Fitting the Person to the Job or to the Organization?

Evaluating the Process of Civil Service Selection in Guangdong Province

Abstract

Job selection is a process of gathering and evaluating information about the applicants before offering the job to the best one. Employee selection is essential to public organizations because the competencies of civil servants largely determine the quality of public service. However, it is highly debatable what kinds of candidates should be keenly sought after in the public service workplace. The distinctions in selection criteria have led to two fundamentally different selection approaches to determining who the right person is. The first approach, the person–job (P–J) fit approach, emphasizes the match between the applicant and the job vacancy. The second approach, the person–organization (P–O) fit approach, focuses on the applicants’ potential to help future organizational development.

The merit system is at the core of modern public personnel management. The civil service exam in China resembles the merit system a lot because it has to follow the principle of public and competitive selection of public servants. Today, this exam has become one of the
largest and most competitive contests in China. As a massive selection program, the Chinese civil service exam should follow the general selection rules to achieve either P–J fit, or P–O fit, or both. Nevertheless, the extant literature has paid inadequate attention to selection effectiveness of civil service exam in China.

This research will take Guangdong Province as a case study. This study aims to assess selection procedures of civil service exam in Guangdong Province by applying the theoretical discussion of P–J fit and P–O fit. There are three main research questions in this study. The first question is concerned with “select for what.” The second one asks “how to select.” The third one asks about “the extent to which the selection tools meet their purposes.” To answer these questions, the first part of this study is intended to interview government officials of selection authority to find out which selection approach is affecting their selection purposes. The second part of this study will examine the selection method applied in China’s civil service selection. It will analyze test content and interview questions of civil service exam to create lists of attributes assessed in the civil service exams. The last part of this research will examine whether the selection purpose has been met or not. It will look into the daily practice of civil service jobs to construct lists of core competencies needed for superior performance. Then this
study will provide an answer to the third research question by applying Q-sort method to calculate the degree of match between the attributes and the competencies.

This study is the first endeavor to conduct a systematic investigation into the civil service selection procedure in China. None of English and Chinese texts can be found in the literature. In a dimension of theoretical significance, the current research calls for more attention to the application fit theory in public service selection. This research also has a strong policy implication. It will offer policy recommendations to help the government attract more competent public servants to better public service quality.

Keywords: selection effectiveness, person–job fit, person–organization fit, competency, civil service exam, China