



Work Environment and Personal-Organizational Fit What are Those? : Preparing Students to Find Their Most Suited Employers

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Keywords: work environment, professional, retail, curriculum

For today's Gen Y (people who were born in or after 1980), the work environment (WE) seems to be one critical factor to consider as they prepare to enter workforce. Gen Y employees are known to have unique work attitudes and behaviors (Business.com). For example, they would easily get dissatisfied, and therefore, start searching for new jobs when there is a lack of open culture in WE. This trend of job satisfaction and job turnover is common across all industries including the fields of retail, fashion, and design (Leslie, 2002). Companies are also taking interests in understanding this generation and tailoring the work culture to appeal to Gen Y employees (Business.com). At the same time, training today's students to be able to assess the WE of a prospective employer is also important while getting ready for their future careers.

Work environment is defined as the cumulative physical, social and psychological characteristics of a company which often predict employees' stress and job satisfaction (Hayes, Douglas, & Bonner, 2015). The Person-Organization (P-O) fit theory (Kristof, 1996) informs us that job applicants try to find compatibility between their own characteristics and those of the organization, and when applicants perceive such compatibility, they assume to have better WEs in those corporations. However, this process of trying to understand WE of future employers and to assess the potential P-O fit is extremely difficult, particularly for soon-to-be college graduates.

Despite the challenge, teaching college students with WE assessment and P-O fit evaluation has been limited in college education as most educators in textile and apparel related programs focus on developing discipline-specific skills, discipline-general skills, and professional skills (ITAA Meta-goals, 2008). Even for personal attributes skills, team work, leadership, communication skills, creative thinking, are critical analysis are targeted (Cheek & Frazier, 2013) with little to no training about the WE and P-O fit assessment.

In this light, the purpose of this study is to call for educators' attention to consider including curriculum contents related to WE and P-O fit assessment. For students to be able to do this assessment properly and successfully, the literature suggests a three-step analysis of person-organization-situational context (Chatman, 1989). Since an individual's behavior is strongly affected by ones' personality traits, values, motives, abilities, and affect (*idem*), first, students need to understand their employment passion and preferences by analyzing their personal characteristics. Several personality tests, such as Strengthquest™, Strong Interest Inventory® test, and Profile Evaluation tests are available in the marketplace to help assess individual personality. Next, students need to perform a similar assessment of the potential organization, or company, to have an understanding of the company and its expectations. In today's digital world,

students have tremendous access to a variety of company information (through their corporate websites and annual reports), values (through their corporate social responsibility reports, transparent endeavors, or community giving), achievements and criticism (through certification indices and media reports), and performance (through online employees reviews, such as Glassdoor). Students could utilize these resources to assess companies' personality characteristics. Finally, practical realities also must be considered in the equation to estimate the best WE and P-O fit assessment (Erickson, 2008). For example, the phase of life, economic situations, personal/family challenges and responsibilities (*idem*) are important factors to consider when assessing the trade-offs when selecting employment choices and get a realistic alignment of person and organization characteristics.

Perceiving and assessing WE and P-O fit with their future employers can offer helpful indices to signal students about their future career success. Considering the importance and complexity of the WE and P-O fit evaluation processes, students might need to be prepared from an early year of their college program and not in their senior year. Educators might need to develop a longitudinal training plan in their educational programs to help students assess their personal, organizational, and situational characteristics. Further, while companies are already trying to adapt to the Gen Y employees, preparing students to assess WE and P-O fit of their future employers can lead to a better compatibility between the company and workforce.

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