

Analyzing Person-Environment Fit with Gender Lens among Managers in Pakistan

By

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Abstract

The present study explored gender differences in perceived person-environment fit among managers working in the public and private sector organizations in Karachi. Person-environment fit refers to compatibility between the individual characteristics and work environment attributes (Lindholm, 2003). This study focused on person-job fit and person-organization fit dimensions of person-environment fit. Data from 200 managers (100 men and 100 women), working at different levels in public and private organizations in Karachi, collected through a brief questionnaire (Saks and Ashforth, 1997) suggest significant gender differences in perceived person-environment fit at the lower management positions ($p < 0.01$ level). As the management ladder went up, the difference diminished. The differences were more pronounced in private organizations ($p < 0.05$ level) and showed significant gender differences at lower ($p < .05$ level) and senior management levels ($p > 0.01$ level). Organizational and personnel implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: *Person-Environment Fit; Management; Gender*

1. Introduction

Women's movement into management positions over the past forty years has attracted intensive research into the similarities and differences between female and male managers (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Wilkins & Andersen, 1991). Many aspects of person, work and organizations, like job satisfaction, leadership styles, work stress and many others, are being investigated throughout these years. The present study focused on the gender differences in perceptions of person-environment fit among managers.

Fit, also termed as 'match' (Strong, 1927) have been explained as the congruence between characteristics of the individuals, their needs and abilities and the supplies and demands of the organization as expressed in role expectations and prerequisites (Kahn, 1979). Although there have been some who questioned whether more fit is always better (e.g. Goldstein et al. 2002), researchers find that higher levels of Person-Environment fit is generally considered positive for both the organization and the individual (Schneider, 1987) like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to remain, job involvement, career success, health and adaptation, and organizational effectiveness, as well as lowers stress and turnover (Livingstone et al. 1997; Powell 1998; Bretz and Judge, 1994).

The concept of fit has been theorized in many contexts and dimensions. Fit results when compatibility occurs either in common characteristics between the organization and the individual (supplementary fit) or in the supply-demand satisfaction between the two entities (complementary fit) (Kristof, 1996). Researchers have also distinguished between matching employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to job requirements (Person-Job or P-J fit); matching employees in terms of their values, beliefs, and personality traits with the values, beliefs and norms of an organization (Person-Organization or P-O fit); and in some cases matching employees' abilities and values with their vocational choices (Person-Vocation or P-V fit).

This research focuses on person-job and person-organizations components of P-E fit only as they appear to be the major dimensions of congruence encompassing both complimentary and supplementary fit between person and organization as endorsed by many researchers (Choi et al., 2005).

'Person' and 'Environment' can be described both objectively and subjectively (French et al., 1982). Objective 'person' and 'environment' refers to these variables as they exist independently of the individual's perceptions and measured externally. Subjective 'person' and 'environment', on the other hand, refers to these variables as they are perceived by the individual. This research focuses on subjective fit i.e. individuals' perceptions of congruence between their values, needs and abilities as they match with organizations' demands, supplies and culture.

Evidence shows that gender can be accounted for many differences in these perceptions and preferences owing to socialization and differential expectations held by men and women (Bartol & Manhardt, 1979; Siegfried et al., 1981). Men tend to be more concerned about money, independence, security, responsibility, long-term career goals, and influence in work and in the organization whereas women tend to be more people oriented, environment oriented, and preoccupied with short-term career goals (Pryor, 1983; Elizur, 1994). Also, certain job characteristics make it easier to coordinate work and family obligations: flexible work schedules, supportive supervisors and co-workers, easy work, more breaks, and good maternity leave. Women might value jobs that adapt to family demands and thus take lower pay to get such jobs. These differences in skills, attitudes and preferences imply that men and women may differ in their perceptions of person-environment fit as well.

Research focus

Increased women participation in the workforce has complicated interactions at work globally (Thacker, 1995). As Pakistani society is undergoing major transition, the complexity gets even more critical. Yet, research evidence in the areas of gender differences in organizational behaviour and management psychology in our geographical area is still scarce.

As mentioned above, the congruence between individual expectations and environmental supplies is the key to improved performance. Therefore, a greater understanding of gender differences in this particular area would provide some useful insights, policy implications and recommendations for our organizations, so that organizations could address both men and women employees in a gender responsive manner.

Hypotheses

Men, universally receive more importance, enjoy a greater freedom of expression and suffer less discrimination. Women, on the other hand, receive lower salaries despite equal qualification and abilities, and experience more discrimination (Shamsuddin, 1998).

H₁: Men managers will perceive a greater person-environment fit and both its component than women managers at all levels.

Organizational structures and recruitment and selection policies and practices are more structured in private organizations in Pakistan as they are more responsive to international development in Human resource management and development with a greater focus on including women in the workforce.

H₂: Women managers will perceive a greater fit in private organizations as compared to those public organizations.

In many studies exploring gender issues in management, the upward mobility of women and the so-called "glass-ceiling" continue to be the focus of considerable concern (e.g., Morrison, 1992; and Ragins et al., 1998). As the women moves up the management ladder, the job and work environment becomes less conducive resulting in greater stress and dissatisfaction at higher levels.

H₃: Women managers at lower level will perceive a higher person-environment fit as compared to middle and senior level

Research suggests that men are characterized by agentic behaviour that is primarily an assertive, goal directed, and controlling tendency (e.g., Bem, 1974). Agentic qualities include aggressiveness, ambition, dominance, independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, directness, and decisiveness. Hence we can infer that they will perceive congruence in environments and job that help them demonstrate and capitalize on these behaviours.

H₄: Men managers at middle and senior levels will experience a higher person-environment fit as compared to managers working at lower level

2. Methodology

Sample

225 managers (116 men and 111 women) working at a junior, middle or senior level of management in public or private organizations in Karachi participated in the study. Complete data for all the questionnaires were available for 200 managers (100 men and 100 women); hence the response rate was approximately 88 percent. The respondents ranged from 25 to 55 years old (average age = 42 years) and had worked for 11 years on average. Of these people, 36% were senior managers (39 men, 33 women), 42.5% mid-level managers (43 men, 42 women) and 21.5% were junior managers (18 men, 25 women). 31% of these participants belonged to the banking sector, 37% to the education sector, 13% to the non-profit sector, 16% to various industries and 3% were entrepreneurs. These participants were selected through availability sampling by emailing managers and heads of human resources for the organizations and institutions listed with Management Association of Pakistan.

Measuring the Perceived Person-Environment Fit

Saks & Ashforth’s (1997) two-item measure of the perceived person-environment fit (P-E fit) was used. The items measured both person-job (P-J fit) and person-organization (P-O Fit) components of the person-environment fit. Items included questions like “To what extent does your job measure up to the kind of job you were seeking?” Responses were scored on a five point rating scale (1= to a very little extent, to 5 = to a very large extent). The items show high construct, convergent and discriminant validity (goodness of fit index = 0.87; coefficient alpha = 0.92 and 0.89). The person-environment fit score was obtained by computing average of the two items’ ratings and ranged between 1 (lowest) and 5 (highest).

3. Results

In addition to the descriptive statistics, all the hypotheses were tested with t test for independent samples to ascertain the significance of means.

Table 1: Comparing mean differences in person-environment fit and its components among managers

Fit	Gender	Mean	t (df = 198)
P-E	Female	3.7100	1.390
	Male	3.5550	
P-O	Female	3.6900	.142
	Male	3.6700	
P-J	Female	3.7380	-2.472**
	Male	3.4400	

** p<.01

As shown in table 1, both men and women managers perceived a moderately high person-environment fit. Between them, women managers perceived a higher person-environment fit including both of its

components. However, taken collectively, gender differences are insignificant for perceived person-environment fit ($t_{(198)} = 1.390$, n.s.).

The researcher had assumed that men will perceive a higher person-environment fit, including person-job and person-organization fit as compared to women. As results in Table 1 show, when taken together, the gender differences in perceived person-environment fit were not significant. This may be attributed to insignificant differences in perceived person-organization fit ($t_{(198)} = 0.142$, n.s.). Gender differences were only significantly observed in person-job fit, which went in favour of women rather than men ($t_{(198)} = -2.472$, $p < 0.01$). Women perceived a significantly higher person-job fit as compared to men managers.

A further analysis (Table 2) suggested that women managers from private organizations reported a significantly higher person-environment fit ($t_{(130)} = 1.668$, $p < 0.05$.) as compared to men. It seems that once again, only person-job fit component differed significantly ($t_{(130)} = 2.750$, $p < 0.00$) and contributed to difference in overall P-E fit. No significant gender differences were found for the person-organization fit component of the P-E fit ($t_{(130)} = 0.222$, n.s.). These findings contradict the expectations and disproves hypothesis 1 which assumed a greater person-job and person-organization fit among men managers as compared to women managers.

Table 2: Showing mean differences in perceived person-environment fit and its components among managers from public and private organizations

Organisation	Fit	Gender	Mean	t
Public (df = 66)	P-E	Female	3.6818	.271
		Male	3.6196	
	P-O	Female	3.7727	.192
		Male	3.7174	
	P-J	Female	3.5909	.304
		Male	3.5217	
Private (df = 130)	P-E	Female	3.7179	1.668*
		Male	3.5000	
	P-O	Female	3.6667	.222
		Male	3.6296	
	P-J	Female	3.7795	2.750***
		Male	3.3704	

* $p < 0.05$

*** $p < 0.00$

Similarly, when compared according to managerial level (Table 3), gender differences suggest a significantly higher person-environment fit ($t_{(41)} = -3.053$, $p < 0.00$) and both its components including person-organization fit ($t_{(41)} = -1.830$, $p < 0.01$) and person-job fit ($t_{(41)} = -3.245$, $p < 0.00$) among women managers at lower management level. At the senior level again, women managers perceived a higher person-job fit ($t_{(70)} = -2.391$, $p < 0.00$) probably contributing to significantly higher means for person-environment fit ($t_{(70)} = -2.073$, $p < 0.01$). Although men managers achieved a higher mean score for perceived-environment fit and its components than women at the middle level, the differences were not significant. This further rejects our expectation that men managers will perceive a higher person-job and person-environment fit as compared to women managers at all levels.

Table 3: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among men and women managers at different managerial levels

Managerial Level	Type of Fit	Gender	Mean	t
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Lower (df = 41)	P-E	Female	3.6200	-3.053***
		Male	2.9167	
	P-O	Female	3.5600	-1.830**
		Male	3.0000	
	P-J	Female	3.7120	-3.245***
		Male	2.8333	
Middle (df = 83)	P-E	Female	3.5119	1.073
		Male	3.6977	
	P-O	Female	3.4762	1.455
		Male	3.8140	
	P-J	Female	3.5476	.185
		Male	3.5814	
Senior (df = 70)	P-E	Female	4.0303	-2.073**
		Male	3.6923	
	P-O	Female	4.0606	-1.257
		Male	3.8205	
	P-J	Female	4.0000	-2.391***
		Male	3.5641	

** p<0.01

*** p<0.00

Table 4 shows the mean difference in fit among managers from private and public organizations. Evidently, the means show slight variations where in most cases, men managers obtained higher averages for person-environment fit ($t_{(98)} = 0.710$, n.s.) and its components i.e., person-job ($t_{(98)} = 0.406$, n.s.) and person-organization ($t_{(98)} = 0.856$, n.s.) fit in public organizations and women managers perceived higher person-environment fit and person-job fit component only in private organizations. However, the differences computed through student's t for independent samples are not significant. An exception to these findings comes from a managerial level analysis of managers working in public and private organizations (Table 5). The results indicate a higher level of person-environment fit among men at senior management level ($t_{(37)} = 2.171$, p<0.01) and person-organization fit ($t_{(37)} = 2.135$, p<0.01) in public organizations as compared to private organizations. Though women perceived a higher fit, it was not significant enough to prove Hypothesis 2.

Table 4: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among managers from public and private organizations

Organisation	Fit	Gender	Mean	t
Males (df = 98)	P-E	Public	3.6196	.710
		Private	3.5000	
	P-O	Public	3.7174	.406
		Private	3.6296	
	P-J	Public	3.5217	.856
		Private	3.3704	
Females (df = 98)	P-E	Public	3.6818	-.202
		Private	3.7179	
	P-O	Public	3.7727	.477
		Private	3.6667	
	P-J	Public	3.5909	-.948
		Private	3.7795	

Table 5: Comparing perceived person-environment fit among managers at various levels working in public and private organizations

Gender	Managerial Level	Fit	Organization	Mean	t
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Men	Lower (df = 16)	P-E	Public	2.8889	-.133
			Private	2.9444	
		P-O	Public	2.6667	-1.155
			Private	3.3333	
		P-J	Public	3.1111	1.140
			Private	2.5556	
	Middle (df = 41)	P-E	Public	3.6579	-.276
			Private	3.7292	
		P-O	Public	3.8421	.145
			Private	3.7917	
		P-J	Public	3.4737	-.788
			Private	3.6667	
Senior (df = 37)	P-E	Public	3.9444	2.171**	
		Private	3.4762		
	P-O	Public	4.1111	2.135**	
		Private	3.5714		
	P-J	Public	3.7778	1.600	
		Private	3.3810		
Women	Lower (df = 23)	P-E	Public	3.7143	.445
			Private	3.5833	
		P-O	Public	3.8571	1.218
			Private	3.4444	
		P-J	Public	3.5714	-.588
			Private	3.7667	
	Middle (df = 40)	P-E	Public	3.6818	.859
			Private	3.4516	
		P-O	Public	3.8182	1.308
			Private	3.3548	
		P-J	Public	3.5455	-.009
			Private	3.5484	
	Senior (df = 31)	P-E	Public	3.6250	-1.300
			Private	4.0862	
		P-O	Public	3.5000	-1.550
			Private	4.1379	
		P-J	Public	3.7500	-.706
			Private	4.0345	

**p<0.01

According to hypothesis 3, women managers working at lower levels will perceive a higher person-environment fit as compared to middle and senior level managers. As shown in table 6, significant differences are obtained in mean perceptions of person-environment fit between these levels. Women, however, perceived a higher person-environment fit at senior levels of management ($t_{(56)} = -2.334$, $p < 0.01$). Here, the component responsible for variation in overall person-environment fit appeared to be person-organization fit ($t_{(56)} = -2.422$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 6: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among women managers working at lower and senior levels

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 56)
P-E	Lower	3.6200	-2.334**
	Senior	4.0303	
P-O	Lower	3.5600	-2.422**
	Senior	4.0606	
P-J	Lower	3.7120	-1.461
	Senior	4.0000	

**p<0.01

Similarly, Table 7 shows that significant difference was observed in perceived person-environment fit ($t(73) = -3.080$, $p < 0.00$) and both its components i.e., person-organization ($t(73) = -2.718$, $p < 0.00$) and person-job fit ($t(73) = -2.340$, $p < 0.01$) among women managers from middle and senior levels. Yet again, senior managers perceived a higher fit thus rejecting our hypothesis. As shown in table no. 8, no such difference was significant among women managers working at lower and middle level.

Table 7: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among women managers working at middle and senior levels

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 73)
P-E	Senior	4.0303	-3.080***
	Middle	3.5119	
P-O	Senior	4.0606	-2.718***
	Middle	3.4762	
P-J	Senior	4.0000	-2.340**
	Middle	3.5476	

**P<0.01

***p<0.00

Table 8: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among men managers working at lower and middle level

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 65)
P-E	Middle	3.5119	-.593
	Lower	3.6200	
P-O	Middle	3.4762	-.355
	Lower	3.5600	
P-J	Middle	3.5476	-.779
	Lower	3.7120	

Lastly, hypothesis 4 stated that men will experience a greater fit as they move up the management ladder. The means showed insignificant differences. Table 9 indicates that managers working at middle perceived a higher person-environment fit as compared to those working at lower levels ($t_{(59)} = 3.309$, $p < 0.00$). The differences were also significant for both of its components including person-organization ($t_{(59)} = 2.513$, $p < 0.00$) and person-job fit ($t_{(59)} = 3.052$, $p < 0.00$). Similarly, managers working at senior levels also perceived greater person-environment fit ($t_{(55)} = 3.601$, $p < 0.00$) and both its components (person-organization fit: $t_{(55)} = 2.969$, $p < 0.00$. and person-job fit: $t_{(55)} = 2.932$, $p < 0.00$) as compared to

managers at a lower level. However, there is insignificant difference in fit perceptions between middle and senior levels. Thus the hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Table 9: Comparing perceived person-environment fit among men managers working at lower and middle levels

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 59)
P-E	Middle	3.6977	3.309***
	Lower	2.9167	
P-O	Middle	3.8140	2.513***
	Lower	3.0000	
P-J	Middle	3.5814	3.052***
	Lower	2.8333	

***p<0.00

Table 10: Comparing perceived person-environment fit among men managers working at senior and lower levels

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 55)
P-E	Senior	3.6923	3.601***
	Lower	2.9167	
P-O	Senior	3.8205	2.969***
	Lower	3.0000	
P-J	Senior	3.5641	2.932***
	Lower	2.8333	

***p<0.00

Table 11: Comparing perceived person-environment fit and its components among men managers working at senior and middle level

Fit	Managerial Level	Mean	t (df = 80)
P-E	Senior	3.6923	-.031
	Middle	3.6977	
P-O	Senior	3.8205	.030
	Middle	3.8140	
P-J	Senior	3.5641	-.099
	Middle	3.5814	

4. Discussion

The present research attempted to analyze gender differences in the perceived person-environment fit and its components (person-job & person-organization) among managers. Research suggests that performance is the function of person and the environment and the congruence between the two leads to better organizational outcomes (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). Since there existed evidence of gender differences in attitudes, skills, preferences (Bennett, 1996), motivation and work values (Manhardt, 1972), it was assumed that the perceptions of person-environment fit will also exhibit gender differences (Caron, 2008).

Results supported some of the predictions. Both men and women managers perceived a moderate person-environment fit, showing no gender difference overall. However, a deeper analysis of the two dimensions of fit (Table 1) found that women managers displayed a greater person-job fit than men ($p<0.01$) and no difference for person-organization fit. The findings are consistent with previous researches where women

expressed a higher level of job satisfaction as compared to men (Chiu, 1998). This implies that women perceive a match with the kind of work they are offered at managerial positions but are not satisfied with organizational policies, environment and opportunities. The factors underlying these perceptions are still to be explored. Perhaps, women are generally less demanding and more complacent to fewer supplies as compared to men (Lovelace and Rosen, 1996).

Gender differences were quite apparent across managerial levels as well. Specifically, women managers perceived higher person-environment fit including both its component as compared to men managers at the lower management level. Surprisingly, women managers also perceived higher person-environment fit as compared to men managers at the senior management level where a major contributor to this difference was a higher perception of person-job fit among women managers. The results are quite contrary to the expectations but still find some support in research which could explain the difference. Apparently, women who excel in their managerial careers are usually more ambitious and career-oriented than men (Schultz and Schultz, 2009). As compared to men managers, these women are motivated by intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic rewards, and acquire more masculine traits and learn not to fear success as they move up (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). Also, women managers are more favoured as compared to men managers by their subordinates and peers due to their inherent social competencies and people-oriented leadership skills (Cindy, 2010). While there may be no difference observed in their effectiveness as subordinates, women are rated higher in their effectiveness on direct and peer assessments (Appelbaum et al, 2002) contributing to higher fit among women managers in private organizations. A detailed analysis of the factors that contribute to differential perceptions of fit among men and women managers is needed to understand the reasons behind these perceptions.

Overall, the results suggest that middle and senior level jobs align with managers' values, preferences and skills for both men and women. This is surely good news for researchers who were concerned about women being stuck at a certain level in organizational ladder with little opportunities for growth and less acceptance. However, the significantly higher level of person-environment fit among senior level managers for both men and women suggests that organizational policies and practices at lower and middle levels of management also need to focus on providing them with gender equitable opportunities for responsibility, advancement, achievement, and challenging work if companies want to retain and benefit from their skills and expertise.

As evident from the results, the differences are more apparent in private organizations as compared to public organizations. In Pakistan, the private sector is expanding very rapidly. Huge influx of multinationals has given a tough competition to local growing industries. To meet international demands, these organizations willingly adapt their human resource practices according to universal standards. A lot of mergers and acquisitions have given a new direction to human resource management and in order to continue competing, influencing local private organizations as well. They are quite encouraging towards women recruitment at all levels, especially at the management level as compared to public and government organizations. No wonder, the number of women in power has doubled in the past few years, specifically in the private sector, and they seem to be more satisfied with the opportunities as compared to men in this sector. Where organizational culture might be the same as in public sector, the work itself seems to be more interesting and satisfying in the private organizations.

Several limitations of this research needs to be noted. Firstly, the measurement tool for perceived person-environment fit, though highly reliable and valid, is too generic. It only tells you about the extent to which a person feels he or she matches with the kind of job and organization they wanted. But it fails to identify factors that make a job or organization fit with the person's demands and capabilities. A deeper analysis of its constitutional differences in men and women managers is desirable at this stage.

Also, the relationships demonstrated here reflect people's perception rather than objective indicators of person-job and person-environment fit operationalized as supply-value and demand-ability fit. Subjective

responses tend to get influenced by elements of social desirability hence must be interpreted with caution. Research is needed to determine and assess indicators of objective fit i.e., external environmental indicators of match between personal values and capabilities and organizational demands and supplies.

5. Conclusion

The results indicate that Pakistani women managers perceive higher person-job fit at various management levels as compared to men managers specifically in private organizations. Further investigation is needed to determine what other personal and external factors contribute to perceptions of fit in women and how these are different from men.

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