



Three-way Interaction between Protean Career Orientation, Perceived Stress and Person-Organization Fit: Evidence from Women Employees

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Abstract: *Introduction: It is assumed that protean career orientation and work-life balance have a positive relationship and predicted that this relationship is weakened by perceived stress but augmented by person organization fit. It is argued that mitigating effect of person organization fit is more salient among employees who exhibit low perceived stress. The results were studied from women employees working in telecommunication sector, who confirmed the hypotheses.*

Methodology: Survey method was used and a total of 352 responses were collected from women employees working in the telecommunication industry. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used in the study to analyze the association between protean career orientation and work-life balance.

Implications: The current research has practical implications for managers who seek motivated employees who would help the organization flourish.

Originality: Firstly, the study explores the three-way interaction by investigating how protean career orientation's contribution to work-life balance depends on employees perceived stress and their person-organization fit with the company. Secondly, the current research studying working women in telecommunication sector in the context of a developing country.

Findings: The results came out to be significant of the three-way interaction as it showed that career oriented women experience stress and fatigue but if they manage to achieve a good fit with the organization they can achieve a balanced life.

Keywords: *protean career orientation; work-life balance, person-organization fit, perceived stress, three-way interaction; telecommunication sector*



Introduction:

Work-life balance (WLB) has been considered important since the last few decades and the advantages of supporting employees to maintain a balanced life has been acknowledged by academics (Jammaers & Williams, 2020). The literature has identified some blind spots (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Kelliher, Richardson & Boiarintseva, 2019), including viewing work-life balance as a gender issue. Issues of maintaining balanced work-life of working women in developing countries has been sidelined (Uddin et al., 2021). This neglect is conspicuous, as the facts suggest that women in developing countries experience work-life balance issues more than men owing to the social and cultural dilemma (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). Women bear the sole responsibility of parenting, caregiving, domestic labor and face discrimination in the patriarchal society (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2013). In this situation balancing work-life gets even more difficult for women. Women are being increasingly employed due to globalization which is resulting in more families having dual earners (Piriu, 2022). Therefore, women are likely to have less time to accomplish multiple roles (Uddin, 2021). The various role demands coexistence along with limited support from family and government creates hurdles (e.g. stress, failure and burnout) for employee's (He et al., 2020). Hence, the current research focuses on analyzing how perceived stress and person-organization fit (POF) impact the work-life balance of protean career oriented (PCO) women in a developing country.

PCO is a concept that helps in understanding careers of contemporary employees (Verma, 2020). Employees are considered to be agents of their career destiny (Musaev, 2021). PCO states an individual's tendency to endorse career which focuses to attain success with sovereign career management (Haenggli et al., 2021). There are two approaches of PCO: Self-directed approach is the first approach towards managing one's career. In this approach, individuals exert special control on their career development by initiating to make career decisions and explore career options (Cortellazzo et al., 2020). Value-driven approach is the second approach, in which individuals chase personally meaningful goals and values that help create standards for experiencing psychological

success and also provide motivation for career decisions. WLB is significant for majority of the employees (Haralayya, 2021) as it plays a significant role in assessing workers' career success (Zahoor, Abdullah & Zakaria, 2021). Hence it is essential to understand the relation between PCO and WLB. WLB is defined as achieving equilibrium amongst both personal and professional life (Marques & Berry, 2021). Conservation of resources (COR) perspective can provide lens that will analyze the relation amongst PCO and WLB. COR is a stress theory that explains motivation, which drives individuals to maintain the current resources and also to pursue the new resources (Hobfoll, 1989). However, the current study aims to evaluate the relation amongst PCO and WLB by considering career and work-related outcomes, such as, POF and perceived stress.

The present research contributes to the extant literature in multiple ways. Firstly, work and career-related outcomes of PCO, such as POF being studied for the first time as a moderator between the relationship of PCO and WLB. Secondly, the research focused on women employees working in telecommunication sector in a developing country, Pakistan; which is an under researched area. Thirdly, three-way interaction is being studied between perceived stress, person-organization fit and PCO. Accordingly, the research examines the interplay of PCO with two contingencies (perceived stress and person-organization fit) as distinct dimensions that underlie work-life balance.

The current study has been structured in the following way: It comprises an introduction, followed by the past literature, methodology adopted in the research is discussed which consists of sample, research design and measures that were adopted. Furthermore, the results of the study are discussed. Additionally, the findings of the study are presented which have implications for the managers.

Hypothesis Development

Conservation of resources (COR) theory explains resources to be energies, states and, personal characteristics which people value (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) as assets help in achieving individual aims (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The COR concept validates that motivated individuals retain their resources (Hobfoll, 2002). The theory also emphasizes that individuals avoid stressful situations and protect their residual

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resources (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory helps us understand how protean career orientated women want to avoid stress and maintain a balanced life.

Another theory, helps us understand how person organization fit is important for studying the relationship of PCO and WLB. The self-regulation theory proposes that individuals try to bring a fit between the organization and themselves (Jennings, Lanaj & Kim, 2022). As the theory suggests, internal control is experienced by individuals to handle stress and also try to achieve a good fit with the organization (Li, Sun, Tao & Lee, 2021). It suggests that, if working women in telecommunication industry can handle stress and achieve a good fit with the company, it would contribute to a balanced work-life.

Protean Career Orientation (PCO) and Work-Life Balance (WLB)

Sekarani, Ahadiat and Djimad (2021) identified balance to arise from satisfaction and effectiveness in numerous roles of life. The research suggested that protean career oriented employees will have a balanced life as they will make deliberate effort to fulfil both responsibilities; at home and at work. Based on the job demand resource fit perspective, study suggested, resources are considered important for achieving balance as it enables workers to cater demand of family and work domain and effectively join in both domains (Voydanoff, 2005). The research concerning antecedents of work-family enrichment and conflict had been constant with Voydanoff's declaration. As enrichment enhances feeling of balance and conflict reduces balance feelings (Greenhaus, Ziegert & Allen, 2014), hence it's concluded that balance can be achieved with the help of resources (Voydanoff, 2005).

The literature suggests that it's important for employees to achieve personal goals as having strong PCO will motivate them to achieve work and career-related outcomes, for instance, Person Organization Fit. Person organization fit is considered to enhance job satisfaction (Pratama, Suwarni & Handayani, 2022) helping workers to lead a balanced work-life. It is expected that PCO will significantly impact WLB (H1).

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between protean career orientation and work life balance.

Moderating Role of Perceived Stress

Perceived stress is described as unfavorable person environment relationship when there is a disparity between situational demands and resources of the individual (Lazarus, 1993). Working women, bare more stress as they deal with managing multiple responsibilities such as looking after, kids, work and home (Kapoor et al., 2021). When they manage so many responsibilities simultaneously, it leads to work-family spillover, making anxiety and stress permanent ally. Occupational stress causes difficulties and forces women to give up work and concentrate more on family (Lockey et al., 2022). Mostly people experience perceived stressors in their lives and that interferes with maintaining and adopting behaviors (Garbóczy et al., 2021). According to this, perceived stress has been considered a negative indicator of quality of life (Matuska & Bass, 2016). It has also been found that stress acts as a mediator between psychological health and work family conflict (Zahoor, Abdullah & Zakaria, 2021). As the literature suggested that stress impact balance of work-life specifically for women, it can be concluded that perceived stress is a moderator between protean career orientation and work life balance relationship (H2).

Hypothesis 2: The significant relationship between protean career orientation and work life balance is moderated by perceived stress, such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of perceived stress.

Moderating Role of Person-organization fit

POF is considered to be an important construct in ensuring that workers' quality of work-life is ensured by enhancing their performance and reducing turnover rate (Babin et al., 2021). It was found that job seekers experience high POF for companies that replace standard pay with work-life balance in recruitment materials. On the other hand, employees' experience low POF for organizations that replace regular salary with health benefits (Firfiray & Mayo, 2017). Being consistent with POF perception, balance in work-life and fit perception speculates employees undergoing low balance along with greater strain when there is a misfit amongst the resources to cope with the demands from

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social environment (Fan, 2018). However, if logically analyzed, we can conclude that employees who are satisfied with their job and experience POF manage their WLB better (H3).

Hypothesis 3: The significant relationship between protean career orientation and work life balance is moderated by person organization fit, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of person organization fit.

Despite the potential of protean career oriented women to achieve a balanced work-life, there are many social pressures that might disrupt this connection. Women in developing countries, like Pakistan, suffer from stress and pressure due to the unfair distribution of family and children responsibilities (Uddin et al., 2021). Being consistent with POF perception (O'Reilly et al., 1991), balance in work-life and fit perception speculates employees suffering from imbalance in work-life along with greater strain when there is a misfit amongst the resources to cope with demands from social environment (Voydanoff 2005; Fan, 2018). In light of these hurdles, the research considered two contingencies that might influence the baseline relationship between PCO and WLB: perceived stress and person-organization fit. Hence it is concluded that both perceived stress and person organization fit moderates the relationship of PCO and WLB (H4).

Hypothesis 4: The significant interaction effect between protean career orientation and person organization fit on work life balance is moderated by perceived stress, such that this interaction effect is weaker at higher levels of perceived stress.

The relationship between protean career orientation and work-life balance is being studied by considering two moderators, including person organization fit and perceived stress. The research focuses on considering each moderator separately and later on exploring the three-way interaction of protean career orientation, POF and perceived stress on work-life balance. Hence, the following conceptual model is suggested.

---Insert Figure 1---

Materials and Method

Sample and data collection

Women respondents were selected from the telecommunication industry. Goodhue, Lewis and Thompson, (2006) proposed to keep minimum sample of 200 responses. The current research collected 373 responses and 352 were found to be usable. The response rate came out to be 94.36%. Current research used self-administered and online surveys which have been used by many researchers earlier (Direnzo et al., 2015). Location and geographical area selected for data collection included Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, the three major cities of Pakistan. Telecommunication companies such as, Mobilink, Warid and Ufone, were contacted and with consent of managers, surveys were conducted. Moreover, an online questionnaire was also circulated within the companies. Online survey was used as data can be handled easily and it also helps in cost reduction (Kaplowitz, Hadlock & Levine, 2004). Online surveys have a higher response rate as compared to traditional paper surveys (McCabe, 2004).

Measures

Validated scales from the past literature were used. Items were extracted from Valentine, Godkin & Lucero, (2002) to measure person-organization fit. Respondents had to select options amongst “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” using Likert scale of five point. Sample question is, “I feel that my personal values are a good fit with this organization.” Items were extracted from Baruch, (2014) to measure PCO. Respondents had to select options amongst “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” using Likert scale of five-point. Sample question for is “I take responsibility for my own development.” Shukla & Srivastava, (2016) proposed items to measure work-life balance. Respondents had to select options amongst “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” using Likert scale of five-point. Items were extracted from (Cohen et al., 1983) to measure perceived stress. Respondents had to select options amongst “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” using Likert scale of five-point. Sample question for is “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in life?”

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Control variables: In order to account for any alternative explanation for work-life balance, the research controlled for age, monthly income and education of female employees working in the telecommunication sector.

The current research, tested hypotheses in three interlinked steps. Firstly, the moderation of POF was tested via SPSS PROCESS macro between the relationship of PCO and WLB. Secondly, the moderation of perceived stress was tested via SPSS PROCESS macro between the relationship of PCO and WLB. Thirdly, three-way moderation was tested (PCO x POF x perceived stress) with WLB.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations and table 2 shows the regression results. The model included three control variables, age, education and monthly income. The model studies the three-way interaction (Protean career orientation x perceived stress x person-organization fit) along with its underlying two way interactions.

--- Insert table 1 and 2 here ---

Table 2 depicts in support of hypothesis 1, that protean career orientation significantly impacts work-life balance ($\beta = 5.394$, $p < .01$). The results also depict that perceived stress moderates the relationship between protean career orientation and work-life balance ($\beta = -1.424$, $p < .001$). Hence it supports hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 stated that person-organization fit moderates the relationship of protean career orientation and work-life balance, it was supported by the results ($\beta = -1.5095$, $p < .001$). Hence the results support the attenuating effect of perceived stress ($\beta = -1.424$, $p < .001$) and the invigorating effect of person organization fit ($\beta = -1.5095$, $p < .001$) on PCO and WLB relationship. Thus, effectiveness of protean career oriented women as means of balancing work-life is greater when women exhibit lower perceived stress (hypothesis 2) and they experience higher person-organization fit (hypothesis 3). To clarify the nature of these interactions, graphs were plotted to show the effects of PCO on WLB for high and low

levels of perceived stress and POF in Figures 2 and 3, respectively, combined with a simple slope analysis for each (Aiken & West, 1991). The results in Figure 2 indicate that the relationship between PCO and WLB is significant as perceived stress moderates the relationship ($t = -3.7030$, $p = < 0.001$). Similarly, the same figure indicates that the relationship between PCO and WLB is significant with POF as a moderator ($t = -3.6314$, $p = < 0.001$). Lastly, it indicates a significant moderation of the three-way interaction of PCO x PS x POF ($t = 4.3190$, $p = < 0.001$).

--Insert Figures 2 here--

Hypothesis 4 was also supported and accepted as the three-way interaction between PCO, POF and perceived stress came out to be significant ($\beta = .4122$, $p < .001$).

This study adds to the theoretical perceptible by contributing to the research of WLB as it elaborates on how two critical factors (person organization fit and perceived stress) impact career oriented women trying to achieve a balanced life. The lack of previous attention given to working women trying to achieve a balanced life is surprising. The novel idea of how stress aggravates the situation of women in developing country, who are already under a lot of pressure due to the social and cultural norms (Kapoor et al., 2021), highlights the importance of studying this phenomenon. Perceived stress means how an individual feel about the general stressfulness of their life and their ability to handle such stress (Khodami et al., 2022). On the other hand, POF means that there is good congruence between the person's abilities and the organization (Pratama et al., 2022). It was posited that perceived stress challenges the positive relationship between protean career oriented women and work-life balance, however POF enhances the relationship.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study researched about the impact of protean career orientation on work-life balance while considering two moderators, perceived stress and person organization fit. The sample was taken from women employees working in telecommunication sector. The study concluded that protean career orientation has a significant impact on work life

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balance of women employees in the telecommunication sector (H1). The result is supported by extant literature, as it is proved that career oriented (self-motivated) employees make deliberate effort to maintain a balanced work life (Direenzo et al., 2015). However, in emerging economies like Pakistan, women bare all the burden of household responsibilities hence, women are more likely to have stress when trying to accomplish multiple roles (Uddin, 2021). There were two moderators included in the model; perceived stress and person organization fit; they were studied between the relationship of protean career orientation and work life balance. The second hypothesis, discussed perceived stress as a moderator between protean career orientation and work life balance. The results concluded that perceived stress did moderate the relationship of PCO and WLB. This was another contribution of the current research. The studies suggest that women bare all the burden of household responsibilities and various role demands coexistence along with limited support from family and government creates hurdles e.g. stress, failure and burnout (He et al., 2020). This suggested that stress is caused due to societal pressures in women particularly in emerging economies like Pakistan. Hence the results also suggested that stress does moderate the relationship of PCO and WLB (H2). Another moderator considered was POF; it was concluded that a career oriented (self-motivated) person balances his/her life better only if they achieve a good fit with the organization (H3). Another contribution to the study was that three-way interaction of (PCO x perceived stress x POF) and its impact on WLB was gauged (H4). The results came out to be significant of the three-way interaction as it showed that career oriented women experience stress and fatigue but if they manage to achieve a good fit with the organization they can achieve a balanced life.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the past literature in numerous ways. It extends the research on work-life balance by testing the relationship between PCO and WLB in the presence of two moderators; person organization fit and perceived stress. In consistent with the past literature, the research provides empirical evidence that person organization fit and perceived stress moderate the relationship of PCO and WLB. The relationship of

PCO and WLB was studied beforehand; nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of person organization fit and perceived stress on work-life balance, especially in women employees' working in telecommunication sector in Pakistan. By introducing two moderators between the relationship of PCO and WLB, researchers can gain insight about how women live a balanced life along with trying to maintain a fit with the organization and carrying the burden of stress.

Managerial Implications

The study suggests from a practical perspective that managers should encourage women employees who are self-driven and self-motivated to achieve a balanced life. To achieve this, HR managers will have to come up with strategies to give comfort to women in the organization. They will have to reward on productivity based work employees do within the organization, that will help reduce the stress of women employees. It is very important for the managers to help hire women employees who are career oriented and have a good fit with organizational goals. That will help the organization have motivated employees who manage good balance in work-life. PCO is related with acquisition of resources (e.g person organization fit), individuals should appreciate the benefit of adopting self-directed approach for managing their careers. Strong PCO can be achieved by self-reflection of their career (Sargent & Domberger, 2007) and also with the help of developmental relationships. For instance, managers can assist employees to develop their own definition of successful career (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007) and to develop proactive strategies in order to help attain their individual goals.

There are numerous informal, such as family-supportive supervision and organizational cultures, and formal, such as, flexibility policies, in an organization that can lead to less work family conflict or high work family enrichment, both contribute to a balanced work-life (Greenhaus et.al, 2014). Lastly, business institutions should accept that they play a significant role in guiding their students to decide their career path in a self-direct (protean) manner in order to achieve their career aims and a balanced life. Institutions can help students by giving them opportunities to develop a proactive

approach towards their career development, to learn what it's like to work in real organizational setting and to understand their values. Such opportunities can be provided with different combination of individual career counseling, career management coursework, organizational experiences through education work assignments and internships and small group workshops.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

There are few limitations in the current study. Data has been collected from telecommunication industry only and because of that the results will only be relevant for the telecommunication industry. Future research should incorporate the relation between PCO with other work and career related outcomes, for instance, job engagement, different career planning behaviors and subjective and objective career success. Job related resources, such as autonomy, may intermingle with motivational factors, such as, felt responsibility for dependents, to predict work-life balance of employees. Clearly future research should incorporate such motivational factors and job related resources in order to assess the achievement of a balanced life. Moreover, research has only addressed the positive effect of PCO (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The future research should study what happens when self-driven employees are unable to achieve their goals. The negative impact of PCO on an individual's personality is yet to be explored. The research should also consider the impact of PCO on part time employees as the work-life balance of part time employees will vary from full time employee's life balance.

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Appendix

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Work-life balance	4.168	.8087						
2. Protean Career Orientation	4.285	.8019	0.662**					
3. Perceived Stress	4.468	.6130	0.576**	0.745**				
4. Person-organization fit	4.1922	.7730	0.661**	0.67**	0.605**			
5. Age	1.43	.717	0.237**	0.317**	0.329**	0.219**		
6. Education	2.79	.641	-0.212**	-0.217**	-0.240**	-0.280**	-0.417**	
7. Monthly Income	2.28	1.341	-0.176**	-0.152**	-0.177**	-0.175**	0.039	0.08

Table 2: Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Work Life Balance)

Three-way Interaction between Protean Career Orientation ...

	Model 1
Age	- 0.0099
Education	0.0031
Monthly Income	- 0.0318
H1: Protean Career Orientation	5.3942**
H2: Protean Career Orientation x Perceived Stress	- 1.4243***
H3: Protean Career Orientation x Person Organization Fit	- 1.5095***
H4: Protean Career Orientation x Person Organization Fit x Perceived Stress	0.4122***
F-value	49.7075
R ²	0.5931
R ² change	0.0223

Notes: N = 352;

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

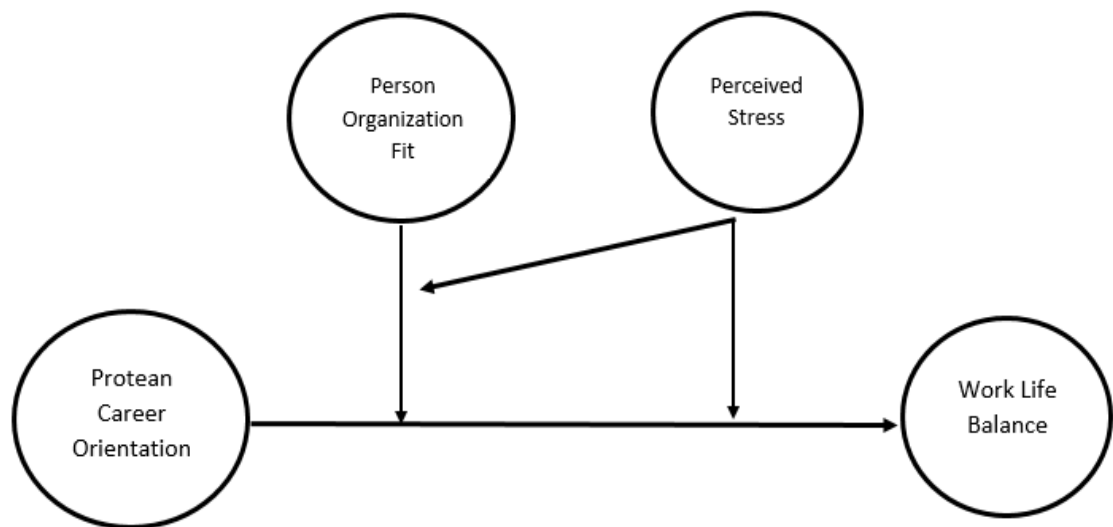


Figure 2: Three-way interaction between Protean career orientation, person organization fit and perceived stress

