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Individual Dimensions of Candidate–position Compatibility: A Literature Review

Summary

This study examines candidate–position compatibility and its link to reskilling potential through a conceptual model that distinguishes individual factors (competencies, motivation, prior experience, interpersonal skills) and organizational influences. Using a structured literature review (2000–2025, 35 sources), the paper focuses on individual-level inputs. Findings highlight that competencies—framed by EU and global models—provide systemic foundations for suitability and adaptability. Workplace motivation, particularly intrinsic drivers (autonomy, competence, relatedness), predicts long-term employability. Prior experience accelerates integration when relevant, but diverse careers enhance adaptability and creativity. Interpersonal skills, especially emotional intelligence, consistently outweigh technical knowledge in predicting integration, performance, and commitment. Overall, adaptability, lifelong learning, and transversal skills emerge as key predictors of future success, forming the basis for an evaluation system to assess fit, reskilling needs, or rejection.

Keywords: human resource management (HRM), candidate–position compatibility, reskilling, competencies.

JEL codes: J21, J24, M51, M53

Introduction

The aim of my research is to explore which factors determine the compatibility between a candidate and a position, and how these influence employees' reskilling potential. To this end, I developed a conceptual model that distinguishes two main groups of input factors: individual-level elements (competencies, workplace motivation, prior experience, interpersonal skills) and organizational/environmental elements (HR systems, leadership style, learning opportunities, organizational culture). On the output side, the model presents three possible outcomes: candidate rejection, direct fit ("ready now" status), or reskilling, which serves to bridge the "competence gap."

One of the long-term objectives of my research is to build an evaluation system based on this model, which can identify and quantify outcomes derived from individual and organizational inputs. In other words, through the analysis of input elements, I aim to define measurable indicators that can predict whether a candidate is immediately suitable for the role, requires reskilling, or may not align with the organization's needs in the longer term.

This literature review focuses on individual-level factors, as these represent the starting point for both compatibility and reskilling. The analysis of organizational and environmental influencing factors will be carried out in the next phase of the research, in a separate study.

Method

This study adopts a structured literature review approach to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical contributions on candidate–position compatibility and reskilling potential. The review focused specifically on individual-level input factors—competencies, workplace motivation, prior work experience, and interpersonal skills—while acknowledging that organizational and contextual influences will be addressed in a subsequent study. Relevant literature was identified using major academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, complemented by targeted searches of organizational reports and policy documents (e.g., European Commission, OECD, World Economic Forum, NACE). Search strings combined terms such as candidate–position compatibility, person–job fit, employability, reskilling, competencies, workplace motivation, prior experience, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence.

The time frame for inclusion covered 2000–2025, allowing both classical theoretical foundations (e.g., Herzberg, 1959; Deci & Ryan, 2000) and contemporary studies addressing technological and labor market shifts (e.g., Schmid & Dowling, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). Articles were included if they (1) explicitly addressed candidate–position compatibility or closely related constructs (person–job, person–organization, or person–team fit); (2) focused on one or more of the four individual-level factors; and (3) were peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or recognized institutional reports. Studies with a purely descriptive focus, insufficient methodological transparency, or limited to non-transferable niche contexts were excluded.

A total of 35 publications were reviewed. These were analyzed thematically and categorized under the four main dimensions of the conceptual model. Findings were synthesized to identify points of convergence and divergence, methodological strengths and weaknesses, and implications for developing an integrated evaluation system.

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Results

Theoretical Background: The Concept of Candidate–Position Compatibility

Candidate–position compatibility, or person–job fit, constitutes a foundational construct in human resource management and organizational psychology. It refers to the degree to which a candidate's abilities, skills, and knowledge, along with their motivational background and personal characteristics, align with the requirements of a given position (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Compatibility may be understood in a narrow sense—as the possession of technical and professional competencies required for task execution—or in a broader sense that incorporates employee attitudes, cultural congruence with the organization, and long-term developmental potential (Chatman, 1991).

The literature distinguishes several dimensions of compatibility:

Person–Job Fit, reflecting the match between job requirements and the candidate's competencies (Edwards, 1991);

Person–Organization Fit, denoting the alignment of employee and organizational values, norms, and objectives (Kristof, 1996);

Person–Team Fit, capturing the quality of collaboration, communication, and interpersonal dynamics within teams (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

More recently, the concept has been extended to include reskilling potential, which accounts not only for current suitability but also for a candidate's capacity for future performance (World Economic Forum, 2023). This perspective underscores the significance of learning potential, adaptability, and transversal competences, particularly in the context of accelerating technological change and shifting labor market demands (European Commission, 2018).

These theoretical foundations frame the present study, which reviews the individual-level input factors of compatibility—focusing specifically on competencies, workplace motivation, prior experience, and interpersonal skills. The influence of organizational and environmental factors will be addressed in the subsequent phase of the research, in a separate paper.

The Role of Individual-Level Factors in Compatibility The Presence of Competencies

One of the most critical determinants of compatibility between a candidate and a given position is the individual's existing set of competencies. Competencies are understood as combinations of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to operate effectively within an organizational context and to develop in a sustainable manner (Ilgaz & Eskici, 2019).

This study draws on the European Union's eight Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, summarized in the corresponding framework (European Commission, 2018). These competences cover areas such as digital literacy, learning to learn, and social and civic skills, which are essential not only for individual development but also for social integration (Ceschi et al., 2021; Nosidlak, 2021).

Seemann and colleagues (2019), in their organizational case study, emphasize that key competences are prerequisites not only for individual development but also for organizational learning. They highlight that fostering willingness to learn, digital proficiency, and social skills is crucial to long-term employability, especially in times of rapid technological and structural change. Similarly, Nigmatullina and Boltakova (2014) identify lifelong learning competences as critical determinants of adaptability, while the research of Kan and Murat (2020) underscores the prominent role of digital literacy and self-efficacy in predicting reskilling potential and learning capacity.

In addition to the EU framework, several other internationally recognized models approach competencies from different perspectives—whether labor market expectations, digital transformation, or sectoral requirements. The following table summarizes six major frameworks:

These frameworks approach individual suitability from different perspectives. ESCO, as the EU's official skills mapping tool, assigns the necessary competences to occupations, facilitating the assessment of position fit. DigComp serves to map digital skills in detail, which is particularly important in examining reskilling opportunities (Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero Gomez, and Van den Brande, 2016). The U.S.-based NACE Career Readiness model measures graduates' employability across eight competency ar-

Table 1. Competency frameworks

Framework	Key Kompetencies	Application	Source
EU Key Competences	Native language, foreign languages, digital skills, learning to learn, cultural, citizenship competence, etc.	General HR compatibility, prediction of reskilling potential	European Commission (2018)
ESCO	Database of position-specific and transversal skills	Comparison of job requirements and individual competences	European Commission, ESCO Portal
NACE Career Readiness	Critical thinking, collaboration, communication, professionalism	Evaluation of graduates, international corporate practices	NACE (2021)
DigComp 2.0	Information management, content creation, data security and problem-solving	Measuring digital suitability and reskilling potential	Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero Gomez, and Van den Brande (2016)
OECD PIAAC	Literacy, numeracy, problem-solving in technology-rich environments	Assessment of general employability level	OECD (2019)
WEF Future Skills	Analytical and creative thinking, flexibility, technological knowledge	Trend-based HR strategies, future-proof selection	World Economic Forum (2023)

eas, while OECD PIAAC evaluates adults' core competencies in a global comparison (OECD, 2019). The WEF Future Skills list identifies the competences expected in the future labor market, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and analytical thinking (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Overall, the different competency models provide a multidimensional perspective for HR practice. This allows selection decisions to assess not only current suitability but also future learning and developmental potential. In this study, the application of the EU Key Competences framework is justified, as it offers a unified, systemic foundation adapted to the European context for examining individual suitability and reskilling potential.

Workplace Motivation

In examining candidate–position compatibility, increasing emphasis is placed on psychological and organizational factors that facilitate successful integration, identification with the role, and sustained long-term performance. Among these, workplace motivation plays a particularly significant role. Motivation not only determines individual productivity but is also closely linked to the extent to which an employee feels "in place" within a given role. A deeper understanding of motivation requires an integrated interpretation of classical motivational theories alongside contemporary empirical research.

The classical frameworks of workplace motivation include Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory. According to Herzberg (1959), job satisfaction and motivation are determined by two independent categories of factors: hygiene factors—such as pay, working conditions, and workplace relationships—and motivators—such as challenge, recognition, and opportunities for advancement. While the absence of hygiene factors leads to dissatisfaction, their presence alone is insufficient to sustain lasting intrinsic motivation. From the perspective of candidate–position compatibility, this suggests that appropriate working conditions and compensation form only a baseline; genuine alignment depends on meeting higher-order psychological needs.

This line of reasoning is deepened by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that intrinsic motivation—such as the joy of learning or experiencing meaning in work—leads to stronger and more enduring engagement than extrinsic motivators such as rewards or status. The theory identifies three basic psychological needs essential for sustaining intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Accordingly, candidate–position compatibility is not solely a matter of capability but also reflects the degree to which the role and organization support the fulfillment of these internal needs.

Recent empirical research substantiates these classical foundations. Chaturvedi and Khanna (2025), in their systematic literature review, examined the impact of leadership styles on motivation. They conclude that effective leaders enhance employees' intrinsic motivation by granting autonomy and recognizing competence, thereby fostering stronger identification with the role.

Similarly, Santos and colleagues (2024) investigated the effects of internal communication on motivation and job satisfaction. Their findings reveal that internal communication indirectly influences satisfaction through motivation as a mediating factor, thereby reinforcing psychological fit with the role. Access to information, transparency, and recognition collectively strengthen autonomy and relatedness, in line with the principles of SDT.

The mediating role of motivation is further supported by the results of Kaviya, Sandhiya, and Dineshkumar (2025), who studied industrial contexts. Their research demonstrates that a supportive work environment alone does not directly increase productivity, but through motivation, it indirectly contributes to improved performance. This underscores that work environments impact compatibility when they are able to elicit intrinsic commitment.

The motivational effects of the technological environment are explored by Schmid and Dowling (2022), who distinguish four interpretive frameworks: technology as background noise, hygiene factor, motivator, or indirect influencer. Their framework aligns with Herzberg's model, in which technology can function as a hygiene factor but, under certain conditions, may also become motivating—particularly when it provides a sense of competence or opportunities for growth.

Finally, the longitudinal research of Bryson and White (2019) highlights the impact of small-firm HR practices on intrinsic motivation. Their findings suggest that the introduction of formal HR systems may initially reduce intrinsic motivation, but over time—if the organization is able to support autonomy and opportunities for development—these systems can ultimately strengthen compatibility with the role.

In sum, candidate–position compatibility is not merely a matter of "fit" but a complex outcome of workplace motivational factors, particularly intrinsic motivation. Herzberg's and Deci–Ryan's theories provide the theoretical foundation for this interpretation, while empirical studies across diverse organizational contexts demonstrate how these factors shape employees' integration, commitment, and performance.

Prior Work Experience

In the study of candidate–position compatibility, prior work experience emerges as a critical factor, as it directly influences the speed of job entry, the length of the onboarding period, as well as long-term performance and commitment. The literature increasingly shifts away from a purely quantitative perspective (i.e., the number of years of experience) toward a qualitative interpretation that emphasizes the relevance, transferability, and context of experience.

Edwards and Edwards (2022), in their qualitative research, examined recruiters' practices in interpreting CVs and concluded that HR professionals value not the "weight" of experience, but rather its contextual alignment—namely, the extent to which previous roles resemble the requirements of the applied position. Their study emphasizes that candidates coming from similar organizational and technical environments face a shorter learning curve, integrating more quickly and effectively—an expression of compatibility in practice.

This dynamic is further supported by Scherer's (2004) longitudinal study, which found that the first work experiences following education significantly shape long-term career trajectories. The research suggests that not only technical knowledge, but also behavioral norms, attitudes toward organizational expectations, and broader conceptions of work can be "learned,"

meaning that experience itself carries the acquired dimensions of compatibility.

At the same time, Rivera's (2012) ethnographic research highlights that experience is often assessed in non-objective ways. Among elite employers, prior experience is not treated solely as an indicator of professional competence but also as a proxy for cultural fit. Recruiters tend to favor candidates whose institutional and career backgrounds resemble those of current employees. This phenomenon may distort the concept of compatibility, as perceived fit does not necessarily coincide with actual professional suitability.

The performance impact of compatibility is empirically confirmed by Dunford, Snell, and Wright (2008), who used quantitative methods to analyze how prior, task-specific experience affects onboarding length and achieved performance levels. Their findings indicate that candidates with previous experience in similar roles integrate more rapidly and reach desired productivity levels sooner. This effect is particularly strong in highly complex roles, where existing skills can be reactivated and transferred to the new environment.

Conversely, Arthur, Khapova, and Richardson (2021) emphasize the positive effects of nonlinear, so-called "boundaryless careers." Their research suggests that experience gained across diverse industries or functions fosters transversal competences—such as problem-solving, adaptability, and creativity—which may prove more important for long-term fit than industry-specific or technical specialization. In roles where innovation, change management, or interdisciplinarity are central, such experience can be especially advantageous.

Overall, prior work experience is not merely a source of information about a candidate's past suitability, but also an active component shaping future compatibility. The type, context, structure, and interpretation of experience all contribute to ensuring that candidates align with role requirements—both functionally and culturally—during the selection process.

Interpersonal Skills

In recruitment and selection, interpersonal skills are increasingly recognized as a critical factor in evaluating candidate–position compatibility. In modern organizational contexts, technical proficiency or professional experience alone are insufficient; compatibility increasingly depends on a candidate's ability to collaborate effectively, communicate clearly, manage conflicts, and adapt to organizational norms. These capabilities, typically referred to as interpersonal skills or *soft skills*, are decisive in determining whether a candidate can successfully integrate into a role and the broader organization.

Emotional intelligence, as a core component of interpersonal skills, is directly associated with workplace performance. Based on their meta-analysis, O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story (2011) demonstrate that emotional intelligence significantly predicts job performance, particularly in roles requiring high levels of social interaction and collaboration.

This perspective is reinforced by Hurrell (2016), whose empirical study shows that employers—especially in the service sector—actively seek soft skills alongside technical competence. A lack of interpersonal skills often presents a greater barrier to integration than gaps in professional knowledge, as such skills shape how employees react, adapt, and relate to others within organizational contexts.

Selection practices further reflect the rising importance of interpersonal skills. According to Robles (2012), the most highly valued soft skills in business include communication, empathy, adaptability, and teamwork. Possessing these competences substantially facilitates smooth organizational integration, making them a key element of candidate–position compatibility.

Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) argue that fit should not be examined solely in terms of *person–job fit*, but also *person–team fit* and *person–organization fit*. Within the team context, interpersonal competences become especially critical, as collaboration and cohesion largely depend on the quality of social skills.

The importance of non-cognitive skills—particularly social and emotional competences—is also highlighted by Heckman and Kautz (2012). Their analysis shows that such skills (e.g., self-control, perseverance, cooperation) exert a stronger long-term impact on labor market success than formal education or IQ. This is especially relevant for early-career employees, where interpersonal skills often compensate for limited professional experience.

The cultural fit framework introduced by Chatman (1991) likewise emphasizes that harmony with organizational norms and values is a prerequisite for effective integration. Achieving such harmony requires acute social perception—that is, the ability to decode informal organizational rules and adjust one's behavior accordingly—an ability fundamentally underpinned by interpersonal skills. The literature further indicates that interpersonal skills affect compatibility not only at the individual level but also at group-dynamic and leadership levels. Majeed and Jamshed (2020) find that a leader's emotional intelligence significantly influences team culture, which in turn reduces turnover intentions and promotes long-term organizational compatibility. This suggests that leaders' interpersonal competencies indirectly shape employees' sense of fit. Moreover, Naz and Li (2025) show that emotional intelligence enhances willingness to share knowledge, mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This demonstrates that interpersonal skills play a central role not only in social interactions but also in knowledge flows and the quality of collaboration, ultimately influencing candidate–position compatibility.

In international contexts, the interpretation and perceived importance of interpersonal skills may vary culturally. Caggiano, Schleutker, Petrone, and González-Bernal (2021), in their comparative study, found that Finnish and Italian students assessed their own soft skills differently; nonetheless, teamwork, adaptability, and communication were universally deemed essential. This underscores the idea that certain interpersonal competences are universally critical for role fit and long-term employability.

In conclusion, interpersonal skills constitute one of the most decisive factors in candidate–position compatibility. During selection, these skills often influence decision-making implicitly yet strongly, as they predict not only task performance but also integration into organizational functioning. For future-oriented HR practices, it is therefore essential to evaluate interpersonal skills in a structured and integrated manner, acknowledging their impact on long-term performance, commitment, and organizational cohesion.

Conclusions

This review demonstrates that candidate–position compatibility is a complex, multidimensional construct shaped by competencies, motivation, prior work experience, and interpersonal skills. Competence frameworks such as the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2018) provide a systemic foundation for evaluating current suitability and reskilling potential, while alternative models—ESCO, NACE Career Readiness, DigComp 2.0, OECD PIAAC, and the WEF Future Skills—offer complementary, future-oriented perspectives (Ceschi, Perini, Scalco, Pentassuglia, Righetti, & Caputo, 2021; Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero Gomez, & Van den Brande, 2016; OECD, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2023).

Workplace motivation consistently emerges as a decisive predictor of long-term employability. Herzberg's (1959) two-factor model and Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory highlight the primacy of intrinsic motivators—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—a finding substantiated by recent empirical evidence (Santos, Martins, Silva, & Lima, 2024; Kaviya, Sandhiya, & Dineshkumar, 2025; Schmid & Dowling, 2022). Prior work experience shows dual effects: similarity to previous roles supports faster integration and performance (Edwards & Edwards, 2022; Dunford, Snell, & Wright, 2008), while diverse, boundaryless careers foster transversal competences such as adaptability and creativity, advantageous in dynamic environments (Arthur, Khapova, & Richardson, 2021). Interpersonal skills, particularly emotional intelligence, are consistently found to outweigh technical knowledge in predicting integration, commitment, and performance (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Hurrell, 2016).

At the same time, literature reflects divergent perspectives and methodological constraints. Competence models differ in scope: some emphasize regulated structures (e.g., EU competences), while others (e.g., WEF Future Skills, DigComp) are trend-driven and dynamic. Motivational research, while rooted in psychological theory, now incorporates contextual influences such as technology (Schmid & Dowling, 2022). Studies of interpersonal skills range from emphasizing universal importance (Robles, 2012; Heckman & Kautz, 2012) to highlighting cultural variation (Caggiano, Schleutker, Petrone, & González-Bernal, 2021). Many rely on cross-sectional or self-reported data, with a narrow sectoral or geographic focus, limiting generalizability.

Despite these differences, a central conclusion emerges: in future labor markets, adaptability, lifelong learning orientation, and transversal skills will outweigh static technical expertise as predictors of success. Building on this insight, the present review provides a conceptual foundation for an integrated evaluation system capable of transforming individual and organizational inputs into measurable outputs. Such a system could predict immediate fit, reskilling needs, or rejection, thereby providing organizations with a strategic advantage in aligning talent selection and development with technological change and labor market volatility.

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