

Post-Pandemic Challenges: Person-Organization Fit, Satisfaction, and Work Adjustment for Expatriate Academics

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Abstract

This study explores the work adjustment among expatriate academics in Malaysia during post covid 19. Specifically, this study examines the antecedents of expatriate academics' job satisfaction and work adjustment in public universities in Malaysia. A quantitative method was adopted in this study and responses from 160 expatriate academics were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The result showed that all of the hypotheses were supported. This result shows that expatriate academics were satisfied with their work environment when the needs that they possess related to work offered by their work environment. Job satisfaction was also found to link with work adjustment. This study adopts a cross-sectional research design and examined the opinions of expatriates at only one point in time. Longitudinal research design should be done for a better result. The result indicate that top management should focus on maintaining expatriates' satisfaction to increase their level of work adjustment during post covid 19. This empirical study attempts to enrich the understanding of the work adjustment among expatriate academics in Malaysia.

Keywords: Expatriate Academics, Person-Organization Fit, Satisfaction, Work Adjustment

Introduction

Malaysia Higher Education System is designed to ensure that the Public Institutions of Higher Education will have the capacity to develop a reputation which encompasses dynamism, competitiveness, ability to anticipate future challenges including acting effectively and keeping pace with globalization. Continuous efforts to enhance the Public institutions' ability to carry out their functions and responsibilities in a more transparent and effective manner will be conducted in order to create an excellent higher education system. In line with the system, universities in Malaysia are categorized into three groups: Research Universities, Focused Universities (technical, education, management and defense) and Comprehensive Universities. Research University concentration on research, Focused Universities concentrate on specific fields related to its establishment, while Comprehensive Universities

offer a variety of courses and fields of study. With increasing the global competition of university ranking, the expatriation assignment is becoming more and more important and it has led to the key factor of success for universities. Students are perceived to be consumers and learning is simply a commodity to the university. It is the academics' role to facilitate students' learning experience that reflects the real world. Hence more Expatriate Academics (EAs) are recruited from other countries to cater for the tremendous increase in the number of students attending universities. Therefore, with the massive numbers of EAs employed, the ability of the universities in appointing and managing EAs is questioned. Richardson, C. and Wong, H.W. (2018) stated that research trend in expatriate academic is encouraging due to first, universities around the world are increasingly hiring and retaining international faculty, second this group of expatriates possess characteristics that differ slightly from other types of expatriates. Despite the growing scholarly interest, however, the expatriate academics (EAs) phenomenon is yet to be fully understood, particularly outside advanced-country settings (Danisman, 2017).

As Malaysia's recent financial success and ongoing reform efforts is almost certainly be interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamid et al., 2021), stress and problems in coping with the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a 52% increase in people in Malaysia (When Stress hits disturbing levels, 2021). Mercy Malaysia Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) team lead Dr Hariyati Shahrma Abdul Majid says the unprecedented nature of Covid 19 resulted in governments around the world also taking unprecedented measures. This is the first global pandemic in recent times, disrupting universities and the experience has certainly been challenging to all academic. It is essential to learn about expatriate academic work adjustment experiences during post covid-19 in order to be better prepared for subsequent disruptions, particularly as research has shown the substantial impact of mental health and wellbeing across the general population (White and Van Der Boor, 2020).

Therefore current study focusing on Person-organization fit, job satisfaction and work adjustment among expatriate academics in Malaysia. Current study contributes to two major aspects of the literature. Firstly, to identify expatriate's task satisfaction derived from Person-organization fit in the workplace. Secondly, the study explores the challenges experienced by expatriates while adjusting to Malaysia's working environment. The primary objective is to help to understand the significance of satisfaction and work adjustment relationship to expatriate academic in Malaysia in Malaysia.

Person-Organization Fit and Satisfaction

Past studies have consistently demonstrated the critical role of person-organization (P-O) fit in influencing job satisfaction and overall employee well-being. P-O fit, which refers to the alignment between an individual's values, goals, and skills with those of their organization, has been shown to enhance job satisfaction, reduce turnover intentions, and improve organizational commitment. For example, Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) established that employees who perceive a strong P-O fit report higher job satisfaction and are more likely to stay with their organization. More recently, Chen, Zhang, and Wang (2021) found that P-O fit significantly predicts job satisfaction, particularly in dynamic work environments where organizational values and employee expectations must align closely. Similarly, a study by Lee, Kim, and Kim (2022) highlighted that P-O fit not only boosts job satisfaction but also mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee

engagement. In the context of expatriates, P-O fit has been shown to facilitate better adjustment and higher satisfaction, especially in cross-cultural settings (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012; Zhang & Li, 2023). Furthermore, recent research by Ahmed, Nawaz, and Usman (2023) emphasized the role of P-O fit in enhancing job satisfaction during times of organizational change, such as the post-pandemic shift to remote work. These studies collectively underscore the importance of P-O fit as a key driver of job satisfaction, particularly in evolving and diverse work environments. Current study derived from the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1994) which provides counseling psychologists with an empirically supported approach to explain employees' work adjustment. This theory outlines a direct relation between person– environment (P-E) fit and workplace outcome variables (e.g., job satisfaction). Present study examined a central assumption of the TWA with among expatriate academics, the ability of person– organization (P-O) fit perceptions, a type of P-E fit, to directly predict job satisfaction and how job satisfaction will influence work adjustment among expatriate academics. Person-organization (PO) fit refers to the compatibility between employees and their organization (Kristof, 1996). When an employee's values and the organization's values are similar, employees tend to have positive workplace attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. When employees have similar values with their organization, they are more likely to interact more efficiently with their organization, reduce uncertainty while increasing satisfaction, commitment, and identification toward their organization. Person-Organization fit of expatriate academics in this study were characterized by the combined sets of work environment, teaching and research abilities and ability to perform with colleagues (Dawis 1994; Black 1991 and Parker and Mc Evoy 1993). If they are pleased with colleagues and at the same time happy with the working environment like teaching and reward, expatriate is expected to experience satisfaction in the university or their workplace. The P-O fit theory suggests that if people fit well with an organization, they are likely to exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors, hence, it is postulated that:

Hypothesis 1

Person-organization fit will be associated with satisfaction among expatriate academics in Malaysia.

Satisfaction and Work Adjustment

Previous studies have extensively explored the relationship between **job satisfaction** and **work adjustment**, particularly in the context of expatriates and employees navigating new work environments. Job satisfaction, which reflects an individual's positive emotional state toward their work, has been shown to significantly influence work adjustment, which refers to the ability to adapt to new roles, tasks, and organizational cultures. For instance, Black and Gregersen (1991) found that expatriates with higher job satisfaction were more likely to adjust successfully to their international assignments, as satisfaction fosters motivation and resilience in unfamiliar settings.

Work adjustment is a process that involves adapting to a deep change in the workplace environment. It is reported that investigations have broadly confirmed the multifaceted conceptualization of expatriate adjustment. There are empirical researches on job satisfaction that indicated a solid effect to work adjustment. The work of Wang and Pierre (2005), studied the relationship between work adjustment and satisfaction with the Philipinos who migrated to work in Canada, the research found that job satisfaction was positively

related to work adjustment with statistically significant. The findings found clearly the positive influences of job satisfaction on work adjustment (Na-Nan & Pukkeeree, 2013). Recent studies have also examined this relationship in the context of remote work and hybrid models post-pandemic. For example, Wang, Liu, and Zhang (2021) found that employees who reported higher job satisfaction were better able to adjust to remote work challenges, such as isolation and blurred work-life boundaries. These findings underscore the critical role of job satisfaction in promoting work adjustment, particularly in dynamic and evolving work environments. Thus, in this study it is predicted that work adjustment is the result of the levels of satisfaction achieved by expatriate academics during the time spent living and working abroad. It is indicated that, an increase of satisfaction will positively influence the level of work adjustment. In light of this, it is assumed that:

Hypothesis 2

Satisfaction will be associated with work adjustment among expatriate academics in Malaysia.

Methodology

Measurement

The measurements were developed based on extensive reviews of literature. The survey was divided into two sections: the first section was designed to collect information on respondents' demographic profile, while the second section contained measurements on employees' person-organization fit (Saks and Ashforth's, 1997 and Lyons, 2003), job satisfaction (MSQ; Weiss et al., 1967) and work adjustment (Black and Stephens, 1989). The survey is measured used the five-point Likert scale (ranging from, 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In addition, a pre-test study was carried out using fifty expatriate working in Malaysian public university. The respondents were a relatively homogeneous population suitable for theory testing and development. They also represented a sample for the research context and therefore were considered appropriate for the present study. From this initial pre-test, several questions were rephrased to improve the instrument's readability. A judgment sampling under purposive sampling was applied in this study whereby it involves the choice of respondents who were most advantageously placed or in the best position to provide information required (Sekaran, 2003). The respondents' first selection criterion required expatriate academics that are attached to public universities in Malaysia. Secondly, they have possibly served in this country for more than six months. The longer the stay in Malaysia will assist to give more meaningful perceptions in terms of their personal experience on adjustment.

Sample

A total of 300 (including 100 via email) copies of questionnaires were distributed to expatriate academics who are working in public university in Malaysia. Only 170 respondents responded to the survey which obtained a 56.6% response rate. However, from 170 only 160 were deemed usable for further analysis because of incomplete responses (many missing values) questionable responses (no variation in the answer throughout the questionnaire). The final sample of respondents in this study were 160 expatriate academics. Majority of the respondents who completed the questionnaire were male 68.5% with females accounting for 31.5%. The age of expatriate academics was between 23 to 70 years old and most of them were 43 years old. Most of respondents held PhD followed by Master. It is important to note that the majority of expatriate academics in Malaysian public university had no prior

international experience. However the pattern was somewhat different in regards to attending training provided by the university, 43% indicating that they had attended training. In total, 80.9% of the sample were married, 15.1% were single and only 4% divorced. The majority of the respondents had been working in Malaysia for 1 to 5 years.

Results and Discussion

Measurement Model

The measurement model analysis was conducted for construct validity. The reliability coefficient of factor structures was measured using the Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient alpha values for the three constructs ranged from 0.78 to 0.88, demonstrating good internal consistency and strong reliability of each dimension (Gerbing, D. W., & Hunter, J. E., 1987). The constructs' validity was further examined using the convergent analysis. The results suggested strong convergent validity. Specifically, the computation of AVE ranged from 0.40 to 0.60, higher than the recommended value of 0.50 by Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F., (1981). The reported CR exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 by Hair, J.F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C.M. and Mena, J.A. (2012). Collectively, these results provided a good support for soundness of scale structures.

Structural Model

A structural model based on the hypothesized relationship was tested according to the goodness of fit indices. The modification index for this initial estimation suggested that several error terms in the model were correlated (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996). Moreover, this approach enhanced model fit. As suggested by AMOS20, only satisfaction involved in the modification index to enhance the model fit. Upon modification, the model yielded a good model fit of $p=0.00$, $X^2/df=1.87$, CFI=0.90, TLI=0.90, and RMSEA=0.06.

Table 1

Hypothesis Testing

	B	P Values	Accept/Reject
H1: P-O FIT ->Satisfaction	0.54	0.001	Accepted
H2: Satisfaction ->Work Adjustment	0.51	0.007	Accepted

Hypothesis 1 was concerned with the direct effects of Person-Organization (P-O) fit on satisfaction. As can be seen in Table 1, it was found to have a significant relationship between P-O fit and satisfaction ($\beta=0.54$, $p<0.001$). This outcome is consistent with the prior studies by Dawis and Lofquist (2005) who have ventured into this relationship in the TWA. The positive relationship between P-O fit and satisfaction as hypothesized in this study was supported by current study. This outline that expatriate academics with a greater fit will experience greater satisfaction than those reporting a lesser degree of fit. It is anticipated that high levels of satisfaction are the result of a close fit between the needs and aspirations of an individual and the tangible and intangible rewards available in the workplace. Likewise, lower levels satisfaction are expected to be caused by a lack of fit between the expatriate's work-related needs and rewards offered during the international posting.

Hypothesis 2, revealed that satisfaction does have a relationship with work adjustment. This finding was supported by previous study. Individuals who change jobs in international assignment often recognize some need to adjust to the new work situation. Expatriate

academics generally experience a need to come to terms with their new jobs as well as the cultural specificities of their host countries.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings on **person-organization (P-O) fit** and **job satisfaction** have significant implications for organizations navigating the **post-pandemic** work environment, which has been reshaped by remote work, hybrid models, and shifting employee expectations. In the wake of the pandemic, many employees now prioritize flexibility, work-life balance, and alignment with organizational values more than ever. The finding shows that there is evidence that expatriate academics' ability to adjust to the demands encountered abroad has a positive effect on their satisfaction during post covid 19. This finding is an exciting finding to report, because it shows that Malaysian Public Universities are providing a good workplace, reasonable reward and good promotion opportunities that meet the needs of academics which lead to their satisfaction even during post covid 19. When employees are satisfied with the rewards they obtain for carrying out their job then it is likely that they will achieve satisfaction. As mentioned, work adjustment is the degree of cross-cultural adjustment that an individual has about their job responsibilities and working conditions in the host culture. It is possible that when the expatriate academics feel more comfortable with their surroundings, they experience more positive feelings towards their job and working conditions in the host organization. This shows that expatriate academics in Malaysia feel comfortable to be 'somebody' in the community, enjoy work in a good working condition, get along with colleagues, enjoy job accomplishment, which then lead to their work adjustment in the workplace.

This study has important practical contributions to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to understand what the antecedents of their work adjustment are and how expatriate academics adjust their work in the workplace. So that MOHE will practice their understanding on how to manage and fulfill expatriate academics' needs and wants to achieve their satisfaction, work adjustment and finally their commitment with the university. The findings offer several practical implications for organizations aiming to enhance expatriate academics engagement and retention. First, organizations should prioritize **recruitment and selection processes** that assess alignment between candidates' values, goals, and skills with the company's culture and mission. This can be achieved through structured interviews, cultural fit assessments, and value-based evaluations. Second, **onboarding and training programs** should emphasize organizational values and expectations, helping new employees integrate smoothly and fostering a sense of alignment from the start. Third, organizations should invest in **leadership development** to equip expatriate academics with the skills to recognize and support P-O fit within their teams, ensuring employees feel valued and aligned with organizational goals. Additionally, in the context of **remote and cross-cultural work**, providing resources like cultural intelligence training and flexible work policies can strengthen P-O fit and enhance satisfaction. Organizations should also leverage **technology**, such as AI-driven tools and employee engagement platforms, to monitor and improve P-O fit throughout the employee lifecycle. Finally, fostering a **strong organizational culture** that resonates with employees and regularly soliciting feedback can help maintain alignment and address mismatches proactively. By implementing these strategies, organizations can create a work environment where

expatriate academics feel connected, satisfied, and motivated, ultimately driving productivity and reducing turnover.

The outcomes of this research make a significant theoretical contribution. Foremost, based on the findings as stated, the present study has extended the existing Theory of Work Adjustment in the literature. Work adjustment will be maintained when a harmonious fit between the individual and work environment is perceived by the individual. An employee who feels that he or she fits to the new job is usually happier with the job. The positive evaluation of such fit could create higher level of self-confidence, professionalism and initiatives in one's job delivery.

Some limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, this study adopts a cross-sectional research design and examines the opinions of expatriates at only one point in time. Longitudinal research design should be done for a better result. One area of limitation is pertains to perspective. There are many different ways to look at this study area. The information is best obtained from another party (superior/coworker). It can be viewed from the perspective of the expatriate academics' dean, colleagues, and spouses. To truly be comprehensive in the analysis, the research should have looked at two-way communication flow, that is, expatriate academics' dean or head of department.

Future research should explore the impact of P-O fit in emerging work contexts, such as hybrid and remote work environments, which have become increasingly prevalent post-pandemic. Investigating how P-O fit influences job satisfaction in these settings, particularly in relation to work-life balance and virtual team dynamics, could provide valuable insights. Additionally, more studies are needed to examine the role of cultural intelligence and diversity in shaping P-O fit, especially in multinational organizations and expatriate populations. Longitudinal studies could also shed light on how P-O fit evolves over time and its long-term effects on job satisfaction and career progression. Finally, exploring the interplay between P-O fit and emerging technologies, such as AI-driven recruitment and workplace automation, could offer new perspectives on optimizing employee-organization alignment in the digital age. These avenues of research would deepen our understanding of P-O fit and its implications for job satisfaction in a rapidly changing work landscape.

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