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Improving Interactional Organizational Research: A Model of Person-Organization Fit

JENNIFER A. CHATMAN
Northwestern University

In order for researchers to understand and predict behavior, they must consider both person and situation factors and how these factors interact. Even though organization researchers have developed interactional models, many have overemphasized either person or situation *components, and most have failed to consider the effects that persons have on situations. This paper presents criteria for improving interactional models and a model of person-organization fit, which satisfies these criteria. Using a Q-sort methodology, individual value profiles are compared to organizational value profiles to determine fit and to predict changes in values, norms, and behaviors.*

Researchers in organizational behavior are concerned with understanding and predicting how people behave in organizational settings. Although they may agree about the importance of understanding behavior, their research has traditionally taken two very different forms—the individual difference approach and the situational approach. The individual difference approach proposes that a person's behavior can best be predicted by measuring his or her personality traits, values, motives, abilities, and affect because such elements are both stable and are reflected in behavior (e.g., Allport, 1937, 1966; Block, 1978; Bowers, 1973; Staw & Ross, 1985; Weiss & Adler, 1984). In contrast, the situationist approach proposes that a person's behavior can best be predicted by assessing the characteristics of his or her situation (e.g., Mischel, 1968; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977, 1978; Skinner, 1971; Thorndike, 1906). The basic question underlying the well-known person-situation debate has been whether persons or situations account for more variation in behavior (cf. Epstein & O'Brien, 1985; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Rowe, 1987; Sarason, Smith, & Diener, 1975).

Most behavioral scientists agree that *both* personal and situational characteristics influence behavior (e.g., Lewin, 1951; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981). However, the challenge has been to develop concepts and methods that not only determine *if* person and situation variables are valid predictors of behavior but also determine *when* and *to what extent* person and situation variables predict behavior (cf. Schneider, 1987). This is no easy task, however, because interactive research must accurately represent *both* person elements and situation elements. A laboratory experiment by psychologists Monson, Hesley, and Chernick (1982) underscored the importance of simultaneously considering the effects that person and situation characteristics have on behavior. They attempted to discover *when* extroversion predicted talkativeness by placing

extroverts and introverts in either a strong or weak situation. Drawing on Mischel's (1977) distinction, a strong situation is one in which everyone construes the situation similarly, the situation induces uniform expectancies, the incentives of the situation induce a response to it, and everyone has the skills to perform in the situation. Results showed that extroversion predicted talkativeness only when the situation was weak. In strong situations, extroverts were no more talkative than introverts. As this study illustrates, we can gain more refined information by paying serious attention to both person and situation elements.

However, when we move out of the lab into the real world, examining interactive issues becomes complex and difficult. For example, the strength of a situation may not be enduring, multiple values and norms may define a situation, and even a single individual's traits, abilities, and motives may interact and change over time (cf. McClelland, 1985). However, organization researchers, many of whom have expertise in conducting research in real-world settings, are in a good position to contribute to the development of both balanced and realistic interactive explanations because organizational settings are highly complex contexts in which people spend a great deal of time.

Consider the following real-world problem: Assume that you are a personnel recruiter for a firm that conducts its business through teams. Your dilemma is, How should you allocate your resources? Should you invest heavily in traditional selection procedures, such as applications, inteviews, recommendations, and personality tests? Or, should you spend your resources developing an extensive employee socialization program that emphasizes the importance of cooperation and conveys the specific norms of the organization to newcomers? A person theorist would argue that you should devote your resources to selection activities. The person theorist assumes that once you've identified a highly cooperative person, he or she will be cooperative across most organizational contexts (cf. Epstein & O'Brien, 1985). A situational theorist would argue that regardless of how the person has scored on a personality scale, if your organizational context promotes cooperation you can expect new entrants to engage in cooperative activities. Therefore, you should make sure that newcomers understand that the culture of your organization emphasizes cooperation (cf. Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

In contrast, an interactional theorist would argue that the above plans are incomplete and that you need information both about the person and the situation. An interactionist would point out that a cooperative person would be most cooperative in an organization that emphasizes cooperation, but he or she might be competitive in an organization that strongly promotes competitive behavior. Conversely, a competitive person would be most competitive in an organization that emphasizes competition, but he or she might engage in cooperative activities if the organization strongly promoted such activities. Furthermore, a truly interactive model would include the effects that people have on situations (Schneider, 1987). Therefore, when a mismatch occurs, for example, when a cooperative organization hires a competitive person, the organization may change over time—in this case, a norm for competition may begin to overshadow the previous norm for cooperation (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1983).

Clearly, models that indicate the joint contributions of persons and situations are not new in organizational research. For example, models have been developed of leader traits and tasks (e.g., Fiedler, 1976), personality traits and vocations (e.g., Holland, 1985), abilities and jobs (e.g., Dunnette, 1976), and personality traits and job characteristics (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980). However, three limiting features of previous work are apparent. First, person and situation characteristics have not been as accurately conceptualized as they, perhaps, could be. Researchers on the person side have criticized research that fails to consider how person characteristics are uniquely patterned within individuals and research that fails to use multiple act

criteria to track a person's behavior over time and during situations (cf. Luthans & Davis, 1982; Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986; Weiss & Adler, 1984). Likewise, little attention has been devoted to conceptualizing situations (cf. Moos, 1973). To meaningfully test person-situation interactions, we must consider the extent to which a situation either induces conformity or is ambiguous (Mischel & Peake, 1982), and we must find ways of making meaningful comparisons between situations and persons (Lewin, 1951). Thus, the empirical results of previous interactive models may be clouded by inaccuracies in conceptualizations of either person or situation contributions to behavior.

A second problem is that few researchers have considered the effects that people have on situations (Bell & Staw, in press; Schneider, 1987). This is perhaps the greatest strength of interactional models when compared to contingency models (e.g., Fiedler, 1976). Although contingency theorists consider person factors such as leader style and situation factors such as how routine the task is, they fail to consider that the task itself may change over time (e.g., become more exceptional) because of the leaders' or subordinates' personal characteristics. The effects that people have on situations are difficult to document because this may require many data collection periods and highly sensitive measurement instruments. However, the few empirical studies that have been conducted reveal that people do affect their situations (Kohn & Schooler, 1978; Miner, 1987). A final problem with current models is that their conceptualizations of persons and situations have been limited. For example, few researchers have considered the importance of the context at the organization level, such as an organization's system of norms and values that have a great deal of influence over people's behavior (cf. Jackson, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

The next section of this paper reviews previous approaches in terms of the criteria established above. A person-organization fit model is then proposed to illustrate how interactional models in organizational research can begin to fulfill these criteria. Drawing on the conceptual distinction between strong and weak situations, the person-organization fit model treats organization values and norms as the situational side of the model. On the person side, individual values and some personality characteristics are examined. Higher levels of person-organization fit exist when there is congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons. Selection and socialization processes are seen as the antecedents to person-organization fit. Once person-organization fit is assessed, predictions can be made about specific outcomes (e.g., changes in values), global behavioral outcomes (e.g., extra-role behavior), and changes in organization norms and values. The methods for measuring the components are described. In particular, Q-sorts (Block, 1978) may be appropriate for measuring interactions between persons and situations over time.

Interactional Concepts and Methods

Interactional researchers incorporate the elements of both persons and environments (cf. Fredericksen, 1972; Ekehammar, 1974; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Moos, 1973). This view has a fairly long theoretical tradition, beginning with Lewin's (1951) proposition that behavior is a function of the person and the environment. To be accurate and complete, interactional researchers in organizations must (a) accurately conceptualize and measure persons and situations, (b) document the reciprocal effects of persons on situations and situations on persons, and (c) be comprehensive and externally valid. Although an exhaustive review of explicitly and implicitly interactional research is beyond the scope of this paper, particular approaches that illustrate strengths or common weaknesses are evaluated in light of each of these requirements.

Conceptualizing Persons and Situations Accurately

Person Research. Two weaknesses have been mentioned on the person side (cf. Schneider, 1983; Staw & Ross, 1985; Weiss & Adler, 1984). First, one individual may differ from another in

the way his or her traits, values, abilities, and motives are related to each other. Also, a given trait may or may not be relevant for the person in question. Therefore, we should use idiographic methods, which can capture the relevance of individual differences. The well-known job characteristics model (cf. Hackman & Oldham, 1980) illustrates this issue. According to Hackman and Oldham, some ideal configuration of task elements exists for each person, depending on that person's growth need strength (GNS). However, the outcome of their analyses takes on a prescriptive and nomothetic quality (Roberts & Glick, 1981). They provided only a limited set of options for task design, and by providing the same solution (job enrichment) for everyone, they underemphasized the extent to which GNS is differentially relevant across people. Therefore, low correlations between enriched jobs and outcome behaviors may be attributed to GNS's not being particularly important for a certain individual. This criticism also can be directed at many contingency models that isolate either one or a few individual differences without measuring how relevant those characteristics are to the particular respondent (Weiss & Adler, 1984). Whether traits, motives, values, or attitudes are being examined, we should recognize that these may be patterned differently across people and that such differential relevance will affect research results.

The larger problem in interactional research is that even though we should capture the differential relevance of traits through idiographic methods, we also should compare people either to one another or to themselves over time, and these comparisons require nomothetic methods (Luthans & Davis, 1982). Two techniques that can work in this capacity include standardized personality profiles (e.g., Gough, 1976) and Q-sorts (e.g., Block, 1978; Stephenson, 1953). The template matching approach, for example, draws on the Q-sort methodology (Bem & Allen, 1974; Bem & Funder, 1978). First, templates are based on expert ratings of how a hypothetical person who is high on a specific trait (e.g., dominance, achievement) would behave in a specific situation (e.g., a job interview). Next, real people are given personality tests, and their behavior is predicted on the basis of how similar or different their scores are from the hypothetical person's scores. The closer the real person is to the hypothetical profile, the more likely it is that the real person's behavior can be predicted by the situation-specific template. The strength of this method is that both a profile of traits and the relevance of any particular trait to a particular individual are considered.

The second major problem with many current interactional models is that often individual characteristics are not collected across a number of situations. This is important because even though it may not be possible to predict single instances of behavior from individual differences, it is possible to predict behavior averaged over a sample of situations (Epstein, 1979). Because the data are cross-situational, systematic longitudinal research designs must be used (e.g., Buss & Craik, 1983; Staw et al., 1986), and a taxonomy of important situational components must be developed so that one situation can be compared to another.

Situation Research. As Terborg (1981) noted, the interactional perspective allows researchers to conceptualize the situation in a variety of ways. In models that include both aspects of persons and aspects of situations, organizational situations have been variously and, in many cases, elaborately defined as the characteristics of a task or a job (e.g., Dunnette, 1976; Kohn & Schooler, 1978; Miner, 1987; O'Reilly, 1977), and as the characteristics of a profession (e.g., Holland, 1985), but only rarely as the characteristics of the organization (Feldman, 1976; Jones, 1983). However, researchers have not identified what the important parameters of situations are. Unifying dimensions that can guide future conceptualizations of situations, regardless of the specific situation element being examined, would help researchers to build a comprehensive framework of interactions in organizations (Frederiksen, 1972; Moos, 1973).

One construct that may cut across all, or at least many, such conceptualizations is the strength of the situation in question. For example, if a situation is defined in terms of occupations, job holders of strong or conformity-inducing occupations may have salient values that can be transmitted in the form of objective standards of work, binding codes of ethics, licensing requirements, and a strong professional association (cf. Van Maanen & Barley, 1984; Wilensky, 1964). In contrast, weak occupations would be characterized by a lack of consensus among job holders about values and either few or no mechanisms to transmit such information. By using the strong/weak distinction, we can move toward a more comprehensive organization taxonomy of situations. As Bell and Staw (in press, p. 11) asked, "are organizations (actually) powerful situations capable of homogenizing behavior in the face of individual differences?" To answer this question, we need to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of important organization factors.

A second criterion for accurately representing situations was suggested by Lewin in 1951, but it has been difficult to address. Lewin suggested that the relevance of persons to situations would be maximized if we could conceptualize and measure them in commensurate terms. According to Lewin's criteria, one potential problem with Bem and Allen's (1974) template-matching procedure is that the person is overemphasized. In other words, situations are construed only in terms of the personality characteristics of individuals acting within them. By assuming that the only important elements about a situation are how a person would behave in it, we may overlook aspects of situations that cannot be described in person terms. Tom (1971) developed a measure to investigate the similarities between people's self-profiles and the profiles of their most preferred organization. By using two personality profiles, Tom showed that people preferred organizations that were most similar to their self-descriptions. However, Tom's work has the same problem as Bem's—the personality items can be only metaphorically applied to organizations because the items were designed to measure personality. Graham (1976) also recognized the importance of measuring both person and organization characteristics. He attempted to create a scale (the Trait Ascription Questionnaire) that could characterize persons and organizations in similar terms, so the two could be compared. However, the problem with Graham's work is that it is not clear if his scale characterizes people within firms or the firm as an entity.

In sum, the problem with each of these approaches is that situations are anthropomorphized because they are defined in the same terms as individuals. Organizations are different than people; therefore, the same adjective may have a very different meaning when applied to an organization, rather than a person. For example, describing an individual as cooperative may be very different than describing an organization as cooperative. The term *a cooperative individual* refers to a person who tends to assist others in order to achieve some joint benefit, whereas the term *a cooperative organization* may refer to the actual financial structure (jointly owned by the consumers or members) of that organization. Therefore, we need to find ways of characterizing persons and situations in *mutually* relevant and comparative forms.

How Persons and Situations Affect Each Other

If we do not consider the influence that people have on situations, our interactive models will be sorely incomplete. People are not passive agents subject to environmental forces. First, there is evidence that people actively choose their situations (cf. Emmons & Diener, 1986; Swann, 1983). In fact, the tendencies exist for people both to choose situations and to perform best in situations that are most compatible to themselves. For example, high achievers are more comfortable in and prefer challenging situations which require high levels of achievement. "People tend to be happier when they are

in settings that meet their particular needs or are congruent with their dispositions" (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984, p. 582).

Second, there is evidence to suggest that people change situations. For example, Kohn and Schooler (1978) gathered two decades' worth of data to determine the relative effects of a person characteristic (intellectual flexibility) and a situation characteristic (work complexity). They found that people influenced their jobs more than their jobs influenced them—people who were more intellectually flexible enhanced the complexity of their work. Along the same lines, Miner (1987) showed that the unique interests and abilities of a job incumbent evolved into formalized job descriptions, which were subsequently used by later job incumbents. Taken together, these studies send a clear message: People have pervasive and enduring effects on situations, which we must continue to investigate.

Relevant Situations and Comprehensive Coverage

From the above review, we might believe that many relevant situation and person factors have been tested interactively; however, this is only partly true. For example, although person-job interactions (cf. Neiner & Owens, 1985; O'Reilly, 1977; Seybolt, 1976) and person-vocation interactions (cf. Holland, 1985) have been examined extensively, person-organization interactions have not been examined as thoroughly. Two researchers have conceptualized such organization-level issues. Schneider (1987) developed a promising theoretical model (the Attraction-Selection-Attrition model) that attempted to identify the process through which people and organizations become more similar to each other over time. House (1988) presented a comprehensive interactive conceptualization of organizational power. In House's scheme, organizations are described in terms of their structural characteristics. Structure is predicted to interact with people's power-striving predispositions. When the structural constraints are weak, House hypothesized that people with power-striving predispositions will acquire power. No direct empirical tests of House's hypotheses have been made.

Jones (1986) and Feldman (1976) presented two of the few explicitly interactional and empirically tested models at the organization level. They both examined the extent to which personal characteristics and socialization tactics contribute to new members' adjustment to their organizations. These two studies are relatively unique because they also consider how people influence organizations. Feldman (1976) found that employees were more likely to suggest changes at the accommodation stage of socialization, whereas Jones (1986) found that institutionalized socialization tactics resulted in stronger conformity when individuals possessed low, rather than high, levels of self-efficacy. However, neither of these studies tracked the extent to which employees' making suggestions and conforming to the organization influenced organizational values.

In sum, interactional research in organization settings has generated some concrete findings, but improvements can be made. First, conceptualizations of both persons and situations must be simultaneously idiographic and nomothetic. On the person side, attention to the differential relevance of characteristics and cross-situational data is essential. On the situation side, we may need to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of a situation and to compare situations and persons in mutually relevant and commensurate terms. Second, complete models should include how people choose and influence their situations. Finally, interactive organizational research should be more comprehensive.

A Model of Person-Organization Fit

This section describes one illustration of an interactional model, person-organization fit. Be-

cause organization factors provide an important contextual level, the third criterion for interactive models, relevance and comprehensiveness, is automatically addressed. The model draws on the Q-sort method, which is both nomothetic and idiographic, and through it the differential relevance of individual characteristics are considered. Additionally, the Q-sort allows for both a distinction between strong and weak situations and for comparisons to person characteristics. Finally, the design of the model is explicitly longitudinal; therefore, both the effects that people have on organizations and the effects that organizations have on people are considered.

Defining Person-Organization Fit

The impact that organizational membership has on people and the impact that people have on organizations are predicted through information gathered about people and information gathered about organizations. The questions become, what aspects of people and what aspects of organizations are important to consider? Although many aspects of organizations and people are important in determining behavior (e.g., abilities, job requirements, personality characteristics, and vocations), a fundamental and enduring aspect of both organizations and people is their values (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

On the person side, *individual values* are defined as enduring beliefs through which a specific mode of conduct or end-state is personally preferable to its opposite (Rokeach, 1973). Values are a type of social cognition that facilitate a person's adaptation to his or her environment, and values have implications for his or her behavior (cf. Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Weiner, 1988). On the organization side, value systems provide an elaborate and generalized justification both for appropriate behaviors of members and for the activities and functions of the system (Enz, 1988; Katz & Kahn, 1978; McCoy, 1985). Norms are closely related to values in that they make explicit the forms of behavior that are appropriate for members of that system (Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1985). Organizational norms and values are a group product; even though all members of the group would not have the same values, a majority of active members would agree on them and members of the group would be aware of the group's support for a given value (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Weiner, 1988).

In addition to a description of their content, both organizational and individual values can be described in terms of their *intensity*, or how strongly held they are, relative to other values. Organizational value systems also can be described in terms of *crystallization*, or how widely shared they are (Jackson, 1966; O'Reilly, 1983). Strong organizational values are both intensely held and widely shared, which is how many researchers define strong culture firms (e.g., Davis, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Drawing again on the strong/weak distinction (Mischel, 1977), we can explain organizations that have intense and crystallized values as strong situations.

Person-organization fit is defined here as *the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons*. In order to determine the effects that organizational membership will have on an individual's values and behaviors and the effects that an individual will have on an organization's norms and values, we must first assess the extent of agreement between the person's values and the organization's values. Additionally, much of the interactional research discussed previously has examined personality traits as important determinants of behaviors. However, as mentioned above, if personality traits are compared directly to organization contexts, there is a risk of misrepresenting (anthropomorphizing) organizations. Therefore, particular traits (e.g., self-monitoring) are seen here as determinants of the particular behavioral manifestation of person-organization fit. A model of person-organization fit is presented in Figure 1, and the ways of mea-

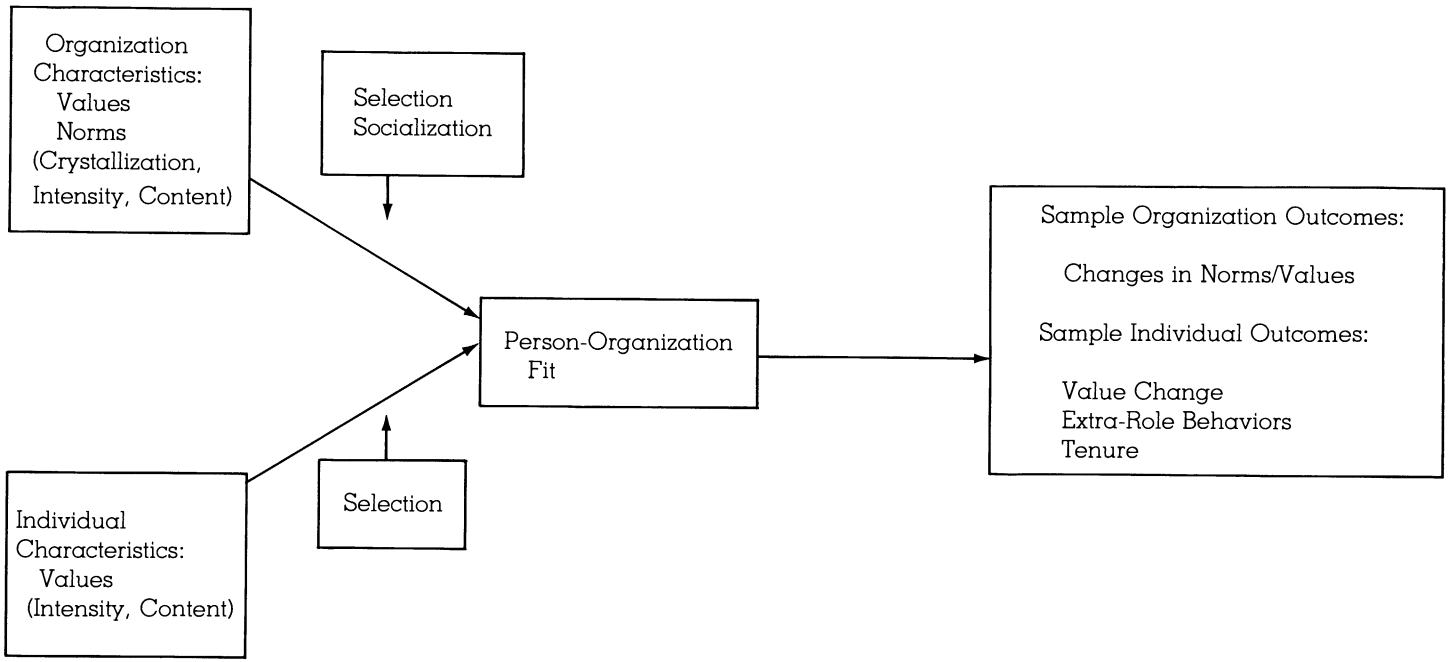

Figure 1. **A model of person-organization fit.**

suring each of the components are discussed below.

Measuring Person-Organization Fit

According to the conceptual requirements for interactional research listed above, the assessment of individual and organizational values should be both idiographic, so that the relevance of particular values and the uniqueness of patterns of values across people and organizations are represented, and nomothetic, so that person and situation factors can be compared. In addition, the situation should be assessed in terms of how strong or weak it is. The Q-sort method is one viable method for developing a simultaneously idiographic and nomothetic instrument to assess values and for determining whether an organization's value system presents a strong or weak situation to individuals.

Although the Q-sort method traditionally has been used to assess personality characteristics (Block, 1978), organizational researchers have developed two Q-sort item sets. The Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) assesses person-organization fit, and the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Profile, which will not be discussed here, assesses person-job fit (Chatman, 1988; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1988). The OCP contains 54 value statements (e.g., quality, respect for individuals) that can generically capture individual and organizational norms and values. The OCP can be used to measure person-organization fit in the following way: To assess an individual's values, job seekers or new firm members are asked to sort the 54 items into 9 categories, with a specified number of cards in each category. Fewer cards are allowed at extreme categories, and more cards are allowed in the central, more neutral, categories. The question new members are asked to keep in mind while sorting the deck is, "How important is it for this characteristic to be a part of the organization I work for?" The anchors given for the 9 categories range from the *most desirable* values to the *most undesirable* values, and the middle category is neutral. The result is an individual profile that represents the person's values in any organizational context.

To assess an organizational value system, a broad representation of organization members who have been with the organization for at least 1 or 2 years (so they are familiar with whatever value system exists) are asked to sort the same 54 value statements. The only differences between the individual profile and the member profiles are that the anchors are labeled *most characteristic* to *most uncharacteristic* (as opposed to *most desirable* and *most undesirable*) and the question they are asked is, "How much does this attribute characterize your organization's values?" Member profiles are then combined by averaging each item to form an organization profile.

Crystallization of organizational values is assessed by calculating a reliability coefficient for the mean organization profile. A strong organizational value system would be indicated by a high reliability coefficient (e.g., above .70, according to Nunnally, 1967), which shows that organization members perceive the content and ordering of the organizational value system similarly. Intensity and content of both individual and organizational values are gauged by examining the top and bottom ranked items. (As a rule of thumb, the top and bottom three categories represent intensely held values, Block, 1978.)

Person-organization fit is measured by first comparing the organization profile to the individual profile and then calculating the correlation between them. Two cautions should be noted. First, if organizational values are not highly crystallized (e.g., the alpha is below .70), the organization profile will not be reliable. Low crystallization is equated with a weak situation; therefore, the organizational values cannot be represented with a single profile. Of course, low crystallization at the organization level may indicate that strong factions exist within the organization. To determine this, member crystallization could be calculated according to various subgroups, such as departments, job levels, or divisions. Second, an overall high correlation

between an organizational value profile and an individual profile would indicate a general congruence between the person and the organization. However, an item-by-item comparison of the top and bottom 12 items also is warranted. Large disparities (e.g., greater than 3 categories) between top firm values and top individual values should be noted—these may be the ones in which the most individual or organizational change occurs over time.

In sum, the Q-sort method allows for a rich assessment of individual and organizational values. First, the breadth and complexity of values are captured because a large number of items are used in the OCP (Chatman, 1988), and each item is implicitly compared to each other item (Cattell, 1944). Thus, a distinct advantage of the Q-sort method is that more items can be used reliably. (Ranking the 54 items would be too cognitively complex to generate reliable results.) Second, the personal relevance of values is represented because the ordering of items reflects the relative importance of values for a specific person or organization. Third, situation strength can be assessed. Crystallization, or the extent to which the members perceive the value system similarly, is captured by looking at the alpha coefficient for organizational values, and the intensity with which values are held is captured by examining the pivotal items (the top and bottom 12). Taken together, crystallization and intensity reflect how strong or weak an organizational value system is. Finally, comparisons between profiles are made possible by using the same set of items for individual and organizational values and by varying the anchor and question associated with individual versus organization raters.

Although the Q-sort method can address many of the criteria for assessment, research still must be designed to capture the dynamic aspects of person-organization fit. Changes in a person's values over time can be assessed by comparing a person's value profile at one period to his or her value profile at other periods. Likewise, changes in organizational value profiles can be assessed by comparing an organization's profile at one time period to subsequent periods. Thus, changes in person-organization fit can be assessed in terms of whether the person or the organization has changed and in terms of the direction of the change. Further, specific changes can be assessed by examining specific changes in the placement of items. For example, if a person who highly values risk taking enters an organization that values risk aversion, subsequent value profiles can be examined to see who the change agent was: If the person subsequently rates risk-taking significantly lower, the organization has influenced the person. If, however, according to the organization profile risk taking is rated significantly higher and the profile is still highly crystallized, the person has influenced the organization value system. More formal propositions of these issues are discussed in the following section.

Outcomes of Person-Organization Fit

What can we learn by knowing the extent to which a person's values are similar to an organization's shared values? Person-organization fit is useful because it enhances our ability to predict the extent to which a person's values will change as a function of organizational membership and the extent to which he or she will adhere to organizational norms. Organization membership can shape and modify people's values (Whyte, 1959). For example, Mortimer and Lorence (1979) found that various work values (e.g., people orientation, autonomy) changed as a function of work experiences. Specifically, people adopted the values that were rewarded in previous organizations or occupations. Similarly, Weiss (1978) found that people aligned their values with the values of their leaders if they perceived their leader to be considerate, competent, and successful. Calibrating person-organization fit also allows us to determine the likelihood of particular individuals' causing an organization's values to change. For example, when strong organizational values and important individual values conflict, so that

what the organization thinks is important is different than what the individual thinks is important (low person-organization fit), a number of predictions could be made. Low person-organization fit could have at least three immediate outcomes: The person's values could change and become more similar to the organization's value system, the organization's values could change, or the person could leave the organization. This general prediction is not as specific as one would hope for. By considering other individual differences, we may be able to specify which of the three outcomes is likely to occur. Although space constraints prevent a consideration of all relevant individual differences (e.g., ability, demographic characteristics, etc.) a few personality characteristics that directly influence person-organization fit will be used as illustrations of how individual differences could be integrated into the model.

Proposition 1: When a person with discrepant values enters an organization characterized by strong values, the person's values are likely to change if that person is open to influence. Furthermore, this person is more likely to behave in accordance with specified norms of the organization.

Proposition 2: When a person with discrepant values enters an organization characterized by strong values, the person's values will not be expected to change if the person is not open to influence. This person would be likely to leave the organization.

Proposition 3: When a person with discrepant values enters an organization characterized by strong values and he or she scores high on self-efficacy (Jones, 1986) or personal control (Bell & Staw, in press), or when many new members enter at once who share the same values with one another, but not with the organization, the organization's values and norms will become more like the individual's over time.

Proposition 4 follows through with the logic of the distinction between strong and weak situations:

Proposition 4: In organizations characterized by weak values (low crystallization and intensity), a person's values are likely to remain the same; that is, his or her values will not change as a function of organizational membership.

In addition to individual or organizational value change and exit, another relevant type of outcome might be extra-role behaviors. *Extra-role behaviors* are defined as prosocial acts that are not directly specified by an individual's job description and that primarily benefit the organization as opposed to the individual. People who share organizational values may be more likely to contribute to the firm in constructive ways. O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that congruence between individual and organizational values predicted a higher likelihood of extra-role behaviors, such as individuals pledging money to a university or helping others, even when it was not required by their formal job descriptions. In a similar vein, Van Maanen and Schein (1979, p. 228) argued that creative individualists are people who score high on person-organization fit. A creative individualist is a reformer who "rarely seeks to change the [values] of the [organization], but rather may seek to improve or make more efficient or less corrupt the existing . . . strategies." This suggests the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Person-organization fit will be positively related to extra-role behavior.

Thus, high levels of person-organization fit are beneficial for individuals and organizations. High person-organization fit increases the likelihood that both extra-role behaviors will occur and individuals will feel more comfortable and competent in organizations that have similar values (Morse, 1975; Swann, 1983). However, extremely high levels of person-organization fit among numerous organizational members may lead to ineffective individual and organizational behavior. For example, person-organization fit may lead to conformity, homogeneity, and lowered innovation as people and organizations become unable to adapt to new environmental contingencies (cf. Janis & Mann, 1977; Kanter, 1988). In fact, *low* fit between people and organizations may be desirable because "mis-fit"

may cause a person to grow and learn, and the act of bringing in people who do not have the same values as the organization may slow or reverse ineffective inertia and allow an organization to adapt to or take advantage of new opportunities (cf. Brown, 1982). Therefore, some optimal level of person-organization fit may exist both in terms of how close the fit is for any one individual and in terms of the proportions of high and low "fitters" within an organization. Of course, a lower boundary exists as well, and extremely low (negative) person-organization fit may result in sabotage or dissent (Graham, 1986). Using the methods and model presented, researchers could explore this notion of what constitutes an optimal level, or mix, of person-organization fit.

Antecedents to Person-Organization Fit

Organizations enhance person-organization fit by both selecting and socializing employees to handle more than a specific job. That is, they find potential employees who will be responsive to organizational practices, and by molding them to abide by prevailing norms and values, they provide a more robust and stable attachment between the person and the organization. Likewise, on the person side, we have seen that people search for and prefer when organizations' situational norms and values match those they believe are important, and they perform better in such situations (Diener et al., 1984). Therefore, people have such characteristics in mind when they select organizations, and once they are members, they may try to change norms either through personal control (Bell & Staw, in press) or through power (Enz, 1988; House, 1988) in order to establish congruence with their own values.

Selection. Selection is the set of procedures through which an organization chooses its members. According to traditional views, the selection processes should assess a candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), so that organizations hire persons whose KSAs are compatible with the job requirements. Although consideration of a candidate's abilities is important, selection processes may be more loosely linked to person-job fit than industrial psychologists have claimed. Selection processes partly serve a more subtle function—for recruiting firms, the screening out of people who have values that are incompatible with the organization's norms and values and for job seekers, the screening out of firms that have undesirable norms and values. Why, for example, do organizations continue to interview job candidates, even though this process is a poor predictor of how well a person will perform a particular job (Arvey & Campion, 1982)? One reason is that an interview may assess how well a person's values fit the organization's values and norms (Dawes, 1988; Rothstein & Jackson, 1980; Snyder, Berscheid, & Matwychk, 1988).

It is proposed here that a major function of selection processes is to select individuals who have values that are compatible with the organization's values. Further, for incoming recruits whose values are more closely aligned with their hiring firm *before* joining the firm, their values may become more similar to the organization's values and, ultimately, they may achieve a closer fit with the organization. This is because of the committing nature and salience of choosing an organization—high person-organization fit at entry may become even more stable after a person spends more time with the hiring organization. Further, individuals who have more offers to choose from initially may cognitively reevaluate their values as more similar to the values of the organization they join (cf. O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1981; Salancik, 1977). Of course, selection is not merely a process of organizations selecting people; people actively seach for and choose an organization to join. From the person's perspective, time, effort, initiative, and breadth of information may predict person-organization fit. Although industrial psychologists have looked at personnel selection almost exclusively from the point of view of the organization selecting employees, some organizational researchers have acknowledged the im-

portance of the *individual* selecting an organization (cf. Kulik & Rowland, 1986). Empirical research conducted among teachers (Betz & Judkins, 1975), newspaper reporters (Sigelman, 1975), and forest service workers (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970) has shown that people tend to choose organizations on the basis of the similarity between their values and those espoused by the organization they are considering. More formally, the following propositions are suggested:

Proposition 6: Potential recruits who either initiate or are asked to spend more time with an organization and who are involved in a variety of organizational activities (e.g., interviews, phone calls, receptions) before being hired will have profiles of values similar to those of the firm upon entry.

Proposition 7: The behavioral outcome of high person-organization fit at entry will be that the person conforms to the pivotal norms of the organization. Further, changes in individual values will be negatively associated with high person-organization fit at entry.

Socialization. *Organizational socialization* is the process through which an individual comes to understand the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge that are essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member (Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). According to traditional theories, socialization processes lead directly to various desirable organizational outcomes (cf. Fisher & Weekley, 1982). In contrast, it is proposed here that person-organization fit *mediates* the relationship between socialization experiences and outcome variables. In other words, socialization processes actually teach employees the norms and values of the organization.

Louis (1980) described socialization activities as opportunities for newcomers to make sense out of their organizational experiences. These activities also are opportunities for organizations to influence the values of members. Further, the influence of socialization programs will be especially pronounced in the early stages of organizational membership (cf. Berlew & Hall, 1966). The following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 8: In organizations that have strong values, a greater variety and number of socialization processes, which include such activities as social and recreational events, formal training, and mentor programs, will be positively associated with person-organization fit and will bring about greater changes in individual values, resulting in a closer fit over time.

Integrating Selection and Socialization. Organization researchers have recognized that the costs of selecting new employees can partly offset the costs of the socialization processes (Etzioni, 1975; Schmidt & Hunter, 1981). If an organization is highly selective (assuming that clear and valid criteria for selection have been established), socialization costs, such as training, orientation, and other informal methods of teaching new employees how things are done in the organization, are presumably lowered. Conversely, as selection ratios become less favorable to the organization (due to fewer qualified applicants), socialization mechanisms will need to be enhanced so that those entering the organization will become appropriately assimilated. It is argued here that selection and socialization are *not* competitive hypotheses; these processes operate jointly to shape a firm's work force. That is, organizations may seek out and select individuals whose values are *already* similar to current members' values (Schneider, 1987), making it easier to socialize them. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Proposition 9: At early stages in organization membership (0–1 year), selection experiences will explain more variance in person-organization fit than socialization experiences. However, as the recruit becomes "less new" in the organization, the number and type of socialization experiences will explain more variance in person-organization fit than person variables will.

Conclusion

Person-organization fit provides an initial index that can signal what specific values and

norms we should investigate further. Specifically, we can begin to predict changes both in individual values and behavior and in organizational values and norms. The following academic example summarizes the contributions of a model of person-organization fit. Consider what would happen when a new professor, who values research more than teaching, enters a university department in which members cohesively and intensely value teaching more than research. The first contribution of the model and methods described here is that we can identify initial discrepancies in values. Once large discrepancies of important values have been identified, the model would then help to determine what behaviors to focus on—will the new professor's values change (research begins to decline as a priority)? Will his or her behaviors change (e.g., he or she begins to spend more time on teaching preparations and in office hours with students than he or she has in the past)? Or, will the new professor inspire his or her colleagues to begin research projects and, eventually, to recruit more research-oriented candidates for the department? The person-organization fit model can identify discrepancies and similarities between people and organizations, can track such changes over time, and can identify what kinds of behavior and normative changes may occur.

The goal of this paper has been to identify specific criteria with which we can construct meaningful and useful interactional models in organizational research. By paying more attention to how we conceptualize people and organizations, through specific methods and longitudinal research designs, we will be able to answer important questions. Using an illustration of one such model, this paper may have raised more questions than it answered. For example, how enduring are individual characteristics? How strong must organizational values be in order to influence different types of people? How likely is it that individual characteristics will shine through despite strong values? Are there optimal combinations of heterogeneity and homogeneity among organization members? However, it is hoped that by clarifying important criteria for conducting interactional organization research, we can come closer to understanding how organizational membership can have enduring and dramatic effects on people and how people can have enduring and dramatic effects on organizations.

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Jennifer A. Chatman (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley) is an Assistant Professor of Organization Behavior at Northwestern University. Correspondence regarding this article can be sent to her at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208. *The author would like to thank Robert Bies, Elizabeth Mannix, and Denise Rousseau for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.*