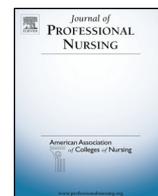




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Professional Nursing



Do I take the job?: Assessing fit with the organization

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 January 2017

Revised 24 July 2017

Accepted 10 August 2017

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Cultural fit

Organizational culture

Self-assessment

ABSTRACT

Purpose: A good 'fit' with an organization is critical to a leader's success yet when searching for a new position assessment an evaluation of many aspects may be overlooked, such as culture. This paper presents key considerations around 'fit' that applicants for leadership positions should consider prior to, during, and after the interview. Suggestions are provided on how to approach an evaluation of 'fit'.

Conclusion: The importance of assessing individual fit with an organization prior to accepting a leadership position cannot be over-emphasized.

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Introduction

The need for nurse leaders in higher education is at an all-time high for deans of academic health centers, deans/directors of stand-alone nursing schools/colleges, department chairs and program coordinators. Professional organizations such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the National League for Nursing (NLN) have focused on quantifying the nurse faculty shortage but have only recently begun to collect data on the shortage and turnover rate of nurse leaders. Anecdotally nurse leaders estimate turnover in leadership positions to be on average 3–5 years. Many leaders chose a position based on the institution's reputation and location, as well as personal factors and goals but may miss clues indicating they would be a poor 'fit' for the organization. Few actually consider 'fit' when they decide to join a new institution in a leadership position. However, being a 'good fit' with the culture of an organization may be the most critical component that can contribute to an administrator's success and organizational effectiveness. Some suggest that fit may be more important than leadership capabilities and that a mismatch with the institution's culture can leave one vulnerable to negative consequences (Stohr et al., 2012). In fact, many businesses use predictive personality tests to assess for cultural fit prior to hiring. Academic institutions generally do not use such metrics when hiring academic leaders, which hinders recognition during the interview process of poor fit and thus may result in turmoil if a leader does not mesh with the institution once hired. This article focuses on assessing "fit" within an organization and presents organizational theory with practical strategies to assist the job seeker in finding their "best fit" and accepting a position.

Organizational culture

The organizational culture literature exploded in the 1980s and 1990s recognizing the powerful effect that an organization's culture had on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organizations (Cameron & Ettington, 1988). The culture of an organization is shaped by the beliefs, norms, language, shared core values (principles and values) and traditions held by its members. These beliefs are rooted in meaningful accumulated learning including experiences of success and failure (Schein, 2004). Shared ways of thinking become entrenched within an organization and thus define what is legitimized and acceptable. For example, statements prefaced by, "this is the way we do things around here", successive internal hires for leadership positions, and taken-for-granted beliefs provide insight into an entrenched culture (Barley, 1983; Schein, 2010). Aligning the capabilities and strengths of the candidate with the mission and culture of the organization is one key to a successful partnership.

While some may argue that aligning the candidate's capabilities and cultural fit with the organization is a key role of the search consultant, candidates must also be engaged in assessing fit. This is not an easy task as there are few tools that assist the candidate in assessing cultural fit, particularly in academic institutions, nor is it often discussed by search consultants or in the literature. Nevertheless, most organizations do have a dominant culture style that is knowable if one takes the time to assess during the job exploration and interview process. Assuming that cultural fit within an organization is potentially even more important than one's leadership skills, assessing the culture is an essential aspect of a candidates' job search process, especially when seeking a key administrative position.

Large organizations such as universities generally have subcultures with a different dominant culture from the larger organization. Thus,

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the culture of leaders and leadership structure at the top of the organization may be very different from the culture of employees working in the academic trenches. Each department within a college may have its own set of subcultures (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Schein, 2010). It is equally as important to assess both the greater organizational culture as well as the subculture within the organization where one is seeing employment, as subcultures hold their own values that shape their actions. For example, university leadership may be pushing for rapid change in the university's culture related to faculty research productivity based on changes in funding streams yet, there may be a subculture within a college or department that believes these changes do not apply to them and will resist any leadership that attempts to bring the unit into alignment with new practices.

Furthermore, microcultures may exist within subcultures. A microculture, composed of a small cluster of individuals who share common tasks and/or histories, may have its own beliefs and values that can either enhance or fragment group cohesiveness (Schein, 2010). Unfortunately these microcultures are not easily identified during the interview process and may only become known after one is hired. For example, a new department chair may notice that after every meeting, the same group of faculty huddle in an office behind closed doors, which then results in behaviors in opposition to the larger group decisions. These microcultures may lead to a reduction in organizational well-being, retribution by disaffected employees, attrition of affected employees, or sabotage of either organizational initiatives and/or the newly hired leader (Lin, Yu, & Yi, 2014). Thus, the importance of assessing one's 'fit' within the layers of the organizational environment (subculture, microculture) during the application and interview process cannot be overstated.

Assessing organizational culture: theory & application

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) by Cameron and Quinn (2011) is a theoretical model that defines organizational culture through the use key themes – the way people think, their values, assumptions, and how they process information – that influence culture. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), based on the CVF model, can be used to evaluate 6 key factors found to determine an organizational culture which reflects the core values, shared assumptions and common approaches to work in that organization <https://www.ocai-online.com>. The six key factors are: dominant cultural characteristics, organizational leadership, management of employees, organizational glue, strategic emphases and criteria of success. For example, within the category of dominant cultural characteristics one would evaluate whether the organization was a very personal place, dynamic and entrepreneurial place, results oriented place, or very controlled and structured place. For example, in an environment where stability and control are valued, someone who demonstrates characteristics of flexibility and dynamic thinking toward rapid cycle change would be a poor fit as these core values lie at opposite ends of the continuum. Therefore, it would be important for the candidate to assess for indicators of transition or movement to a more dynamic environment. An awareness of system or culture aspirational goals such as more flexibility and openness to meet market needs may however be a mismatch between practical goals given the environment. Evidence to support statements that may sound inspired, motivational and aspirational assist in aligning organizational fit and leader capacity for organizational effectiveness and outcomes.

Instruments are available to assist the leader in identifying both culture and leadership skills and styles. The OCAI is one instrument used to identify fundamental assumptions of an organization and its values and to evaluate the effect of organizational culture on workplace outcomes, e.g., morale, commitment, productivity, physical health, and psychological distress, depression, emotional exhaustion, and well-being (Marchand, Haines & Dextras-Gauthier, 2013). The validity of the OCAI has been reported in the literature (Helfrich, Li, Mohr,

Meterko, & Sales, 2007; Heritage, Pollock, & Roberts, 2014; Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Gillespie, 1999). The OCAI is a 24-item instrument whereby respondents' first answer questions as they pertain to the current culture and second, the same questions for their "preferred culture". A free copy of the OCAI and informational videos on organizational culture are available online (<http://www.ocai-online.com/>). This instrument may be useful to the job seeker, not only as a tool for cultural exploration to identify organizational assumptions and values, culture preferences, but also can be used for framing questions pre-, during and post-interview. Once a position is accepted, the OCAI can be useful to compare the current to desired culture and to evaluate readiness and direction for change, and identify coaching and team building strategies for both the leader and followers (Suderman, 2012).

Based on the dominant culture profile assessed by the candidate during the exploratory (pre-phase) through post-interview process, the candidate can identify valued leadership attributes and behaviors most likely to be recognized and rewarded as well as valued management competencies. The candidate should also be aware of their preferred type of work culture, their own leadership style and note if it is compatible with the dominant culture profile of the organization that they would be leading if hired. One can also determine disconnects between the larger academic institutional culture and that of the target unit through use of this assessment tool. Importantly, not one culture or leadership style is ideal but rather the congruence of the organization's vision, values, and strategies and the fit with the leader's skills and capabilities will determine the effectiveness of the partnership with the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

In pursuit of a new position

The purpose of assessing, analyzing, and evaluating data related to fit pre, during and post-interview is to capture the reality being described to make a decision regarding fit and to ultimately determine if the position should be accepted. The initial attraction to a position announcement is often based on the institutional brand or the personality characteristics of that institution. Effective marketing of a position may prompt you to dream of a change in direction and of having the job "you want". A necessary first step is self-examination – to align career aspirations with personal goals and values. "Know thyself" is an important adage when considering a leadership position in any organization. Reflecting on questions such as, "What is my ideal job?"; and "How will this position fit with my current career, family, professional, and community responsibilities? Responsibilities in 5 years? Responsibilities in 10 years?" provides a foundation for proceeding. Do not overlook a discussion with your spouse/partner/children. Family responsibilities change over time and impact the timing to seek a new position. Consider the opportunities and challenges each member in the family will face by your change in position, e.g., work, school, living environment, social networks (Archer & Bloom, 2003).

Commit to writing the characteristics of your "ideal job" and examine the position description. Is it a stepping stone to your ideal position or a goal position? While comparisons to one's current job are inevitable, commit to move forward rather than dissecting what you do not like about your current position. Document the type of environment in which you thrive as a leader and which type of environments you find stifling. Examination of one's leadership style, strengths, and capabilities is an additional important component of this self-examination and can be evaluated by readily available instruments. Resources to assist with the examination of one's leadership style (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), emotional intelligence (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), and strengths (Rath, 2007) are a few of the commercially available instruments. Investing in leadership development by hiring a leadership coach or participating in programs such as the Leadership for Academic Nursing Program (LANP) by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing or the American Council on Education Leadership and Advocacy Program

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