What are the Causes of Organizational Misfit?

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Introduction

In this paper, I explain why there is a need for research leading out of the field of Person Organization (PO) fit into misfit and I identify a key research question for my PhD study - namely, 'what are the causes of 'misfit''? Answering this question will create a definition of misfit on which I will base my future research. As a start to the study I seek to identify fields of literature where I can find opinions on what could be construed as misfit, in a systematic review, so that I can bring them together, before I start looking for people to interview.

In the field of PO fit, Schneider's, (1987) ASA (Attraction, Selection, Attrition) framework is one of the most cited theories. It says that people are attracted to, selected by, and retained in organizations when they are similar to other people in the organization. Present day practitioners and HR recruiters alike seek such a situation because the resulting state of homogeneity that occurs as a result of having 'same' people as theorized by Schneider allows and facilitates coordination, communication and team working amongst the people there because they share many personal attributes (Schneider, 1987 p. 444). PO fit can be seen to operate at its best where people for senior positions as such CEOs, senior partners in the professions, SWAT teams in the armed forces, and highly trained and specialized medical teams, are selected and retained because their goals and values are congruent with the people already in the organization; and by the very nature of the work, such attributes are not only desirable but mission critical. These New High Involvement Organizations (HIO) rely on self motivated, multi-tasked and committed employees, so personalities and characteristics are just as important as key skills and academic qualifications (KSAs) (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991)

One of the key processes in the ASA cycle is the idea that when people find that they do not 'fit', they leave the organization (attrition), and its state of homogeneity. However, for people who do not fit, there is little evidence to demonstrate, one way or the other, that they always leave (attrition), even when the organization for which they work goes through (major) changes or 'shocks', causing value sets to change (Wheeler, Halbesleben, Brouer, & Ferris, 2005); or organizational and personal values to drift apart (Chatman, 1989).

We know quite a lot about fit, but very little about misfit.

Are people who 'do not fit' in the PO sense just people who would not fit anywhere or are they something more than this? Are they what one may call, 'misfits'? That is, not just people who have an absence of fit, but an actual misfit. Regrettably, the literature on the nature of people who do not fit and misfits is only in its infancy (Talbot & Billsberry, 2008a). One crucial step forward is to explore the nature of misfit and how it might be defined. Once done, the challenge is to look at the causes of misfit. So the next step that needs to be taken to move this literature

forward is to answer the question 'what is a misfit?' This will be the overarching question framing my study.

As has already been said, people who do not fit, or who have experienced a trigger point so causing a state of misfit, will not always leave an organization but stay on "acting as centres of rebellion, disaffection and malcontent" (Billsberry, Ambrosini, Marsh, Moss-Jones, et al., 2005) in order to express feelings of stress, dissatisfaction and frustration. Or, according to Chatman, (1989); Dickson, Resick, & Holdstein, (2008) if they have low organization fit they may go as far as to attempting to change the organization's values to become more similar to their own. The extent to which this is successful one could assume, is linked to the level of formal and informal power (French & Raven, 1959) and control that they have. Furthermore, it had been identified in their later paper; that organizations have what the authors identify as 'climate strength', ranging from the weak (which could be changed by an individual) to strong (where change to match the values of the individual is unlikely) so that person would look at other options as well as attrition. Wheeler, R., Halbesleben, Brouer, & Ferris, (2005) describe other types of approaches that the misfit might adopt, especially when there is no other job available, in order to avoid attrition from the organization. These are:

- do nothing (inaction)
- express their concerns (voice) or,
- pretend that they fit by putting up a façade (impression management).

Billsberry and his colleagues; (Billsberry, et al., 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009), bring to the fore the subject of 'misfit' in the context of it being a detrimental state, perhaps even a psychopathology? Is it a disease or illness? People so far, who perceive themselves as misfits would, one assumes, want to cure themselves of this state (Billsberry, 2008) because it has negative consequences for the person, such as stress, (Fevre, Matheny, & Kolt, 2003), frustration, nervous breakdown, promotion sidelining, no career fulfilment, loss of job (Talbot & Billsberry, 2008). The ultimate 'cure', in order to rid themselves of these symptoms, is to exit the organization and find work elsewhere – organizational exit (Schneider, 1987), despite the consequences of "dislocation, disruption and uncertainty caused by organizational change" (Billsberry, 2008). However, business evidence is arising that is starting to look favourably at people whose approach is diverse to what is expected within the organisation. These are people who have a different approach to problem solving and creative thinking, and demonstrate diversity which is more reflective of the flexibility of organizations needed in the ever changing business environment (Elfenbein & O'Reilly I11, 2007). So, where are these people?

Where to find the information

The starting point for looking for literature about misfit starts with the mainstream I/O literature detailing various types of PO fit, using as an initial guiding point systematic reviews already carried out (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006); and revisiting the studies to identify, and look further into areas that could not be described as fit. I plan also to look at conceptualizations and empirical findings on what could be regarded as misfit across several social science fields, such as workplace deviant behaviour (WDB), social network/cluster analysis, job crafting, unfolding model of voluntary turnover, and social cognition theory (SCT) to name but a few. Can anyone suggest where else I might look?

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