Person – Job Fit in Students' Perspective and Its Consequences for Career Aspirations

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between students' dedication (S_DED) and their perception of person-job fit (P_J Fit) and investigate how it correlates with students' career aspirations (CAREER_ASP). Additionally, the relationship between perceived P_J Fit and students' work experience (WORK_EXP) and social support (S_SUPPORT) have been analyzed.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study was conducted among tourism and/or hospitality students of two universities that agreed to participate in the study. They are located in cities of Poland and Croatia which are very attractive tourist destinations. The questionnaires were administered in each institution and the auditorium survey technique was applied to gather the data.

Findings: The findings of this study revealed that there is a positive and significant correlation between students' dedication and their perception of person-job fit. It was also indicated that there is a positive and significant correlation between students' work experience, students' social support and perceived P_J Fit. Finally, it was proved that the more students perceive their skills and abilities as matching the requirements of their future work, the more they believe they can pursue a career in this field.

Practical Implications: It is recommended that the educators pay more attention to the person-job fit of students when recruiting them for T&H courses at higher education institutions. Moreover, it is important to offer a variety of activities to increase students' dedication to the studies undertaken. Specifically, for curriculums to be suitable and to generate enthusiasm among students, they should be customized to meet the requirements of the labor market and modern teaching techniques should be applied to actively engage students in the learning process, making it challenging.

Originality/value: To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first to focus on identifying factors relating to students' perception of their P_J Fit by linking it with their career aspirations in a single research model.

Keywords: Person-job fit, students' dedication, working experience, social support, career aspiration.

JEL classification: I23, J24, L83, I23.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a very labor-intensive industry (Kusluvan, 2003) in which the achievement of service quality as well as customer satisfaction and loyalty depends largely on employees, their attitudes, performance and behaviour (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000). It is therefore not surprising that human resources are perceived as the most important assets of any tourism and hospitality organization (Kusluvan and Kusluvan 2000), which are valuable, highly dependent on professional education (Tuna *et al.,* 2014) and determine the success of the organization (Lo *et al.,* 2014).

Although the competitive advantage in tourism is gained through people (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000), the global industry is still struggling to attract and retain high quality employees (Richardson, 2009; Richardson and Butler, 2012; Song and Chathoth, 2011; Wan *et al.,* 2014), experiencing a high rate of employee turnover (AlBattat and Som, 2013; Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2016b). Unfortunately, the industry-specific characteristics such as underpaid low-skilled workers, long working hours, seasonal or part-time work contribute to its negative image and may influence the attractiveness of tourism among its prospective employees (Jiang and Tribe, 2009), reducing, as a result, the level of their commitment (Tan *et al.,* 2016).

It is empirically proved that many tourism and/or hospitality (T&H) students do not believe that the industry offers the conditions that are important to them when choosing a future career (Grobelna, 2017; Richardson, 2009; Richardson and Butler, 2012) and are reluctant to embark on a career in hospitality after graduation (Teng, 2008). Many young people perceive working in tourism as a temporary employment and do not see long-term career prospects in the industry (Jiang and Tribe, 2009).

The literature underlines that career choice is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is difficult to predict and understand (Sibson, 2011). Thus, not surprisingly, tourism educators and industry practitioners have always been interested in understanding the career decisions of students (Lo *et al.,* 2014).

One of important elements that influences the attitude, career plans and employment aspirations in T&H is industry-person congeniality (Grobelna and Dolot, 2018; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000; Teng, 2008). Dimensions that may define industry-person congeniality refer, among others, to the confidence that students are suited to working in the T&H, that they will have an opportunity to use their skills and abilities, and that they will enjoy working in the industry (Grobelna and Dolot, 2018; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000). Industry-person congeniality is important in service industries in general, however, in the T&H sector, classified as a high service

encounter one (Lin, 2007), it is of particular importance (Grobelna and Dolot, 2018), given its requirements. Competing successfully in the T&H industry requires not only an appropriate number of employees, but above all employees equipped with appropriate competences, well suited to the job (Bednarska, 2013). If a person is fit for his/her job, that person will be able to cope more effectively with the high job demands, providing guests with outstanding service experience.

Therefore, the literature underlines that students have to design their career plans before graduating in order to find the most suitable job that best matches their skills (Tuna *et al.*, 2014). Students perception of job fit in the sector in which they will be qualified may be a factor determining their career aspirations and future career success in T&H. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of understanding the factors that affect students' views on their ability to meet future job demands. Specifically, the purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between students' dedication (S_DED) and their perception of person-job fit (P_J Fit) and investigate how it correlates with students' career aspirations (CAREER_ASP). Additionally, the relationship between perceived P_J Fit and students' work experience (WORK_EXP) and social support (S_SUPPORT) have been analysed.

This study addresses the need for further research in the current understanding of the young people's perception and attitudes towards their potential careers in the tourism sector (Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2016a; Grobelna and Wyszkowska-Wrobel, 2021). Moreover, such research areas as: students' dedication; students' work experience; their social support, perceived person-job fit and career aspirations have not been thoroughly examined in the Polish and foreign literature. Therefore, the research value of this study may result from combining the above issues in a single empirical investigation. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first to focus on identifying factors relating to students' perception of their P_J Fit, by linking it with their career aspirations in a single research model.

2. Literature Review

The rapid changes taking place in the tourism and hospitality industry are making it increasingly difficult for students to make the right career decision due to the volatile labor market and a large number of career opportunities (Chuang *et al.*, 2020; Lam and Santos, 2018). Despite the significant number of hospitality and tourism management graduates (i.e., potential industry employees), numerous tourism companies continue to struggle to attract industry talents (Chuang *et al.*, 2020; Karatepe and Olugbade, 2016), given that only half of the hospitality graduates go on to pursue a career in the field (Chang and Tse, 2015).

There are reports showing that many tourism and hospitality graduates may not choose to work in the industry after graduation (Chang and Tse, 2015) or do not feel satisfied with a career in hospitality once they enter the workforce (Rastogi *et al.*, 2019). This is due, among other things, to their unsuitability to their work. For

example, a study of Grobelna and Marciszewska (2016a) revealed that students cited a lack of confidence in their suitability for the job and the necessity to have special abilities and personality traits to work in the industry as one of the reasons for the lack of commitment to work in the tourism industry after graduation.

Theoretical concepts dealing with the person-job fit have emerged from a broad stream of research on the human-environment fit (Czerw and Czarnota-Bojarska, 2016). The concept of person-environment (P-E) fit, which is defined as the degree of congruence or match between a person and environment, has long been prevalent in the management literature (Sekiguchi, 2004; Holland, 1997; Kristof, 1996). Among the various types of P-E fit, researchers have most extensively studied person-organization (P-O) fit and person-job (P-J) fit. P-O fit refers to the compatibility between a person and the organization, emphasizing the extent to which a person and the organization share similar characteristics and/or meet each other's needs (Kristof, 1996). P-J fit refers to the match between the abilities of a person and the demands of a job or the desires of a person and the attributes of a job (Sekiguchi, 2004).

The issue of P-J Fit is fairly complex and involves numerous subject variables. In the management reality, i.e. at the level of practical applications in the organization (e.g. recruitment process, employee evaluation or career planning), the competences most often sought are those necessary to function efficiently at work and in a specific professional role. P-J Fit can be defined as the fit between the abilities of a person and the demands of a job or the desires of a person and the attributes of a job. It refers to the desires of the individuals and the characteristics and attributes of the job that may satisfy those desires. Individuals' desires include goals, psychological needs, interests and values (Sekiguchi, 2004).

Contemporary work psychology emphasizes that such characteristics as skills, competences, knowledge, abilities, professional preferences and interests, as well as the values held, are important for the sense of P_J Fit (Czerw and Czarnota-Bojarska, 2016: Dawis and Lofquist, 1984). P-J Fit researchers indicate that the sense of unsuitability results in tension, stress and frustration, poor work performance and burnout. Conversely, a good fit results in job satisfaction, effective task performance and commitment (Bretz and Judge, 1994; Czarnota-Bojarska, 2010, Warr and Inceoglu, 2012).

According to Maslach and Leiter (2008), engagement involves being full of energy, absorbed and effective, which are the direct opposites of the three dimensions of burnout. By contrast, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) believe that engagement may also be seen as a stand-alone, separate construct negatively correlated with burnout, which, however, is not its direct opposite. Engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling state of mind associated with a given activity that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Bakker *et al.,* 2008). Vigor means that those involved in work have high levels of energy and mental resilience,

and are willing to expend efforts in their work and are persistent even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to a sense of the importance of work and even pride in performing it. Absorption involves complete concentration and immersion in one's work.

Engagement may relate not only to work but also to studies undertaken. Just as employees' engagement, students' engagement also has three dimensions, i.e.:

1. vigor;
2. dedication;
3. absorption.

This study attempts to analyze how one of the dimensions of student's engagement, i.e. student's dedication (S_DED) may correlate with students' perceptions of their suitability to meet the demands of their future job (P_J Fit). Dedicated students feel a sense of significance of their studies, engage in their studies with enthusiasm and pride and find their studies challenging and inspiring (Schaufeli *et al.,* 2002). Students' dedication to studies undertaken, as previous findings proved, may be positively related to their employment aspirations in the tourism industry (Grobelna and Dolot, 2018; Grobelna and Wyszkowska-Wrobel, 2021). Therefore, it is believed that the more students are engaged in their current studies, the more they are confident that they have the right skills and abilities to meet the future job demands in the sector in which they will be qualified.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between students' dedication and their perception of person-job fit.

In addition, the following factors are analyzed in the article: students' work experience (WORK_EXP) and social support (S_SUPPORT). This is because the aforementioned factors may also significantly influence students' perception of their fit for future work. Taking up a job in tourism or hospitality industry during one's studies has a positive impact on the attitudes and career plans of university students (Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; Richardson and Thomas, 2012).

As literature emphasizes, students with work experience may hold more realistic views towards their future jobs and might be ready to make their job decisions (Teng, 2008). Research conducted in Poland shows that gaining work experience before graduation is positively correlated with both the perception of particular dimensions of the tourism and hospitality companies' image as employers and the willingness to pursue a career in the analyzed service sector (Bednarska, 2014). The correlation observed may indicate the influence of professional experience on having more reasonable expectations towards employers and the workplace (Kim and Park, 2013). The quality of the relationship with the employer determines how

professional experience translates into the willingness to pursue one's future career in a specific sector (Ko, 2007; Lee and Chao 2012).

Social support is another important variable (Semerci, 2016) associated with the Person-Job Fit. The results of previous studies (Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2016a) demonstrated that the social and family environment plays an important role in students' understanding of the nature of the work in tourism, which in turn influences young people' decisions regarding their future career in the sector. The results of the Fraser's (2003) study indicated that the willingness to stay in the industry is highest among students with friends or relatives working in the industry, additionally students with social or familial support are also more committed to the industry and more reluctant to make a different career choice. Wong and Liu (2010) found, among other things, that the factor referred to as "perceived parental support of the H&T industry" contributed most to the intention to choose a career in hospitality and tourism. Furthermore, it is assumed that the more students are convinced that their skills/abilities match their future work demands, the higher the career aspirations they have.

Therefore, based on the theoretical background and the rationale of previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Students' work experience (H2a), students' social support (H2b) are positively related to students' perception of person-job fit.
H3: Students' perception of person-job fit is positively related to their career aspirations.

3. Research Concept

This study develops and tests a research model (Figure 1) investigating the relationships between students' dedication (S_DED) to studies undertaken (as one of the engagement's dimensions) and their perception of person-job fit (P_J fit) with respect to their future job in the sector in which they will be qualified. Additionally, this conceptualization considers the relationships between students' work experience (WORK_EXP), their social support (S_SUPPORT) and perceived person-job (P_J) fit. The relationship between P_J fit and students' career aspirations (CAREER_ASP) will be also analyzed.
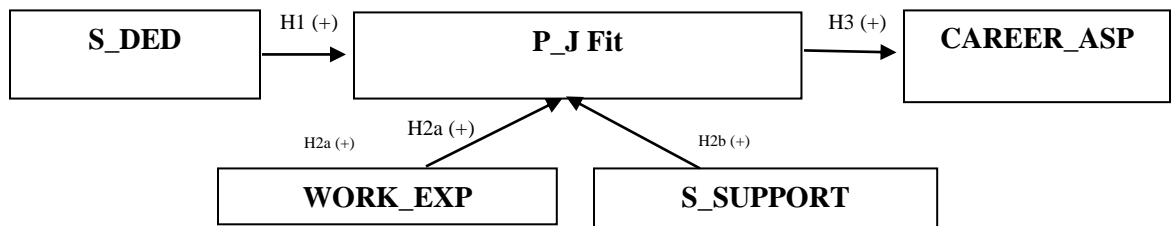
4. Methods

Data Collection Procedure:
This study was conducted among tourism and/or hospitality (T&H) students of two universities that agreed to participate in the study. Both Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are located in coastal cities that are very attractive tourist destinations where tourism is perceived as an important sector of the regional economy. The HEIs are located in Poland (Gdynia city) and Croatia (Dubrovnik

city). Gdynia is a city situated in Pomorskie Province that is one of the key tourist destinations in Northern Poland, in the coastal area of the Baltic Sea (Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2016a; 2016b); whereas Dubrovnik, is a very attractive coastal town by the Adriatic Sea, well known for its Old Town that is registered in the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list (Abbasian *et al.,* 2020). Additionally, it is one of the main cruise ports in the Mediterranean and the main port in Croatia (Pavlić, 2013).

Figure 1. *Research model*

Note: *S_DED (students' dedication); P_J Fit (person-job fit); CAREER_ASP (career aspiration); WORK_EXP (working experience); S_SUPPORT (social support)*
Source: *Own elaboration.*

The questionnaires were administrated in each institution and the auditorium survey technique was applied to gather the data. Respondents were requested to fill in the questionnaires that were distributed to students during their formal teaching time, as agreed with the lecturers. A detailed explanation of the study purpose was provided to the students, who were also informed that their participation is voluntary. All questionnaires were completed anonymously, and students' answers were kept confidential.

The literature underlines that self-administrated questionnaires are one of the most popular methods of social research with many advantages, such as relatively low cost, no pressure to answer immediately, reduced embarrassment regarding sensitive questions and feeling much more comfortable when providing honest responses regarding the discussed topics (Gray *et al.,* 2007). All the above aspects, including distributing the questionnaires under controlled conditions and supervision during formal class time, contributed to receiving a maximum number of responses (Barron, 2007).

A total of 60 valid questionnaires were obtained for the final analysis in this study. Most of them were filled in by females (53.3%), full-time students (91.7%), and respondents aged 22–25 years (63.3%). 66.7% of the study participants declared having work experience in the sector, additionally most of the students (70%)

indicated having relatives or friends working in the sector in which they would be qualified.

Measures:
The scale statements used in this study were taken from different sources in the relevant literature. To measure students' dedication (S_DED), five statements were used from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-S) (Schaufeli *et al.,* 2002); example statements include: *My studies inspire me, and I'm proud of my studies.* Cronbach's alpha for the measure was .78, confirming its internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally, 1978).
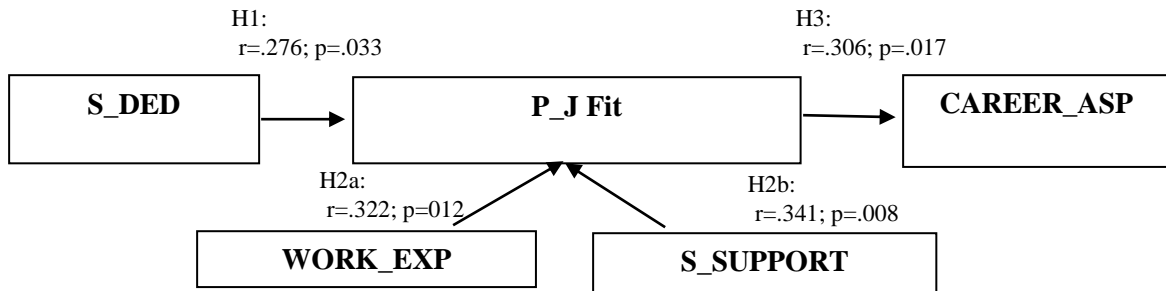
Students' career aspirations (CAREER_ASP) were assessed using a statement taken from the Teng's scale (2008) which has been used to measure hospitality employment aspirations of post-internship hospitality undergraduates in Taiwan. However, as this study participants had different specializations, including T&H, students' aspirations in this study reflect the degree to which they believe they can pursue a career in the sector in which they will be qualified. Therefore, the statement was reworded as follows: *I believe I can advance a career in the sector in which I will be qualified after graduation.*

Finally, perceived P-J fit of study participants was assessed using a statement taken from Babakus *et al.* (2011) which was based on the scale of Donavan *et al.* (2004), and measured perceived P-J fit among frontline bank employees. However, as the P-J fit in this study refers to students as future employees, the statement used has been reworded accordingly: *My skills and abilities perfectly match what my future job demands are.*

Responses to the items were indicated on a five-point scale from: (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Questions regarding work experience and social support were binary coded. Before collecting data, the survey instrument was administrated to a pilot sample of students for its verification. The feedback from the pilot test confirmed a good understanding of the survey statements. The analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics tool, ver. 27.

5. Results and Discussion

To verify the study hypotheses, the Pearson's correlation was applied. The results demonstrate that all correlations are significant and consistent with the directions assumed in the study hypotheses (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Verified model*

Note: S_DED (students' dedication); P_J Fit (person-job fit); CAREER_ASP (career aspiration); WORK_EXP (working experience); S_SUPPORT (social support)
Source: *Own research.*

More specifically, the findings of the study revealed that there is a positive and significant correlation between students' dedication and their perception of person-job fit. In other words, the more students are engaged in their current studies, the more they perceive their skills and abilities to be better suited to their future job in the sector in which they will be qualified. Thus, the hypothesis 1 was supported. The findings also indicated that there is a positive and significant correlation between students' work experience, students' social support and perceived P_J Fit.

This shows, that in the case of the study results, students who have direct work experience in the sector perceive that their skills and abilities are better suited to their future job in the sector, as do those who have friends and family working in that sector. Thus, hypotheses 2a and 2b were also confirmed. Finally, it was proved that the more students perceive their skills and abilities as matching the requirements of their future work, the more they believe that they can pursue a career in this sector, which confirms hypothesis 3.

It is worth noticing that the results of this study are similar to findings of previous works. For example, in terms of students' work experience, Grobelna and Marciszewska's (2016a) study found that T&H students who were currently working in the industry were more likely than others to claim a good understanding of the nature of work in their fields of study and were more willing to work in the industry after graduation. A study by Richardson and Thomas (2012) showed that an overwhelming majority of students claimed that working in the industry had positively influenced their perception of careers in the industry, most students also stated that they could use their skills and abilities in hospitality and tourism.

The study findings also revealed that having social support from family and friends working in the industry positively correlates with students perception of P_J fit. Grobelna and Marciszewska's (2016a) work found that students with this social background were more likely than others to declare that they understood the nature

of work in tourism, which in turn is positively related to their intention to work in the industry after graduation.

To sum up, the findings of this study show that the more students perceive their study as meaningful and challenging, a source of pride, enthusiasm and inspiration, the more they believe their skills and abilities are well suited to the demands of their future jobs. Both students' work experience and social background are positively related to students' perception of that compatibility. Finally, the more students believe that they have the right skills and abilities for their future job, the more they are convinced that they can pursue a career related to the field of their studies.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The research concept reflected an integrated approach that should contribute to a better understanding of factors shaping students' perception of their suitability for a future job in the sector in which they will be qualified, and how this perception may relate to students' aspirations for their future career in the industry. This study also adds to the growing body of research on students' attitudes and perceptions about their future career in tourism and/or hospitality industry (Jiang and Tribe, 2009; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson and Butler, 2012; Teng, 2008; Grobelna and Dolot, 2018; Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2021). Moreover, the study deals with the engagement and perceived person-job fit in students (non-workers) and constitutes a very interesting area of new research.

In terms of practical implications, it is recommended that educators pay more attention to the person-job fit of students when recruiting them for T&H courses at higher education institutions (Grobelna and Dolot, 2018). Moreover, it is important to offer a variety of activities to increase students' dedication to the studies undertaken.

However, for curriculums to be meaningful and a source of enthusiasm and pride for students, they should be closely aligned with the requirements of the labor market, and modern teaching techniques should be applied to actively engage students in the learning process, making it challenging. Additionally, it is important to bridge the gap between academic institutions and industrial organizations through close cooperation involving, for example, more company visits, internships, industry guest speakers, as well as through applied research and collaborative teaching activities (Teng, 2008). Furthermore, practitioners should be more attentive to the needs of working students as their future employees, as such first work experience may give students an opportunity to enter the tourism industry and verify whether they are suited to the requirements of their future work.

This study also has some limitations. Particularly, due to the small number of study respondents, it was not possible to generalize the results. Nevertheless, the study

findings can serve as a basis for discussion and may provide an opportunity for future research with larger samples and in different educational settings.

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