

EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION ON THE EFFECT OF PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY AMONG PUBLIC SERVANTS IN SELANGOR

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Abstract: *An individual's performance is assessed based on their contribution towards achieving a specific target, whereas the performance of a public organization is evaluated based on the goals it has accomplished in alignment with its purpose statements. Positive individual behavior plays a crucial role in determining positive life outcomes, including the development of strong professional ethics. Individuals who possess a strong alignment between their psychological (spiritual) and physical (physical) functions play a significant role in determining their effectiveness in the organization This study investigates the effects of person-environment fit, specifically person-job fit and person-organization fit, on the individual performance of public sector servants in Malaysia. This study underwent testing using SPSS on a sample of 384 individuals employed in the public sector in Selangor. The presence of both person-job fit and person-organization fit has a favorable impact on individual performance. Moreover, the influence of Public Service Motivation on the connection between person-job fit person-organization fit, and individual performance is statistically significant. Therefore, it is crucial to devise strategies and establish appropriate organizational settings to effectively enhance the performance levels of public sector employees.*

Keywords: *Person-Job fit, Person Organization Fit, Individual performance, and Public Service Motivation*

Introduction

The examination of employee performance is crucial in the realm of human resource management. The Malaysian Government has made multiple efforts to cultivate a highly skilled and dynamic workforce that can meet the administration's objectives and serve the public sector customers effectively (Hassan et al., 2021). In the current context, where the government prioritizes the human capital of the nation in terms of intellectual knowledge, competence, and skills, individual performance also plays a vital role as a factor in strengthening the country's performance model. Individual performance plays a role in recognizing lives that have been improved via employment and relationships (White et al., 2022). Güleriyüz and Sürücü (2023) found that in Iranian culture, employees with high moral intelligence, characterized by traits like honesty and responsibility, tend to engage in ethical thinking and decision-making. This, in turn, leads to improved job performance. However, it is important to note that multiple intersecting factors contribute to the aspiration of individuals to become effective public servants. Furthermore, public sector personnel are inclined to evaluate the acceptability and significance of their jobs (Pealeu, 2023).

A proud public worker is characterized as an individual who conducts their work with integrity, diligence, and commitment, utilizing their education, expertise, experience, and professional principles to achieve this status (Chen & Lin, 2023). Consequently, employees possessing elevated moral intelligence are reputed to maintain a constant state of vigilance regarding their work. They do so because of their alignment with the company's objectives and their belief that fulfilling those objectives is a component of their duty (Hue et al., 2022). Primarily, it seems that the initial choice is accurate for individuals employed in the public sector. Performance, as explained by the person-environment fit (PE fit) theory (Rajper & Ghumro, 2020), is influenced by the interaction between individual characteristics and the organizational context. Various types of fits can be distinguished from each other. The two most extensively studied categories of fit are person-job fit (PJ fit) and person-organization fit (PO fit). These studies suggest that they have the greatest impact on affecting behavioral outcomes (Omar et al., 2022; Sheikh et al., 2022; Suryosukmono et al., 2022).

Prior studies have examined the role of perceived person-organization (PO) and person-job (PJ) fit in mediating the relationship between individual characteristics and various work-related results (Thuy & Phinaitrup, 2023). Only a limited number of studies have examined multiple dimensions of fit at the same time (Abdullah Thani, 2019); nevertheless, our understanding of the relative importance of person-job (PJ) and person-organization (PO) fits is limited (Kakar et al., 2022). Consequently, the relative responsibilities of these two fits seem to be ambiguous. A study conducted by Lee et al. (2021) examined the impact of PJ (person-job) and PO (person-organization) fits on the relationship between PSM (public service motivation) and job selection. The study concluded that PJ fit had a greater level of significance compared to PO fit. Sheikh et al. (2022) assert that the fit notion is infrequently utilized in the public or non-profit sectors, despite its popularity. In addition to the examination of the PE fit, another area that is extensively studied to determine the factors that influence the success of public sector employees is Public Service Motivation (PSM). An examination of previous studies on the Person-Environment Fit (PE-fit) theory reveals that they mostly focused on investigating individuals' direct perceptions of how well they fit with the work or organization (Abdullah Thani, 2019). These studies are crucial in determining if a match between the work or organization and an individual's personality matters. However, they are unable to establish the specific ways in which Public Service Motivation (PSM) positively relates to individual performance. Recently, there has been a growing trend in research to include PSM as an

intervening variable, along with other factors of interest. This suggests that researchers are consistently incorporating PSM into the field's knowledge base (White et al., 2022). The studies on PSM have incorporated a type of alignment that is focused on what seems most relevant for employees with high PSM. For instance, Hue et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of Person-Organization fit as they anticipated that an employee's alignment with the organization's values would be essential for a public service-oriented individual. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2020) and Nugraha and Ramdansyah (2020) directed their attention towards the Person-Job fit (PJ fit) as they anticipated that employees with Public Service Motivation (PSM) would aspire to pursue occupations that make a positive impact on society.

Although there is a substantial amount of research on the relationship between Person-Environment fit (PE fit) and work outcomes, there is a lack of investigation in the public sector about the connection between Person-Job fit (PJ fit) and Person-Organization fit (PO fit) about individual performance. To have a deeper comprehension of the role of intrinsic motivation among public sector employees, it is necessary to analyze academic research on this subject matter. This research specifically examines the relationship between PE Fit (PJ Fit and PO Fit) and the individual performance of public servants. Additionally, PSM will be considered as a moderator in this study. Progress will be facilitated by conducting a survey that will accurately represent the present viewpoint of Malaysian government employees. The objective of this study is to address these deficiencies by empirically evaluating the suggested conceptual model and contributing to the existing knowledge on the topic

Literature Review

Individual Performance in the Public Sector

Since 2003, the administration has prioritized combating corruption by deploying new programs and strategies. Although a framework has been established to address corruption, further efforts are required. Malaysian civil workers play a crucial role in ensuring the effective implementation of government programs (Abdirahman et al., 2020). Consequently, there is a strong demand for high-performing workers who can assist the organization in attaining its objectives and delivering exceptional service. Engaging in work activities will instill a sense of importance in public employees towards their jobs and allocated departments. Public sector employees who engage in a greater number of workflow phases will perceive a higher level of contribution toward serving the clients of the public sector (Abdullah Thani, 2019). Public servants derive delight, pride, and mastery from their performance. Employees who possess a strong sense of integrity will carry out their responsibilities with honesty and a keen sense of accountability, according to the expectations of management. They will undoubtedly deliver and serve as a model for their colleagues.

Inadequate performance can evoke feelings of discontentment and, in the most extreme circumstances, a sense of individual inadequacy (Mansor et al., 2023). The individual's perception of the job's overall significance, value, and worthiness. Experienced responsibility for work outcomes is the term used to describe the level of personal accountability and responsibility that an individual feels towards the results of their work. Knowledge of results pertains to an individual's level of awareness and comprehension regarding their constant execution of tasks (Abdullah Thani, 2019). Job-specific behaviors, such as the key job responsibilities outlined in the job description, are encompassed within task performance. Task performance requires a greater level of cognitive ability, which is mainly supported by task knowledge (essential technical expertise or principles for ensuring job performance and

managing multiple assignments), task skill (application of technical expertise to complete tasks with minimal supervision), and task habits (an inherent ability to respond to assigned jobs that require minimal supervision) (Omar et al., 2020). The most crucial factors influencing task performance are the individual's ability to complete the work and their previous experience.

Person-environment fit

Over the decades, in the person-environment fit studies, four types of fit have emerged as the most studied phenomena (Saufi et al., 2020) namely; (i) person-job fit (P-J fit), (ii) person-organization fit (P-O fit), (iii) person-group fit (P-G fit), and; (iv) person-supervisor fit (P-S fit). In understanding person-environment fit, it is crucial to define what “person” and “environment” stand for (Amarneh et al., 2021). A person is defined by one’s knowledge, skills, abilities, and other traits such as personality, values, and interests. On the other hand, “environment” concerns those external characteristics of an individual, which are job characteristics (e.g. challenge and autonomy) and organization characteristics (e.g. values or pay structure).

Person-job fit has been associated with a decreased level of employee turnover but a higher level of job performance. Naz et al. (2020) and Hassan et al. (2021) in an overview of the person-job fit literature and research also suggested that the person and the job operated together as joint collaborative determinants of individual and organizational outcomes. According to Pudjiarti and Hutomo (2020), a significant relationship has been observed between P-J fit and the employee’s job performance in a study that was conducted on the service sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. P-J fit is seen to have a significant relationship with the job performance of employees. A study conducted by Sharma and Kumar (2023) revealed that P-J fit shows a significant and positive relationship with job performance. The result also implies that; as the P-J fit is higher, job performance will also be higher. Since person-job fit may influence the job performance of the employees, thus it can also impact the choice of job that they would like to do.

It is noted that people usually tend to choose a job that appears to be meaningful to them besides promoting satisfaction towards their internal as well as external needs (Bericha& Lajci, 2020). In other words, when P-J fit occurs, employees will have the motivation to perform at a better level in carrying out their jobs as they have the willingness to contribute their efforts and energy to fulfill the duties that they are interested in. As the P-J fit somehow is deemed related to the fact that employees possess the right skills and capabilities in fulfilling the job demands, this on the other way around is more likely to explain that the person is more motivated to perform at a higher level and to remain on the job when fit exists (Hu et al., 2022, Narayanan & Nadarajah, 2022).

Generally, person-organization fit refers to the extent to which an individual and the employing organization are considered compatible. Findings from the previous studies in this area have successfully demonstrated that there is a positive effect contributed by the P-O fit on employees’ job-related attitudes and behavior. It has also been found in the studies that highlighted the job-related attitude that P-O fit is considered one of the important aspects in predicting employee organizational commitment (Akkaya, & Serin,2020), job satisfaction (Dousin et al., 2020), intention to stay (Dousin et al., 2020), and turnover intention (Kwon & Kang, 2019). Apart from that, a study by Sørli et al. (2022) found a result that is consistent with the results by Chen and Tang (2022) that P-O fit as well as P-J fit correlated with individual performance as a whole.

This paper formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: Person-job fit has a positive and significant effect on individual performance

H2: Person-organisation fit has a positive and significant effect on individual performance

Public Service Motivation

Motivation has been extensively studied on a global scale, leading to the development of numerous theories. Generally, motivation is described as the factors that activate, guide, and maintain conduct (Miao et al., 2019). Public Service Motivation is a prevalent notion frequently employed in studies about public service. The Public Service Motivation (PSM) in this study refers to the set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that extend beyond personal and organizational interests. It encompasses the interests of a broader political body and serves as a driving force for individuals to behave according to these interests when deemed suitable (Neumann & Schott, 2023). PSM can function as a personal asset for employees to enhance their collection of structural and social resources to contribute to the public welfare (Zhang et al., 2022). PSM is often regarded as an effective indicator of public-sector performance. A prevailing belief among scholars is that an increase in PSM (Public Service Motivation) is positively correlated with enhanced performance among public personnel. Nevertheless, the results of two published research examining this notion conflict (Lee et al., 2021). PSM has been found to function as a moderator, interacting with other variables, as indicated by specific studies (Taylor et al., 2022). Several studies have demonstrated the moderating function of various factors. For instance, Kim and Torneo (2021) found a relationship between red tape and negative employee attitudes. Chung et al. (2021) examined citizen participation and its perceived importance and evaluation. Law et al. (2020) investigated the impact of work-related stressors on employee health outcomes.

In addition, those who are committed to the betterment of society are more adept in managing challenging job demands, as they recognize that addressing tough job demands, such as those posed by demanding citizens as clients, contributes to the overarching objective of assisting citizens (Zhang et al., 2022). The present study hypothesizes a strong relationship between the congruence of person-job fit person-organization fit, and individual performance. Furthermore, conducting tests to see if PSM (Public Service Motivation) can strengthen the strength of this relationship. It can be beneficial for public sector managers to formulate strategies to improve the performance of their staff, provided that the study confirms the significance of this hypothesis. The utilization of this conceptual model will enable us to examine the influence of PSM on the performance of public sector employees, with PJ fit and PO fit serving as predictors. Given this discrepancy, this study also postulates the following:

H3: Public service motivation positively moderates the relationship between person-job fit and individual performance

H4: Public service motivation positively moderates the relationship between person-organisation fit and individual performance

Methodology

Data Collection

A questionnaire was chosen as a quantitative tool in this research. Respondents were state-level public servants in Selangor, who work for 15 state departments, 9 land and district offices,

and 12 city councils. Because of its proximity and accessibility, Selangor was chosen for sampling. In this study, the convenience sampling method was used. There was a total of 371 respondents responded to the questionnaires. SPSS Statistics Version 27.0 is used to key in the data obtained and the descriptive analysis used to analyze them.

Table 1: Reliability Analyses

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's alphas
Person-Environment Fit Variables		
Person-Job Fit	4	0.87
Person-Organization Fit	7	0.96
Moderating Variable		
Public Service Motivation	5	0.99
Dependent Variable		
Individual Performance	7	0.73

As presented in Table 1, Cronbach's alphas for independent variables are in the range of .87 to .96. The figures indicate that the measure had high internal consistency and stability. Similarly, the reliability analyses also confirmed that the moderating variable used in the study had high internal consistency and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for public service motivation was .99. The analyses also produced high-reliability coefficients for a dependent variable with Cronbach's alphas exceeding .73. Hence, based on the reliability analyses, the measures used in the study were highly reliable, thus, suggested its readiness for further analyses.

Table 2

MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
Variables	Dependent Variable	Variables	Dependent Variable	Variables	Dependent Variable
	Individual Performance		Individual Performance		Individual Performance
Independent Variables		Independent Variables		Independent Variables	
Person-job fit	-.028	Person-job fit	-.033	Person-job fit	.735**
Person-organization fit	.038	Person-organization fit	.036	Person-organization fit	-.457*
Moderator					
Public Service Motivation			.379**		.391**
Interaction terms					
PJF x PSM					-.893**
POF x PSM					.487*
R ²	.726	R ²	.746	R ²	.799
Adjusted R ²	.729	Adjusted R ²	.742	Adjusted R ²	.761
R ² Change	.729	R ² Change	.017	R ² Change	.021
F Change	246.435	F Change	23.815	F Change	7.991
Significance Change	F .000	Significance Change	F .000	Significance Change	F .000

From the table above also, $R^2 = .799$ or 79.9%, indicates that 79.9% of the variance of the regression model has been explained by the independent variables with public service motivation as a moderator and individual performance as the dependent variable. The F change value is significant ($F= 7.991$, $p = 0.00$) - the Durbin Watson value is 2.047 and still within the acceptance range. Public service motivation has a moderated effect on the relationship between person-job fit person-organization fit and individual performance. It can be concluded that public service motivation is a moderator for the link between person-job fit person-organization fit, and individual performance as the dependent variable, and the hypothesis is supported

Discussion

Empirical findings demonstrate a positive relationship between person-job fit person-organization fit and individual performance. The outcome aligns with the findings of White et al. (2022), which indicated a positive relationship between person-job fit and both staff performance and organizational commitment. Bright (2021) also found that employees who have a higher level of person-job fit are more likely to demonstrate superior performance compared to those with a lower level of person-job fit. This study reveals that there is a favorable influence of PJ fit and PO fit on individual performance. This discovery supports the findings of Lee et al. (2021), which showed that the fit between a person and their job is more strongly linked to task performance than to organizational citizenship behavior. This study demonstrates that the congruence between an individual's characteristics and the requirements of a particular job can significantly influence their behavioral outcomes, in addition to their impact on organizational outcomes. Furthermore, according to Bright (2021), individuals are more likely to achieve optimal performance in public sector organizations that satisfy their essential needs and foster their talents and capabilities. Therefore, according to the literature on person-organization fit, individuals who have attained compatibility with their organization will outperform those who have lower compatibility. Furthermore, table 1 indicates a strong probability that interaction occurred above the measured range of values. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as ordinal interaction. Indications show that the influence of PSM on the connection between PJ and PO fit and individual performance was almost statistically significant for the gathered sample. The findings of this study, specifically regarding the PSM variable, endorse the recommendation made by White et al. (2022) to reevaluate the operationalization and constructions of PSM. The R^2 coefficient for this study indicates that 79.9% of the variability in individual performance may be accounted for by the alignment between individuals and their jobs as well as the alignment between individuals and the organization. These findings indicate that there are additional elements that influence the performance of public sector personnel, which were not taken into account in this study. Therefore, additional potential factors that could be taken into account are ethical cultures, workplace religion, and personality features

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings revealed that it is important to acknowledge the various limitations of this study. The study's sample comprised public sector personnel at the state level in Selangor. Public service in Malaysia mostly centers around delivering services to citizens. However, the findings of the study may differ, particularly when examining samples of public sector employees in specialized service sectors like medical or education. Furthermore, the study is exploratory and examines the hypotheses through a survey conducted using a questionnaire. This approach restricts the capacity to establish a cause-and-effect relationship in the examined variables. To

enhance precision, it is advisable to do longitudinal research, which involves studying relationships over an extended duration.

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