**Virtual Fit or Misfit: Creating Strategies for Recruiting and Hiring Online Instructors**

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While online instructors may start out teaching students from local areas, this particular opportunity has been changing over the past decade. In fact, many online instructors have noted an increase in a more diversified student population in their classes. Further, they realize that they need to update their teaching skills, practices and strategies in order to accommodate the changing needs of the learners in the classroom, as well as updating their own portfolio.

Teaching business and management has changed over the past decades in terms of the types of delivery, especially with the use of technology. The use of online learning has helped to increase student enrollments, diversify the variety of student input and perspectives, as well as increase the exposure of instructors to bigger learning demands of the learners. As a result, virtual instructors today need to develop and enhance their teaching strategies and methodologies in order to meet the growing needs of today's online learning. No longer are instructors focusing on teaching just local learners, but they must also concentrate on teaching students from a variety of international locations.

Thus, this chapter will focus on how several U.S. universities have focused on developing their best teaching practices and strategies to help prepare their teaching workforce to meet the challenges of a changing student population in the fields of business administration and management. Further, this work will help current instructors and practitioners to identify potential learner needs and brainstorm ideas on how to improve upon their teaching practices and strategies. The key focus of this writing will focus on identifying needs and creating potential solutions towards meeting the challenges of teaching business and management courses in today's virtual learning environment.

**Context of the Problem**

As more technology has become available in many parts of the globe, a new type of student population has emerged. The traditional student image of higher learning has been somewhat limited in many countries, but given the impact of the Internet, this traditional "student body" has changed to online communities. According to Preece (2000), these online communities "consists of people who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles; a shared purpose that provides a reason for the community; policies that guide people's interactions; and computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness" (p. 10). In the field of business and management, educators have recognized the demographical changes of the student population. In a virtual environment, the student is not the traditional student seen in a classroom in previous years, but rather one that reflects a vast array of cultural differences and needs that require educators to help build "new learning paths" towards the creation of virtual learning communities.

While technology has provided a powerful infrastructure, the emerging technologies have allowed educational institutions, educators, and students to achieve education on a much higher playing field – in a virtual learning environment. Consequently, the business world has also worked with technology in this venture to help assist educational institutions in

becoming more modern and adaptive for change. With the possible news of a merger between Blackboard and WebCt demonstrates how the business world is working hard towards blending technology and seizing yet a larger share of the online learning market (A-HEC, 2005). As a result, these changes only signify to the educational and learning communities that technology recognizes a need for change – but do we, as educators, recognize the need for change completely?

Historically, many colleges and universities have recruited and hired online instructors based on their review of received resumes and recommendations of others. However, these two methods may not be efficient enough to accommodate the needs of educational institutions in staffing their various online teaching positions. As a result, many of these institutions are searching for better methods of recruiting and hiring personnel. While some have outsourced these human resources duties, other companies are learning how to create and implement best practices in order to seek, interview, hire, and train potential online instructors to teach their online course offerings. Jones (1993) described best practices as centered:

on the very essence of good management: guiding employees toward greater productivity, liberating them from the burdens of disorganization without saddling them with restrictive bureaucracy, and helping them to overcome some measure of the troublesome flaws inherent in people and processes. These are the measures of effectiveness and efficiency (p. 11).

Therefore, how can our best recruitment and hiring practices be improved upon if we limit our possibilities? Further, as more educational institutions are beginning to offer more courses online, there is a need for a different type of educator. These online educators need to offer the same type of high-quality learning, but in a different educational format. Thus, these instructors need to possess certain characteristics that will "fit" both the needs of the online learner, as well as the educational institution.

**Statement of the Problem**

Many post-secondary Human Resources (HR) departments still recruit, interview, and hire personnel according to antiquated methods used for face-to-face interaction. However, when one needs to recruit for virtual positions, the ability to personally meet and interact with candidates on a one-on-one basis may not always be possible. Thus, there is a need to change this outdated recruiting and hiring methods and procedures in order to meet the changing needs of online course offerings. The role and function of online faculty is to teach students in online environment utilizing online educational software, as well as providing a quality education. As a result, there is a growing need to develop and implement better recruiting and hiring processes to accomplish such change in the current HR paradigm. Thus, this chapter will serve as a work in progress on how online educational institutions may approach a different approach to online recruiting and hiring.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the characteristics of an online instructor?

2. How does one recruit and hire online faculty to best fit the needs of the educational institution in the offering of quality, online courses?

3. How is trust established during the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process of instructors to teach in an online environment?

4. How can an educational institution monitor and evaluate whether the Person-Organization (PO) fit works or does not work?

**Significance of Paper**

This chapter will help to explore and examine how educational institutions may create and implement new practices for recruiting, interviewing, and hiring their online instructors. Thus, a university needs to be successful in finding the "right fit" in terms of "Person-Job (PJ) fit," as well as helping to recruit and hire online instructors who will be good fits in terms of "Person-Organization (PO) fit." Kristof (1996) defined PO fit as the "compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work" (p. 1). As a result, this paper will serve as a framework for organizations to determine whether their current methods of recruitment and hiring have measures in effect to achieve a good PO fit.

**Measurement of PO Fit**

According to Kristof (1996), the measurement of PO fit can be classified into three categories: subjective fit, perceived fit, and objective fit. As more and more colleges and universities are moving towards online offerings, there is a direct need to find instructors who will fit the needs of these organizations. In fact, many of these organizations will need to move about from the old paradigm of recruiting and hiring via face-to-face interviews and progress to newer and improved methods of staffing. Thus, the following sections will discuss how these measurements of PO fit can be applied to a "newer form" of online recruitment and hiring by online educational programs.

*Subjective Fit*

During face-to-face interviews, many interviewers will ask applicants if they can work well with others and how they could see themselves working in the organization. While most applicants will be positive with their answers, many interviewers may fail to take proper and adequate notes in order to reflect upon the applicants at a later time. Thus, in the online learning environment, a department chair may need to take detailed notes in order to select the best, possible candidate. As a result, data collection and analysis are important factors. As a result, as more applicants desire to apply for online teaching positions, academic chairs will need to be more selective in the hiring process. Thus, if one is to apply a subjective fit measure in this particular situation, applicants may be asked to series of online survey questions. Questions focused on the individual's ability to express and defend how their personal characteristics will fit with those of the employing organization's characteristics might help the recruiting manager to determine whether a subjective fit appears to be present or not. While this may sound easy in theory, it may not be a strong enough measure at that time. As a result, it is prudent for interviews to look next at the perceived fit.

*Perceived Fit*

Do all applicants understand the characteristics of an organization in order to determine if they will fit or not? Do their perceptions of an organization hurt or help them during an interview? In fact, many people can try to adapt or modify their answers to these questions by looking at the environmental surroundings, as well as watching the body language of the

interviewer.  However, if the applicant was taken out of a physical environment and asked questions online – would their answers be different?  Would their perceptions of a virtual learning environment be different – if they had never worked in a virtual learning environment before?  Thus, this reinforces the writer's belief that online recruiting methods need to differ from face-to face recruiting – due to the differences in technology and environmental situational factors.  Finally, this leads to the next type of fit – the objective fit.  This particular measurement may be difficult at times to measure – due to the fact of various scheduling factors that affect those individuals involved in the recruiting process.

*Objective Fit*

While an interviewer may interview various candidates for certain positions, there may be organizational procedures in place which require additional people to be involved in the process.  As a result, these additional people may need to rank or judge whether various candidates possess certain characteristics deemed necessary for employment with the organization.  Historically, many HR departments would start the recruiting efforts and proceed with interviewing and testing of selected candidates first.  As a result, they would then narrow down the possible candidate listings to a certain number for consideration by others in the organization.  However, as noted early in this paper, not all organizational members may be available to assist in this process.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has started to build a general framework of why recruiting and hiring methods for online instructors needs to be different from those methods used for live classroom teaching.  Due to the various changes in technology, online learning has become a vast growing segment in the field of education – and our employment methods need to change in order to adapt to these changes.  Since this is a draft chapter, further research and development will focus on identifying factors which indicates whether changes need to be made in online recruitment and hiring.

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