

Person-Organization Fit and Autism in the Workplace

Sacha Pence
Auburn University

Daniel J. Svyantek
Auburn University

Social interactions and social contexts are a particularly relevant and problematic issue for those with autism. The impact of the behavior of an individual with autism cannot be understood without understanding the organizational context in which he/she resides. Workplace cultures differ greatly and behaviors which are problematic in one organizational culture may be acceptable in another organizational culture. The organizational construct, person-organization fit (PO), provides a framework for understanding how social interactions may affect those with autism in the workplace. This paper will do this by a) describing the social interaction patterns of those with autism; b) describing organizational culture as a social environment and how PO fit operates to affect the performance of those within an organization; c) using the construct of PO fit to contextualize the social interactions of those with autism in a workplace; and d) discussing the human resource and legal implications for dealing with autism in the workplace.

Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan (1991) proposed a "new model of selection" in which employees are hired to fit the characteristics of an organization, as well as the requirements of a particular job. This notion is based on the idea of hiring a "whole" person who will fit well into the specific organization's culture. They proposed the selection process should achieve two types of fit (Bowen et al., 1991). First, the selection process must match the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) of the individual and the task demands of the job (i.e., person-job fit). Second, organizational processes attempt to match individual dispositional variables and the culture of the organization (i.e., person-organization fit). These two forms of fit define person-environment fit (Kristof, 1996).

Person-job (PJ) fit is concerned with the degree to which there is a match between an employee's skills and abilities and the requirements of the job the employee holds

(Kristof, 1996). The better the match, the more likely the employee is to be successful. As this match decreases and employees do not have the needed skills and abilities to perform the job, employees tend to become frustrated and dissatisfied which can lead to a decrease in organizational performance. This concept of fit is consistent with traditional approaches to human resource practices (e.g., selection and performance evaluation). Defining person-job fit is done in traditional ways by matching the needs of job analyses to the knowledges, skills, and abilities of applicants. From a legal perspective, PJ fit is concerned with the essential job functions as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (cf., Gutman, Koppes, & Vodanovich, 2011).

Person-organization (PO) fit is concerned with the match between employee characteristics and the characteristics of the organization (e.g., organizational culture) in which the employee works (Kristoff, 1996). The better the match, the more likely the employee is to be a successful employee. For example, some organizations value teamwork and some organizations value individual accomplishment. Individuals with a high need for individual accomplishment will have good fit with an organization valuing individual accomplishment; however, their fit will be poor in an organization valuing teamwork. As this match decreases and employee characteristics and values do not reflect organizational characteristics, employees tend to become frustrated and dissatisfied, which can lead to a subsequent decrease in organizational performance. This concept of fit may impact traditional human resource practices. However, this impact is much more complex and not as well-defined from a legal perspective. The primary organizational variable PO fit relates to is organizational culture. Organizational culture is defined in part by the social interactions among workers. These interactions, in turn, affect performance and related concepts covering social interactions such as a hostile work environment (cf., Gutman et al., 2011).

Social interactions and social contexts are a particularly relevant and problematic issue for those with mental or psychiatrically defined disabilities. Stefan (2002) stated that individuals with such mental and psychiatric disabilities interact with the organizational environments of the companies in which they are employed. The impact of the behavior of an individual cannot be understood with understanding organizational cultures. Stefan (2002) noted that workplace cultures differ greatly and that behaviors which are problematic in one organizational culture may be indicative of creativity in another organizational culture.

Therefore, understanding the impact of a mental or psychiatric disability requires that both the behavior patterns of the individual with such a disability, the organizational culture in which the individual resides, and the potential fit (or misfit) of these cultures be understood. This is particularly important because organizations are required to balance the needs of members of different protected groups. For example, the behaviors exhibited by an individual with a mental disability may disturb a member of another protected group (e.g., a woman) and the organization must come to a decision regarding these two individuals. This decision must be made carefully with a full understanding of the nature of the mental or psychiatric disability and the part played by that disability in social interactions.

Social Interaction Patterns and Autism in the Workplace

Individuals with autism have deficits with social skills that may be markedly different depending on the functioning level of the individual which can affect their participation in employment (Chiang et al., 2013). Although social deficits are more apparent with individuals who have intellectual disabilities, it is important that employers understand that individuals with autism with normal or above-average cognitive abilities will be impacted by impairments in their social repertoires. For example, social-skills deficits may manifest as impairments in conversation skills, detecting and responding to subtle social cues, and developing and maintaining appropriate relationships with coworkers, bosses, and customers (Howlin & Goode, 1998).

A variety of social skills are necessary to perform work-related interactions and professional social requirements at or above employer's expectations. The employee needs to be able to respond to subtle social cues from his/her bosses, coworkers, and customers. These social cues can include facial expressions that indicate signs of emotional states (e.g., frustration, confusion, happiness, and boredom), the amount of personal space to provide another person (e.g., standing too close to others when talking), posture, and body language (e.g., slouching). Individuals not only need to be able to detect such changes in facial expression and body language, but also need to know how to respond to these cues given the context of an organizational culture. This knowledge of proper responses is critical for successful transition to, and performance within, an organization.

In addition to understanding social cues related to facial features and body language, individuals with autism can have difficulties understanding situational social cues. This could include situations where a person in the social environment needs help (Reeve et al., 2007). This could be, for example, peers in the organization and customers of the organization.

Individuals with autism may struggle with conversation skills, including answering questions directly, engaging in casual chit-chat exchanges, greeting and departure skills, and having meaningful, context-appropriate conversations with bosses, coworkers, and customers (Bates, 1980; Hughes et al., 1995). Eye contact may be sporadic, nonexistent, or too intense, resulting in awkward social interactions with others. In addition, individuals with autism may have difficulties with perspective taking, resulting in difficulties understanding how they might be viewed by others. These difficulties with conversation skills can negatively impact how well individuals perform their work responsibilities or how positively others view them and want to engage with them.

Social-skills deficits can interfere with the working relationship with an employer. Individuals with autism may lack imitation skills needed in social situations to help them acquire skills through observational learning or to inform how to respond in a novel or difficult situation by watching a coworker. In addition, they may have poor self-management skills and as a result, may engage in off-task behavior or prolonged conversations that can impede productivity. Individuals with autism may have difficulties engaging in problem-solving skills, including defining the problem, perspective taking, considering consequences and choosing the best option, developing

a plan of action, evaluating one's actions (Bonete, Calero, & Fernández-Parra, 2015). They also may not know when or how to request assistance, resulting in a situation when the individual either stops the work behavior (i.e., he waits until a supervisor comes to check-in with him) or performing a skill incorrectly (Bonete et al., 2015). Individuals with autism may also have difficulties expressing differing opinions and accepting criticism (Bates, 1980), making it difficult for supervisors to provide feedback and for the individual with autism to incorporate that feedback into effective behavior change. Finally, individuals with autism may have challenges with self-advocacy and negotiation skills (Quinn et al., 1992), making them more susceptible to abuse in the workplace or unfair work distribution.

The individual with autism faces a number of challenges in the workplace. The inability to perceive social cues and learning to respond appropriately may adversely affect the influence of the organizational culture on them. Organizational culture and PO fit are two important constructs relating to the effect of social interactions and careers in organizations. These two constructs are discussed in the next section.

PO Fit and Organizational Culture

Person-organization fit has been defined as "the congruence between patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values, defined here as what an individual values in an organization, such as being team-oriented or innovative" (Chatman, 1989, p. 459). Kristof (1996) defined PO fit as the fit of the person not with any specific subgroup, job or vocation, but the organization as a whole. Cable and DeRue (2002) described PO fit as the judgment of value congruence between the organization and the employee.

The emphasis in these definitions is on the match of an individual's values, when considered along with the value system in a specific organizational culture, and the potential effects that this match (or lack of match) has on that individual's subsequent behavior, attitudes and career in the company. Person-organization fit has been shown to be related to a number of organizational variables including (1) job choice decisions by organizational applicants (Cable & Judge, 1996); (2) organizational attraction of applicants (Judge & Cable, 1997); (3) selection decisions made by recruitment interviewers (Cable & Judge, 1997); (4) employee job satisfaction, job tenure, and career success (Bretz & Judge, 1994); and (5) employee's level of task and organizational citizenship performance (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999).

An important thing to note, however, is that, even when controlling for PJ fit, PO fit may result in positive or negative work outcomes which affect the success of the employee (Bretz & Judge, 1994; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). When Lauer and Kristof-Brown (2000) investigated the distinction between PJ and PO fit, they found that the two constructs weakly related to each other ($r = .18$), implying that employees distinguish between the types of fit in the work environment. The findings of Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) supported the idea that job-related constructs are most strongly associated with attitudes about the job, while organization-related constructs are related to organizational attitudes (Shore & Martin, 1989). This is evident in job satisfaction's high correlation to PJ fit and organizational

commitment's relationship with PO fit. Positive outcomes of person-organization fit include more commitment, more satisfaction, and less intention to quit (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Chatman, 1989; Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Therefore, for any employee, including those with autism, careers in an organization are affected by both the ability to perform essential job functions and to adapt to the organizational culture.

Organizational culture may be defined by a set of shared values and norms, held by employees, which guides employees' interactions with peers, management, and clients/customers (Morgan, 1998). A major reason for the formation of organizational culture is the creation of social order (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Organizational culture allows recurrent behavior patterns among people to develop within organizations.

Organizational culture affects behaviors within an organization. Organizational culture defines a strong situation (Mischel, 1977) for individuals residing within it. A strong situation provides people with generally accepted rules and guidelines for appropriate behavior. The rules that are present in strong situations constrain people from acting in a manner inconsistent with accepted conduct and behavior. Organizations develop values and norms to set parameters on the behaviors exhibited within an organization. Understanding these parameters becomes critical for employees within the organization.

The process by which person-organization fit may come to maintain an organizational culture across time; influence organizational human resource practices; and affect employee behavior is illustrated in the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, 1987a; Schneider, 1987b; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995; Schneider, 2000). Schneider proposed that "attributes of people, not the nature of the external environment, or organizational technology, or organizational structure, are the fundamental determinants of organizational behavior" (i.e., "the people make the place") (Schneider, 1987b, p. 437). The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework is a mechanism for explaining the homogeneity of organizational level variables such as organizational culture found in organizations. Schneider (1987a) stated that this homogeneity is due to three main processes. Firstly, it occurs because people are attracted to places that they prefer (Attraction). People will seek out organizational environments in which they are comfortable being a member. The primary human resource practice affected by this is recruitment and there are potential legal implications for organizations here. Secondly, homogeneity results from people being placed into settings to which they are perceived to be compatible (Selection). Organizations tend to select certain individuals who appear to fit with those already there. The primary human resource practice affected by this is selection and there are potential legal implications for organizations here as well. Thirdly, if people manage to enter an environment that is not a fit for them, they are more likely to leave it (Attrition) or the organization may terminate them. The behaviors exhibited by individuals with lack of fit may come to be dysfunctional (Svyantek & Brown, 2002) and may potentially be grounds for dismissal from an organization (Svyantek, Cullen, & Doerr, 2015).

Arthur et al. (2006) stated that PO fit may also be used to make decisions about the termination of employees. The question remains whether or not such

termination decisions are defensible. Svyantek et al. (2015) provided a model showing that undesirable behaviors may be grounds for dismissal of employees exhibiting problematic behavior.

There has been a growth in research on dysfunctional behavior in the workplace (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, & Collins, 1998). Much of this research has focused on how individual differences in employees relate to dysfunctional behavior. Griffin et al. (1998), for example, developed a model of the dynamics of dysfunctional behaviors in organizations that is concerned with individual differences and individual pathologies as antecedents of behavior. This model, however, also includes organizational characteristics (e.g., norms, culture, reward and control systems) as potential influences on employee behavior in general.

Person-organization fit is a critical variable in understanding the relationship between organizational culture and dysfunctional behavior as PO fit is for desirable behavior (Svyantek et al., 2015). Not all individuals are equally suited to all organizations. The performance of dysfunctional behavior may be a matter of a poor fit between the individual and the situation and not just a set of individual and/or organizational variables considered in isolation from each other. Dysfunctional responses to poor fit, however, include increased stress, burnout, cynicism, role ambiguity and role conflict among employees. Poor fit is not necessarily a deficit of either the person or the organization. Rather, misfit occurs when there is a mismatch between employee value systems and organizational culture. This misfit, however, leads to issues which the organization may be required to address because of decrements in performance found. Behaviors may be seen as socially deviant in a particular organization or for a particular group within an organization. Refusal to change these, when given feedback about them, may lead to termination. The key here for the decision to terminate is not necessarily that the behaviors are simply observed. Rather, the decision to terminate should be based on the response of the employee to feedback about the appropriateness of the behavior in the current context.

In addition, it has been proposed that misfit has the potential to lead to decreased employee and organizational performance (Svyantek et al., 2015). This proposal is based on the work of Steiner (1972). Steiner proposed that, for any job in which groups were involved:

$$\text{Actual Productivity} = \text{Potential Productivity} - \text{Process Loss}$$

Process involves the people in an organization. Therefore, the human element in this model is a source of error. Process loss involves communication, interpersonal dealings with others, and discussing and making decisions for situations where there is no clearly superior solution. Individuals who lack person-organization fit will cause disruption and process loss. This decreases the performance of the organization in which they reside. The greater the misfit, the greater the process loss and probability of termination of the employee.

There is an interesting conundrum in studying PO fit. This construct is recognized as an important construct in predicting employee well-being and performance criteria. However, there is a paucity of work on PO fit's legal standing and legal implications

for human resource management practice. Svyantek et al. provided a logic for the use of PO fit in human resource practice. Their work helped address the issues involved in identifying the implications of PO fit for organizations for making human resource decisions involving individuals with autism in the workplace. Interestingly, analysis of the available legal decisions on mental disabilities in the workplace also inform the legal standing of PO fit as a viable factor in employment decisions.

Autism and PO Fit in the Workplace

There are many ways in which the social interactions of those with autism may affect their PO fit. This section addresses some of the potential issues that may arise for those with autism in the workplace. In addition, legal decisions which relate to these social interaction issues for those with autism are also looked at.

Autism and Workplace Interactions Issues

The need to understand social cues and appropriately respond is an integral part of performance in organizations. Individuals with autism need to be able to respond to these cues given the context (i.e., discriminate the social cue and the person engaging in the social cue). This is important in interactions with superiors, peers and customers/clients of an organization.

The interaction with supervisors is a critical social situation in which all employees are placed. If a supervisor is displaying a downturned or thinned mouth, flared nostrils, and lowered brows that all indicate frustration and has his arms crossed across his chest, this might signal a number of things, including 1) that the employee needs to discontinue what he is doing immediately; 2) that his performance is poor and that he needs to adjust his behavior to please his boss; or 3) that his boss is simply having a bad day. Those with autism may have difficulty selecting which response is appropriate in these types of situations.

Such social understanding difficulties may occur for the peers of those with autism as well. Individuals with autism may lack imitation skills needed in social situations to help them acquire skills through observational learning or to inform how to respond in a novel or difficult situation by watching a coworker. Often coworkers, for example, ask for help indirectly through verbal statements. A coworker may state, "I don't know how I am going to get all these papers filed, copies made, and write the report in time to make my deadlines." Although the coworker did not directly ask for help, based on her statement, one might offer to help file papers to assist the person in completing her responsibilities within the timeline. Lacking discrimination and imitation skills, the individual with autism has not acquired the proper response for this organization. Alternatively, someone may require help based on the physical arrangement of the environment. For example, a coworker carrying a large stack of papers down the hallway who drops some of those papers and a coworker setting up for a meeting and having technology difficulties are situations in which it would be appropriate to offer assistance. Individuals with autism may have difficulties understanding indirect verbal statements and physical cues that indicate situations in which one should offer to provide assistance. This difficulty may lead those with autism to have problems

performing appropriate organizational citizenship behaviors and helping their peers. In addition, they may have poor self-management skills and as a result, can engage in off-task behavior or prolonged conversations that can impede productivity.

One particular area of potential problems is that the deficits in social skills can result in strained relationships with coworkers. Individuals with autism may have difficulties detecting humor and sarcasm and thus might respond to their coworkers literally when a coworker attempts to make a joke or a nonliteral statement. Individuals with autism may have difficulties telling innocent white lies (e.g., saying “yes” when someone asks if she looks okay regardless of how she actually looks). They also might have difficulties interacting with others during breaks and over lunch due to lack of appropriate conversation skills or leisure skills during those periods of unstructured time. Because of such social-skills deficits, individuals with autism may have difficulties forming meaningful relationships with their coworkers. Repeated negative interactions can even result in the development of hostile relationships with coworkers. This is a particular issue for organizations if the interactions of those with autism affect members of another protected group (e.g., women) adversely.

Finally, those with autism may have difficulty interpreting the same cues from members of a different group. For example, if a customer is engaging in those same facial features and body language as described for the supervisor above, then this should signal that the employee needs to provide assistance or to communicate with the customer to reduce the negative feelings. This may be difficult. In many situations, the individual with autism must use contextual cues with social cues to determine how to respond. However, they may have not yet developed the skills to perform such contextualized responses fluently.

Social-skill deficits can interfere with a working relationship with the employer. The next section looks at some of the legal decisions that have been made which impact the requirements of the employer to accommodate those with autism.

Legal Issues and Workplace Interactions

Accommodations for those with mental disabilities in the workplace are a unique challenge for individuals requesting such accommodations. There are few accommodations that may be requested as a matter of law. Rather, accommodations which are reasonable must be determined on a case-by-case basis (Gutman et al., 2011). This is particularly true for accommodation requests made by those with mental disabilities in regards to the social environment of the workplace.

This means that accommodations that aid those with mental disabilities that on the surface seem reasonable (e.g., transfer away from a supervisor who shouts at workers), are not necessarily required. Being in an environment where shouting occurs does not necessarily constitute a hostile work environment. The Supreme Court has recognized that the right to work in an environment that is free from intimidation, insult, and ridicule exists based on membership within a protected class (Stefan, 2002). Stefan (2002) noted, however, that this is very different from recognizing a right to work in an environment that is free from these things as being universal. Therefore, hostility by a supervisor which is indiscriminate is not hostility based on a protected class and may be considered part of the working environment to which an employee must adapt.

Stefan (2002) summarized court decisions which were relevant to the degree in which those with autism may successfully work within an organization based on their fit with organizational and work characteristics. These rulings have been based on properly conducted job analyses which show the importance of variables related to fit as essential to job function. First, social skills may be essential to job function. These include such social skills as ability to accept and follow instructions, the ability to refrain from arguments, and insubordinate conduct with supervisors, peers, or customers. Second, attendance is an essential job function. Individuals with mental disabilities like autism are still required to fulfill all attendance policies laid down by corporate policies. This includes policies related to shiftwork and overtime. Third, the ability to handle stress may be seen as an essential job function if this is derived from a job analysis. Courts have held that all jobs and/or employment may be inherently stressful. Therefore, a supervisor shouting at all employees may be an element of the organizational context to which all employees must adapt. Fourth, the ability to get along well with others (e.g., supervisors, peers, or customers) is necessary for almost all occupations. Therefore, not getting along well with coworkers is not necessarily a reason to request accommodations by those with autism. Finally, employees may be ill-suited to some work and poor fit will create stress which the employee must accommodate. For example, downsizing in an organization may lead to a situation where the nature of all jobs must change or work shifts must change. These organizational changes, which can affect all employees, are sometimes required by business necessity and may greatly impact those with autism who may be required to adapt to them.

Gutman et al.'s (2011) analysis of court cases supported Stefan's summarization of the legal decisions vis-à-vis those with mental disabilities. Employers do not need to fundamentally alter job duties but these duties must be justified by a proper job analysis. Gutman et al. (2011) provided findings of several court cases showing this. First, requests to be able to leave a room when an employee has conflict with a supervisor have been held to be unreasonable as a matter of law. Second, a similar request to be shifted away from coworkers who caused an individual prolonged stress was also held to be unreasonable as a matter of law. Finally, requests to choose one's own supervisor have been found to place an undue administrative burden on employers.

Most people with mental disabilities seek jobs with which they have good PJ fit (Stefan, 2002). They look for jobs where they can perform the essential job functions. The nature of the essential job function, however, goes beyond task KSAs to include social interactions in the workplace. Court decisions have altered the definition of essential job functions to include the social environment of work as well as the actual knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) to perform the actual job (cf., Stefan, 2002; Gutman et al., 2011). This is consistent with development in selection where the old acronym, KSA, has become KSAO. The O indicates other characteristics related to the job (Levy, 2013). In essence, the other characteristics as noted above, come to be part of the essential job functions. The degree to which an employee has these other characteristics may be as relevant as the KSAs they possess for the performance of such essential job functions or duties. This means that PO fit for those with autism may lead to either positive or negative employment outcomes as it does for all employees (cf., Svyantek et al., 2015). PO fit, therefore is an important determinant of career success

for those with autism. The next section reviews some proposals for how individuals with autism may be have improved PO fit.

Improving PO Fit in the Workplace

The social environment of work may be a problematic issue for those with autism. The social environment has been found, by courts, to be a relevant, essential component of the workplace. Several general and specific approaches are proposed for helping those with autism integrate themselves into the workplace. Two important considerations for employers are that, 1) it is always legal to exceed the requirements of the ADA and the case law decisions in making accommodations (as long as these accommodations do not discriminate against another protected class, violate a union contract, etc.) (Gutman, et al., 2011); and 2) the accommodations, particularly the general recommendations that are typically requested, are often those which make good human resource management practices for all employees in an organization.

General Recommendations for Aiding Integration into the Workplace of those with Autism

Research about PO fit and its outcomes is important for organizations hiring any individual. The practices outlined here are relevant to all employees, not just those with autism. Given the change to a KSAO model in court decisions, the social environment, the employee, and the interactions between them are particularly relevant for those with autism. Some general practices which aid the integration of those with autism into the workplace include:

Recruitment. As noted earlier by Stefan (2002), those with mental disabilities typically seek jobs which fit their KSAs. It is the social environment which remains unknown. Therefore, PO fit may be used to inform recruitment practices. Organizations should make sure that prospective employees have a realistic overview of the organizational values and practices so that applicants may make informed decisions on whether or not they wish to be a member of the organization. Organizations should ensure that prospective applicants from all groups have the same information and that these individuals have access to this information in some manner. This information should provide a valid description of various elements of the job such as the social environment (e.g., relationship among supervisors and subordinates, among coworkers, and among employees and customers) and the pace of the work (e.g., constant versus varied). This information may be used by all, including those with autism, to make a decision on joining an organization based on the fit with their other characteristics.

Selection. There are things that organizations may do in their hiring practices based on PO fit research. Organizations should take steps to ensure that all individuals assessing PO fit have a common framework and understanding of the culture and of the complex set of KSAO characteristics that make up the employees in the culture. In addition, organizations using PO fit must understand that selection based on traditional testing methods (e.g., paper and pencil instruments) is complex. PO fit requires that measures of both employee and organizational variables (e.g., personality and organizational culture) are required. It is a violation of the ADA to inquire about disabilities before an employment offer has been made (cf., Stefan, 2002; Gutman et

al., 2011). However, organizations can use personality tests which are not diagnostic of psychological or mental disabilities for pre-employment selection. Arthur et al. (2006) proposed that the use of PO fit requires local validation studies demonstrating criterion-related validity. Organizations which conduct a valid job analysis for the other characteristics needed to succeed in them, may be able to use such personality tests to assess the fit of all employees, independent of the issue of disability.

Work Policies. Carling (1994) proposed that many of the accommodations requested by those with mental or psychological disabilities do not impose undue hardships on the organization. In addition, he noted that the reasonable accommodations that are requested are examples of effective management and supervisory practices which have the potential to impact the overall culture of an organization positively. These general policies include a) emotional support systems; b) employee support systems for assistance with things like child care and proper procedures for dealing with grievances at work; c) flexibility in setting work hours; d) effective supervision; d) proper training; and e) mechanisms for dealing with issues between coworkers.

These policies are in place in many organizations. Employee Assistance Programs are one example of such employee support systems. Therefore, many of the accommodations requested are in place in progressive organizations. Organizations without such policies might improve both the quality of life for their employees and the organization's performance by adopting such practices.

Finally, the courts have held that social environments where behaviors that some might consider abusive (e.g., yelling supervisors) are not grounds for reasonable accommodation (e.g., such as transfer from such a supervisor to another) if all employees are treated this way. Two points must be made here. First, requested accommodation such as this are common personnel practices for other circumstances (e.g., change of supervisor for sexual harassment or part-time work for mothers) even if courts hold these as not required for mental disability (Stefan, 2002). Therefore, while not required for mental disability, such a policy would show that the organization is going beyond what is required. This is an option that every organization could take, however (Gutman et al., 2011). Second, it is believed that organizations which argue undue hardship for such transfers are not realizing the full potential of their employees. Such organizations could actually improve their organizational culture by improving the culture for all employees by eliminating such potentially abusive practices. Thorough audits of the culture of an organization, and the adherence of all individuals to the cultural values espoused, is a practice which has the potential to improve the quality of work life for all employees, not just those with autism.

Termination. Svyantek et al. (2015) proposed that lack of fit may be enough of an issue for an organization to decide to terminate employees because of their poor social interactions. Organizations have the right to eliminate low performers based on PO misfit. However, such decisions must be 1) based on a job analysis describing the other characteristics needed to perform the job; 2) be able to link these other characteristics to some performance criteria (e.g., disruption of group processes lead to decline in productivity); 3) these decisions should be made on an individual basis; and 4) follow the tenets of progressive discipline. Once again, this termination process described is appropriate for all employees. The primary difference for those with autism is that

the organization and the individual with autism will also follow the legal procedures described in the ADA for flexible interaction and reasonable accommodation (cf., Gutman et al., 2011) at some point in the process.

Specific Recommendations for Aiding Integration into the Workplace of those with Autism

Although individuals with autism may have an array of social skills deficits, the key is whether with reasonable accommodations these individuals can be productive members of the organization. It is important for employers to note that each person with autism is an individual and will have his or her own strengths and weaknesses, as is the case with any employee. Under the ADA, each individual with a disability must be treated on an individual basis.

There are also more specific recommendations for work policies and processes to aid the integration of those with autism into the workplace. These are more personalized accommodations for those with autism. Organizations which attempt to make such accommodations are demonstrating that the company cares about employees and, if ever sued for an ADA issue, are clearly demonstrating that they have attempted to make all reasonable accommodations for those employees with autism.

Social Skill Issues—Recruitment and Selection. The most common complaint employers have when hiring individuals with autism is the lack of social skills and how such deficits inhibit their hiring, promotion, or tenure in a position (Chiang et al., 2013). Therefore, employers should consider using interviews or a pre-evaluation of the social skills needed in a current position to help identify what additional support an individual may need in order to be successful. After an employment offer is extended, if an individual with autism identifies themselves as having a disability (cf., Gutman et al., 2011), a more specific discussion of the social supports needed by those with autism can occur. Employers should plan to provide instruction and feedback to help develop the social repertoires of all individual employees and be willing to develop more specific programs for those with autism. By being proactive with instruction, support, and coaching, an employer can help teach the individual with autism the necessary social skills so that he/she can perform at or above expectations in their position. In addition, proactive approaches to social skills can help prevent awkward or negative interactions with the individual with autism and others (coworkers, bosses, and customers) that could lead to termination of the employment.

Social Skills Issues-Training. As part of the proactive approach in addressing social-skills deficits, employers might develop a system of embedding instruction into the orientation period or training regarding the expectations in social situations and step-by-step instructions for how to handle common social situations. This kind of training has potential benefits for all employees. Similar to how individuals with autism perform better with explicit instruction on vocational tasks, explicit instruction on social skills will improve the overall professional behavior of all employees, not just those with autism. Employers should also consider developing visual aids and written instructions (task analyses) to help outline social skills that will be needed to perform regularly (Cuvo et al., 1992). These aids may include textual prompts or pictorial prompts to help support employees who have limited reading skills. For example, the employer could have written instructions next to the phone that help

guide the individual with autism through the steps of a phone conversation or how to take a message. Employers can also consider training coworkers how to provide praise for correct work-related skills, and how to provide prompts (e.g., instructions, models, and gestures) and feedback to improve performance (Likins et al., 1989).

The training area of an organization should understand that didactic instruction alone is insufficient to consistently improve social skills in those with autism. It is insufficient for individuals with autism to simply be able to label social cues or situations or be able to state how to respond in those situations; this does not consistently translate to appropriate responses when actually faced with those social situations. For example, Peters and Thompson (2015) taught children with autism to label their conversational partner as being interested or uninterested. However, this training was not sufficient enough to improve conversational exchanges. Instead, the experimenters had to explicitly teach individuals to ask a question or change the topic when the conversational partner was uninterested.

Instead of relying on instructions to promote behavioral changes, employers are encouraged to take a behavior skills training approach that involves instructions, modeling, role play, and feedback (Bates, 1980; Lerman et al., 2013; Nuernberger et al., 2013). Using this model, employers should have their employees with autism explicitly practice the skill until the individual can consistently and correctly perform the skill. Training does not need to exclusively involve direct supervisor training. Instead, employers may opt to supplement the training with video modeling. Video modeling is a procedure that involves a videotaped response that outlines the target response and can include voiceover or written instructions to help facilitate acquisition. The video model is shown to the individual before he or she is expected to engage in the relevant behavior and can help the individual learn appropriate workplace behavior, including responses in social interactions (e.g., Hitchcock, Dowrick, & Prater, 2003; LeBlanc et al., 2003) and helping to promote generalization (Jones, Lerman, & Lechago, 2014). Once again, as noted for all accommodations described, these training methods have the potential to benefit all employees.

Social Support. Employers should plan for some level of ongoing support, structure, and feedback for employees with autism. The frequency of coaching, supervision, and feedback will depend on the individual and the degree of social-skills deficits. With adequate training and continued support, individuals with autism can be productive and valued employees that contribute to the workplace (e.g., Burt, Fuller, & Lewis, 1991; Mawhood & Howlin, 1999). Such support can be incorporated into either training or Employee Assistance Programs at an organization.

Conclusion

Unemployment can unfortunately be an important part of being disabled in the United States (Carling, 1994). Individuals with autism want to work and enjoy the same career paths of those without autism. The stigma against individuals with psychiatric mental disabilities, however, may be greater than the stigma associated with other more visible disabilities (Carling, 1994). Individuals with autism, in particular, face challenges in organizations because of the importance of daily social interactions

that occur in a work environment. They may need accommodations to address the correct behavioral patterns expected within the organization. As noted earlier, however, two important considerations for employers are that 1) the legality of exceeding the requirements of the ADA and the case law decisions on making accommodations; 2) making accommodations that exceed what is required by the ADA and case law provides a good defense for showing attempts at reasonable accommodation; and 3) the accommodations that are typically requested by those with mental disabilities (e.g., autism) are often those which create good human resource management practices for all employees in an organization.

References

- Arthur, W. R., Bell, S. T., Villado, A. J., & Doverspike, D. (2006). The use of person-organization fit in employment decision making: An assessment of its criterion-related validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 786-801.
- Bates, P. (1980). The effectiveness of interpersonal skills training on the social skill acquisition of moderately and mildly retarded adults. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 13*, 237-248. doi:10.1901/jaba.1980.13-237
- Bonete, S., Calero, M. D., & Fernández-Parra, A. (2015). Group training in interpersonal problem-solving skills for workplace adaptation of adolescents and adults with Asperger syndrome: A preliminary study. *Autism, 19*, 409-420. doi:10.1177/1362361314522354
- Bowen, D. E., Ledford, G. E., & Nathan, B. R. (1991). Hiring for the organization, not the job. *Academy of Management Executive, 5*(4), 35-51.
- Bretz, R. D., & Judge, T. A. (1994). Person-organization fit and the theory of work adjustment: Implications for satisfaction, tenure, and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 44*, 32-54.
- Burt, D. B., Fuller, S., & Lewis, K. R. (1991). Competitive employment of adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 21*, 237-242. doi:10.1007/BF02284763
- Cable, D. M., & DeRue, D. S. (2002). The convergent and discriminant validity of subjective fit perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*, 1-17.
- Cable, D. M., & Judge, T. A. (1996). Person-organization fit, job choice decisions, and organizational entry. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 67*, 294-331.
- Cable, D. M., & Judge, T.A. (1997). Interviewer's perceptions of person-organization fit and organizational selection decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82*, 546-561.
- Carling, P. J. (1994). Reasonable accommodations in the workplace for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. In S.M. Bruyere, & J. O'Keefe (Eds.), *Implications of the Americans with Disabilities Act* (pp.103-136). New York: Springer Publishing Co.
- Chatman, J. A. (1989). Improving interactional organizational research: A model of person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Review, 14*, 333-349.
- Chiang, H. M., Cheung, Y. K., Li, H., & Tsai, L. Y. (2013). Factors associated with participation in employment for high school leavers with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 43*, 1832-1842. doi:10.1007/s10803-012-1734-2
- Cuvo, A. J., Davis, P. K., O'Reilly, M. F., Mooney, B. M., & Crowley, R. (1992). Promoting

- stimulus control with textual prompts and performance feedback for persons with mild disabilities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 25, 477-489. doi:10.1901/jaba.1992.25-477
- Goodman, S. A., & Svyantek, D. J. (1999). Person-organization fit and conceptual performance: Do shared values matter? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 55, 254-275.
- Griffin, R. W., O'Leary-Kelly, A., & Collins, J. (1998). Dysfunctional work behaviors in organizations. In C. L. Cooper & D. M. Rousseau (Eds.), *Trends in organizational behavior*, Vol. 5, (pp. 65-82).
- Gutman, A., Koppes, L. L., & Vodanovich, S. J. (2011). *EEO law and personnel practices* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Hitchcock, C. H., Dowrick, P. W., & Prater, M. A. (2003). Video self-modeling intervention in school-based settings: A review. *Remedial and Special Education*, 24, 36-45. doi:10.1177/074193250302400104
- Howlin, P., & Goode, S. (1998). Outcome in adult life for people with autism and Asperger's syndrome. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *Autism and pervasive developmental disorders* (pp. 209-220). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hughes, C., Harmer, M. L., Killian, D. J., & Niarhos, F. (1995). The effects of multiple-exemplar self-instructional training on high school students' generalized conversational interactions. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 28, 201-218. doi:10.1901/jaba.1995.28-201
- Jones, J. Lerman, D. C., & Lechago, S. (2014). Assessing stimulus control and prompting generalization via video modeling when teaching social responses to children with autism. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 47, 37-50. doi:10.1002/jaba.81
- Judge, T.A., & Cable, D.M. (1997). Applicant personality, organizational culture and organizational attraction. *Personnel Psychology*, 50, 359-394.
- Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualization, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology*, 49, 1-49.
- Kristof-Brown, A. L., Zimmerman, R. D., & Johnson, E. C. (2005). Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person-job, person organization, person-group and person-supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58, 281-342.
- Lauver, K. J., & Kristof-Brown, A. (2001). Distinguishing between employees' perceptions of person-job and person-organization fit. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59, 454-470.
- LeBlanc, L. A., Coates, A. M., Daneshvar, S., Charlop-Christy, M. H., Morris, C., & Lancaster, B. M. (2003). Using video modeling and reinforcement to teach perspective-taking skills to children with autism. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 36, 253-257. doi:10.1901/jaba.2003.36-253
- Lerman, D. C., Hawkins, L., Hoffman, R., & Caccavale, M. (2014). Training adults with autism spectrum disorder to conduct discrete-trial training for young children with autism: A pilot study. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 46, 465-478. doi:10.1002/jaba.50
- Levy, P. E. (2013). *Industrial organizational psychology: Understanding the workplace* (4th ed.). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Likins, M., Salzberg, C. L., Strowitschek, J. J., Lignugaris-Kraft, B., & Curl, R. (1989). Co-worker implemented job training: The use of coincidental training and quality-

- control checking on the food preparation skills of trainees with mental retardation. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 22, 381-393. doi:10.1901/jaba.1989.22-381
- Mawhood, L., & Howlin, P. (1999). The outcome of a supported employment scheme for high-functioning adults with autism or Asperger syndrome. *Autism*, 3, 229–254. doi: 10.1177/1362361399003003003
- Meglino, B. M., Ravlin, E. C., & Adkins, C.L. (1989) A work values approach to corporate culture: A field test of the values congruence process and its relationship to individual outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(3), 424-432.
- Mischel, W. (1977). The interaction of person and situation. In D. Magnusson & N. S. Endler (Eds.), *Personality at the crossroads: Current issues in interactional psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Morgan, G. R. (1998). *Organizational theory* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Nuernberger, J. E., Ringdahl, J. E., Vargo, K. K., Crumpecker, A. C., & Gunnarsson, K. F. (2013). Using a behavioral skills training package to teach conversation skills to young adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 7, 411-417. doi: 10.1016/j.rasd.2012.09.004
- O'Reilly, C. A., III, Chatman, J., & Caldwell, D. F. (1991). People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34, 487-516.
- Peters, L. C., & Thompson, R. H. (2015). Teaching children with autism to respond to conversation partners' interests. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 48, 544-562. doi:10.1002/jaba.235
- Quinn, J. M., Sherman, J. A., Sheldon, J. B., Quinn, L. M., & Harchik, A. E. (1992). Social validation of component behaviors of following instructions, accepting criticism, and negotiating. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 25, 401-413. doi:10.1901/jaba.1992.25-401
- Reeve, S. A., Reeve, K. F., Townsend, D. B., & Poulson, C. L. (2007). Establishing a generalized repertoire of helping behavior in children with autism. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 40, 123-136. doi:10.1901/jaba.2007.11-05
- Shore, L. M., & Martin, H.J. (1989). Job satisfaction an organizational commitment in relation to work performance and turnover intentions. *Human Relations*, 42, 625-638.
- Schneider, B. (1987a). E=f(PB): The road to a radical approach to person-environment fit. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 31, 353-361.
- Schneider, B. (1987b). The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology*, 40, 437-453.
- Schneider, B. (2000). The psychological life of organizations. In N.M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderon, & M. F. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational culture and climate* (pp. 17-21). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schneider, B., Goldstein, H. W. & Smith, D. B. (1995). The ASA framework: An update. *Personnel Psychology*, 48, 747-773.
- Stefan, Susan. (2002). *Hollow promises: Employment discrimination against people with mental disabilities*. American Psychological Association: Washington, D.C.
- Steiner, I. D. (1972). *Group process and productivity*. New York: Academic Press.
- Svyantek, D. J., & Brown, L. L. (2002). Mental health and organizational design, climate and culture. In M. Hersen & J. Thomas (Eds.), *Handbook of mental health in the workplace* (pp. 477-500). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Svyantek, D. J., Cullen, K. C., & Doerr, A. (2015). Person-organization fit and its implications for Human Resource management practices. In W. I. Sauser & R. R. Sims (Eds.), *Legal and regulatory issues in Human Resource management* (pp. 315-340). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Trice, H. M. & Beyer, J. M. (1993). *The cultures of organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

