Trying to Find and Keep Top-notch Agents for your Sales Team? Why Not Use the Person-Job Fit Approach?

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Good salespeople are still hard to find and keep over the long haul. The national turnover rate for real estate agents remains high and many individuals do not survive in the business.

What is the tenure of salespeople in your office? Are you satisfied with it? If you are not, what do you believe is causing this problem? What can you do to improve this situation?

This article shows how managers can use the Person-Job fit concept when hiring new salespeople. Doing so can reduce the stress that your salespeople feel in their jobs, help retain your best sales agents, and enhance your office’s overall sales performance.

Recent studies (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al. 2005) show that if management can do a better job hiring individuals whose personal characteristics match the requirements of a particular job, employees will:

- Experience greater satisfaction with their jobs
- Be more committed to their organizations
- Be less likely to quit their jobs

Current research that we have underway (Fournier et al.) reveals that Person-Job fit has a strong positive impact on business outcomes.

**What is Person-Job Fit (P-J fit) and How Does it Impact a Specific Organization?**

Person-Job fit is the relationship between an individual’s characteristics and his/her job or the tasks s/he must perform (Edwards 1991; Kristof 1996). Beyond a person’s characteristics, experts are paying a lot more attention to the way people think about their time as well as how time relates to their jobs. Specifically, “time congruity”, is a form of P-J fit that exists when there is a match between the temporal requirements of a job (Job Time Personality) and the temporal style of the person who holds that job (Individual Time Personality). For instance, one might expect to find time congruity between an individual who is normally very punctual and the job of a railroad engineer who operates on a very structured schedule.

In the context that we are studying this phenomenon (the broadcasting industry), the sales leadership team has concluded that their account executive role requires lots of switching between tasks and focusing on scheduling and meeting deadlines. So, this work setting requires someone to be very “polychronic” to succeed. However, it should be recognized that this polychronic time perspective will vary for sales roles across industries.
We conducted preliminary analysis for 167 account executives, and found that those account executives who prefer to switch between job tasks and have a propensity to schedule their time and focus on meeting deadlines experience greater P-J fit. Furthermore, these account executives have less uncertainty about what must be done in their job, which reduces role conflict at work (e.g., conflicting expectations from multiple parties, boss vs. spouse). Finally, they report much greater satisfaction with their jobs and commitment to their organizations, and these factors drive their individual performance. Such findings, if identified in the real estate industry, should be equally important if the goal is to get and keep good salespeople, as well as grow organizational revenue.

**How can Managers Access a Job Applicant’s Person-Job Fit?**

In order to assess a job candidate’s fit with your organization, it is necessary to follow a three-step process.

a) First, using input from your agents, identify the optimal job timestyle for real estate agents in your organization

b) Next, when considering new hires, determine the job applicant’s individual timestyle

c) Finally, compare the applicant’s individual timestyle with the job’s optimal timestyle in order to determine if P-F fit exists

**How can You Measure the Real Estate Agent Job Timestyle and an Agent Applicant’s Timestyle?**

In order to measure a work preference to switch between tasks, we recommend using the Inventory of Polychronic Values (IPV) scale (Bluedorn et al. 1999). This includes four questions which focus on an individual’s preferences for how they would like to work and the wording should be adapted to fit the particular job.

To measure a propensity for scheduling and meeting deadlines, we recommend using a list of questions created by Schriber and Gutek (1987). This scale is comprised of 9 questions which are appropriate for determining a job candidate’s timestyle and the wording of the questions will have to be adjusted to refer to the sales agent position when measuring the job timestyle.
**Future Directions Regarding Person-Job Fit Investigation**

The investigation of how time can be used to recruit and hire the best people is in an early stage. While we have discussed above the concept of polychronicity/monochronicity and focused on scheduling and meeting deadlines, more topics are worthy of consideration. For example, would it be better to hire real estate agents who have a short-term orientation (who focus on the here and today) or would you prefer agents who are more long-term oriented and interested in the future implications of their efforts and growing long-term relationships? Furthermore, would you prefer to hire a new agent who prefers to be in a job that has a moderate or fast pace of work? Which is more appropriate for your organization’s sales role?

**The Bottom Line**

In conclusion, there is growing evidence that organizations can experience positive business outcomes by more systematically matching new employees with a specific job role. Achieving this objective should benefit organizations through bringing on board the right people for the right jobs, resulting in the new hires experiencing greater satisfaction with their organizations and higher performance. This should also result in less employee turnover which will reduce expenses associated with hiring and training new people and subsequently increasing company profitability.

**References**


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Chris Blocker completed his Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee in marketing. His research focuses on understanding the dynamics of customer value and how deep customer insights can enhance strategies like relationship management and global segmentation. Prior to pursuing a Ph.D. in marketing, Chris held marketing and sales positions in the high-tech sector, including consulting work in professional services and as a global account manager for AT&T and in business marketing at Sprint. His research has appeared or is forthcoming in *Journal of Business Research, Industrial Marketing Management, The European Journal of Marketing, and The Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing,* and in the proceedings of several international marketing organizations.