



Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones

ISSN: 1576-5962

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Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid  
España

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Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones, vol. 29, núm. 3, diciembre, 2013, pp. 161-168

Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid  
Madrid, España

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# Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology

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## Job-person fit and well-being from a gender perspective

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

Manuscript received: 31/05/2013

Revision received: 11/09/2013

Accepted: 16/09/2013

#### Keywords:

Job-person fit

Well-being

Satisfaction

Engagement

Gender

### ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Job-Person Fit Model, this study examines whether the wanted (person) and the actual (job) features fit has similar effects on job related well-being (work engagement and satisfaction) in both men and women. A sample of 840 employees from 29 countries (53% men) participated in this study. The results of the Student's t-test, ANOVA, and hierarchical regression analyses showed that there were no gender differences on perceived job well-being or on the ideal job features but, interestingly, differences did appear for the real job features and fit, with men perceiving better fit and work characteristics. Moreover, it is found that both actual job features and the job-person fit affect men's and women's well-being. Finally, theoretical and practical implications on human resources management and development are discussed.

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### El ajuste persona-puesto desde una perspectiva de género

#### RESUMEN

Partiendo del modelo de Ajuste Persona-Puesto, en este estudio se analiza si el ajuste entre las características del trabajo deseadas (persona) y las reales (puesto) influye de igual manera sobre bienestar (engagement y satisfacción laboral) en hombres y mujeres. En este estudio participaron 840 empleados de 29 países de los que el 53% eran hombres. Los resultados de las pruebas *t* de Student, ANOVA y análisis de regresión jerárquicas mostraron que aunque no hay diferencias de género en cuanto al bienestar percibido ni en las características laborales ideales, sí que las hay en cuanto a las características del puesto reales y en el ajuste, percibiendo siempre los hombres unas mejores características laborales así como un mejor ajuste. Además, se comprueba que tanto las características reales percibidas como el ajuste persona-trabajo influyen en el bienestar de hombres y mujeres. Finalmente, se debaten implicaciones teóricas y aplicadas en los procesos de gestión y desarrollo de recursos humanos.

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The *Job-Person Fit Model* (e.g., Cable & Edwards, 2004; Ostroff & Judge, 2007), as a specific form of *Environment-Person Fit Theory*, explains how the discrepancies between a person's preferences, wants, or values, and the presence or absence of conceptually similar aspects of the environment lead to specific forms of well-being, such as satisfaction (in hedonic terms) or engagement (in eudemonic ones). According to this model, well-being is a function of several comparative judgments concerning where one is and where one could be instead (Warr, 2013). In this case, job-related well-being derives in part from judgments based on a person's prior expectations

or assessments of other situations, either known or imagined. Previous studies have explored the relationships between job-person fit and well-being empirically (e.g., Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012), and found the importance of considering this match.

However, these findings have been generalized to women and men, despite the fact that gender is one of the individual characteristics that might be affecting this job-person fit and its consequences on a person's well-being (Warr, 2013). As Messing et al. (2003, p. 618) pointed out, both women's and men's occupational health deserve scientific attention, and "researchers need to consider the effect of gender on how occupational health issues are experienced, expressed, defined, and addressed". Then, consideration of gender-related factors will help to identify both risk and optimization factors for women and men that should promote gender equality to health because health systems that are "gender blind" – that is, where gender differentials in health services are not

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recognized – may maintain and/or reinforce gender inequalities (World Health Organization, WHO, 2009).

In this line, gender differences regarding occupational health might be due not to the nature of their sex, but to nurture. Nurture in our western societies might develop gender identities, gender roles, and gender stereotypes that could be affecting not only what our job preferences are but also to which kind of jobs we should aspire. Previous studies have focused on gender differences to stressor exposition and their stress reactions. In this sense, some authors have suggested that the impact of gender on the stress process might be conditioned by the traditional socialization patterns that would prescribe different attributes to the feminine (i.e., dependency, affiliation, emotional expressivity) and the masculine (autonomy, self-confidence, assertiveness) roles (see García-Vega, 2011, for a review). These traditional prescriptive roles would give rise to biased judgments and decisions, thereby impeding women's advancement (Heilman, 2012). Hence, exposure to different jobs and different career expectations could be expected between men and women and, consequently, different job-person fit and well-being. To this extent, the aim of the present study is to go a step forward by performing empirical analyses of the role of gender in the job-person fit and well-being relationships.

Job-level characteristics refer to the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of an employee's job role that shape the experience employees have of their own work. Different studies have shown that employees' perception of those characteristics is associated with employee well-being (Warr, 1987, 2007). Specifically, after extending the 12 original features in the original version of Warr's *Vitamin Model*, Warr and Inceoglu (2012) specified 33 job features to predict job satisfaction and job engagement. Those features were grouped into eight factors, each of them including from two to six features, namely: 1) supportive environment, 2) competition and financial focus, 3) personal influence, 4) challenging workload, 5) ethical principles, 6) career progress, 7) amount of social contact, and 8) status. Following an approach similar to the complementary job-person fit (Cable & Edwards, 2004) to determine the fit between what employees want from their job and what they actually have, some researchers asked participants (for each feature) how much of it they would like in their ideal job, and to what extent they perceive this feature to be present (Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Hence, the fit between the features of the wanted and the actual job will predict employees' well-being.

To our knowledge, not only has the relationship between job-person fit and well-being received little attention in the literature, but additionally the role played by gender in this relationship has been ignored. Most of the studies on well-being have focused on the negative health consequences of job-person misfit, such as stress (Edwards, Caplan, Harrison, & Cooper, 1998). Recent research, conversely, is now beginning to focus on more positive consequences of well-being such as happiness (Park, Monnot, Jacob, & Wagner, 2011), job engagement and job satisfaction (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Notwithstanding the above, previous empirical research has not focused on differences between men and women in the relationship between job-person fit and well-being. As we understand it, and we will develop later, gender is a key factor in the explanation of this relationship between job-person fit and well-being, as men and women are not only exposed to different job features (job), but might also aspire to different ones (person) due mainly to social factors such as gender stereotypes. According to the job-person fit model, these different expositions and aspirations might affect men's and women's well-being in a different way.

Given the relevance that engagement and job satisfaction currently have for researchers and practitioners on organizational psychology, as well as its theoretical background (both concepts have gained increasing attention during last decades since they have been

proved to be representative wellbeing outcomes) and its applicability in organizations (both constructs and are feasible to measure, then well recognized and used by practitioners for years to 'capture' wellbeing) (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Kahn, 1990), in the present study we will analyze job-person fit and its consequences on engagement and job satisfaction considering the gender perspective. All these analyses will be exploratory, in accordance with the near absence of previous literature regarding the relationship between job-person fit and well-being, and the total lack of empirical studies focused on the effects of gender on this relationship.

Since engagement and job satisfaction are relevant scientific and practical well-being indicators, we will use both of them because these constructs represent the eudemonic and the hedonic perspective, therefore having a more holistic viewpoint regarding well-being. To this extent, *job engagement* is more related to the eudemonic perspective (i.e., positive outcomes from the pursuit of objectives that are in some sense worthwhile), and it can be defined "in terms of high levels of energy and high levels of involvement in work" (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011, p. 22). On the other hand, *job satisfaction* is a positive affect with moderate-to-low arousal, as it implies enough sufficiency or adequacy. From the hedonic perspective of well-being (i.e., experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain), "satisfaction refers to an acceptable level rather than to an enthusiastic, energized state" (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, "engagement connotes activation, whereas satisfaction connotes satiation" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 24).

Previous theoretical models explain the relationships between job features and well-being by focusing on different aspects. According to Warr (2007, p. 383), on the one hand, the "environment-centered" models postulate that "Features of the environment are important for subjective well-being because they are desirable or undesirable in relation to individuals' needs or wants". On the other hand, "person-centered" models are mainly concerned with the individuals themselves, and factors regarding "their judgment processes, cultural settings, demographic characteristics, and the salience that they accord to particular elements of their environment". However, it seems clear that they should not be exclusive but inclusive models instead, as well-being might arise from the combination of both environment and the person's individual threshold. In this sense, the *Job-Person Fit Model* (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012) argues that well-being will arise as a consequence of the discrepancies or the congruence between the degree to which a particular feature was or was not present in a person's job, and the number of specific features the person would like to have (his/her individual threshold). Particularly, regarding the two indicators of well-being used in this study, Warr and Inceoglu (2012) found that quiescent well-being (i.e., job satisfaction) was associated with a good job-person fit (complete congruence), since activated well-being (i.e., engagement) was associated with a poor one (non-congruence). The authors explained these results by considering that engaged workers' greater motivation linked to their higher levels of arousal means that they tend to want more than they have of many job features.

#### *Gender and well-being*

Although environmental sources are highly relevant, well-being also derives from the individual person. According to Warr (2013), two aspects are important: 1) longer-term characteristics, such as dispositional or demographic features, for instance, gender (Warr, 2007); and 2) an individual's way of attending to and thinking about particular situations as they are experienced, for instance, the discrepancies between job content and a worker's preferences is in general linked to job-related well-being or job-person fit (Ostroff & Judge, 2007). Considering these two aspects, this paper analyses how

job-person fit relates to job engagement and job satisfaction among men and women, as gender is one of the variables that might be influencing not only the exposure to environmental job features but also characteristics of the person and their reaction to a stressful situation (Cifre, Salanova, & Franco, 2011; Roxburgh, 1986).

Gender is conceptualized as the cultural aspect of sex, that is, how we come to know ourselves as social beings that are male and female (Franklin, 2012), or “how individuals perform sex categories in everyday life” (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 34). Summing up, sex is biologically determined while gender is socially constructed, which is the point we will focus on in the current study.

There is a wealth of studies on gender differences in emotions, with diverse laboratory studies revealing gender differences in the psychophysiological (e.g., Bradley, Codispoti, Sabatinelli, & Lang, 2001), cognitive (e.g., Halpern, 2000), and behavioral-expressive (e.g., Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000) components of emotions. However, the results of field studies in work settings have been inconsistent (e.g., García-Vega, 2011), as some studies have reported differences between women and men in relation to workplace stress, whereas others have not found any dissimilarities. In fact, several reviews have been performed and remark the inconsistency of previous research (e.g., Gyllenstein & Palmer, 2005; Nelson & Burke, 2002). In a wide literature review, Warr (2007) showed that most of the studies have found a small but significant average gender difference in overall job satisfaction, with women scoring higher. However, regarding well-being measures that consider any level of activation (such as engagement in our case), women usually score higher on anxiety and depression than men. Moreover, other studies found that women showed higher job satisfaction and higher engagement (Cifre et al., 2011).

We think that three main causes might be behind these contradictory results regarding the role played by gender in well-being. Firstly, the way in which the variable gender has been treated during research (e.g., design and data analysis), since it has been considered mainly as just a control variable, without any specific study of the processes underlying the samples of both women and men. Secondly, only part of the picture has been analyzed in each of these studies: some of them only focused, for instance, on the effect of environmental variables on well-being (e.g., Cifre et al., 2011), others focus on individual variables such as personality (Armon, Shirom, & Melamed, 2012), and still others also include non-work variables, such as work-family interface (e.g., Casini et al., 2010; Pines, Neal, Hammer, & Ickerson, 2011). Thirdly, different indicators of well-being have been used, some focused on the emotions (i.e., subjective well-being and/or satisfaction), and others also including cognitive and motivational variables (i.e., engagement). In this case, we go a step forward by analyzing both well-being indicators (job satisfaction and job engagement) and considering only one process: job-person fit. Therefore, our first objective will be to test whether there are gender differences in the level of job satisfaction and job engagement.

#### *Job features and gender: Actual job*

According to the environment-centered perspective, job features might be considered the main source of job well-being (Warr, 2013). Regarding gender, the first point to consider is the fact that men and women can be exposed to different job features. In this line, job features have proven to differ between women and men, mainly due to a double horizontal and vertical segregation. On the one hand, the *horizontal segregation* would be reflected in the fact that there are still feminine (i.e., mainly focused on the care of others, such as nursing, teaching, etc.) versus masculine (i.e., those involving decision-making) professions. This means that emotionally demanding work is more common among women than men. Furthermore, the typical jobs of many women include repetitive

tasks and they have less control over their work than men around middle age (ranging from 35 to 49 years old), since they often have to deal with people from outside at work (Eurofound, 2012).

On the other hand, the *vertical segregation* would be reflected by the fact that the higher the job position is, the fewer women there are (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2010), as shown by the fact that just one in seven board members at Europe's top firms (13.7%) is a woman (European Commission, 2012). These circumstances, together with the fact that women's jobs are usually seen as a help to the family economy, might explain why most part-time jobs are usually performed by women (according to Eurostat, May 2013, regarding 2012, 32.1% of women versus only 8.4% of men). Moreover, women typically experience a higher workload due to their additional responsibility over the family domain (Cifre et al., 2011; Nelson & Burke, 2002). This double-shift, paid and unpaid, work might increase the risk of stress-related psychological disorders such as chronic fatigue, nervousness, anxiety, sexual problems, and depression (Wedderburn, 2000). Thus, our second objective will be to explore whether there are any differences in the perception of actual job features as a whole between men and women.

#### *Person characteristics and gender: Wanted job*

Although women might be exposed to different job features such as lower substantive complexity and lower job control (Roxburgh, 1996), the effect of these dimensions are similar for men and women, thus suggesting that differential exposure to job stressors does not account for women's higher distress. Hence, maybe other factors related to gender might be influencing. According to the person-centered perspective, within-person mental processes, such as job features preferences, might be considered the main source of well-being (Warr, 2013). Then, one factor that might then affect men's and women's well-being differently could be job-feature preferences, which concerns the salience of job features for each employee. In this line, job well-being is likely to be affected by the importance a person attaches to the primary features of a role.

Regarding these primary features of a role, from a biological point of view, it seems that women's brain activity shows greater responsiveness to social stimuli (Proverbio, Zani, & Adorni, 2008). In this respect, both past and recent studies conducted in work-settings have demonstrated that women tend to value social aspects of their jobs, such as support or personal relations at work, whereas male employees consider the opportunity for skill use and personal control more important (Centers & Bugental, 1966; Cifre et al., 2011; Neil & Snizek, 1988). However, other studies have found that scheduling facilities (a form of personal control) was of particular importance to women's job-related well-being (Bender, Donoue, & Heywood, 2005). To sum up, empirical studies show contradictory results that do not allow clear hypotheses to be obtained regarding the direction of those job feature preferences. However, these possible differences as a whole seem important to predict workers' well-being. Therefore, as we cannot predict whether there will be differences between them, and if there are in which direction they run, our third objective will be to analyze whether there are any differences between men and women in the wanted job features as a whole.

#### *Job-person fit and well-being: A gender perspective*

The relationship between job-person fit and well-being has been widely demonstrated. For instance, in a meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), the average correlation between overall job-person fit and overall job satisfaction was found to be .44. Moreover, this relationship has been considered an antecedent of both job satisfaction and job engagement (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). More specifically, their results showed that the job-person fit increased



the correlation of job features with well-being more than their content alone.

However, as far as we know, this relationship has not previously been tested considering gender effects. The *Job-Person Fit Model* taking gender into account could help to improve overall understanding regarding the job-person relationship. In this line, the combined perspective (Warr, 2013) considers well-being as a function of both job and personal features. So gender might be associated with the prevalence, and potential impact, of the job-person fit (i.e., comparison of actual job with the expected situation). Accordingly, our fourth objective will be to assess whether job-person fit varies according to gender.

Moreover, we also want to know if the results reported by Warr and Inceoglu (2012), in which job-person fit explained job satisfaction (because of the sense of fullness) whereas job-person misfit explained job engagement (because of its motivational factor), will occur equally in men and women. As far as we know, there are no previous studies focused on this point. Only a few studies have tested the relationship of similar concepts regarding job-feature congruence and well-being. For instance, the congruence between the sources of stressors and stress has been found to be moderated by social support only in the case of women (Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudunowski, & Nair, 2003). However, the relationship between perceived over-qualification (no congruence between the person's qualification and the one required by the job) and well-being has not been found to be related to gender (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Thus, as we do not have any previous data with which to hypothesize any kind of relationship, our fifth objective will be to test whether actual job features, as well as job-person fit, will affect job engagement and job satisfaction differently in women and men.

## Method

### Participants and procedure

Sample was collected using an international website publicly available that offered people free advice for taking assessments about assessment processes for staff recruitment and development, and also provides opportunities for practicing tests. Thus, participation in this research was voluntary. All participants agreed for their data to be used for research purposes and were ensured through a data protection notice that their data was treated with confidentiality and anonymized for analysis so that individuals could not be identified. After receiving such assessment, individuals were asked to fill in a questionnaire.

It was completed by 840 employed people from a range of organizations in 29 countries (Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea North, Korea South, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States), all of them English speakers. Regarding the sample characteristics, 53% were men, and most of those in the sample were between 21 and 44 years old (76.6%). In the case of men, most of them were between 25 and 29 years old (19.9%) versus 16.1% in the case of women. Moreover, in the case of women, the most frequent group was the one between 21 and 24, and between 35 and 39 years old (17.1%) versus 12% and 13.5% respectively in the case of men. Moreover, most of them (60%) had a university education (63.4% of men and 64.5% of women). Regarding work status, 8% were self-employed (9% of men, 5.5% of women), 1% were trainees (1.1% of men, 2.3% of women), 50% were employees (47.4% men and 52.9% women) and 41% had a high position (from supervisor to director, 42.2% of men, 39.3% of women). The sample contained data from 34 different sectors, but the most common business sectors were finance, banking, retail, aviation, and manufacturing, with 9% employed in the public sector.

### Variables

*Gender* was measured by asking participants to fill out the questionnaire indicating whether they considered themselves “women” or “men”. Because we were interested in the cultural aspect of sex, i.e., the consequences of performing her/his gender role at work as women or men (including his/her own expectations of what it means to be women and men in their society), our aim was measuring “gender” (men/women) and not “sex” (male/female).

*Job engagement* was measured through six items linked to conceptualizations by Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006), in line with the idea that the construct can be defined in terms of high energy (i.e., vigor, arousal) and high involvement (i.e., absorption) in a job (Inceoglu & Fleck, 2010). Previous studies (Inceoglu & Warr, 2011; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012) reported high internal reliabilities (higher than .85) of a single job engagement factor. In this study, the alpha coefficient was .89. More particularly, in relation to the past two months, three items measured job-related energy (“My job makes me feel energized”) and three items measured job absorption (“I get carried away by what I'm working on”). The answer scale was a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 9 (always). Positive construct and criterion validity of the scale have been demonstrated by Inceoglu and Fleck (2010).

*Job satisfaction* was measured with one item (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012) by asking participants to respond to the question “Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?”. The answer scale was a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). As Warr and Inceoglu (2011) stated, the use of overall assessments of this directly targeted kind helps to reduce respondent fatigue and sustain attention. They are commonly used in survey research (e.g., de Jonge, Bosma, Peter, & Siegrist, 2000), and have been shown to be highly correlated with multi-item indicators (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997).

*Person-job fit* was investigated through 33 job features identified as important for job-related well-being in Warr's (2007, 2012) “vitamin” model (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). We measured both wanted and actual features in a way that allowed measurements of the person and the environment to be commensurate with each other. Thus, participants first reported how much of each feature they would like in their ideal job (“In your ideal job, how much opportunity would you have to try out new ideas or procedures?”). After that and for the same items, participants rated how much of each was present in their current job (“In your current job, how much opportunity do you have to try out new ideas or procedures?”). Both features – wanted and actual levels – are to be answered in the same way, that is, using a nine-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (none at all) to 9 (*the most possible*). The 33 features were grouped into eight factors (for more information about this, see Warr & Inceoglu, 2012): 1) *supportive environment*: eight job features covering physical and social supports such as a comfortable workplace, job security, feedback about performance, and supportive colleagues (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .90, and actual job features = .91); 2) *competition and financial focus*: four features such as working in a competitive market, focusing on financial outcomes, and competing with other people (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .89, and actual job features = .89); 3) *personal influence*: four job features including the chance to organize your own activities, the opportunity to express your views, and having influence in the organization (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .87, and actual job features = .91); 4) *challenging workload*: five features such as very demanding goals, a lot of work to do, and long hours (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .81, and actual job features = .90); 5) *ethical principles*: four features covering consistency with personal values, concern for social responsibility, and contribution to society (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .85, and actual job features = .86); 6) *career progress*: four features including prospects for promotion or other

career moves, personal development, and taking on a variety of roles (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .90, and actual job features = .93); 7) *amount of social contact*: two features involving frequency of interaction with others and number of social contacts (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .84, and actual job features = .79); and 8) *status*: two features covering a high-status position and responsibility for a team or larger unit (alpha coefficients: wanted job features = .81, and actual job features = .87). The fit between the perceived wanted and actual levels of each job factor was obtained through algebraic incongruence, that is, wanted job features minus actual job features.

All questionnaires were in English, what did not involve any problem since only English speakers composed the sample.

#### Data analyses

Firstly, we carried out descriptive analyses using the statistical software package SPSS 21. Secondly, in order to answer the first objective, which is to test whether there are any gender differences in the level of job satisfaction and job engagement, Student's t-test for the comparison of two independent means was performed in order to find out whether there were any significant differences between men and women when they reported their levels of job engagement and job satisfaction. Moreover, Student's t-test for the comparison of two independent means was also performed between men and women when they reported their levels of wanted and actual job features, as well as in the fit between wanted and actual features, in order to test our second (i.e., to explore whether there are any differences in the perception of actual job features between men and women), third (i.e., to analyze whether there are any differences between men and women in the wanted job features), and fourth objectives (i.e., to assess whether the job-person fit varies according to gender). Finally, in order to test our fifth objective (to test whether actual job features, as well as job-person fit, affect both job engagement and job satisfaction differently in women and men), four hierarchical linear regression analyses were performed in order to test how much job engagement, as well as job satisfaction, was explained by the actual job features and job-person fit in both women and men.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

Harman's single factor test with Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA, e.g., Iverson & Maguire, 2000) was used for the variables. Results reveal a significantly lower fit of the model with one single factor ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 2155.87, p < .001$ ) as compared to the model with four latent factors (i.e., actual job features, wanted job features, job engagement, and job satisfaction). We have not included fit in the CFA, since it is an algebraic operation of the two variables: wanted and actual job features. Hence, one single factor cannot account for the variance in our dataset, and therefore we cannot consider common method variance to be a serious deficiency.

### Descriptive analyses

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations, of the “actual and wanted” job features (supportive environment, competition and financial focus, personal influence, challenging workload, ethical principles, career progress, amount of social contact, and status) and the well-being indicators (job engagement, and job satisfaction). All these results are differentiated between males and females. Table 2 shows correlations of all the variables studied in this research work, including the job-person fit, which was calculated as the wanted minus the actual job features (i.e., the higher the value is, the lower the fit is). As expected, all variables were positively and significantly related between them, except job-person fit, which was negatively and significantly related with actual job features, job engagement, and job satisfaction. Our results make sense since the greater the difference between the wanted minus the actual features is, the further away the fit is, and so the worse the workers would feel.

### Job features and well-being: Gender differences

In order to explore our first objective, we performed Student's t-test for the comparison of two independent means to find out if there were significant differences between men and women in their levels of job engagement and job satisfaction. Accordingly, there

**Table 1**

Means and standard deviations of the study variables ( $n = 443$  men and  $n = 397$  women)

	Men						Women					
	Wanted		Actual		Fit		Wanted		Actual		Fit	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Job Features	6.84	0.89	5.56	1.30	1.28	1.19	6.77	0.80	5.23	1.21	1.54	1.31
Job Engagement			5.88	1.69					5.82	1.54		
Job Satisfaction			4.61	1.58					4.45	1.52		

**Table 2**

Correlations between the study variables ( $n = 443$  men and  $n = 397$  women)

	Men				Women			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Actual job features								
2. Wanted job features	.46**				.43**			
3. Job-person fit	-.75**	.25**			-.77**	.25**		
4. Job engagement	.58**	.44**	-.30**		.50**	.39**	-.25**	
5. Job satisfaction	.57**	.25**	-.44**	.59**	.59**	.17**	-.52**	.53**

\*\* $p < .01$

were no gender differences in job engagement ( $t = 0.454, p = .650$ ) or in job satisfaction ( $t = 1.436, p = .151$ ).

Table 1 shows the level of job features (wanted, actual, and the fit between them) of men and women. Although at first glance some differences can be seen between genders, in order to answer our second objective, we performed more Student's  $t$ -tests for the comparison of two independent means. Results showed that in the case of *actual job features* there were significant differences between men and women ( $t = 3.81, p = .000$ ). More specifically, men's scores (Mean = 5.56) were higher than women's (Mean = 5.23).

Regarding the third objective, which focused on *wanted job features* (i.e., characteristics that workers would like to have in their job), we did not find any statistical differences between men and women ( $t = 1.17, p = .240$ ). Hence men and women seem to want the same job features.

In the case of the *fit* between the wanted and the actual situation, i.e., our fourth objective, there were significant differences between men and women ( $t = -3.257, p = .001$ ). More specifically, men showed a better fit (Mean = 1.27) between the wanted and the actual job features than women (Mean = 1.54).

Finally, in order to explore the fifth objective, four hierarchical lineal regression analyses were performed. The first one was carried out to analyze to what extent actual job features as well as job-person fit explain job engagement in the case of men. The second one sought to analyze the same but in the case of women. Thirdly, the aim was to analyze the extent to which actual job features as well as job-person fit explain job satisfaction in the case of men. And finally, the last one had the same aim, but for women. All four regression analyses followed the same strategy, that is, to include the two predictors in the regression at the same time. Results showed (see Table 3) that indeed not only actual features explained both job engagement and job satisfaction, but also there was an additive and a significant effect of the job-person fit. Moreover, there were differences between men and women, since the  $R^2$  in both variables (i.e., job engagement and job satisfaction) was not the same in men and women. Furthermore, in the case of job satisfaction, the additive effect of job-person fit was significant for women but not for men. More specifically, job engagement is explained, for men and for women, by the actual job features as well as for the job-person fit, the contribution of actual job features being more important. That is to say, the better the perception of actual job features and the bigger the differences between what we want and what we actually have, the higher the level of job engagement. It is important to note the relevance of including both predictors in the regression analyses together, since the negative sign of beta in the case of job-person fit explaining job engagement ( $\beta = -.30, p < .001$  for men;  $\beta = -.25, p < .001$  for women) becomes positive when actual job features are included. Regarding job satisfaction, the role played by actual job features is clear in men as well as in women, but the job-person fit is only significant in the case of women. Just as the  $\beta$  sign changed in the case of job engagement, in job satisfaction the effect becomes lighter (for job-person fit explaining job satisfaction:  $\beta = -.44, p < .001$  for men;  $\beta = -.51, p < .001$  for women). Thus, the better the

perception of actual job features and the smaller the differences between what we want and what we actually have, the higher the level of job satisfaction will be, but only in the case of women.

## Discussion

This study has improved the general claim that job-person fit is important for workers' well-being by finding a distinct pattern of results for men and women. The current research can be considered mainly exploratory due to the near lack of empirical literature concerning relations between job-person fit and well-being, in general, and by analyzing this relationship from a gender viewpoint, in particular. The study was conducted within a real working context on a sample of 840 people employed in organizations in 29 countries, 53% of them men.

Regarding the objectives of the research, this study has provided some interesting results. Overall findings suggest that men and women did not show any differences, in the level of job satisfaction or in job engagement (first objective). Nevertheless, there were some differences in exposure to job features (second objective), since men employees scored higher than women in their perception of actual job features (i.e., healthier job features), although men and women did not differ in the wanted job features (third objective). Besides, men showed a better fit between the "actual and wanted" job features (i.e., supportive environment, competition and financial focus, personal influence, challenging workload, ethical principles, career progress, amount of social contact, and status) than women (fourth objective). Finally, results confirmed that actual job features and the job-person fit have an influence either on job engagement or on job satisfaction (fifth objective), but this effect differed depending on the gender. More specifically, in the sample of women, the fit between the actual and the wanted job features increased the percentage of the explained variance that the job features had already explained regarding job engagement and job satisfaction. However, this increase only appeared for men's job engagement (and not in the case of men's job satisfaction).

The above results are in line with prior findings reported by Warr and Inceoglu (2012) in a general sample, without distinguishing by gender. Nevertheless, it seems that when considering the gender perspective, those findings are only valid for women (fifth objective). According to these authors, it appears that the fit between the actual and the wanted job features leads to job satisfaction because of its sufficiency connotation (they have enough), whereas a misfit would lead to job engagement because of its motivational mean, i.e., "they tend to want more than they have of many job characteristics" (p. 3). In our case, the misfit between the wanted and the actual job features, together with the actual job features, explains the motivational well-being indicator (i.e., engagement) in both men and women. However, complementing the previous findings, the misfit also explains women's job satisfaction in the way expected: the lower the misfit is, the higher job satisfaction will be. It seems, therefore, that the results add further information to those found in previous studies (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012): the job-person fit would

**Table 3**  
Hierarchical lineal regression analyses ( $n = 443$  men and  $n = 397$  women)

	Job engagement						Job satisfaction					
	Men			Women			Men			Women		
	$R^2$	$\beta$	Semipartial	$R^2$	$\beta$	Semipartial	$R^2$	$\beta$	Semipartial	$R^2$	$\beta$	Semipartial
Actual job features	.335***	.80***	.534	.246***	.73***	.470	.327***	.55***	.366	.351***	.48***	.306
Job-person fit	.374***	.30***	.199	.285***	.31***	.198	.328	-.03	-.02	.361*	-.15*	-.10

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

lead to work engagement in general, while a low misfit would lead to satisfaction only in the case of women.

### *Theoretical implications*

These results have several theoretical implications. First of all, the current findings have shown that even when the sample was composed of young-to-middle-aged employees, with high levels of education (60% with a university degree), and a large number in a high position (41%), men's actual jobs have the features of a healthy job to a higher degree than women's (second objective of the study). And this happens even when women and men employees want almost the same features for their ideal job (third objective). Summing up, it seems that men get their desired job in a higher percentage than women do, and achieve a better job-person fit (fourth objective).

Our results suggest, therefore, that gender might mark personal and work trajectories and set opportunities, responsibilities, and facilities, which are definitely not the same for men and women. Why men find jobs that fulfill their expectations earlier in their careers compared to women might have different explanations. From an evolutionist point of view, "men are likely to subordinate other things – often including families – to maintain a single-minded focus on success" (Browne, 2011, p. 71). According to this perspective, based on biological roots, "many jobs continue to be highly segregated by sex not just because of cognitive and physical sex differences, but probably even more strongly because of differences in occupational interests" (Browne, 2011, p. 71), mainly due to hormones. For instance, according to the evolutionist approach, men show higher levels of competitiveness and risk-taking because they have much more to lose in terms of future reproductive success if they do not run risks to achieve status, resources, and partners (Browne, 2000). However, this approach would not explain why women in our study show the same wanted job features as men in the rest of them, which means that they might have the same occupational interests.

Consequently, although both men and women employees might have the same interests, the truth is that finally only men get the desired job. It seems, indeed, that women might have more difficulties in getting those jobs, or even that they might give them up in order to focus on other priorities, such as those coming from the reproductive domain. As a result, there are no differences in their well-being (engagement and satisfaction) indicators (first objective of the study). Besides the biological explanation provided by the evolutionist perspective, there could be also a social one. From a social gender-role perspective, although the underlying basis for gender roles is biological sex differences, many authors agree that the behaviors associated with women or men in a society are learned. Children learn gender roles through reward for performing some behaviors and punishment for others, and through observation of other relevant people (parents, peers, etc.). In our society, the learning of these gender roles might include the notion that working women should focus on nurturing (i.e., the reproductive domain) as a priority. This fact, together with horizontal and vertical segregation, will make women employees give up looking for their ideal job. This could be the main reason why the job-person misfit has a motivational component in both men and women, but only a low misfit is related to women's satisfaction (not so in the case of men) (fifth objective). However, as the *Social Cognitive Theory* (Bandura, 1986) posits, human development and functioning are highly socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally manifest, with a high emphasis on agentic actions. According to Bussey and Bandura (2004), "further progress in understanding the sources, social functions, and personal and social effects of gender differentiation will require greater effort to clarify the complex interplay of the various subsystems of influence within the larger societal context" (p. 113).

### *Practical implications*

In practical terms, the findings reported here point to a need to combine organizational practices in order to offer both men and women employees the opportunity to fulfill their expectations at work, as a way of guaranteeing equality of opportunities at work, in all their Human Resources practices, both as organizational and individual interventions. And it is important because of the key role played by job-person fit in the consequences on men's and women's job well-being.

### *Limitations of the study and future research*

Because of the nature of the study, it has some limitative constraints that might be surpassed in the future. Firstly, a possible limitation of the study concerns the kind of information analyzed, since all the measures were self-reports. Some experts consider this kind of measure an important limitation because they consider many other factors influence it. However, we used Harman's single-factor test and the results reveal that common method variance is not necessarily a serious deficiency in this dataset, although this is only one and by no means a final solution to this problem. Secondly, the lack of additional data that might help to understand the underlying processes that result in the outcomes shown above. In this regard, an important point that needs further analysis is the role that non-work characteristics are playing (i.e., family demands) in women so that they give up the possibility of getting the ideal job. Another limitation of this study is the cross-sectional nature of the data. In this sense, longitudinal data would provide causal results that might help in understanding those mental processes. However, this study might mean a starting point in studying the reasons why men find jobs that fulfill their expectations quite early in their careers and women do not. This might be the beginning of a new and interesting line of future research.

Moreover, and regarding future studies, it would be interesting to analyze gender differences between the eight features in particular and not in general, as has been the case in this study. In this sense, this study represents a first approach to this interesting topic to check whether there were any differences worth studying in greater depth. Thus, future studies focused on analyzing each feature could better explain the gender differences in the values of the actual job features as well as in the job-person fit and its relation to the well-being indicators. Finally, it would also be interesting to include more socio-demographic and labor variables that could be relevant to interpret the results, such as the types of companies or the work-family policies of the organization, and to analyze the importance that all these kind of variables have in both men's and women's perception of job features and their well-being.

Summing up, this study has confirmed the importance of considering the gender perspective when studying psychosocial health at work in general, and the job-person fit perspective in particular. As stated by Wilson (2003), organization theory has tended to neglect the gender dimension in organizational life. However, such gender blindness within "malestream" theory "can be seen as a significant weakness in understanding the complex dynamics that operate in organizations" (Thompson, 2011, p. 191). This study represents a step forward on the path toward furthering this knowledge.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors of this article declare no conflicts of interest.

### **Acknowledgements**

The preparation of this manuscript was possible thanks to the data provided by SHL Group.



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