

## THE ASA FRAMEWORK: AN UPDATE

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In 1987, B. Schneider proposed a person-oriented model of organizational behavior based on the proposition that it is the collective characteristics of people who define an organization. He further proposed that, over time, organizations become defined by the persons in them as a natural outcome of an attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) cycle. We provide a brief overview of the ASA cycle and review literature relevant to two facets of the theory. The literature reviewed provides some indirect support for the proposal that founders and the members of top management have long-term effects on organizations through the ASA cycle. The literature reviewed provides both indirect and direct evidence supporting a central proposition of ASA theory—that organizations over time become relatively homogeneous with regard to the kinds of people in them. Suggestions for future research on ASA are presented.

In the organizational sciences there is a fundamental difference in paradigms between studies of people who work and studies of the attributes of organizations in which people work. This difference has led to a scholarly bifurcation characterized by two parallel, yet largely non-overlapping literatures. As a result, there has been a general failure to integrate the individual and organizational foci of theory and research inhibiting a full understanding of the reciprocal relationships that exist between individuals and their employing organizations. Some have begun to call for the integration of individual and organizational theories and research referring to this intermediate ground as "meso" (e.g., House, Rousseau, & Thomas-Hunt, 1995).

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Recently, several investigators have attempted to fill this intermediate ground, crossing levels of analysis both in thinking and in data collection. One such example is the research program of Chatman and her colleagues (Chatman, 1989, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991) who proposed and tested a person-organization fit (POF) framework for understanding individual behavior in organizations. In their research, Chatman and her colleagues showed that the fit of people's values to the values of the organization they join predict individual satisfaction, commitment, turnover, and performance. Another example, and the focus of the present paper, is the attraction-selection-attribution (ASA) model proposed by B. Schneider (1983a, 1983b, 1987).

The ASA model outlines a framework for understanding organizational behavior that integrates both individual and organizational theories. The framework proposes that the outcome of three interrelated dynamic processes, attraction-selection-attribution, determines the kinds of people in an organization, which consequently defines the nature of the organization, its structures, processes, and culture.

Although it suggests several empirically testable propositions, the ASA model as presented by B. Schneider (1987) is vague in several regards. For example, the model proposes that people are differentially attracted to organizations on the basis of some sort of fit between "personal and organizational" characteristics. However, what is meant by "personal and organizational" characteristics is left unspecified. The model also proposes that persons who do not fit the organization they join will leave, leading to increasing homogeneity of persons in the organization. Precisely how to measure fit and how to index homogeneity and on what issues are left unspecified.

In spite of these omissions in the original presentation of the ASA model, we attempt here to summarize the model and to present research and theory that appear to have relevance for some of the model's propositions. In the present review we focus especially on those propositions concerning the role of founders in the long-term culture of organizations and the tendency of organizations, over time, to become homogeneous in the kinds of people in them. We will not attempt to further elaborate the theory here. Rather, we will review research that has indirect relevance for ASA theory and studies in which researchers have creatively operationalized B. Schneider's somewhat vague propositions so that seemingly meaningful direct tests of those propositions have been possible.

#### *Propositions of ASA: An Introduction*

The ASA framework places primary causation for organizational behavior on the collective characteristics of the people in the organization,

especially the founders and top management. Although not specified by B. Schneider, the clear implication in his 1987 paper is that the attributes of interest are personality, attitudes, and values. In the present paper we will use the term "personality" to subsume these dispositional characteristics of people. As noted earlier, the precise facets or dimensions of personality will not be of concern in the present review because different researchers have (appropriately, we believe) conceptualized and operationalized this issue in accord with their own interests.

At the core of the ASA model are the goals of the organization originally articulated (implicitly or explicitly) by the founder. Organizational goals, and the processes, structures, and culture that emerge to facilitate achievement of these goals, are said to be reflections of the particular characteristics (i.e., personality) of the founder and his or her early colleagues. Over time, these are thought to determine the kinds of people who are attracted to, are selected by, and stay with the organization.

The *attraction* process concerns the fact that people's preferences for particular organizations are based upon an implicit estimate of the congruence of their own personal characteristics and the attributes of potential work organizations. That is, people find organizations differentially attractive as a function of their implicit judgments of the congruence between those organizations' goals (and structures, processes, and culture as manifestations of those goals) and their own personalities. For example, a doctor may choose to affiliate with hospital A versus hospital B based on his or her estimate of the fit or congruence between his or her own personality and the values he or she believes characterize the two hospitals.

The next step in the ASA cycle refers to the formal and informal selection procedures used by organizations in the recruitment and hiring of people with the attributes the organization desires. Finally, the *attrition* process refers to the idea that people will leave an organization they do not fit. The turnover literature is quite clear about the fact that people who do not fit an organization will tend to leave it (see Schneider B & Schneider JL, 1994, for a review).

In summary, ASA proposes that three processes—attraction, selection, and attrition—result in organizations containing people with distinct personalities, and it is these distinct personalities that are responsible for the unique structures, processes, and cultures that characterize organizations. In what follows, we first locate the ASA framework in the world of alternative explanations for organizational behavior. Then we review research literatures that are relevant for the validity of two main propositions of the ASA model that accompanied B. Schneider's

1987 paper: the role of the founders and top management in the initiation and continuation of the ASA cycle, and the prediction of increased homogeneity within an organization as a consequence of the ASA cycle.

#### *Alternative Explanations for Organizational Behavior*

*The situationist perspective.* ASA's focus on the personality of the members of organizations as defining those organizations stands in stark contrast to most contemporary theorizing about organizational behavior which places primary emphasis on situational conditions such as leadership (e.g., Bass, 1990), job design (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980), groups or teams (e.g., Guzzo & Shea, 1992), pay systems (e.g., Lawler, 1981), dynamics of the external environment (e.g., Joyce & Slocum, 1990), and so forth. These theories, and the data supporting them, assume the primacy of situations in understanding and predicting the behavior of organizations and the people in them (cf. Bolman & Deal, 1992).

ASA theory does not deny that there are situational correlates of organizational behavior. Rather, ASA proposes that differences between organizations in the ways those situational attributes manifest themselves, are attributable to the personality attributes of the people those organizations attract, select, and retain. Why do some founders choose to compete based on price and others on quality? ASA proposes that such differences have long term consequences for the types of persons those organizations will attract, select, and retain (Schein, 1993). Why do organizations, even in the same industry, differ in their pay plans, their structures, and their cultures? ASA proposes it is because of differences in the personalities of the people in those organizations—and that those organizations will attract different kinds of people (Cable & Judge, 1994).

*The interactional psychology perspective.* An alternative to the situationist perspective, which includes aspects of the person, would be an interactional approach. The interactional psychology perspective proposes that the behavior of individuals is a function of some set of personal attributes and some set of situational attributes, in interaction (cf. Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Pervin & Lewis, 1978). This interactional model, primarily due to the seminal theoretical work of Kurt Lewin (e.g., Marrow, 1969) followed by the persuasive logic of Bowers (1973) and others (e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974), has had a modest influence on the study of the behavior of people in organizations.

For example, Chatman (1989, 1991) and her colleagues (O'Reilly et al., 1991) have championed an interactional person-environment fit approach to understanding and predicting individual behavior in the workplace. Indeed, in one of B. Schneider's earlier papers (1983a) he promoted the interactional vantage point for understanding organizational behavior. However, the interactional vantage point is a framework for understanding and predicting the behavior of *individuals*. In contrast, the ASA framework has as its criterion the prediction and understanding of *organizational* behavior.

Further, the ASA framework proposes that persons *make* environments. This proposition establishes the ASA framework as quite different from interactional psychology and person-environment fit models for understanding individual or organizational behavior. Interactional models view the situation as something persons either must fit to be effective (satisfied, committed, productive) or something that moderates the relationship between some individual characteristic and individual effectiveness.

Models of behavior of the latter sort include job design as a moderator of higher-order need strength and job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), the work situation as a moderator of ability-performance relationships (Schneider B, 1978), facilitators and inhibitors as enhancers and suppressors, respectively, and thus moderators of individual differences—performance relationships (Peters & O'Connor, 1988), and situational favorableness as a moderator of personality and leadership effectiveness (Fiedler, 1967).

In summary, the interactional psychological models conceptualize situations as separate and distinct from the individuals behaving in them, and that the criterion of interest is the behavior of individuals.

*The person perspective on organizational behavior.* The ASA framework is person-based. It is person-based in the sense that the personality attributes of the people in a setting are seen as the fundamental defining characteristic of that setting. The ASA framework promotes the idea that the situation is not independent of the people in the setting; the situation is the people there behaving as they do. According to B. Schneider, structure, process, and culture are the *outcome* of the people in an organization, not the cause of the behavior of the organization.

The ASA framework is certainly not the first theory to emphasize the role of people in defining situations. Nor is it the first to emphasize the importance of attraction and selection. For example, Diener, Larsen, and Emmons (1984; Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1985) have tested the two models of reciprocal interactionism proposed by Murray (1938) and Eysenck (1952). Their research suggests that people do, in fact, choose

situations consistent with their personality and avoid situations inconsistent with their personality. Further, they found support for Eysenck's proposition that congruence was related to affect. Buss (1987) and his colleagues (Buss, Gomes, Higgins, & Lauterbach, 1986) have reported similar research.

In addition to the work in personality psychology, the organizational demography literature (Pfeffer, 1983) also posits hypotheses similar to those of ASA. Although the two theories make many similar predictions regarding attraction, selection, and attrition, ASA theory is more psychological in that the characteristics of persons that are of interest are dispositional or personality-related characteristics. Organizational demography, tracing its roots to structural theories of sociology, focuses on less psychologically-oriented characteristics like age, gender, and educational background. Both theories suggest that homogeneity at the level of the group or organization is the result but they focus on different variables to define homogeneity.

In summary, general theory in personality psychology and organizational demography, as well as conceptualizations concerning the world of work, suggest that persons are not randomly assigned to settings but that they actively choose themselves into settings that they fit. Thus, in the ASA model, a main effect for organizations on individual differences in personality attributes across organizations is proposed. That is, the range of individual differences in personality within a setting is hypothesized to be smaller than the range of those same personality differences between organizations. Further, the predictions of interest concern *organizational behavior* (structure, process, culture, effectiveness) not individual behavior.

In what follows, we review the current literatures that are relevant to the issues of attraction, selection, and attrition regarding two central propositions of the ASA model: (a) the role of founders and top management in determining organizational goals and the ASA cycle, and (b) homogeneity of personality attributes within organizations as a consequence of the ASA cycle.

#### *Founders and Founders' Goals*

Central to the ASA framework is the concept of goals. In the ASA framework, the goals of the organization are seen as operationalizations of the personality of the organization's founders. B. Schneider proposed, as have others (e.g., Schein, 1993), that some organizations pursue innovation, others service quality, and still others, a high level of worker quality of life as a function of the influence of the organization's founder.

The logic is as follows: Founders' goals result in the enactment of specific policies and practices to achieve those goals, and the combination of goals and their resulting policies and practices yields an organization characterized by unique structures, processes, and culture. The ASA cycle that follows is thought to produce homogeneity.

In Schein's language:

Founders not only choose the basic mission and the environmental context in which the new group will operate, but they choose the group members and bias the original responses that the group makes in its effort to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself. Organizations do not form accidentally or spontaneously. . . . Founders not only have a high level of self-confidence and determination, but they typically have strong assumptions about the nature of the world, the role that organizations play in that world, the nature of human nature and relationships, how truth is arrived at, and how to manage time and space. They will, therefore be quite comfortable in imposing those views on their partners and employees as the fledgling organization copes. . . (1993, pp. 211-213).

There is some research that lends support to the idea that organizations are a reflection of their founders, or at least their top management. Although many of these studies are case studies (see Schein, 1993 for some examples), they are nonetheless interesting and we will review some of these in what follows. But at this point it is important to note that, to our knowledge, there are no explicit studies of the degree to which founder personality characteristics are (a) correlated with the goals and eventual culture of the organizations they found, or (b) reflected in the later personality of the people attracted to, selected by, and retained by an organization. Yet there are some hints in various case studies that these may actually occur.

Kimberly (1980) conducted a case study of the founding of a medical school and demonstrated how the founding dean left a legacy in the way of goals, structures, processes, and culture that differentiated that particular medical school from others. Kimberly does note in passing the kinds of faculty members who were attracted to the new dean and the role they played in the evolving culture of the school, but his description of these issues is sparse.

Schein (1993), in the three cases he presents that illustrate founder influence, comments in one of the cases about the fact that the founder chose "lieutenants" who "shared the founder's basic assumptions" (p. 214) and in another that the founder chose people who "were usually people like himself" (p. 219). In the third case Schein is more explicit with regard to both selection and attrition: "So over the course of its first decade, the organization tended to hire and keep only those kinds

of people who fitted the assumptions [of the founder] and were willing to live in the system even though it might at times be frustrating" (p. 224).

In a similar vein, Kets de Vries and Miller (1986) proposed that management creates a culture for the strategy they wish to enact and then create the structures and processes necessary for carrying out that strategy. Miller and Droge (1986) have shown that CEO personality characteristics are related to the form of organizational structures that characterize their organizations. Feldman (1985), and Hambrick and Mason (1984) make similar points about the importance of top management and leaders in determining the style with which organizations function.

These kinds of findings appear to be somewhat supportive of the importance accorded founders and top management in the ASA model. Indeed, with regard to the homogeneity proposition in particular, Schein (1993, p. 227) concludes from his case studies the following:

In the early life of any new organization one can see many examples of how partners or co-founders who do not think alike end up in conflict and that results in some people leaving, thus creating a more homogeneous climate for those who remain.

Is there evidence that founders do not have the long-term effects proposed by ASA? Such evidence is difficult to find. It might be claimed, for example, that because organizations contain subcultures (Frice & Beyer, 1993), the influence of the founder is less clear than proposed by B. Schneider and Schein. With regard to subcultures in organizations (e.g., Martin, 1992), there is no inherent logic for denying cultural differences between organizations even though each organization may have considerable "subcultural" variability within it. The issues are at different levels of abstraction, and both may be true. Thus, much as spruce forests and oak forests are dominated by particular kinds of trees and each of the forests has considerable variability within them, there are levels of abstraction at which "spruce" versus "oak" is a useful and meaningful distinction. In ASA, founders have long-term effects on the kinds of forests we deal with—and probably with the form and nature of the subcultures that exist within each, too.

One might also argue that, over time, the vestiges of founder influence might dissipate to the extent that the existing processes, structure, and culture (and, subsequently, the people) reveal little resemblance to that articulated and erected by the founder. Again, this is an issue of the level of abstraction at which organizations are viewed. ASA theory would suggest that although an organization may in fact evolve, the nature and path of that evolution would differ across organizations as a function of differences in the basic characteristics of the people in those organizations.

Thus, it would seem to follow from ASA that two organizations might differ in terms of differentiation and integration (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969), and also in the ways in which the people in similar functions differ from each other. J.L. Schneider (1994), for example, shows how accountants in four accounting firms share some attributes (life history experiences) but differ significantly on other attributes, (i.e., there is a main effect for accounting firm on the distribution of some accountants' life history experiences). In summary, the evidence, based on case studies of founders having an influence on organizational culture is considerable. The evidence indicates that, as the organization grows and evolves, founders make choices about everyday activities and that these choices influence the way the organization organizes to cope with its larger environment. These choices create the organizational culture to which ASA suggests people are differentially attracted, selected, and retained. Schein's case studies summarized briefly above suggest that part of what happens as the result of the personality of the founder is the inclination to bring aboard similar sorts—or, for family businesses, to have family members as employees, further enhancing the similarity of personality of founders and members (Dyer, 1986; Rosenblatt, de Mik, Anderson, & Johnson, 1985).

#### *Research Relevant to the Homogeneity Hypothesis*

The ASA cycle is proposed to, over time, yield increasing homogeneity of personality in an organization. Two kinds of studies in the literature are relevant for this hypothesis. The first kind of study, not designed as a test of ASA but nevertheless relevant to ASA, has provided only indirect evidence for the homogeneity prediction. The second kind of study was designed as a direct test of the homogeneity hypothesis.

*Indirect evidence for homogeneity.* We shall not repeat the case study evidence summarized earlier that suggests an outcome of the actions of founders is relative homogeneity in organizations. Here we are concerned with more quantitative studies that have been accomplished that appear to be relevant to the ASA model.

In the typical study of this kind, some personality or values measure of individuals applying for a job (or already in an organization) is tested for the degree to which it fits some measured aspect of the situation. For example, Chatman (1989) and her colleagues developed a Q-sort technique with which individuals can reveal their personal values and through which incumbents already at work in organizations can reveal the values of the organization. They (O'Reilly et al., 1991) show that when the fit of personal values to organizational values is high, employees are less likely to turnover (and are more satisfied, committed, and

productive). By inference it follows that if people who fit are more likely to stay in an organization, then over time, the environment will become more homogeneous because similar people will stay in the organization and dissimilar ones will leave. The principle here is that whenever the turnover of persons from an organization can be predicted based on the fit of personality characteristics to organizational characteristics there is indirect evidence for homogeneity of personality in organizations (Schneider B & Schneider JL, 1994).

There are other studies that are relevant to the homogeneity hypothesis and that reveal indirect evidence for homogeneity. For example, Judge and Bretz (1992) showed that people chose jobs whose values fit their own values. In this study, the values of people were assessed and the value orientation of jobs was presented to people who then had to choose which job they would take. People chose jobs that fit their value orientations. Earlier studies by Keon, Latack, and Wanous (1982) and Tom (1971) reported similar findings with the personality fit being to organizational rather than job attributes.

Another indirect study relevant to the topic of homogeneity emerges from a line of research in which supervisor and subordinate values congruence is assessed. Meglino, Ravlin, and Adkins (1989) studied this phenomenon and showed that value congruence between superior and subordinate predicts subordinate job satisfaction and commitment. It is a short inferential leap to suggest that this phenomenon can yield homogeneity because subordinates who do not fit their supervisor will tend to be dissatisfied and perhaps leave. More closely related to the homogeneity of the organization (rather than to the homogeneity of a supervisor's subordinates) is a similar study by Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt (1985). Posner et al. (1985) studied the values congruence of managers and their organizations and showed that the greater the congruence for managers the more likely they were to intend to remain with the organization. Posner (1992) reported similar findings for non-managers' values congruence to core organizational values.

Ivancevich and Matteson (1984) also explored congruence of person and environment, but they used the Type A construct in their research. They designed an assessment of the Type A or Type B organization and showed that when persons joined an organization with a personality like their own they experienced significantly less stress at work. Burke and Deszca (1982) found a similar relationship for the fit of personality to organizational climate.

An interesting study on goals was conducted by Vancouver and Schmitt (1991) in which they collected goals data across a number of organizations (schools) and showed a significant main effect for schools on goals profiles. In addition, within the schools, when peers agreed on the

goals of their school they had more positive job attitudes and increased intention to remain.

Judge and Ferris (1992) summarize similar literatures to those described above. In addition, they note anecdotal evidence from a number of sources regarding the tendency for organizations to seek homogeneity as an outcome of their staffing decisions. For example, they cite decision-makers at Sears (who based management selection decisions on uniformity in height; Katz, 1987), succession planning boards at GM who were actively lobbied by candidates for promotions by those candidates displaying various General Motors stereotypes (Wright, 1979), and decisions Hewlett-Packard made based on interviews yielding evidence regarding culture fit rather than competencies fit as a basis for hiring.

Kanter (1977), in her usually insightful use of language for labeling organizational processes, calls this kind of selection decision making the "homosocial reproduction system." In her label, she connotes the tendency for organizational decision makers to base staffing decisions on personality and values that fit with the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the decision makers. Argyris (1957) a number of years ago called this the "hiring the right type" syndrome.

Additional indirect evidence for the tendency towards homogeneity comes from the vast social psychological literature on what is called the "attraction paradigm" (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Neuman, 1992). Although research based on the attraction paradigm has focused on interpersonal attraction and liking at the diadic level, the phenomenon appears to be robust enough to equate it with hiring decisions because the hiring decision tends to be an interpersonal event (Rynes, 1991). Indeed, within the literature on interviewing, the attraction paradigm is called the "similar to me phenomenon."

A recent study by Krackhardt and Kilduff (1990) provides some interesting data relevant to the attraction paradigm within organizations. Krackhardt and Kilduff had 47 employees in a firm rate each other on seven behavioral dimensions. They also had the 47 employees rate each other so far as friendship was concerned. Analyses revealed that friends made similar attributions about the behavior of each other whereas non-friends made different attributions about each other. In addition, when friends made different attributions about each other, they tended to be less satisfied at work, suggesting that they could leave—with those remaining having similar attributions about each other.

These results on friendship clusters are reminiscent of the issue regarding subcultures explored earlier in the discussion of founder influences. The same issues apply here. That is, ASA theory would propose that those persons who are not in friendship clusters that correspond to the dominant personality type(s) of the organization will eventually

leave; ASA would predict that organizations would have subcultures that fit the dominant personality type(s) of the members of the organization with different organizations predicted to have different kinds of organizational subcultures; and, finally, that the issues of culture and subculture are not at all competing issues but are issues that reside at different levels of generalization.

In sum, there is considerable indirect evidence in the literature supporting the idea that organizations will tend towards homogeneity of personality as a function of the job and organizational choices people make. It appears that the choices they make are to fit the organizations they join and, if they fail to fit, to leave. The logic here is that fit yields satisfaction and commitment, that these in turn yield retention and, by implication, those who do not fit will leave. The result is improved fit over time and homogeneity of persons in an organization.

We must confess here to have explored the research literature for studies that were relevant to the homogeneity hypothesis and that we may have overlooked studies that would tend to invalidate the hypothesis. As noted earlier, one of the limitations of the ASA model is its vague specification of what is meant by "personal characteristics" or "kind" in its reference to people. ASA is also vague in what it means by "fit" yielding ambiguity in how fit should be operationalized. However, all of the studies reviewed above with regard to fit that we interpreted in the light of the homogeneity hypothesis used the Euclidean distance formulation ( $d^2$ ) of fit proposed by Cronbach and Gleser (1959).

Although this formulation has come under some recent critique (Edwards, 1991; 1993), all research we have found relevant to fit and homogeneity uses it. We will explore this issue of the measurement of fit and the usefulness of alternatives to  $d^2$  in ASA research a bit more later.

*Studies that directly test the homogeneity hypothesis.* A comprehensive search of the research literature revealed some studies that have tested facets of ASA relevant to the homogeneity hypothesis. The number of studies is small, perhaps due to the requirement for a sample of organizations for field studies; indeed most of the studies that have explicitly tested ASA turn out to be laboratory studies using paper organizations. Bretz, Ash, and Dreher (1989), for example, conducted a laboratory study to test the homogeneity hypothesis. In their study, they assessed the personality of participants and then presented those participants with descriptions of organizations for which the reward systems had been manipulated. They showed some partial support for homogeneity in that individuals high in need for achievement disproportionately expressed attraction for organizations with individually-based reward systems. No effects for need for affiliation or other interpersonal issues were found. The fact that only reward systems of organizations were manipulated

might account for a significant effect being found only for the achievement need.

Turban and Keon (1993) conducted a similar laboratory study and found stronger support for the homogeneity hypothesis than did Bretz et al. Turban and Keon measured need for achievement and self-esteem of participants who read descriptions of organizations' reward structure, centralization, and organizational size and then indicated the attractiveness of those organizations to them. Turban and Keon found that people with lower self esteem were more attracted to decentralized and larger firms while people high in need for achievement were more attracted to organizations that rewarded performance rather than seniority.

These studies suggest that people prefer organizations that fit their personality—at least in "paper organization" laboratory studies. A problem with these studies is that they test only attractiveness of the organization to subjects and that no real-time choices are involved. In contrast, ASA is conceptualized as a cycle meaning that homogeneity is the outcome of the entire cycle, not just of attraction to organizations. On the other hand, laboratory studies of very complex phenomena seem to have considerable generalizability when results are contrasted to similar studies accomplished in the field (Locke, 1986).

The "fit" issue exemplified in these two laboratory tests of ASA is of interest because fit in these studies is conceptualized along non-commensurate dimensions. That is, when we typically think of fit, we think of the fit between a person and an organization or other group of persons along *common* dimensions (e.g., individual need for achievement and organizational need for achievement; Kristof, 1995). In the case of the two studies just reviewed, however, fit is conceptualized along non-commensurate dimensions. That is, in both studies the individual measure is need for achievement and the organizational measure is the nature of the reward system.

Because of the vagueness in B. Schneider's (1987) paper, it is not clear whether commensurate or non-commensurate dimensions of the person and the organization are to be preferred. Thus, Chatman (1991) and her colleagues (O'Reilly et al., 1991) used commensurate measurement (individual values and organizational values on the same dimensions) as did Tom (1971); Bretz et al. (1989) and Turban and Keon (1993) used non-commensurate measures yet both sets of studies found similar results.

There are also some field studies that directly test the homogeneity hypothesis. For example, Jackson et al. (1991) studied the homogeneity of top management teams over time. They discovered the following: (a) top management teams are relatively homogeneous in their demographic make up, (b) the more heterogeneous the demographics of the

top management team, the more likely there will be turnover from that team, (c) newcomers to the top management team from inside the organization tend to be homogeneous with existing members of that team, and (d) the more different an individual is from the other members of the team the more predictable is his or her turnover.

The Jackson et al. (1991) research did not study the personality of top management team members; demographics were the data of interest. Of course there has been increasing interest in demographic diversity in organizations (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Jackson, 1992), but B. Schneider's (1987, 1993a, 1993b) writings have studiously ignored this issue; Jackson et al. drew the analogy between the demographic and ASA models and showed that they lead to similar predictions in organizations. As with B. Schneider, we choose not to embark on the demographic diversity tack except to note that (a) ASA claims that organizations tend to homogeneity and (b) ASA predicts that the tendency towards homogeneity can be dangerous so far as long term organizational effectiveness is concerned. We, like Herriot and Pemberton (1995) in their exciting new book, believe these predictions apply equally well to demographic and personality diversity in organizations.

A British field study of the tendency towards personality homogeneity in organizations was conducted by Jordan, Herriott, and Chalmers (1991). In this study, a sample of 344 UK managers from four organizations completed the 16 PF. Jordan et al. showed (a) a main effect for organization on personality (even after controlling for age and education), and (b) an interaction between occupation (function) and organization on personality. The latter finding indicates that different personalities characterized the same occupation as a function of the organization in which the occupation existed. Jordan et al. concluded that the homogeneity hypothesis was supported but that the issue of the same occupation existing with somewhat different personalities in different organizations merited additional research. This latter finding is reminiscent of the point we made earlier that different organizations might each have subcultures and that those subcultures would be characteristic of the organization in which they existed. Occupations, of course, are subcultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993) so the work of Jordan et al. would appear to lend some support to this prediction.

This latter issue is also reminiscent of a paper by B. Schneider and J.L. Schneider (1994) in which they propose that different single-occupation organizations (like accounting firms or law practices) may contain people with different personalities. They theorize that vocational interests may bring similar people together in an occupation but personality differences may, further, bring people together in an organization. O'Reilly et al. (1991) provided some support for this hypothesis when

they demonstrated that big eight accounting firms differ in their culture profiles and, thus, retain different kinds of people as a function of those people's values.

A field study conducted by J.L. Schneider (1994) provides additional evidence regarding separating the occupational from the organizational culture issue. She tested propositions originally proposed in the B. Schneider and J.L. Schneider (1994) article regarding life history experiences (biodata) and organizational choice and demonstrated that (a) life history experiences distinguish people who are accountants from people who are lawyers—not an unusual finding, (b) among accountants, life history experiences distinguish among those who work in four different accounting firms, and (c) among lawyers, life history experiences distinguish among those who work in public versus private sector law organizations. J.L. Schneider's findings are particularly strong because by studying people in occupation-specific organizations, occupation was controlled for in her research design so far as organizational membership was concerned.

In summary, there is some laboratory and field study evidence that has emerged from direct tests of ASA theory to indicate that the ASA hypothesis regarding homogeneity has some validity. This direct evidence is sparse but, combined with the earlier indirect evidence we found in the research literature, there appears to be a growing body of validity evidence for the homogeneity hypothesis.

#### *Summary, With Commentary*

ASA is a person-based framework for understanding organizational behavior. In ASA the organization (its structure, process, and culture) is hypothesized to be a function of the personalities of the people there; the organization is the outcome of the founders and top management of organizations and the people subsequently attracted to, selected by, and retained there. In what follows, we summarize and comment on the results of the literature review presented earlier.

*Founders, leaders and goals.* In our review of the literature, we found both empirical (e.g., Finklestein & Hambrick, 1990) and anecdotal support (e.g., Schein, 1993) for the contention that organizations (their structure, process, and culture) are a reflection of their founders, leaders, and top managers. This literature suggests that the personalities of founders and top managers do have long-term consequences for the goals organizations pursue and the processes and structures they erect to pursue them.



The relative importance of the founders and top management of organizations as defining influences on their organizations is in some debate right now. For example, the population ecology model of organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1976) discounts leadership control over the destiny of organizations in favor of an explanation based on control by the larger environments in which organizations function. Issues of turbulence in the environment, re-engineering the corporation, total quality management, and so forth can be conceptualized as interventions that are explicitly designed to break down the influence of founders and incumbent managers. But these change efforts frequently either fail to have their intended consequences (Gersick, 1991; Schneider B & Klein, 1994; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994) or they are absorbed by different organizations in different ways as a function of the existing structures, processes, and cultures (Sashkin & Kiser, 1993).

In fact, most organizations are family-owned businesses so the legacy of the founders is perpetuated over the generations of the family members connected to the business (Dyer, 1986). It is misleading to think that most businesses are large businesses listed on one of the stock exchanges; most businesses (some estimates are as high as 90%; Rosenblatt et al., 1985) are small family-owned or at least family-controlled and the legacy lingers.

Research is clearly needed that tests the direct connections hypothesized in ASA between the personality of founders and top managers and the structures, processes, and cultures associated with their organizations. To our knowledge no such research currently exists although work modeled on the O'Reilly et al. (1991) approach could prove useful. Recall that O'Reilly et al. developed a Q-sort culture profile measure containing 54 values statements with which incumbents could describe their organization and newcomers could describe themselves. Research in which the incumbents in a sample of organizations completed the Q-sort and the founders and top management of those same organizations completed a personality measure or values inventory would provide a test of the hypothesized relationship. Of course, the ideal research design would be one in which organizations that are about to be founded, or newly founded organizations, were located, the founders were tested, and then the evolving structure, process and culture of their organizations were tracked. But archival research, perhaps research in which psychologists coded the personality of founders based on existing materials and others coded the evolution of structure, process and culture, might also prove interesting. Research on the evolution of structure, process, and culture is desperately needed in the abstract (Martin, 1992), but particularly needed to document the presumed relationship between

founder and top management personality and these organizational attributes.

*Attraction-selection-attrition and homogeneity.* Our review of the literature indicates some direct and indirect evidence for the proposition that organizations become homogeneous with regard to the personality of incumbents. Indirectly, research employing the fit model (e.g., Chatman, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1992), as well as numerous studies in the turnover literature, suggest that the mechanisms of attraction and attrition do operate to define the characteristics of people who enter organizations and, by implication, the characteristics of those who remain in organizations.

Directly, two lines of research provide some validity for the homogeneity hypothesis. First, evidence from two multi-organization studies (Jordan et al., 1991; Schneider JL, 1994) suggest that organizations can be statistically differentiated on the basis of the attributes (personality, life history experiences) of the people in them—even when the people are in the same occupation. Second, laboratory studies employing “partner organizations” (e.g., Turban & Keon, 1993) have found that people prefer organizations with characteristics (e.g., reward systems) that mesh with their personalities (e.g., need for achievement).

Although the evidence for the homogeneity prediction is supportive, many questions remain unanswered. For example, it is interesting to note that the research projects on homogeneity that were previously reviewed have studied only homogeneity; they have not studied the degree to which homogeneity of personality is, in turn, reflected in structure, process and/or culture, as hypothesized in ASA.

Another interesting question involves the relative contribution of attraction, selection, and attrition to homogeneity. The laboratory studies have only studied attraction, and the field studies confound all three! Thus, in Jordan et al. (1991) and J.L. Schneider (1994) homogeneity is found but the explanation for that homogeneity is ambiguous; it is the outcome of all three ASA processes.

Perhaps, then, the attempt to tease apart A, S, and A is inappropriate. The fact is that the attraction or selection or attrition piece of the homogeneity equation may not be usefully examined separately; the pieces are parts of a total cycle and it is the outcome of the cycle that is critical. Holland (1985), for example, shows how people do not necessarily make the initial career choice that best fits their interests but that, over time, their subsequent choices move them increasingly closer to their measured interests. ASA is a time-based conceptualization of homogeneity, one in which homogeneity is predicted to occur over time as the ASA cycle plays out for each individual. Studies only of attraction or only of

selection or only of attrition do not fulfill the requirements of the framework. The fact that studies of only isolated pieces of the cycle reveal a tendency towards homogeneity is encouraging and suggests that, when the entire cycle is considered, homogeneity of persons in an organization might be very strong indeed.

Also, with regard to the ASA cycle, there are no studies of which we are aware on the relative importance of, for example, structure, process, and culture as attractions to people compared to pay levels, vacation plans, and fringe benefits. There is already evidence to indicate that people differ in the relative attractiveness of pay and other more tangible organizational attributes (Cable & Judge, 1994; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969; Rynes, 1991) and that these individual differences in preferences predict individual differences in organizational choices, too (Vroom, 1966). It seems a relatively small inferential leap to suggest that individual differences in the relative attractiveness of tangible organizational rewards and attributes are tied to deeper personality and values issues, the kinds of issues ASA suggests drive eventual organizational membership. Thus, the research issue of interest may be as follows: For which kinds of personalities are the different kinds of tangibles organizations offer most attractive?

For example, preferences to associate only with similar others in terms of race and religion are related to the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), preferences to work in smaller compared to larger organizations are related to need for achievement (Turban & Keon, 1993), and people who are low in self-esteem and high in neuroticism are more attracted to jobs with high pay (Lawler, 1971). ASA theory tells us nothing about precisely which personality attributes are likely to be reflected in which preferences for organizational attributes; such conceptualization is obviously needed.

There is also an interesting question one might raise about whether people seek a fit or match of their own characteristics to jobs or to the whole organizations they join and, perhaps, leave. The issue for us is not one of comparing job to organizational characteristics as the research question but the relationship between job characteristics and organizational characteristics. Research on job design, for example, indicates that jobs do not exist separate from the larger organization (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This may help explain why job redesign efforts succeed in some organizations and fail in others; when the job redesign fits the culture of the organization then job redesign succeeds (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Sashkin & Kiser, 1993).

ASA assumes that people join whole organizations regardless of whether they initially realize it. ASA further assumes that people leave

whole organizations, not just jobs, because of the organizational structures, processes, and culture they experience working at their job. The suggested interrelationship of job and organization is, of course, not new here, forming as it does the very foundation for important organizational science conceptualizations, especially those associated with the Tavistock Institute (cf. Miller, 1976).

*Future research issues.* Although some evidence for the validity of homogeneity predicted by ASA has begun to accumulate, there are a number of other research issues following from the propositions of the ASA model still requiring attention: (a) theory development and research, (b) research methodology, and (c) practical implications. We deal with each of these in turn.

1. *Further theory development and research* is needed regarding the predicted outcomes of the ASA model and their implications. For example, does homogeneity occur continuously or discontinuously over time and, if continuously, linearly or non-linearly? What is the impact of homogeneity on organizational survival?

Contrary to the predictions of P-E fit models, that positive consequences exclusively follow from good P-E fit and thus homogeneity (Schneider B, Kristof, Goldstein, & Smith, in press), the ASA model views this increasing homogeneity as having *both* positive and negative consequences. The primary positive consequences include feelings on the part of members that they are comfortable in the organization, higher levels of satisfaction, communication, and cooperativeness, and fewer interpersonal conflicts. The primary negative consequence of such homogeneity is seen as an inability to change when the environment demands and, concomitantly, the demise of competitiveness through unchanging and easily predictable decision making (cf. Walsh & Holland, 1992).

Miller (1991), for example, found that as the average tenure of the top management in an organization goes up, there is less of an appropriate fit between the strategies they put in place and the demands of the environment. This lack of fit, in turn, yields negative outcomes for the organization. Achieving a kind of equilibrium (Gersick, 1991), such organizations are unable to enact the changes required for adaptation to a changing environment. The results presented by Miller (1991) support this notion (although he does not interpret his results within the ASA framework), as do studies of small group diversity at work (Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995).

This issue of the positive and negative consequences of fit and homogeneity is a complicated one. Our present thinking (Schneider B et al., in press) is that homogeneity is positive for organizational survival early in the history of an organization because it facilitates coordination,

communication, and cooperation. Later, as the organization becomes increasingly successful, such homogeneity can, paradoxically, yield inflexibility, an inability to adapt and change, and eventual organizational demise (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Miller, 1991). If this hypothesis is correct, a very practical suggestion following from ASA theory is to facilitate homogeneity in the early history of an organization and promote heterogeneity later. This late heterogeneity should provide the kinds of alternative perspectives and conflicts that can stimulate accurate sensing of the environment and the concomitant changes required to adapt and cope with changes that might not otherwise be perceived (Schneider B, 1983b).

B. Schneider (1987), and we, have written as if the founder comes first, then the people attracted to the organization come and stay (or leave) with the resulting personality of the people in the organization determining structure, process, and culture—nothing else matters. We take this vantage point because we believe in the primacy of people's personalities as the root cause of structure, process, and culture. However, this does not deny that structure, process, and culture have an effect on people through socialization practices (e.g., Louis, 1990). But in ASA theory, organizational socialization works because it is, more often than not, working on people who already share many of the attributes to which they are being socialized (Schneider B, 1983a). And if they do not share those attributes they leave.

Are there reciprocal relationships between people's personalities and their employing organizations? We think so, but we put primacy on the *people* in those employing organizations as those people's personalities are revealed in the structures, processes, and culture employees experience. Research is certainly required to test these presumptions.

2. *On a methodological note* it is important to remember that the research conducted on the ASA model must be at the organizational level of analysis. Although it is difficult to collect data in multiple organizations, in order to properly test hypotheses presented in the ASA model this level of analysis is required. A few researchers have already successfully examined propositions relevant to the ASA model at the organizational level (i.e., Chatman, 1991; Jackson et al., 1991; Schneider JL, 1994) and we are aware of additional research efforts in progress.

Reference to the organizational level of analysis raises the following question: What would a personnel selection validity study look like at the organizational level of analysis? Such research would use homogeneity/heterogeneity of personality as a predictor of *organizational* effectiveness. In this case it is not the personal attributes of individuals within an organization that is the predictor of interest but the relative homogeneity of personality at the organizational level of analysis that is

the predictor; the criterion is not individual performance within an organization but organizational effectiveness. In addition, if homogeneity does have negative consequences, then it is possible that heterogeneity of personality in an organization would predict positive organizational effectiveness. ASA theory implies that the individual differences model for personnel selection validity may be only *one* model, not *the* model, for the establishment of personnel selection procedures validity (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986).

One last methodological note related to this jump in the level of analysis in personnel selection validity studies concerns how to index homogeneity. The issue of homogeneity is similar to the question of fit: as the variance in fit of persons to each other and/or to the modal personality in the organization increases, so does heterogeneity increase. In a series of papers, Edwards (1991, 1993) has argued for abandoning the Euclidean distance (sum of  $d^2$ ) formula as the preferred index of fit. His proposal, the polynomial regression analysis procedure, simultaneously considers the contribution of the main effects of the two components of fit and their relationship (interactive) as the predictor.

Although the formulae proposed by Edwards are straightforward, the calculation of the main effects becomes cumbersome as the number of elements in the profiles to be fit increases, the sample size requirements for research escalate quickly, and, most importantly for the present article, the elements in the profile to be fit must be specified prior to the use of the polynomial regression formula—but B. Schneider (1987) makes no such specification.

There are several research questions posed by ASA that might require an index of fit. ASA theory predicts that: (a) the poorer the fit of an individual to an organization, the more likely the turnover; (b) as homogeneity of personality in organizations (fit) increases, organizational effectiveness decreases; (c) over time, the average fit of persons to each other (homogeneity) increases. The latter case, in which fit is the dependent variable is a different class of problem amenable, as Edwards (1993) notes to classical multivariate procedures.

The first two cases, where fit is a predictor at (a) the individual level of analysis and (b) at the organizational level of analysis, require further consideration here. Unfortunately, neither B. Schneider (1987) nor we have identified precisely the facets of personality on which similarity/fit/homogeneity are to be assessed, and this is a fundamental requirement of the polynomial regression procedure (Edwards, 1993). We are unable to resolve the fit measurement issue in the present article.

3. *With regard to practical implications*, we have written about ASA theory with Kurt Lewin's dictum in mind: There is nothing so practical

as a good theory. The ASA model presents a way to think about organizational functioning and organizational effectiveness; it presents a new paradigm for organizational research. ASA does not present a new technique, test, or training program, yet it is eminently practical in its implications with regard to issues like organizational effectiveness and organizational demise, organizational change, and personnel selection. The primary practical implication of the theory is cautionary: Over time, the tendency for organizations to become homogeneous with regard to person types can be dangerous for long-term organizational effectiveness. We have presented here no evidence for this negative outcome of homogeneity but we have presented some support for the proposition that, over time, organizations may become homogeneous with regard to the personalities of the people in them.

It might be assumed that homogeneity only occurs in large, bureaucratically stable organizations but this is not true. As noted earlier, most organizations are small, family owned or family controlled businesses and the inclination to homogeneity is potentially exacerbated in such businesses. Conclusion: Small businesses, in particular, must guard against the inclination towards homogeneity.

It also might be assumed that homogeneity is only a problem for organizations functioning in stable, non-turbulent or even monopolistic market environments. On the contrary, ASA proposes that homogeneity is always potentially dangerous. High technology companies, for example, that attract and retain "mavericks" can become too homogeneous with regard to mavericks! Apple discovered this when it became clear that administrative rigor and professional management expertise was required to save it from the threat of bankruptcy. Conclusion: Everyone wearing jeans and sporting a beard can be as dangerous as everyone wearing a white shirt, suit, and tie.

Additional practical questions can be raised with regard to the whole personnel selection enterprise. For example, if we are correct that jobs carry with them the organizational culture in which they are embedded, should not job analysis as a basis for personnel selection also include an organizational diagnosis? Such a diagnosis might be a useful way to incorporate personality issues into selection programs and provide impetus for attention to those "other" characteristics in addition to the traditional knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) on which so much attention has been focused related to the job. To our way of thinking, performance on a job includes reactions to the context of the job, and personalities that better fit the context, combined with the KSAs required by jobs might, in combination, enhance the validity of personnel selection procedures.

Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan (1991) have recently argued for the selection of people for organizations not just for jobs and we would support

this view, but always with a caution. Our caution is that choosing people for an organization because they fit it well in terms of their personality can yield the negative consequence of over-homogenization associated with organizational failure.

With regard to personality and personnel selection, it would follow from ASA that personality tests would most likely not have strong validity in predicting the performance of individuals within an organization. Range restriction, the statistical result of ASA's hypothesized homogeneity effect, would attenuate these validities. Thus, if the ASA cycle is operating, attraction leads to restriction of range, making those eventually appearing for the selection process a restricted sample.

B. Schneider et al. (in press) note several practical implications of ASA for personnel selection, some of which have already been noted. For example, personnel selection procedures can be used to identify persons who will fit the organization and those who will not fit so well. At different times in an organization's evolution it may be useful to have good fit (perhaps early in its history) and, at other times (like later in its history) it may be useful to use selection procedures to promote heterogeneity.

With regard to personality (and values, too), ASA suggests that there is restriction of range in those who appear to be processed through formal selection procedures with the concomitant restriction in range that can yield attenuation of validity. We were unable to find studies that explored this logic in examining personality test validity and we encourage such research.

### Conclusion

Our goal in the present paper was to summarize where research on the ASA model is today. We reported on research that provides both direct and indirect evidence for the most fundamental proposition of ASA theory, homogeneity of personality in organizations. We also identified many issues still requiring both theoretical and empirical documentation, especially regarding the consequences of homogeneity and the implications of ASA theory for such practical considerations as personnel selection (B. Schneider et al., in press). Obviously, there is much still to be done before ASA theory can be accepted fully as a personally-based explanation for organizational structure, process, and culture. But, as an alternative to the situationally dominated theories currently accepted in the field, ASA offers some interesting avenues for new research and new insights into the etiology of organizations as we experience them.

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