

# Relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit on employees' work engagement: a study among engineers in semiconductor companies in Malaysia.

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### **Abstract**

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit on employees' work engagement. Work engagement reported to have positive significant impact towards individual performance, and organizational performance and success. Person-job fit and person-organization fit which were measured using complementary demands-abilities fit was claimed to influence positive human behavior, especially engaging employees. This study focused on how employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) fit the demands of the job (person-job fit) and the organization (person-organization fit) that could be used in enhancing employees' work engagement. Respondents of this study were engineers in seven semiconductor companies in Malaysia. A quantitative method was employed and data were collected through questionnaire. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed to seven semiconductor companies, but only 271 questionnaires were used for further analysis. There is significant relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit with employees' work engagement. This reveals that employees who fit with their job and organization, in terms of possessing KSAs could influence employees work engagement that could in turn benefit the organization.

**Keywords:** Person-job fit, Person-organization fit, Person-environment fit, Work engagement, Recession

The current business organization is faced with the ambiguous business environment, especially with the changing of economic structure due to world recession. Practically, recession is a result

of decreasing demand of raw materials, products, and services that may impact the performance and profit of the organization. In order to cope with this situation, many organizations had made drastic strategy through organizational downsizing in order to operate the business more effective and efficient. Recently, organizational downsizing has become the main corporate strategy and has been a frequent phenomenon in recent decades when facing with the issue of economic recession and production slowdowns (Selmer and Waldstrom, 2007). Organizational downsizing involved the activities of cutting the numbers of job or task, reducing the amount of employee's salary, and the biggest action which mostly taken by organization is reducing the numbers of employees (Hardy, 1989; Marks, 1992). This organizational downsizing is claimed to be an effective strategy during recession as it could reduce the company's total operating expenses in term of employees' salaries and benefits (Mishra and Mishra, 1994).

However, organizational downsizing may also impact towards employees in term of their perceptions towards organization and job (Nantaporn and Kleiner, 2003; Appelbaum et al., 1999). For example, downsizing may reduce the employees' work engagement in conducting job and it was theorized to have significant impact towards individual performance, and organizational performance and success (Welbourne, 2007; Aggarwal et al., 2007; Richman, 2006; Harris, 2006; Demerouti and Bakker, 2006; Harter et al., 2002, Richman, 2006; Lockwood, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial for organization to increase the level of employees' work engagement for their organizational success, especially in the current situation of economic downturn. Therefore, the study tends to investigate the influence of person-job fit and person-organization fit on work engagement in the manufacturing sector, particularly among semiconductor companies in Malaysia.

### **Problem Statement**

The economic downturn had resulted in decreasing demands for products or services that forced many companies to close their business and there are also companies which decided to downsize their organization by reducing the numbers of employees. In Malaysia, it is reported that 17,437 employees have been permanently retrenched, and 8,315 employees have been temporarily laid off by the employers starting from 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2008 until 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 (Ministry of Human Resources, 2009), and this number is expected to increase. However, the use of downsizing strategy does not always achieve the expected goal. According to Schraeder et al. (2006), the unsuccessful of downsizing strategy may be due to the psychological impact (Schraeder et al., 2006) on surviving employees that may affect their level of work engagement within organization. The disengaged employees is someone who distancing from work roles (Kahn, 1990) and would not perform their job effectively. This may cause to low employees' performance and indirectly will affect the company's profit.

Additionally, there also have studies that shown a decreasing level of work engagement among employees. For example, a recent survey that conducted in Canada by Towers Perrin's (2005) consulting firm, shown that only 17% of the employees are fully engaged in their job and their level of work engagement have declined significantly since 1999 and the percentage of highly engaged employees has dropped 4% since 2003. Other than that, a Gallup Management Journal Report (Crabtree, 2004) claimed that only 29% of employees in the United States are actively engaged in their jobs and this situation needed an action to increase the level of work engagement among employees. Thus, the needs in investigating the factors that could increase the work engagement level are crucial for organizational success, especially in Malaysia.

Moreover, most of the empirical researches on work engagement are conducted in western country and only little empirical research on work engagement has conducted in Asia (e.g. Bhatnagar, 2007; Koyuncu et al., 2006; Bhatnagar and Srivastava, 2007), particularly in Malaysia. Besides that, many studies conducted on work engagement which consists of three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption were taken lead by consultancy and practitioner firm, and little attention has been done in academic line (Louison, 2007; Aggarwal et al., 2007; Saks, 2006). Therefore, this present study attempts to investigate on work engagement in Malaysia and it is hoped to increase the numbers of literature on work engagement in the academic line.

Review of the literature revealed that workforce reduction is implemented for organizational survival, competitiveness, and performance (Flude, 1994; Nantaporn and Kleiner, 2003; Schraeder et al., 2006; Selmer and Waldstrom, 2007), and due to these reasons the employer will select and retain the employees who fit with the job and organizational demands. Fitting the employees' with job and organizational demand which refer to person-job fit and person-organization fit may become the factors that could influence the level of employees' work engagement. This is because employees who fitted well with the job and organizational demands, especially possessing knowledge, skills, and abilities may motivate them to highly engaged in their work role through effectively accomplishing work goal. However, there is limited study conducted on the effect of person fit on work engagement (e.g. Scroggins, 2008). Therefore, this study was focused on the influence of employees' person-job fit and person-organization fit, particularly in the concept of demand-abilities (DA) fit on employees' work engagement.

The study is conducted in the manufacturing sector which are most affected by the economic crisis, especially semiconductor companies. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources (2009) about 13,171 employees from the manufacturing sector have been retrenched from January, 2008 until February, 2009 and semiconductor companies become the highest contributor of these employees' retrenchments.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Work Engagement***

The concept of work engagement evolved in the mid 1990's (Harris, 2006) and was conceptualized by Kahn (1990) as individuals' attachment to their work roles. Specifically, work engagement refers to the degree to which employees within an organization are willing to perform their best, enthusiasm and motivated in role performance. Work engagement has theorized to have impact on business performance (Harris, 2006), financial performance, organizational success (Demerouti and Bakker, 2006; Harter et al., 2002, Richman, 2006; Lockwood, 2007), job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Maslach et al., 2001), in-role performance (Bakker et al., 2004), willingness to do extra-role performance (Bakker et al., 2004 and Schaufeli et al., 2006), safety (Harter et al., 2002; Lockwood, 2007; Buckingham and Coffman, 1999), employees intention to quit (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004 and Sonnentag, 2003), employees productivity (Bhatnagar, 2007; Buckingham and Coffman, 1999), loyalty, and employees retention (Lockwood, 2007; Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Bhatnagar,2007).

With respect to the impacts of work engagement towards organization, it becomes a great deal to create and enhance the level of work engagement in order to gain good organizational outcomes. Thus, finding ways in developing and enhancing the level of work engagement are become crucial for organizational success (Harter et al., 2002). Specifically, this study defined work engagement as person who energetic, enthusiasm, and emotionally detaches in implementing work and it further characterized into three dimensions, which are vigor dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

### ***Person-Job Fit***

Person-job fit refers to compatibility of individual's characteristics with his or her job's demands (Kristof, 1996; Cable and DeRue, 2002). It measures how individual characteristics meet the demands of work environment (Munchinsky and Monahan, 1987), particularly towards their job. Specifically, characteristics include knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Edwards, 1991) which required for meeting the demands of job. Therefore, based on Munchinsky and Monahan's (1987) conceptualization, the person-job fit refers to complimentary fit which represent the degree of compatibility or congruence between individual's KSAs and job's demands, which also called as person-job demand-abilities (DA) fit.

The person-job DA fit specifically defined as the congruence of employees' KSAs with the job's demand which focused on successful job implementation. This person-job DA fit explained that an individual needs to have specific KSAs that are required for job implementation. With these KSA's, an individual will perform their job effectively.

### ***Person-Organization Fit***

Person-organization fit has been broadly defined as congruence between individual and organization. According to Kristof (1996), person-organization fit refers to “compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (pp.4-5). In this definition, person-organization fit can be both supplementary and complementary fit. The first part of Kristof’s (1996) definition refers to complementary fit, and it can be divided into two, which are demands-abilities (DA) fit and needs-supplies (NS) fit. Person-organization DA fit can be defined as the degree of match between individual abilities with the organization requirement. Edwards (1991) in his study have focused the term abilities in the DA fit as having specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that fulfill the requirement of work environment. On the other hand, person-organization NS fit refers to the degree of employees psychological’ needs are fulfilled by the organization. In this complementary fit, it represent win-win situation as one entity will fulfill the other one’ needs. The win-win situation exists when the employees complement the organization’s demands by applying their abilities in terms of DA fit. Meanwhile, the organization will fulfill the employees’ needs by providing salary and benefits that represent NS fit. For this study, person-organization DA fit was used and it can be defined as the degree of match between individual abilities with the organization requirement, in terms of fulfilling the organization’s mission and vision.



*Relationship between Person-job fit, Person-organization fit, and Work engagement*

There are limited studies conducted on the relationship between person fit and work engagement (e.g. Scroggins, 2008). In explaining this relationship, the findings from Scroggins's (2008) study on the effect of self-concept-job fit towards meaningful work was used. In the self-concept-job fit, employees tend to adjust themselves to fit with the job requirement, which can be related with perceived fit with the job requirement (person-job fit). Meanwhile, meaningful work was one of the antecedents of work engagement (Scroggins, 2008) through employees' feeling of worthwhile, useful and valuable when conducting their job (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, the construct of meaningful works from Scroggins's (2008) study could be used in representing work engagement construct.

The results of the Scroggins's (2008) study reported that self-concept-job fit was related to meaningful work. This explained that when the employees perceived self-concept-job fit as they are highly skilled in adjusting towards job implementation, they tend to experience meaningful feeling towards job. As the employees are highly fit with their job, they may feel that their effort, time, and energy in performing job are valuable and worthwhile that representing high meaningful works. This situation may encourage employees' feeling towards engaging in their job implementation. Therefore, it is shows that employees who fit with their job could increase their level of work engagement through positive meaningful works.

Other than that, the relationship between person fit, particularly relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit on work engagement can be explained using the Field Theory

developed by Lewin (1951). In Lewin's (1951) theory, he proposed the interaction between the person and its work environment will lead to certain behavior. In this theory, the human behavior was based on the individual perception towards their work environment. When individual perceived positive with their work environment, he or she tend to demonstrate positive behavior. Therefore, when the employees perceived fit with their job and organization, he or she tend to perform job effectively by engaging towards their role and organization's mission and vision success. In this study, the fit between person, job and organization were defined as DA fit. By using this definition, when the employees perceived their abilities fit with the job and organization's demand, they tend to demonstrate high work engagement.

In addition, the above relationship was also supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991). In TPB (Ajzen, 1991), employees who possess specific KSAs may acquire high control over the job implementation. The employees may feel that they are highly skilled in implementing the job and this will influence them to engage in the job implementation. Applying this concept to person-job and person-organization DA fit, employees who possess abilities that fit with the job and organization's demands may perform their job effectively. They are fitted well with the job and organizational demands, in terms of attaining successful job implementation and organizational mission and vision that consequently help them to highly engage in their role. Therefore, from the concept of Lewin's (1951) theory and TPB (Ajzen, 1991), it is hypothesized that person-job fit and person-organization fit may influence employees' work engagement.

## Methodology

### *Design of Study*

A set of questionnaire with 7-Point Likert Scale was employed as an instrument for this study. The questionnaires were distributed to engineers in semiconductor companies in Penang, Malaysia. The person-job fit instrument was taken from Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001), and Cable and DeRue (2002). This study used three out of five items from Lauver and Kristof-Brown's (2001) instrument. These three items measured employees' skills and abilities. The other two items measured the individual personality which is not included in this study. Meanwhile, this study adopted the instrument by Cable and DeRue (2002) in measuring the employees' knowledge. The instrument reported reliability result of .89.

The person-organization fit (DA fit) instrument was taken from Hutcheson (1999) and reported reliability value of alpha .85. In addition, this study adds another two items developed by Sekiguchi (2004) in measuring person-organization demands-abilities fit. These items represent the measurement of knowledge required by the organization and had a reliability value of alpha .75. To capture data regarding work engagement, this study used the employee version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). It had 17 items which comprised the three dimensions of work engagement namely vigor, dedication, and absorption and reported reliability value ranged from .81 to .90 for vigor, .88 to .95 for dedication, and .70 to .88 for absorption (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2003).

### *Population*

The population of this study consists of engineers in seven semiconductor companies, particularly in Penang, Malaysia. The selection of engineers in semiconductor companies in Penang based on three reasons. Firstly, the semiconductor companies was the most affected companies during the economic recession (Malaysia Ministry of Human Resources, 2009). Secondly, the selection of engineers as the unit of analysis due to study's objective in focusing DA fit as the conceptualization of person-job fit and person-organization fit. Engineers are classified as professional and skilled workers (Muthuveloo and Raduan, 2005) who have technical expert in managing high-technology electronic machines and devices. Therefore, they are possessing with high KSAs in fulfilling the job (person-job fit) and organizational (person-organization fit) demand that could assist in their role implementation. Lastly, the selection of semiconductor companies in Penang is based on its outcomes to Malaysia economy and employment (Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2007). Additionally, semiconductor companies in Penang was claimed to be the main semiconductor exporter in the world (Penang Joint Chambers of Commerce, 2009). Therefore, it is important to have highly engaged engineers who have KSAs which fitted with organization and job demand that could assist the Penang economic, particularly Malaysia economy.

Out of the 700 sets of questionnaire distributed, 341 (48.71%) were returned. However, from these 341 questionnaires, 65 were incomplete questionnaires and 5 were found to be outliers. Thus, only 271 respondents were used for further analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 14.0. The data analysis starts with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) that

determined the validity of the instruments by identifying the number of items and factors in each variable. Then, the factors were used for further analysis. Both descriptive and inference analysis were conducted in the process. The data were analyzed using frequency statistics, standard deviation, mean, and Pearson correlation.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the results of EFA for person fit and work engagement, respectively. The EFA of person fit (refer Table 1) indicated that five items were extracted for Factor 1 which measure person-job fit, and three items for Factor 2 which measure person-organization fit. Meanwhile, four factors extracted from work engagement items, namely vigor (Factor 1), dedication (Factor 2), intensely (Factor 3), and absorption (Factor 4). The instrument of person-job fit, person-organization, and work engagement reported reliability value of .875, .891, and .870, respectively. The next section discussed the findings of the study.

(“Insert Table 1 about here”).

(“Insert Table 2 about here”).

### **Findings**

Table 3 exhibits the demographic characteristics of the 271 respondents. It shows that 195 respondents (72%) of the study were male, while 76 respondents (28%) were female. These respondents were in the age group between 29-34 years (73%) and more than half of them were Chinese (64.6%). As the respondents were engineers, more than three quarters of them (89.3%)

had their first degree in engineering disciplines and 29 of them (10.7%) held master and other degrees in engineering disciplines.

(“Insert Table 3 about here”).

Table 4 shows the relationship results between person-organization fit, person-job fit, and work engagement. From the table, it exhibited that person-organization fit and person-job fit were significantly correlated with work engagement. The results show that person-job fit correlated with work engagement at  $r=.421$  ( $p<.01$ ), followed by relationship between person-organization fit and work engagement at  $r=.406$  ( $p<.01$ ).

Table 4 also presents the relationship between person-organization fit and person-job fit with four dimensions of work engagement. The results indicate that person-organization fit and person-job fit significantly correlated with the four dimensions of work engagement (vigor, dedication, intensely, and absorption). The strongest correlation was found on the relationship between person-job fit and dedication ( $r=.421$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Meanwhile, the weakest correlation was found on the relationship between person-organization fit and absorption ( $r=.161$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

(“Insert Table 4 about here”).

Table 5 shows the multiple regression results of person-job fit and person-organization fit on work engagement. The table indicates that 21.4% of the variance in work engagement has been significantly explained by the two variables, namely person-job fit and person-organization fit.

The result shows that both person-job fit and person-organization fit are significantly correlated with work engagement at the coefficient alpha of .00 and .01, respectively. The highest positive Beta value of .277 for person-job fit and followed by .239 for person-organization fit indicate that the increment level of person-job fit and person-organization fit could enhance the level of employees' work engagement.

("Insert Table 5 about here").

### **Discussion**

This study attempts to examine the relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit with work engagement among engineers in seven semiconductor companies in Penang, Malaysia. The result of this study revealed significant positive correlation between person-job fit and person-organization fit with work engagement. These results suggest that person-job fit and person-organization fit influence employees' work engagement which in turn could benefits the organization, especially during the economic downturn. Employees who fit with job demands (person-job fit) may know better their job implementation by applying their KSAs. They know how to implement the job effectively and successfully that consequently helps them to engage in job implementation which represents high work engagement level. Besides that, employees who fit with organizational demands (person-organization fit), in terms of possessing KSAs that meet the organizational mission and vision may highly engage towards work implementation and organization' success. The employees could use their KSAs in attaining the organizational mission and vision that help them to highly involve in work success that consequently influence their work engagement level. Therefore, employees' who fit well with their job and

organizational demands, in terms of possessing adequate KSAs, which specifically call as person-job fit and person-organization fit may enhance their level of work engagement.

The relationship result between person-job fit and work engagement was supported by Scroggins's (2008) study which reported positive influence of self-concept-job fit on meaningful work. Referring to Scroggins's (2008) study, self-concept-job fit can be applied as person-job fit variable as it refer to how employees adjust themselves towards job implementation. In Scroggins' definition of self-concept-job fit, employees are equipped themselves with KSAs in fulfilling the job requirement, which also can be referred to person-job DA fit. Employees who are highly fit with their job may feel that their effort, time, and energy in performing job are valuable and worthwhile which representing high meaningful work. Further, meaningful work which correlated with employees' feeling of connection towards job may influence employees to highly engage in their job. Therefore, employees' effort which consists of adequate KSAs are highly important that influence them to feel valuable that consequently help employees to engage in job implementation.

In addition, the relationship between person-job fit and person-organization fit with work engagement can be supported by the Field Theory developed by Lewin (1951) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991). According to the Field Theory (Lewin, 1951), employees who perceived positive fit with their job and organization may influence their behavior. In this situation, employees who perceived fit with job and organizational demands may demonstrate positive behavior towards work success through putting full effort and energy.



They will behave effectively and this could enhance their level of work engagement towards role success. In addition, employees who fit with their job and organization's demand through acquiring specific KSAs may have control over their role implementation (Ajzen, 1991). They know how to implement the job effectively through applying their KSAs and this could help them to engage and involve in their job. Employees who possess KSAs fitted with job and organizational demands, in terms of attaining successful job implementation and organization's mission and vision may put full effort, energy, and applying their KSAs that consequently influence them to engage in job implementation that represent high work engagement level. Therefore, it shows that employees who fit with job (person-job fit) and organizational (person-organization fit) demand may influence their work engagement level that could benefit the organization.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, findings suggest that employees who fit with job and organizational demands, in terms of possessing KSAs could be used in enhancing the employees' level of work engagement, especially in economic downturn. Employees who fit well with job and organizational demands are effective in conducting their job by applying their KSAs. As they possess specific KSAs that fit the demands of the job and organization, it is easy for them to implement their job role. This situation may create high level of work engagement as the employees are highly expert in work implementation. It suggests that employees need to enhance their level of KSAs in order to fit with job and organization's demands. They could attend training classes, extra courses, and seminars that enhance their level of KSAs that fit the job and organization's demands which in turn enhance their work engagement level and help organization to cope with the current situation of economic recession.

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**TABLE 1 EFA FOR PERSON-JOB FIT AND PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>
Person-organization1		.858
Person-organization2		.853
Person-organization3		.869
Person-job 1	.781	
Person-job 2	.807	
Person-job 3	.800	
Person-job 4	.740	
Person-job 5	.753	
<b>Eigen Values</b>	<b>4.718</b>	<b>1.129</b>
<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>58.975</b>	<b>14.109</b>
<b>Total Variance Explained</b>	<b>58.975</b>	<b>73.083</b>
<b>KMO</b>	<b>.892</b>	

TABLE 2 EFA FOR WORK ENGAGEMENT

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Vigor1	.653			
Vigor2	.713			
Vigor3	.700			
Vigor4	.706			
Vigor5	.782			
Vigor6	.723			
Dedication1				.590
Dedication2				.865
Dedication2				.810
Intensely1			.720	
Intensely2			.818	
Intensely3			.709	
Absorption1		.755		
Absorption2		.796		
Absorption3		.852		
<b>Eigen values</b>	<b>5.461</b>	<b>1.662</b>	<b>1.488</b>	<b>1.085</b>
<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>36.407</b>	<b>11.079</b>	<b>9.922</b>	<b>7.231</b>
<b>Total Variance Explained</b>	<b>36.407</b>	<b>47.487</b>	<b>57.409</b>	<b>64.640</b>
<b>KMO</b>	<b>.849</b>			

TABLE 3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	195	72.0
	Female	76	28.0
<b>Age</b>	Below 25 years	18	6.6
	25-29 years	105	38.7
	30-34 years	93	34.3
	35-40years	36	13.3
	40-44years	15	5.5
	45-50 years	4	1.5
<b>Race</b>	Malay	67	24.7
	Chinese	175	64.6
	Indian	15	5.5
	Others	6	2.2
	Not stated	8	3.0
<b>Education Level</b>	First Degree	242	89.3
	Masters	12	4.4
	Others	17	6.3

**TABLE 4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PO FIT, PJ FIT, AND WORK ENGAGEMENT**

	<b>POfit</b>	<b>PJfit</b>	<b>Vigor</b>	<b>Dedication</b>	<b>Intensely</b>	<b>Absorption</b>	<b>WE</b>
<b>POfit</b>	1						
<b>PJfit</b>	.602**	1					
<b>Vigor</b>	.365**	.342**	1				
<b>Dedication</b>	.33**	.421**	.399**	1			
<b>Intensely</b>	.315**	.286**	.455**	.342**	1		
<b>Absorption</b>	.161**	.204**	.457**	.221**	.461**	1	
<b>WE</b>	.406**	.421**	.861**	.621**	.742**	.692**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note: PO fit= Person-organization fit

PJ fit= Person-job fit

WE= Work engagement

**TABLE 5 MULTIPLE REGRESSION FOR PERSON-JOB FIT AND PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT ON WORK ENGAGEMENT**

Variable Entered	Coefficients				
	Work Engagement				
	Unstandardized		Standardized		
	Coefficients	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.946	.257		11.456	.000
Person-job fit	.212	.052	.277	4.082	.000
Person-organization fit	.176	.050	.239	3.523	.001

**Independent Variables: Person-job fit, Person-organization fit**

**R square= .214**

**F= 36.380**

**R= .462**

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p< .05