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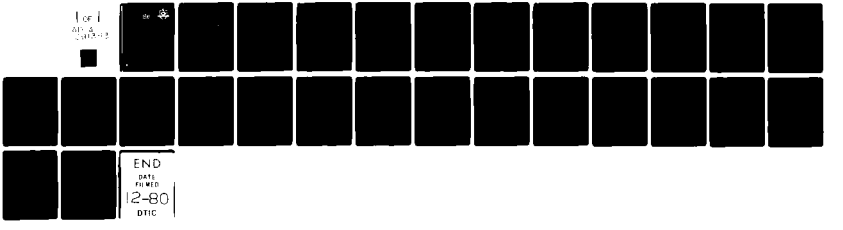

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THE ENTRY OF NEWCOMERS INTO ORGANIZATIONS

John P. Wanous

Research Report No. 1
September 1980

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The organizational entry process concerns how newcomers and organizations get matched to each other. This involves the twin processes of ~~(1)~~ matching a job candidate's abilities to organizational job requirements, and ~~(2)~~ matching a person's needs to the climates in an organization. Research in four areas is briefly reviewed: ~~(1)~~ how individuals and organizations learn about each other, ~~(2)~~ the consequences of job candidates and company recruiters trying to "sell" themselves to each other, ~~(3)~~ how individuals decide which →

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20. organization to enter, and ~~(4)~~ how organizations decide which job candidate to select.

The Entry of Newcomers into Organizations

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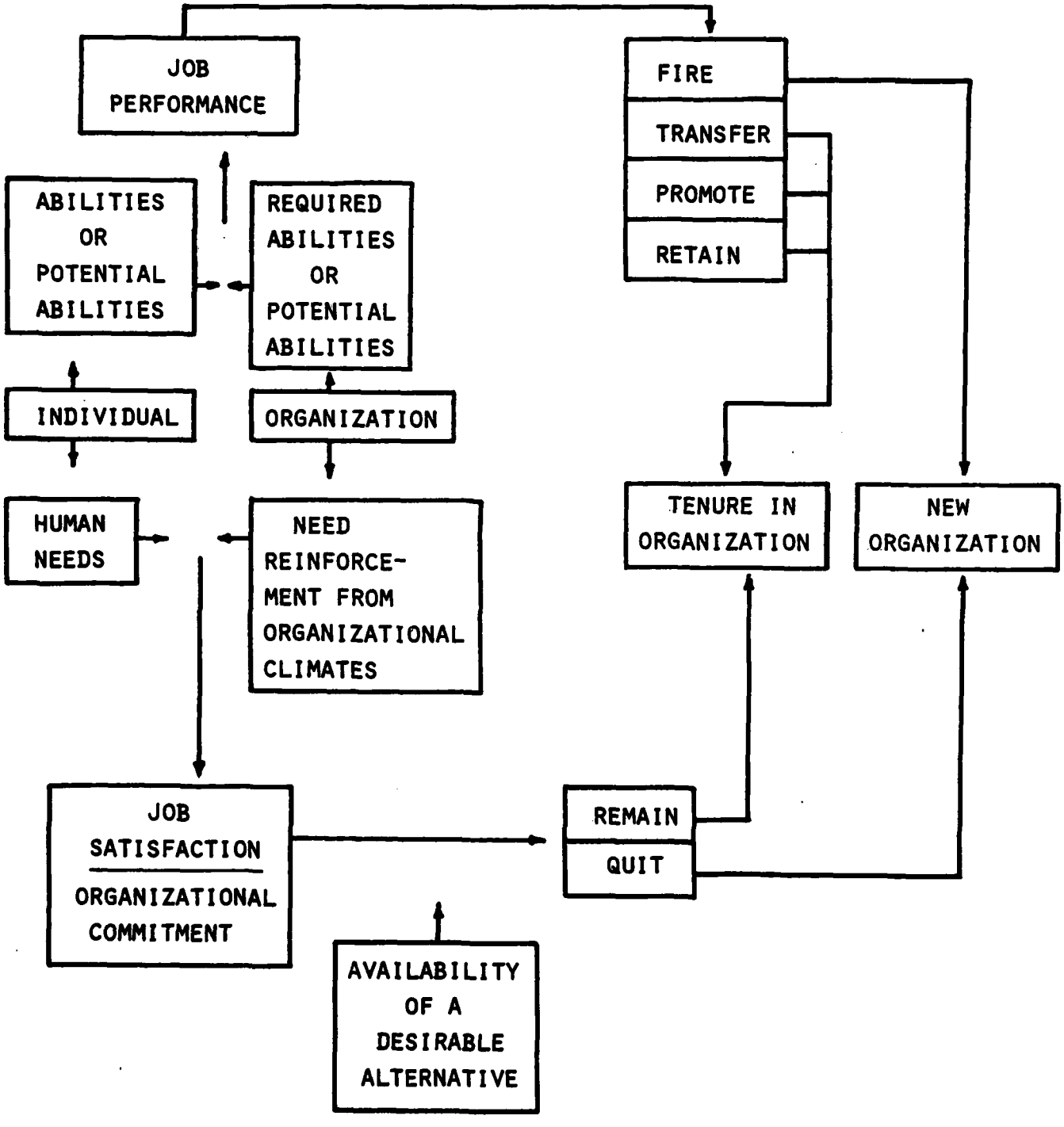
The entry of new personnel is an important event for both the individual and the organization, because an ineffective matching is costly to both. As an example, a large midwestern bank hired 370 tellers in 1979 just to maintain a steady teller workforce of 1300. About half of this turnover was considered to be "controllable" by the bank. At a cost of about $2,000 per new hire, the bank spent about $370,000 on replacements that might have been avoided. Because the influx of newcomers can be viewed from either an individual or organizational perspective, it is important that we examine the entry process from both these viewpoints.

The Matching Model shown in Figure 1 is a helpful way to organize and visualize the basic issues in organizational entry (Wanous, 1978, 1980). It shows two ways in which individuals and organizations are matched. The "top" match between one's abilities and those required by the organization is, perhaps, the more familiar of the two since it has traditionally been of great concern in hiring new employees. The "bottom" match is also important, but for different reasons. Whereas job performance is the likely victim of a poor ability-job requirements match, low job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the consequences of a poor human needs-organizational climates match.

The Matching Model shows only the most obvious relationships, not the less frequent ones. For example, it is possible for an ability mismatch to affect job satisfaction. This can occur when a person is <u>over</u> qualified for a job, because there is less likelihood of poor performance. There is, however, a much greater potential for low job satisfaction followed by quitting. Similarly, a poor match in terms of human needs sometimes can affect job performance. A very dissatisfied employee may withdraw almost all energy from work, or even go so far as to commit

FIGURE 1
MATCHING INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATION



Source: J. P. Wanous (1978)

sabotage. While the Matching Model shows the most direct or common effects of these two matchings, there are exceptions as indicated here.

The Matching Model is incomplete in another sense. It does not show all the forces that influence one's job performance. Specifically, work motivation factors are excluded. This is because the Matching Model is concerned with the entry of newcomers, rather than being a more general representation of employee job behavior. Another omission from the model is a broader view of all the factors that cause someone to decide to quit or stay in an organization. It simply shows that people make such a decision based on a comparison of their present jobs with what they think might be available elsewhere.

Topics in Organizational Entry

The entry of newcomers is a process, not a single event. The components of the entry process are often hard to disentangle, but some arbitrary stages can be identified. Within each stage of entry, the process can be viewed from either the individual's or organization's perspective.

1. How do individuals and organizations find out about each other?

From the individual's viewpoint this question can be split into: (a) how do job seekers learn about job openings, and (b) how do they learn specific information about organizations. From the organization's perspective this question can be asked in terms of the sources used to obtain new employees.

Individuals learn about job openings through either formal (ads, governmental or private employment agencies) or informal sources (friends or relatives). White collar workers tend to use both about equally, whereas blue collar workers tend to rely more on word-of-mouth (Parnes, 1970). As will be seen shortly, the source of new employees is important

to organizations. This is because there are significant differences in job performance, and particularly in turnover rates for employees from different sources.

As the Matching Model shows, individuals are concerned with how well a new organization's climates will be able to satisfy their various needs. In order to ascertain this, job candidates need information about organizations that is both accurate and complete. Do they get it? The accumulated research evidence shows they do not (Wanous, 1980). Studies of newly entering AT & T managers, of stayers and leavers at the Ford Motor Company, of telephone operators, of new MBA students, of Harvard Business School graduates, and of armed services personnel all indicate unrealistically inflated expectations held by individuals who entered these organizations (see Wanous, 1980 for details). The only time newcomers' expectations are accurate is when they concern factual, concrete factors, e.g., starting salary or tuition costs. In virtually all other instances, expectations are inflated. This obviously presents serious problems for the effective matching of person and organization.

From the organization's viewpoint it does matter where new employees come from. A small number of research studies have related the job performance and turnover rates of newcomers to the source from which they came. The sources with the lowest turnover rates are referrals by present employees or re-employment of former personnel. Those with the highest rates of subsequent turnover tend to be newspaper ads or employment agencies. This difference may be explained by the greater accuracy and greater amount of information available to job candidates who had previously worked at a company or who were referred by a present employee. Armed with this greater quantity and quality of organizational information, those people were

able to make job choices that come closer to matching their own needs (Wanous, 1980).

2. What happens when individuals and organizations try to "sell" themselves to each other?

The organizational entry process is a bit like a courtship, i.e., each party tries to appear as attractive as possible to the other. Thus, individual job candidates emphasize their strengths and minimize (or try to conceal) their weaknesses. Similarly, organizations recruit new employees by stressing their most positive characteristics, while minimizing frustrations. As a result of this, both individuals and organizations present distorted images of themselves making it difficult for each to make optimal choices of the other (Porter, Lawler, and Hackman, 1975).

Despite the fact that individuals and organizations present only favorable images, the organization usually manages to learn more about the job candidate than the reverse. Through interviewing, testing, reference checks, and past employment history, the hiring organization is in a better position to uncover the faults and weaknesses of individuals. In contrast, it is much more difficult for the individual job candidate to investigate an organization in as thorough a manner. One might be tempted to think this problem for job candidates is typical for only lower level employees. Actually, executives who switch companies have similar problems. The most common misunderstandings at the executive level are about the actual scope of one's authority in the new organization.

In terms of the Matching Model, the primary concern of organizations has been to achieve sound matches in terms of abilities meeting job requirements. To a certain extent organizations also try to determine if the newcomer will "fit" in the organization, as in the human needs match

with organizational climates. Methods for doing this latter matching are less well developed than techniques for matching abilities to job requirements. They include interviews, personality tests, personal essays about one's life/career goals, and even the use of "weighted" application blanks.

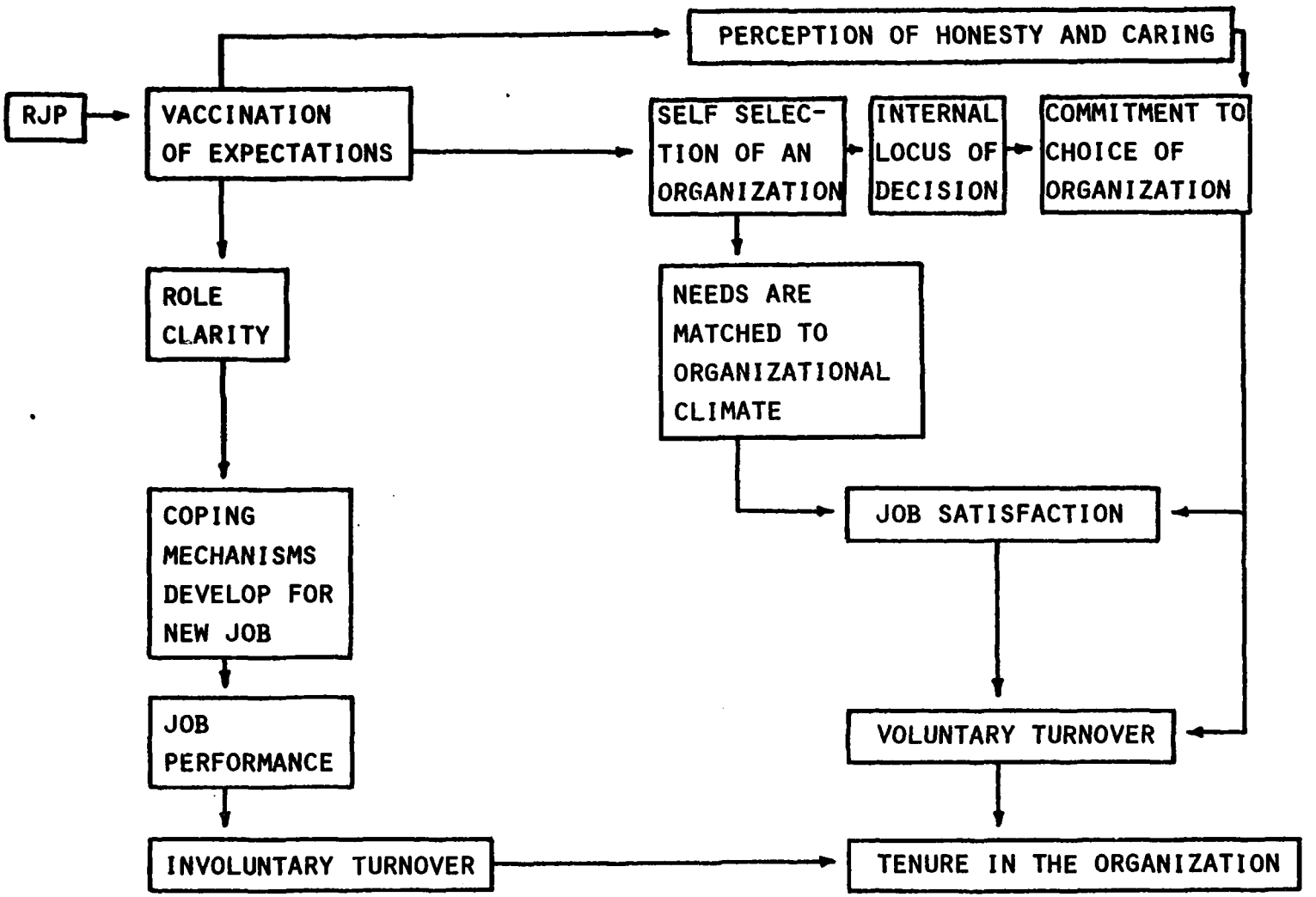
In contrast to the organization's prime concern with the ability match, job candidates are more concerned with whether their needs will be met in a new organization. Since organizations "sell" themselves to job candidates, individuals have a difficult time choosing a job offer that matches their needs. Note that organizational attempts to do this for the job candidate are doomed to failure because candidates can fake personality tests more easily than tests of job abilities.

What can be done about this dilemma? The concept of the "realistic job preview" (RJP) (Wanous, 1975), or more simply "realistic recruitment" (Wanous, 1980) has been offered as one solution. In essence, the organization lets the job candidate decide whether the human needs-organizational climates matching is a good fit or not. The individual is able to do so because the organization provides accurate and fairly detailed information to job candidates during recruitment.

The RJP functions exactly like a vaccination, i.e., it can prevent a problem from occuring, but not cure it once it has begun. The essence of a vaccination is to inject a person with a small dose of germs so that one's body can develop a natural resistance to that disease. So it is with the RJP. Job candidates are presented with a small dose of organizational reality. This vaccination with realism has been shown to have several beneficial effects for the entry process, e.g., more favorable attitudes and lower turnover among newcomers. Figure 2 shows a theory of how RJP's work.

FIGURE 2

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE RJP



Source: J. P. Wanous (1978)

To date, a total of thirteen experiments have been done to evaluate the specific effects of realistic recruitment (see Wanous, 1980 for details concerning these studies).

*Did the realistic information tend to "scare off" job candidates?

No. Five studies examined this specific possibility and all five found no negative effects.

*Were the expectations of job candidates correctly vaccinated, i.e., lowered by the RJP?

Yes. All five studies which considered this particular question found lower expectations among those who were realistically recruited.

*Did the RJP affect one's decision to accept or reject a job offer?

No. In four of five studies the RJP was not potent enough to actually change a person's decision. This is not supportive of the theoretical model shown in Fig. 2, which suggests that the RJP may have an effect on self selection for an organization.

*Were the job attitudes of realistically recruited newcomers more favorable than those recruited in a more traditional way?

Usually. In three of six studies which measured post entry job attitudes, they were more positive for those who received RJP's. In three others there were no differences. In no case were they worse for those realistically recruited.

*Was job performance affected by the RJP's?

No. Of the eight studies which measured the job performance of newcomers, four found no differences between RJP recruits and other recruits, in one case performance was lower for the RJP recruits, and in three cases it was higher for the RJP recruits.

*Was turnover lowered using realistic recruitment?

Usually. Twelve of the thirteen studies measured turnover rates for newcomers. In six of the twelve, turnover was statistically significantly lower for RJP recruits, in three others it was lower but not significantly lower, in three others there were virtually no differences.

The method used to present realistic information may have an effect on whether turnover is reduced or not. For example, four of the thirteen studies used an oral presentation for the RJP, but none of these found any significant lowering of turnover. Written booklets were used five times and significantly lowered turnover in four cases. Audio-visual methods were used three times, but only one lowered turnover significantly. Finally, a work sample test* was used once and significantly lowered turnover.

3. How do individuals decide which organization to enter?

Organizational entry is the result of a mutual choice. Individuals must seek out jobs, then be selected by an organization, and then they must choose which organization to enter. Thus it is important to understand how individuals choose organizations because they initiate action at two points. First, individuals must make some effort to join an organization. Second, after the organization has made its selection decision, individuals must decide to accept or decline the offer of admission.

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*In a work sample test, job candidates work on the actual apparatus used on the job. In this particular case it was a sewing machine operator's job.

To understand how individuals make these two choices, we must consider what psychologists have said. Unfortunately, those who have studied organizational choices are not in agreement on how they are made. There are, in fact, two rather different views about the organizational choice process.

The first explanation of an individual's choice process is expectancy theory. Basically, this view is that people are fairly rational beings, that they seek out information about organizations, and that they try to maximize their own satisfaction by choosing an organization that will best meet their needs. This model of motivation, as applied to an organizational choice, can be represented as follows:

(1)	Total motivation to join an organization	=	Expectancy of being admitted to the organization	x	Attractiveness of the organization

where,

(2)	Attractiveness of an organization	=	Beliefs about each outcome that will be obtained in the organization	x	Desirability of each particular outcome

Equation (1) addresses the issue of what organizations people try to join. It clearly shows that individuals seek out desirable jobs, schools, etc., but also those that are attainable. For example, a mediocre student may see Ivy League Schools as highly desirable, but will not even apply to them since there is such a low chance to be accepted. Research concerning equation (1) has been rather infrequent. Two of the three studies conducted have supported equation (1), however (Wanous, 1980).

Equation (2) shows what makes an organization attractive to an

individual. This is an important factor since it is the basis for a person's actual choice from among job offers. When an individual has offers of acceptance by several organizations, the "expectancy of being admitted" is irrelevant (it is then a 1.0 probability in expectancy theory terms). Thus, one's choice of a job offer is based on comparing the perceived attractiveness of those organizations which extended job offers.

How accurate is expectancy theory when it comes to an individual's choice of a job offer? To answer this question, seven studies calculated organizational attractiveness based on questionnaire data. The researchers then checked to see how often one's actual choice was also the most attractive organization based on the responses to a questionnaire. The average "hit rate" was 73%, ranging from 54% to 87% (Wanous, 1980). Since questionnaires are imperfect measurement tools, this is a remarkably high level of agreement. It is strongly supportive of an expectancy theory view of organizational choice.

The alternative view of organizational choice is called unprogrammed decision making. Individuals are viewed as far less systematic and rational than in expectancy theory terms. One difference is that the unprogrammed view states that individuals consider only a small number of potential outcomes. In contrast, expectancy theorists believe individuals consider quite a few more. Another difference is that the outcomes considered are not "weighted" by their desirability to an individual as in equation (2). Instead, the unprogrammed view is that people consider outcomes as either crucial or practically irrelevant. The few outcomes that are considered are all equally essential to the

choice. The third, and last, difference is that the unprogrammed model sees people as comparing organizations two-at-a-time to assess which is the more attractive. In contrast, expectancy theory stipulates that an individual considers all the alternatives simultaneously. The unprogrammed view is more a sequential process of paired comparisons.

Both expectancy theory and unprogrammed decision making are similar in a couple respects. First, both suggest that job candidates are able to give fairly clear descriptions of what they are seeking in an organizational choice. Second, both agree that people will <u>say</u> they are being rational, even though they act much less rational according to the unprogrammed decision model.

Only three research studies have examined the unprogrammed model, and supporting data were found in only one case (Wanous, 1980). Nevertheless, it is an intriguing alternative to expectancy theory. It is also much harder to design a research study to give the unprogrammed model a fair test. It is likely that "the truth" probably lies somewhere in between the two views of how individuals choose organizations, but that is for future research to decide.

Regardless of <u>how</u> most people choose organizations, some have suggested that people <u>should</u> be more rational. Whether or not people act in accordance with expectancy theory, Janis and Wheeler (1978) have described techniques to facilitate a systematic decision process much like expectancy theory. One of several techniques is the "balance sheet" approach where individuals are assisted by a "decision counselor" to complete an outline of the reasons for and against an organizational choice. This involves getting people to articulate the "pushes and pulls" of various alternatives.

4. <u>How do organizations select newcomers</u>?

This important question has been the primary focus of industrial psychologists for many years. In a formal, scientific sense personnel selection first got started in the U.S.A. as a consequence of World War I when the nation had to mobilize human resources quickly.

In terms of the Matching Model (Fig. 1), the traditional concern of selection has been to effect a matching between abilities and job requirements. To achieve this matching, many types of psychological tests and other screening criteria (interviews and application blanks, for example) have been developed. Since this field is so vast, it is beyond the scope here to consider it in its entirety.

As an alternative, the selection of personnel will be considered from a more current perspective. Only those selection techniques that match both newcomer abilities and needs to the organization will be considered.

Two selection procedures, realistic work sample tests and assessment centers, focus on both match ups shown in Fig. 1. The reason they are able to match job candidates both ways is that they also function much like the RJP - even though their primary intent is to provide data about an individual's likely job competence.

A realistic work sample test is a simulation of the actual task one is being considered for. Thus, a simulation must be designed for each job. This is in contrast to the use of psychological tests (e.g., I.Q.) which used to be applied across a wide variety of job situations (and without too much success either).

Realistic work sample tests fall into two categories: verbal and manual. Examples of verbal tests are: group discussions and business games (for managers), or a speech interview for potential foreign students.

Examples of manual tests are: a sewing machine test for operators, a rudder control test for pilots, and the road test for a drivers license (see Asher and Sciarrino, 1974).

An assessment center is the combination of several different methods into an intensive experience. Such "centers" have been used to select new personnel, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of current personnel for development purposes, and to identify management potential (see Moses and Byham, 1977).

Examples of exercises include: an in-basket, management games, leaderless group discussions, an oral presentation, role playing, and paper-and-pencil tests. As individuals participate in these various exercises, they are being observed by a trained assessor, who takes careful notes. At the conclusion of the exercises the assessors meet as a group to discuss each candidate. It is at this time that judgments are made, but only after a thorough review of what the candidate actually did. For example, an assessor might take note of the fact that a candidate "spoke without the use of notes", but would not say "the candidate seemed confident". The former is what actually happened, the latter is a conclusion.

A Wall Street Journal reporter recently went through the Merrill Lynch assessment center for account executives and wrote of his experiences (Rout, 1979). His experience nicely illustrates how this particular simulation provides both an RJP and a selection procedure.

The job simulation was conducted after hours in the Merrill Lynch offices. Since it is much quieter then, a tape recording of office noise (telephones, tickertape, typing, voices, etc.) was played in the background. There was a very full in-basket that needed attention, sporadic telephone

calls to interrupt one's train of thought, and an appointment calendar with time conflicts that needed resolution. An experienced employee also role-played a very angry customer who had just lost $97,000 on a $100,000 investment based on your recommendation. You had to cope with his phone call.

Apparently this assessment center simulation has been successful at helping Merrill Lynch hire competent people, as well as providing job candidates with realistic information about the job duties and pressures of an account executive. It is not a thorough RJP, since information about the uniqueness of Merrill Lynch is not included. It is an RJP for the job, not the company. Nevertheless, it does seem to function as both a selection and realistic recruitment procedure.

About 25 years ago A.T. & T was the assessment center pioneer in the business world. Even today they continue to monitor the careers of those managers who were hired during the 1956-60 period. The results of this A.T. & T "Management Progress Study" (Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974) show the effectiveness of this selection procedure. They also show that success on the job is influenced by the degree of job challenge* in one's immediate working environment.

The accuracy of predictions about future promotions at A.T. & T based on their assessment center is rather high. For example, 64% of

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*Job challenge was measured by two psychologists who evaluated tape recordings of annual interviews with managers. The overall measure of challenge was a composite of four factors: (1) the degree to which one's boss set a model for achievement, (2) the degree of job stimulation, (3) the extensiveness of supervisory responsibilities, and (4) the frequency of unstructured assignments.

those individuals who were predicted to reach middle management in 8 years actually did so. In contrast, only 32% of those not predicted to reach middle management actually did so (Wanous, 1980). It must be remembered that these predictions were based on only a 3½ day period of time for the assessment center. In terms of the Matching Model the assessors were aiming primarily to predict accurate ability-job requirements match ups. The assessors could not have known, nor could they have influenced, the type of environment into which these new hires were placed.

The degree of initial job challenge experienced on the job has been shown to have an influence on one's rate of promotion at A.T. & T (Berlew and Hall, 1966). When the effects of both assessment center predictions and job challenge are considered together, an interesting picture emerges. Figure 3 shows one way to re-arrange the data from the Management Progress Study (Bray, et al, 1966).

5. What happens when individuals and organizations are well matched?

The Matching Model shows two types of matchings between people and organizations. Virtually all experts agree that it is desirable to match human abilities with job requirements. There is less agreement on the universal desirability of matching human needs to organizational climates, however. Some experts fear that conformity may be a by-product (see the article by Argyris, 1957).

At the present time only four research studies have attempted to relate the degree of matching to various indicators of organizational success (e.g., job satisfaction, turnover, job performance). None of the four investigated possible effects on conformity. The four studies included nurses, students, machine operatives, and life insurance agents. In all four cases there were desirable outcomes resulting from matching

FIGURE 3

The interaction between Selection Predictions and Newcomer Socialization

Socialization	Selection Prediction: Will Be Promoted	Selection Prediction: Will Not Be Promoted	
High Job Challenge	76% (25 ÷ 33)	61% (11 ÷ 18)	51
Medium or Low Job Challenge	50% (14 ÷ 28)	20% (9 ÷ 44)	72
			123

Note: The percentages show how many persons in each cell actually were promoted to middle management.

human needs to organizational climates (Wanous, 1980). In one of the four, however, there was some indication that this type of matching is undesirable for ineffective organizations, since it tends to perpetuate that ineffectiveness.

Recommendations for Managing the Organization Entry Process

Based on this abbreviated review of research on organizational entry, several recommendations can be offered to both organizations and to individuals.

From the organization's perspective it would be wise to conduct research on the sources used to obtain newcomers. It is likely that informal sources will yield those less likely to quit. Organizations should also consider injecting more realistic information into the recruiting process. This should be done throughout the process, but it is most likely to have an impact when done at the initial contact with job candidates. Realistic recruitment can be integrated with accurate selection procedures by using either work sample tests or assessment centers. In both cases the key ingredient is the use of a realistic job simulation. Finally, new employees need to be placed in work environments high in job challenge.

The organizational entry research suggests several guidelines for individuals seeking jobs. First of all, individuals must take the time and energy to investigate organizations. This could include talking to both present and former employees. Printed material from organizations should be evaluated with a careful, cynical eye. If possible meet the person who will be your immediate supervisor. Second, when actually making the job choice decision, carefully outline all the forces and factors in that decision. At least try to behave in a systematically thorough way,

similar to the expectancy theory model or the decision counselor approach. Finally, be prepared to encounter a new environment that is likely to be much less attractive than you expected.

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Educational Equity Grants Program
1200 19th Street, N.W.
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1 National Institute of Education
ATTN: Dr. Fritz Muhlhauser
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1200 19th Street, N.W.
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1 National Institute of Mental
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1 Office of Personnel Management
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1 Social and Developmental Psychology Program
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1 Headquarters, FORSCOM
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1 Army Research Institute
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1 Air University Library/
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1 DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
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