors, doesn’t always manifest as intended. This discrepancy can result from factors attributed to employees, organizations, and, on a broader scale, cultural beliefs, economic conditions, or employment policies.

Over nearly a century of extensive research, the concept of person-environment (PE) fit has emerged as a complex and pivotal precursor to various work-related outcomes. This intricate interplay between individuals and their surroundings has been meticulously explored by researchers, yielding a wealth of knowledge. Studies have revealed that a harmonious alignment between the individual and their work environment, characterized as a good fit, can lead to a range of favorable outcomes. These include reduced stress, heightened trust, improved team cohesion, increased job satisfaction, and a significant advantage for organizations in terms of decreased employee deviance, cynicism, withdrawal, and turnover. Additionally, enhanced performance, both in the context of tasks and within the broader organizational framework, has been observed.

Schneider’s attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model posits that self-selection and the natural attraction to similar individuals propel both employees and organizations towards homogeneity and fit. However, contemporary research has

illuminated the reality that misfits are prevalent in most employees' work situations. Misfit, positioned at the negative end of the fit spectrum, typically results in discomfort and incompatibility. Scholars are increasingly advocating for an in-depth examination of how individuals experience and navigate through misfit, as there is a growing understanding that it can be partially influenced by employees' cognitive processes and actions.

Over time, researchers have disentangled the multifaceted nature of PE fit, identifying several key dimensions, including person-organization (PO), person-job (PJ), person-group (PG), and person-supervisor (PS) fit. These dimensions have been quantitatively assessed through various methods, encompassing objective evaluations by comparing individual attributes to environmental attributes and perceptual assessments where individuals directly evaluate their own fit. Intriguingly, research has shown that perceived fit consistently outperforms objective assessments in predicting a broad array of outcomes, lending empirical support to the importance of studying individuals' subjective perceptions and experiences of fit.

It is widely accepted that perceived misfit is an uncomfortable and stressful experience. The ASA model postulates that employees with poor fit will likely, either voluntarily or involuntarily, exit their work environments. While empirical evidence broadly supports this assertion, there exist nuanced relationships between fit and various components such as attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors. For instance, research has unveiled strong correlations between perceived measures of PO fit and job attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, the link between perceived fit and actual turnover tends to be weaker, implying that individuals do not necessarily act immediately upon their dissatisfaction. They often find themselves in dynamic tension, experiencing misfits but not actively pursuing alternative opportunities.

Recent studies have explored the factors influencing this decision to tolerate misfits rather than seek new positions. Factors such as job mobility and embeddedness, which combine the influence of connections to the work environment, the desire to avoid turnover-related sacrifices, and the perception of fit, play crucial roles in employees' decisions to stay in a misfit situation. Moreover, the notion that employees evaluate their fit *in media res*, comparing their current situation to past experiences and future expectations, suggests that a state of misfit might not necessarily lead to immediate turnover if it is perceived as an improvement over previous misfit or if improvements are anticipated.

Scholars have long contended that mental well-being and adjustment hinge on achieving a harmonious alignment between employees' work-related expectations and their actual experiences. When such fit is lacking, a persistent sense of dissatisfaction, frustration, and unfulfilled goals tends to prevail. Yu's motivational model of PE fit offers an insightful perspective, suggesting that employees are highly motivated to alleviate the tension induced by misfit. To achieve this, they employ both conscious and unconscious efforts to transform their experiences of misfit into a sense of fit, actively seeking to reconcile their expectations with their actual experiences in the work environment.

In fact, a substantial body of evidence reveals that a considerable proportion of employees are, in fact, overqualified for their roles (Arvan et al., 2019). For example, countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Germany, the EU, China, and various parts of the world have witnessed instances where a significant portion of the workforce finds themselves overqualified for their current positions. This trend has been accentuated by increased labor market competitiveness, economic downturns, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gong et al., 2021). Overqualified individuals bring extensive qualifications to their roles, potentially contributing to organizational performance and creativity. However, there's a flip side to this coin. Overqualified employees may exhibit negative work attitudes, including a lack of willingness to exert additional effort. Consequently, the issue of overqualification has garnered attention from academics, practitioners, and business leaders.

Past research underscores the adverse consequences of perceived overqualification for both employees and organizations. It has been linked to low job satisfaction, demotivation, frustration, and adverse health effects (Wassermann et al., 2017; Chambel et al., 2021a). Despite extensive research, there remains an important gap in understanding the relationship between perceived overqualification and withdrawal behaviors, as well as the psychological underpinnings of this phenomenon. Delving into the “when,” “why,” and “how” of employee withdrawal in the context of perceived overqualification is an essential exploration. One of the pivotal facets of such withdrawal is Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), characterized by voluntary actions that harm an organization's goals, breach organizational rules, and undermine its well-being (Bakker et al., 2012).

This misfit often leads to feelings of job boredom when the work environment doesn't correspond with employees' interests or expectations. Overqualified individuals who perceive a mismatch between their qualifications and the responsibilities required in their position may find themselves experiencing boredom at work (Liu and Wang, 2012). In response, employees may proactively alter their work to align better with their needs, talents, and motivations, which could manifest as job crafting, defined as “self-initiated, proactive strategies to change the characteristics of one's job to better align it with personal needs, goals, and skills”. Examining whether job crafting mitigates the effect of perceived overqualification on job boredom is an area that warrants further exploration.

The ramifications of employee misfits reverberate through an organization's individual and collective layers, exerting an influence that extends far beyond the immediate impact. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) highlight the profound linkage between employee misfit and a spectrum of challenges, including dwindling job satisfaction, waning intrinsic motivation, surging stress levels, and even the emergence of conflicts within the workplace. However, its ramifications transcend the microcosm, influencing collaboration dynamics, stymieing innovation, and eroding the fabric of organizational culture. Hence, it becomes imperative to unravel and address the criticality of harmonizing employees' competencies, interests, and aspirations with their designated roles, as this alignment constitutes the bedrock of a harmonious work environment and the achievement of optimal organizational outcomes.

The landscape of career consciousness among job seekers has undergone a tectonic shift, necessitating a recalibration in how organizations approach the holistic process of employee selection and role alignment. In an era characterized by heightened awareness and empowered individual agency, job seekers actively seek roles that resonate with their long-term career aspirations and deeply-held personal values (Aguinis, 2013). The rigid adherence to traditional job molds has given way to a preference for positions that align with the fluid trajectory of individual career paths. This seismic shift mandates a re-evaluation of strategies by HR managers to ensure a harmonious synergy between job roles and the evolving career compass of candidates.

While HR managers wield considerable influence over employee recruitment and selection, the prevalent emphasis on technical prowess and qualifications can inadvertently overshadow the nuanced dimensions of “fit”, particularly the pivotal aspects of job satisfaction and pride in accomplishments (Roth et al., 1996; Judge et al., 2000). This unintended oversight can result in the placement of individuals lacking intrinsic motivation and a sense of fulfilment in their designated roles. Consequently, organizations grapple with instances of misfit that reverberate through the organizational framework, compromising efficiency and eroding engagement.

Effectively navigating the multifaceted challenge of employee misfit mandates an integrative approach encompassing diverse organizational strategy dimensions. Organizations should proactively offer an array of career trajectories that cater to diverse ambitions and aptitudes, encouraging employees to traverse a spectrum of roles within the organizational realm. This strategic diversification empowers employees to chart their growth paths, nurturing a culture of continuous learning, sustained job satisfaction, and unwavering engagement. Simultaneously, transparent dialogues between management and candidates emerge as an indispensable tool. By fostering candid conversations, organizations bridge the chasm between personal aspirations and professional roles, mitigating the spectre of employee misfits and fostering an era of heightened organizational synergy (O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

In the fluid dynamics of the modern workforce, conventional selection paradigms often fail to capture the intricate interplay of temperament and personal alignment. To circumvent the challenges posed by employee misfits, organizations must adopt an inclusive selection process encompassing temperament-based evaluations, rigorous aptitude and interest assessments, and holistic evaluations of attitude and personality traits (Aguinis, 2013; Cable and Judge, 1996). This comprehensive framework bestows organizations with profound insights into candidates’ suitability for specific roles, elevating the probability of identifying individuals inherently attuned to their designated positions.

In the context of an ever-evolving work landscape, the issue of employee misfit assumes seminal significance for organizations that aspire to carve a trajectory of enduring success. Discerning the pivotal roles played by job satisfaction and pride in accomplishments is instrumental in harmonizing individuals with their designated roles. Organizations must remain agile and adaptable to the shifting contours of career consciousness, steering the course by offering a diverse spectrum of career pathways and nurturing a milieu of unwavering support (Harrison et al., 1998). The strategic implementation of a comprehensive selection process emerges as a potent instrument

for identifying candidates poised to flourish in their designated roles. Through proactive interventions to address employee misfits, organizations stand to manifest an ecosystem of symbiotic collaboration, invigorated employee engagement, and overarching organizational triumph. The strategic investment in aligning the right individuals with the right positions becomes an indomitable cornerstone in navigating the ever-evolving expanse of the contemporary world of work.

The discussion revolves around the intricate dynamics of person-environment (PE) fit, which has been extensively studied over nearly a century in the context of work-related outcomes and business success. Two prominent frameworks have emerged in management scholarship, emphasizing external and internal factors that shape competitive advantage. The first, known as the “outside-in” approach, focuses on external market opportunities and threats and conceives competitive advantage as something gained outside the firm. This perspective, popularized by Porter in 1985, prompts managers to address practical questions such as market selection and strategic positioning. The second perspective, termed the “inside-out” approach, delves into the strengths and weaknesses of resources under the firm’s control. This perspective underscores the importance of resource management, including human resources, as a source of competitive advantage and is encapsulated in the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm.

Workplace learning, crucial for individual and organizational growth, occurs through various channels, extending beyond formal training programs. Learning happens incidentally through daily work experiences, as well as through social interactions with colleagues, clients, and customers. However, the nature of learning is often shaped by job demands. Some roles broaden employees’ horizons, promoting expansive learning, while others emphasize adherence to set procedures and boundaries, leading to more restrictive learning experiences.

Qualified employees are the lifeblood of organizations, contributing to sustainability and competitiveness. To foster a flourishing work environment, jobs should provide elements like skill variety, job identity, and job significance, as proposed by Hackman and Oldham in their Job Characteristics Model. However, a significant challenge arises when employees perceive themselves as overqualified for their roles. In the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), overqualified employees have been recognized as a form of human capital. Organizations must efficiently utilize these overqualified individuals to achieve their objectives through employee development programs.

Nonetheless, a critical discrepancy arises when the qualifications of employees do not align with job requirements. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as the individuals themselves, the organization, or broader cultural, economic, and policy contexts. A substantial body of research reveals that a significant portion of the workforce is, in fact, overqualified for their positions, with this trend being influenced by factors like labor market competition, economic downturns, and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While overqualified employees can bring extensive qualifications to their roles, they may exhibit negative work attitudes and be less willing to exert additional effort. This has drawn the attention of academics, practitioners, and business leaders.

Previous studies have shown that perceived overqualification has adverse consequences for both employees and organizations. It can lead to low job satisfaction, demotivation, frustration, and adverse health effects.

One aspect of the perceived overqualification (POQ) phenomenon that requires further exploration is its relationship with employee withdrawal behaviors, especially Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB). CWB refers to voluntary actions that undermine an organization's goals, contravene organizational rules, and jeopardize its well-being. Understanding the "when", "why", and "how" of employee withdrawal in the context of POQ is critical. Research suggests that the relationship between perceived overqualification and CWBs may be mediated by negative emotions and behaviors arising from a poor needs-supplies fit.

Moreover, job boredom is another issue that often plagues overqualified employees. A mismatch between their qualifications and job responsibilities can lead to boredom at work. Employees may attempt to alleviate this boredom through job crafting, which involves self-initiated efforts to reshape their job characteristics to align better with their needs, goals, and skills. Investigating whether job crafting can mitigate the effects of perceived overqualification on job boredom is a research area that warrants further exploration.

In summary, the dynamic interplay between individuals and their work environments, framed within the context of person-environment (PE) fit, has garnered significant attention in management scholarship. The two primary perspectives, the "outside-in" and "inside-out" approaches, provide valuable insights into the determinants of competitive advantage. Understanding the complexities of perceived overqualification (POQ) is essential, as it has significant implications for both individuals and organizations. Addressing issues related to job boredom and employee withdrawal behaviors, such as Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), is vital in the realm of Human Resource Management (HRM). A holistic understanding of these dynamics can inform strategies to better manage employee qualifications and enhance job experiences, ultimately benefiting both employees and organizations.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach to understanding the multifaceted issues surrounding employee misfits and perceived overqualification. While prior studies have often examined these aspects in isolation, this report takes a comprehensive view by integrating various dimensions of person-environment fit, organizational behavior, and individual perceptions. It doesn't just stop at outlining the existence of misfits or overqualification; rather, it intricately explores their impacts on individual behaviors, organizational dynamics, and potential mitigating factors.

Moreover, this report goes beyond the surface-level analysis by delving into the less-explored territories within the realm of overqualification. It investigates not only the commonly discussed implications, such as job dissatisfaction, but also delves deeper into how overqualified individuals cope with their situations. This includes examining the potential role of job crafting in alleviating job boredom stemming from overqualification, which represents a novel angle not extensively covered in existing literature.

The synthesis of these different elements—exploring the interplay between individual attributes, organizational settings, and the psychological implications of

misfit and overqualification—provides a more nuanced understanding of these issues. It does not just reiterate existing findings but extends the discussion into uncharted territories, paving the way for further research and offering actionable insights for organizations seeking to address these complexities effectively. This comprehensive approach adds depth and richness to the understanding of these critical topics in the context of modern workplaces.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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