

The Role of a Person-Supervisor Fit on Employee Attitudes and Retention

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The study of person-environment fit (P-E Fit), or the relationship of people to their working environment, has long focused on the congruence between individuals and some level within the environment (e.g. the organization, the group, the vocation). While past research in this field has found a multitude of outcomes of high P-E Fit, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), or organizational citizenship behaviors (Comeau & Griffith, 2005), researchers have yet to fully inspect the influence that person-supervisor fit, or the relationship between people and their managers, could have on employees—or more specifically, the role that person-supervisor fit would have on the retention of employees.

Research on employee attitudes and retention should provide a more complete picture of how perceived person-supervisor fit impacts employee outcomes. However, we are not aware of any substantial analysis of the various ways in which this fit impacts the relationship of employee attitudes and retention. Are there situations in which an employee's decision to return to an organization rest on perceived high person-supervisor fit, or stated differently, do people choose to return to a company because of the positive relationship that they had with their previous manager? Does person-supervisor fit affect employee attitudes and the retention of employees; more importantly, does a positive relationship decrease turnover?

With respect to employee retention, Saks and Ashforth (1997), in a longitudinal investigation of employee perceptions of person-organization fit and work outcomes, found person-organization fit to be significantly negatively related to intentions to quit and turnover after employees were hired; thus people who have a strong positive connection with their environment are much less likely to consider leaving. Furthermore, Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), using meta-analytic techniques, found the relationship between

employees and their supervisors to be significantly positively related to organizational commitment or loyalty. However, research in this domain has yet to look at the specific relationship of person-supervisor fit and retention.

The relationship between employees and their working environment has most often been analyzed in relation to employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. For example, Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) found person-supervisor fit to be significantly positively related to job satisfaction. Additionally, when the components of people's relationship with their organization are analyzed by individual personality and organizational climate, this relationship is significantly correlated with employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (Westerman & Cyr, 2004). Yet, we are aware of no research that has examined the relationship of supervisors to associates with employee satisfaction of pay/benefits and satisfaction with organizational support for learning, development, and advancement.

In a recent study, we examined the relationship that person-supervisor fit has on employee attitudes as well as employee retention. This study utilized employees (N=1162) in a large banking company who completed exit interviews within three months of leaving the organization. Past employees were asked three questions pertaining to returning to the organization after leaving; these items comprised the retention scale. Additionally, past employees' perceptions of person-supervisor fit were assessed using a nine item questionnaire. Employees' satisfaction with the pay and benefits were also measured, along with their satisfaction with the organization's support for learning, development, and advancement.

Utilizing several regression analysis techniques, the results revealed that satisfaction with pay and benefits had a partial significant effect on retention. The results also showed that the relationship

of satisfaction with pay and benefits and retention was partially mediated by person-supervisor fit. Furthermore, satisfaction with the organization's support for learning, development and advancement also had an effect on retention, but was also mediated by the relationship which employees had with their manager.

The aforementioned results have important implications for managers hoping to retain their best employees. It may be the case that offering employees a higher salary or developmental/ advancement opportunities may not be enough to retain employees. As shown, employers may have to go a step further in retaining employees by providing a good person-supervisor fit, or a better match between associates and their managers. Given the sparse data on person-supervisor fit, it is our hope that future research will begin to explore potential avenues which examine the relationship of person-supervisor fit with other variables. ■

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