

City University of Hong Kong

Department of Public Policy

Research Student Seminar

Fitting the Person to the Job or to the Organization?

Evaluating the Process of Civil Service Selection in Shenzhen Municipality

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by

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Abstract:

A 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 delivery. However, it is highly debatable what kinds of candidates should be keenly sought after in the public service workplace. Theoretically, 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 modern China also follows its principles of public and competitive selection of public servants. As one of the largest and most important contests in China, the selection purposes and criteria of Chinese civil service exam are still vague. What kind of candidate fit its desire? Has it follow the general selection theory to achieve either P–J fit, or P–O fit, or both? The extant literature has paid inadequate attention to answer these questions.

This research will take Shenzhen Municipality as a case study. This study aims to assess selection procedures of civil service exam (written test and interview) in Shenzhen City 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, this study interviews cadres of Organization Department of Chinese Communist Party (the selection authority) to find out their selection purposes. Second, this study examines the test content and interview questions of civil service exam to locate the selection criteria. Third, this research measures the selection effectiveness by surveying the job holders about the degree of match between the selection criteria and their daily practice.

This study is the first systematic investigation on the Chinese civil service exam. In a dimension of theoretical significance, the current research calls for more attention to the application fit theory in public service selection. As for the policy implication, this study 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