

ENSURING FIT IN FACULTY HIRING

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ABSTRACT

One of the most difficult decisions facing any faculty is selecting the job applicant to fill a faculty vacancy. Faculty hope that new hires will stay for many years and become productive faculty members. In this era of modest academic budgets, universities often cannot afford to replace departing faculty; when funds are available, faculties must not fumble their limited hiring opportunities.

The turnover costs associated with faculty mis-hiring are substantial. The list of well-known costs associated with faculty turnover includes such direct costs, as the increased salaries paid to new faculty when *market rates* exceed current pay levels and such indirect costs, as the loss of institutional memory and alumni loyalty. The indirect costs associated with faculty mis-hiring are difficult and sometimes impossible to quantify. Each faculty's goal is to hire applicants who will be long-term assets to their university, thereby reducing the probability of repeatedly incurring such turnover costs.

One way to reduce the probability of incurring these turnover costs is to ensure that new hires *fit* their departments. This notion of *fit* was first conceived as the match between job requirements and employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities (Caston and Briato 1985). Recently, *fit* was re-conceived as the match between the norms and beliefs of organizations and their employees' values, beliefs, and personality traits (Saks and Ashforth 1997). Both conceptualizations suggest that employees fit an organization when their job-related attributes match their work milieu (Ostroff and Rothausen 1997). Although the *fit* between employees and their organizations is never perfect, successful employees typically share the dominant characteristics of their organizations (Cable and Judge 1996).

Management experts contend that organizations dominated by good-fitting employees are highly effective because such employees are more satisfied, more committed, and more productive, than other employees (Werbil, James, and DeCarlo 1996; Saks and Ashforth 1997). Incongruent employees are often absent, frustrated, stressed, anxious, burned out, and physically ill (Furnham and Walsh 1990; Meir, Melamed, and Dinur 1995), all of which inhibit personal and organizational productivity. Because high congruence among employees enhances organizational productivity, faculty should

hire applicants with similar values, beliefs, and personality traits. Thus, many management experts would argue that faculty should consider *employee-organization fit* to inform their hiring decisions. Faculties now rely on informal procedures to assess this *fit*; we recommend a more formal procedure to assess this *fit*.

Fit is based primarily on value congruence among the members of the organization. It is the shared core values that bind organizations together. These core values are a function of the individuals within the organization, both past and present. By examining its history, an organization such as a department can discover its core values. Once these values are delineated and ranked, the department can use them to formally assess the *fit* of potential hires. As the extant literature suggests, more value congruent hires are more likely to succeed within a department.

Qualitative research methods provide one way to uncover an organization's evolving set of rituals, heroes, and symbols (Hofstede, et al. 1990). Such research is often used to uncover veiled information about consumers (Stern, Thompson, and Arnould 1998). We posit that the effect of a department's history on its current practices is not self-evident. By tracing a department's history, we may reveal the motivations behind its current practices.

To aid departments in uncovering their core values through the examination of their history, we suggest the use of a textual analysis tool like NUD*IST (Richards and Richards 1994). NUD*IST (Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theory Building) is a software package used by qualitative researchers to identify patterns in responses to open-ended questions or in data from focus group sessions (i.e., to locate the interrelationships in different peoples' answers) (Fleenor 1998).

Specifically, we suggest that properly trained interviewers conduct unstructured interviews with all the faculty members—past, if possible, and present. Once transcribed, these interviews should be loaded into a NUD*IST-like program. The text should reveal a clear ordering of work-related values. These values can then be used to develop a screening tool that would reduce the probability of a mis-fit in the hiring process by insuring value congruence between new members and existing members of the department.

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