Aligning People with Roles: A Pathway to Enhanced Employee Performance

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Abstract: In the present study, the role of person–job (P–J) fit in shaping employee performance through employee work engagement and the role of supervisor support in bolstering the relationship between person–job fit and employee performance are examined. The current study adopts person–environment fit theory, job demands–resources model, and conservation of resources theory, to explore the link between employees' job fit, engagement, supervisor support, and performance. A cross sectional survey of administrative people of public universities in KP, Pakistan was done for data collection. The results indicated that the match between the employees' capabilities, skills and personal attributes and the employees' job requirements is a positive correlation with the employees' work engagement and job performance. Work engagement through its role as a mechanism, is the bridge between person–job fit and employee performance, meaning that higher person–job congruence would result in higher work engagement. In addition, the positive association between person–job fit and work engagement is reinforced by supervisor support, suggesting that supportive supervisors facilitate the link between person–job fit and greater work engagement and performance. The results also show that the impact of person-job fit on performance via work engagement is greater when the employees feel that their supervisors are more supportive. The study suggests overall that the competencies of the employees should be matched with job demands and a positive supervisory climate should be created to support the development of employee competencies. HR practices should not just be about recruitment and job placement, it includes supportive leadership and workplace practices that can be used to enhance employees' engagement and performance in the public sector universities.

Keywords: Person–Job Fit, Work Engagement, Supervisor Support, Employee Performance, Moderated Mediation, Universities

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1. Introduction

The only way to maintain performance in an organization is based on the motivational level and drive of human beings. The research on human resource management (HRM) was therefore explored in terms of the matching of employees to their jobs, and the psychological states that might transform a good fit into productive behaviour. Person–environment fit theory suggests that there is an increase in outcomes where the person and their environment are compatible, and the person–job fit (P–J fit) – the fit between employees' abilities and job demands, and their needs and what the job provides – has been most directly associated with the experience of daily tasks Edwards [1]; Kristof-Brown [2]. But a meta-analysis has demonstrated that P–J fit has a strong relationship with job attitudes, and weak relationship with performance Kristof-Brown [2] suggesting that there is a question of how the relationship between P–J fit and performance

becomes performance. Positive and fulfilling state of vigor, dedication and absorption as a result of work is a strong candidate (Bakker [4]). In line with the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, resources engender engagement that leads to better performance Bakker & Demerouti, [5]–[6]. There are relationships between fit and engagement in different work sectors (Hossain, 2002 [7] and engagement and task and contextual performance (Christian, 2004 [9] and Rich, 2004 [10]). A few studies have focused on the entire chain, and outcomes are similar and indicate a mediating effect of fit on performance, through engagement Lee [11] and Wiegand & Morgan [12]. Whether or not this process is relative to the supervisor is not known. Supervisor support of employees' resources and abilities to meet needs is related to employee engagement Burns, [14]; Jin & McDonald, [15]; and others. The theories have been controversial with two studies reporting no moderation in the fit – engagement relationship between fit and support Hossain [7] and Kızrak [16] while another study showed support for this fit – engagement Su [17] relationship. In this study, therefore, the direct and indirect relationships between P–J fit and employee performance, and the moderating role of supervisor support in the fit–engagement relationship and its indirect relationship with employee performance, were examined. It does this by combining three theories (fit theory, JD-R theory, conservation of resources theory and social exchange theory) into one model, by bringing evidence to support findings in a boundary condition where results have been conflicting, and by providing evidence from administrative staff members in a South Asian context for public higher education. The hypotheses are stated in Section 2, the method is explained in Section 3, the results are presented in Section 4, and discussed and concluded in Section 5 and 6, respectively.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Background

The two types of P–J fit are: demands–abilities fit (P–J fit of employees' skill to job demands) and needs–supplies fit (P–J fit of job offers to employees' needs) (Edwards, 1991). The principles of engagement are the three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability presented by Kahn [18]. The model is structured to a three perspectives. The JD-R theory suggests that engagement is a product of a motivational process, where resources condition the work situation and promote engagement, and where work is then meaningful or meaningful to the person (P-J fit can be viewed as a resource state that helps to make work meaningful – Tims [19]). Conservation of resources (COR) theory implies resources are wrapped in “caravans,” and those with resources are better able to invest and gain more resources Hobfoll, [20]. Based on social exchange theory, supervisors as organizational agents send signals for reciprocity when they offer their support Blau, [21]; Eisenberger [13].

2.2 Person–Job Fit, Engagement, and Performance

Performance of employees here includes both the performance of the core tasks as well as the behaviors that are consistent with the work context, but not necessarily directly required for completing the task Christian [9]; Rich [10]. The demands–abilities fit means efficiency for employees, and the needs–supplies fit means rewarding work and greater effort on the part of the employee. There is evidence from a meta-analysis of 172 studies that P–J fit is related to performance, but less so than to attitudes Kristof-Brown [2], and evidence across cultures shows that fit is beneficial in terms of outcomes, whereas evidence for performance is not as clear Oh [3]. As revealed in these primary studies, positive relationships tend to exist between children and their parents, and this is typically experienced through engagement Lee [11]; Wiegand & Morgan [12].

H1: Person–job fit is positively related to employee performance.

The competency of the worker corresponds to the requirements of the assigned job to perform, so the worker feels competent, and the requirements of the assigned job to perform are met, the worker feels that the job is meaningful for him or her, which will lead to the worker's engagement with the work Kahn [18]. Perceived fit is positively linked to engagement for telecommunication workers (Hossain, 2013) [7] and for engagement itself and job satisfaction (Keane, 2012) [8] and job satisfaction in its own right (Warr and Inceoglu, 2014) [22]. Furthermore, transformational leadership models indicate that, at a certain level, it contributes to an increase in the P-J fit of employees, thus positively affecting employee engagement (Bui [23]).

H2: Person–job fit is positively related to work engagement.

Positive emotion, focus on work, and mobilisation of resources are a few of the benefits that engaged employees feel Bakker [4]. Large-scale research by Rich [10] did not find a relationship between engagement and task performance and citizenship behavior over attitudes, nor did a study by Christian [9] find a relationship between engagement and job attitudes.

H3: Work engagement is positively related to employee performance.

Rich [10] and Christian [9] have both found that engagement is a mediator between distal antecedents to performance, and other fit studies have revealed a similar pattern Lee [11] and Wiegand & Morgan [12]. Mediation is regarded as an associational process claim by Maxwell & Cole, [24] because it is a cross-sectional test of mediation that is a poor approximation of a longitudinal process claim.

H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between person–job fit and employee performance.

2.3 Supervisor Support as Moderator

Proximal job resources include supervisor support, where employees feel that their immediate supervisor values and cares about them [13]. JD-R and COR can be mutually supportive, e.g., a supervisor could support an employee in applying his/her skills, clarifying his/her expectations, and equipping him/her with the tools to implement what a well-fitting job can offer Bakker & Demerouti, [6]; Hobfoll, [20]). The team level of support, for instance, served to strengthen the link between job autonomy and engagement for nurses Vera [25]. This is especially true in collectivistic and high power distance cultures with relational attributes of the work environment (Oh [3]). Evidence of such interaction is inconclusive, however. Supervisor support did not moderate the fit–engagement relationship in telecommunications Hossain [7] or civil aviation manufacturing Kızrak [16] for which the authors posited that fit employees are engaged anyway, but it did in an earlier thesis Su [17]. Support has also been shown to mediate the engagement–performance relationship, De Pedro & Fernández-Valera, [26]. We propose a direction in which to look for answers to this question, but suggest that it remains an open question because the logic of resource synergy is well established and the contexts in which the "no" was found in these cases is limited.

H5: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between person–job fit and work engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when support is high than when it is low.

Combining H4 and H5 implies first-stage moderated mediation Hayes, [27]. Figure 1 depicts the model.

H6: The indirect effect of person–job fit on employee performance through work engagement is moderated by supervisor support, such that it is stronger at higher levels of support.

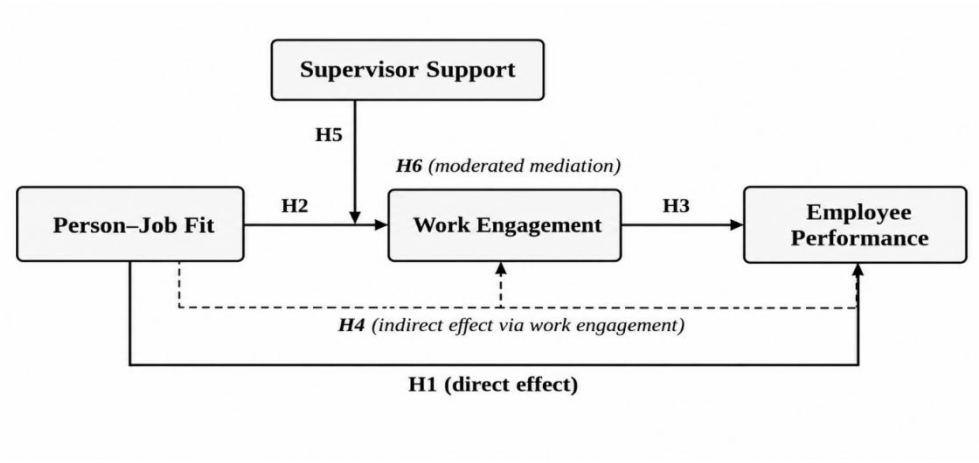


Figure 1 Conceptual Model of the Study

3. Methodology

3.1 Design, Population, and Sample

The cross-sectional survey of non-teaching administrative staff was conducted in 4 public universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Gomal University, University of Science and Technology Bannu, Kohat University of Science and Technology and University of Lakki Marwat) with quantitative approach. The population was made up of three levels of personnel—operational (assistants and junior clerks), supervisory (senior clerks, superintendents and managers), and top management (heads of administrative offices, directors). The respondents were asked to have been in the same job position for at least six months (excluding faculty and Class IV who are not in a desk position). Purposive sampling as described by Etikan [28] was the sampling technique used. A power analysis was performed by Faul [29] for a regression with 5 predictors and gave the following: 138 respondents would allow an effect of $f^2 = .15$ to be detected with a power of 95% and 263 respondents would allow an effect of $f^2 = .05$ (small to medium) to be detected with a power of 80%. To these numbers, a minimum 300 respondents was added, and they were eventually 345. Consent was fully informed, voluntary and anonymous.

3.2 Measures

Every item was rated on five-point scales (1-5), and composite scores were item means. P–J fit was assessed using six items of the scale from Cable and DeRue [30], which measures both needs–supplies and demands–abilities fit. Work engagement was measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli [31] with the same response format as for all other items and as a total sum score. Supervisor Support was assessed using the 13-item Perceived Supervisor Support scale of Burns [14], in which “manager” was changed to “immediate supervisor”. Ten items from Williams and Anderson [32] that measure in-role and organizational citizenship behavior were used to assess employee performance. The screening of the variables as controls included gender, age, education, tenure, administrative level, and university.

3.3 Analysis

Every item was rated on a 5-point scale (1–5) and composite scores were item means. P–J fit was measured with six items on the scale developed by Cable and DeRue [30] that measured needs–supplies fit and demands–abilities fit. Work engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli [31]) which was scored on a 0 to 5 response scale and was summed together to create a total work engagement score. Supervisor Support was measured using a 13 item scale from Burns [14] that was modified as “manager” was replaced by “immediate supervisor.” Ten items from Williams and Anderson [32] that measure in-role and

organizational citizenship behavior were used to assess employee performance. Gender, age, education, tenure, administrative level and university were all controlled in the screening of the variables.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

The summary of the sample is given in Table 1. Most of the respondents were male (73.3 %), aged 31-50 (69.0 %), and had Master's Degree or above (55.7 %) and their level of operations was Gomal University (34.5 %). This means there was no missing data, no univariate or multivariate outlier was found and all composites were within the range of skewness and kurtosis of ±1. Composite means were close to the scale midpoint (2.96 to 3.04, SD = 0.69 to 0.87). All scales had a Bartlett's test that was significant, with KMOs ranging from .85 to .90. As expected, one factor appeared in each of the scales, and the four-component varimax solution resulted in the highest cross-loadings (as low as .24 and as high as .42) of each item to the scale it was intended for. As Table 2 shows, α ranged from .75 to .82 and CR from .82 to .86. Limitations are that AVE was less than .50 for each construct (range .32 to .48) and even though CR was greater than .60, convergent validity could be considered adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results indicated discriminant validity because the square root of AVE was greater than all inter-construct correlation values (.33) and less than HTMT values (.42) which were below .85. Common method bias is not likely to be a serious problem as the first unrotated component accounted for 14.9% of the variance and the full-collinearity VIFs ranged from 1.07 to 1.26.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 345)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
University	Gomal University	119	34.5
	Kohat University of Science and Technology	84	24.3
	University of Science and Technology Bannu	75	21.7
	University of Lakki Marwat	67	19.4
Gender	Male	253	73.3
	Female	92	26.7
Age (years)	21–30	65	18.8
	31–40	135	39.1
	41–50	103	29.9
	51–60	42	12.2
Education	Intermediate	30	8.7
	Bachelor's	123	35.7
	Master's	144	41.7
	MPhil/PhD	48	13.9
Job tenure	6 months–2 years	74	21.4
	3–5 years	90	26.1
	6–10 years	95	27.5
	11+ years	86	24.9
Administrative level	Operational	200	58.0
	Supervisory	106	30.7
	Top management	39	11.3

Note. Percentages are based on N = 345.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations (N = 345)

Variable	M	SD	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1. Person–job fit	3.04	0.87	.78	.85	.48	—		
2. Work engagement	3.03	0.70	.75	.82	.34	.32***	—	
3. Supervisor support	2.96	0.69	.82	.86	.32	−.02	.21***	—
4. Employee performance	2.98	0.74	.81	.86	.37	.20***	.33***	.17**

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. **p < .01. ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

4.2 Hypothesis Tests

Since there were no significant relationships between the demographic variables or university and performance or engagement (the smallest p = .068), the final models were not controlled for any of the demographic variables or university. Table 3 and Table 4 report the results.

Table 3: Regression Results for the Moderated-Mediation Model

Predictor	b	SE	p	95% CI
Model 1: Work engagement (R^2 = .168)				
Person–job fit	0.264	0.040	< .001	[0.186, 0.342]
Supervisor support	0.226	0.050	< .001	[0.127, 0.324]
Person–job fit × Supervisor support	0.155	0.059	.009	[0.038, 0.271]
Model 2: Employee performance (R^2 = .119)				
Person–job fit (direct effect, c′)	0.091	0.046	.049	[0.000, 0.181]
Work engagement	0.315	0.057	< .001	[0.203, 0.427]
Total effect of person–job fit on performance (c)	0.172	0.045	< .001	[0.083, 0.262]

Note. Predictors in Models 1 and 2 are mean-centered; unstandardized coefficients are shown.

H1 was supported as fit was positively correlated with performance (b = 0.172, p < .001). The hypotheses predicting engagement (H2: fit predicted engagement; b = 0.260, p < .001, β = .323 without the moderator) and predicting performance (H3: engagement predicted performance controlling for fit, b = 0.315, p < .001) were supported. The direct influence of fit was b = 0.091 (p = .049, lower CL = 0.000) instead of small and fragile, that is to say, that it is not significantly different from zero. The fit × support interaction predicted engagement (b = 0.155, p = .009), adding 1.7% of variance (f^2 = .020), so H5 was supported. The slope of the fit for the predicted engagement was over 2x higher from low to high support (Table 4, Figure 2), but fit was achieved at all support levels. The Johnson–Neyman analysis showed that the mean slope was significant for those with scores ≥ 2.08 for support, which accounted for 88.1% of the respondents.

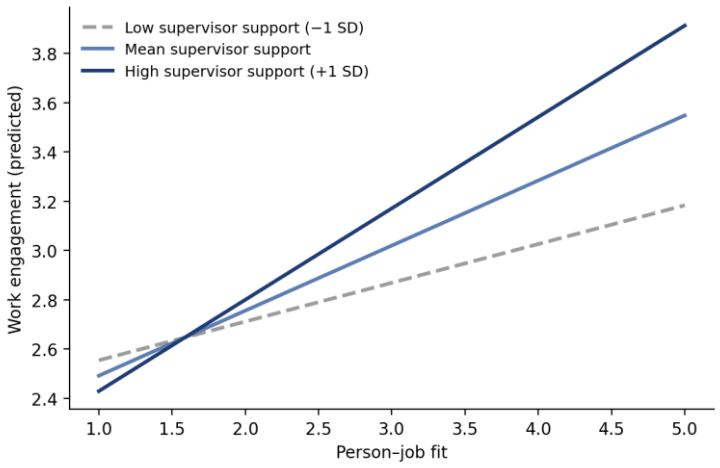


Figure 2: Interaction of Person–Job Fit and Supervisor Support in Predicting Work Engagement

Table 4: Conditional Effects of Person–Job Fit at Levels of Supervisor Support

Supervisor support	Effect on engagement [95% CI]	Indirect effect on performance [95% CI]
Low (−1 SD = 2.27)	0.157 [0.046, 0.269]	0.050 [0.017, 0.090]
Mean (2.96)	0.264 [0.186, 0.342]	0.083 [0.046, 0.128]
High (+1 SD = 3.65)	0.371 [0.258, 0.484]	0.117 [0.062, 0.183]
Index of moderated mediation		0.049 [0.012, 0.095]

Note. 5,000 bootstrap resamples; percentile confidence intervals.

The indirect effect of fit on performance through engagement was 0.083 (95% CI [0.046, 0.128]) as predicted in H4 and it accounted for approximately half of the total direct effect (a descriptive ratio) due to a small direct effect. The indirect effect was significant at low support (0.050) and high support (0.117), both of which were in support of H6, which represents the index of moderated mediation. Please do not switch on the pathway, but try to support it.

4.3 Assumptions and Robustness Checks

There were no significant outliers, with the largest Cook's distance being < 0.041, and no residuals were significantly different from a normal distribution (Breusch–Pagan p = .918 and .977). The interaction with all five demographic controls (b = 0.151, p = .012) and the index of moderated mediation (0.049, 95% CI [0.009, 0.096]) remained essentially unchanged, and the interaction remained significant compared to the heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors (p = .007). Positive interaction was observed at all three administrative levels, but for zero in staff other than supervisory (n = 106) the index has been found as exploratory and differences between the levels were not formally teste.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Hypotheses 1–6 were accepted. Performance was found to have a positive correlation with Fit while engagement was found to have a strong and significant correlation with Fit. The correlation was small and borderline for performance with Fit. This is consistent with the previous meta-analyses which found a weak association between fit and performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) as well as the notion of a positive relationship between fit and energy level of employees (Lee et al., 2022; Wiegand & Morgan, 2025). The correlation between engagement and performance was fairly close to the meta-analytic value of .37 (Corbeanu & Iliescu, [38], r = .33). The result of the moderation is a collated literature. But from the results, the fit–engagement relationship is supported by the increase of fit slope from 0.157 (low) to 0.371 (high) fit status,

according to the assumption of the resource-synergy relationship of fit–engagement relationship in JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011), but not with Hossain et al. (2024) and Kızrak (2025). The difference may perhaps be because of differences in sector, culture, model specification, and measurement; for instance, the supervisor support scale used in this study is quite general and incorporates development, recognition, and resources, which might involve more of the resource content that relates to fit. All of these are speculative and need to be tested. Again, there was no correlation between fit and support ($r = -.02$), and the positive correlations of both independent resources with engagement ($b = 0.226$) show that when both are used together, the effects compound to further increase engagement, as found by Burns (2016) and Jin and McDonald (2017). Fit is correlated with engagement even at low support (adequate); tendency is to amplify not on/off.

5.2 Practical Implications

There are three implications for the HR departments of the university. Firstly, job design, recruitment and placement in administrative jobs must gauge both the match between the employees' capacity and the job requirements, and the match between the job and the employee's needs. Second, engagement is fit, and fit is a lever to check the effectiveness of placement decisions. Third, there is a possibility that the supervisors' development – specifically in the areas of recognition, communication and coaching colleagues' development – can be aligned with placement, with placement results in increased engagement and performance returning to fit. These interventions should be considered as complements, and not replacements, as the size of the effects was small to moderate (1.7% of variance in engagement explained by the interaction).

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design does not allow causal or temporal ordering, and it needs longitudinal or multiwave designs. (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). All the measures were self-reported. The UWES-9 response format has been scaled to a 5-point response format to minimize comparability to published norms. May overestimate the associations from common source data, which can be advantageous with supervisor or objective data. The assessment of measurement was carried out using principal component analysis, and the AVE was calculated for all constructs, and they were all below .50, so replicating the model with confirmatory or structural (SEM) analysis is encouraged, as is a lower α as compared to the one calculated in the development sample where $\alpha = .94$ (Burns, 2016). The sample was purposive and consisted of four public universities in one province, the interaction was smaller than planned, and the subgroup analysis (top management $n = 39$) was of exploratory nature. Second stage moderation (De Pedro & Fernández-Valera, 2017) could be tested, facets of engagement could be tested separately, clusters of supervisors and

universities could be included in multilevel designs, organizational support and supervisor support could be compared.

6. Conclusion

Supervisor support mostly mediates the relationship between person–job fit and employee performance, and work engagement is also a predictor of employee performance. Administrative personnel in public universities may be considered complementary investments in HRM since providing for person- job fit and training supervisors to assist seems to be complementary investments.

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