



# Influence of Triadic Interactions on Work-Life Balance Among Working Women in Emerging Political Economies

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Received date: 10 September 2025; Accepted date: 21 October 2025; Published date: 31 October 2025

Citation: Munshi B, Munshi B (2025) Influence of Triadic Interactions on Work-Life Balance Among Working Women in Emerging Political Economies. SunText Rev Econ Bus 6(2): 234.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51737/2766-4775.2025.134>

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## Abstract

This study examines the three-way interaction between personal, organizational, and societal factors influencing work-life balance among working women in emerging political economies. By applying a mixed-method approach, including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, this research identifies key determinants of work-life balance in a context characterized by rapid economic and social transformations. The findings highlight how personal ambitions, organizational support, and societal expectations collectively shape the work-life dynamics of women. Policy implications are discussed, aiming to guide employers and policymakers in creating more supportive environments for working women. The results contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality and economic development in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance; Emerging economies; Women in the workforce; Organizational behavior; Societal expectations; Gender equality

## Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) has gained recognition as a crucial aspect over recent decades, with scholarly acknowledgment of the benefits of helping employees achieve a balanced life [1]. Existing literature reveals some overlooked areas [2,3], notably the tendency to frame work-life balance as primarily a gendered issue. The challenge of maintaining a balanced work-life for working women in developing nations has often been overlooked [4]. This oversight is significant, especially as evidence indicates that women in these regions face more pronounced work-life balance challenges than men due to socio-cultural conflicts [5]. In such environments, women typically take on exclusive responsibilities for parenting, caregiving, and domestic chores, while also confronting discrimination in patriarchal societies [6]. Balancing work and life in these conditions becomes increasingly challenging for women. The rise of globalization has led to more women entering the workforce, resulting in a higher number of dual-earner

households [7]. Consequently, women may find themselves with less time to manage their multiple roles [8]. The simultaneous demands of various roles, coupled with limited support from family and government, create obstacles such as stress, failure, and burnout for employees [9]. The current research, therefore, aims to explore how perceived stress and person-organization fit (POF) influence the work-life balance of protean career-oriented (PCO) women in a developing country.

PCO is a framework that helps recognize the careers of modern employees, positioning them as architects of their professional fates. PCO emphasizes the pursuit of career success through self-managed career development. It encompasses two main approaches: a self-directed approach, where individuals actively manage their career progression by making autonomous career decisions and exploring options; and a value-driven approach, where individuals pursue goals and values that are personally significant, guiding their career decisions and contributing to their sense of fulfillment. WLB is crucial for most employees as it

significantly affects their professional satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential to understand the interplay between PCO and WLB, especially from the perspective of the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals strive to maintain and acquire new resources to avert stress [9]. This study aims to assess the relationship between PCO and WLB by examining professional outcomes like POF and perceived stress. The study adds to existing research in several ways. It is the first to investigate POF as a moderating factor in the relationship between PCO and WLB. Additionally, it focuses on female employees in the telecommunications sector of Pakistan, a relatively understudied demographic. A novel aspect of this research is the exploration of a three-way interaction among perceived stress, person-organization fit, and PCO, thus examining how these factors collectively influence work-life balance. This study is structured as follows: an introduction, review of past literature, followed by a detailed methodology section including sample, research design, and measures used. Subsequently, it presents the results, discussions, and managerial implications derived from the findings.

### **Hypothesis Development**

Conservation of resources (COR) theory posits assets to be dynamisms, conditions and, individual features which people prize as assets help in achieving individual goals. Resources can be personal, within the character, or circumstantial, outside the character. Resources can be unstable or robust. Acquiring individual assets such as information, positive mood, self-efficiency and skills allows for employees to achieve positive consequences, such as positive attitude and improved enactment, at home as well as at work. The COR concept validates that motivated individuals retain their resources. COR theory adopts that a resource gain spiral is established, as people who attain resources are able to generate and obtain additional resources, which helps them improve their performance [10-16]. The current research adopted COR theory as it will help understand how career-oriented women acquire resources which will enable them to strive a balanced work-life.

### **Protean career orientation (PCO) and work-life balance (WLB)**

PCO refers to an individual taking complete charge over his career path [21]. When individuals become agents of their destiny they try to acquire resources that will help them grow in their career [22]. Work-life balance is attained when a worker is satisfied with the career progress along with other life responsibilities. Since balance is contingent on gratification in numerous functions and assets are

required to achieve satisfaction. COR perspective [17] provides conceptual lens to examine relationship of PCO with WLB.

Individuals who pursue a protean career strive to create both external alongside internal resources to attain significant targets. Individuals with high PCO explore career options proactively, along with acquiring resources [18-20]. They navigate their own career development with the help of internal resources, such as having a meaningful life [25]. Navigating their own career development will help individuals meet demands of various domain of life and facilitate work-life balance [22]. Individuals with PCO achieve good work-life balance [22-24]. Moreover, PCO employees need to plan their career and establish targets in order to achieve an acceptable equilibrium amid professional and personal life. Hence, 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 the extent of frustration of a specific event, with the impact of a characteristics of a person's personality, capacity to deal with stress-stimulating indicators and surroundings [26,27]. Working women, bare more stress as they deal with managing multiple responsibilities such as looking after, kids, work and home [28]. 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 [29], which causes an imbalance in work-life. Mostly people experience perceived stress in their lives and that interferes with maintaining a balanced life. Perceived stress, according to this perspective, has been considered an undesirable measure of the quality of life of a person. Therefore, it is assumed that if there is low stress among women employees, the primary relationship between PCO and WLB holds. Alternatively, if there is high level of stress the primary relationship does not hold, as all the resources will be dampened due to stress. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

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 regarded as a vital concept in guaranteeing that the work-life quality of employees is safeguarded by augmenting their productivity and decreasing the rate of turnover. It was revealed that people who seek employment experience high POF for firms that substitute typical salaries with work-life balance in staffing

constituents. On the flipside, workers sense low POF for firms that substitute standard pay with health reimbursements. Being consistent with POF perception, equilibrium in work-life and fit insight leads to workers experiencing decreased balance alongside an increase in stress when there is a nonconformist amid the reserves to deal with the burdens from the external setting.

Once a career-oriented employee gets access to better resources and along with that has achieved a good fit with the organization, the employee gets the chance to attain equilibrium in their work-life. On the other hand, if an employee is career oriented but the organization fit is not achieved, the employee will suffer at the hands of the misfit with the organization [30-36]. In this case, employee will not be able to achieve balanced work-life. Hence, we propose that workers who are content with their career and sense POF achieve 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.

While a positive impact is predicted of PCO on WLB, there are exogenous enabling and constraining factors. Despite the potential of protean career-oriented women to acquire resources and utilize those resources to achieve a balanced work-life, there might be disruption in that relation due to high level of stress and low person organization fit. Stress may act as an undermining factor while POF will potentially strengthen the relationship as discussed above. However, these two factors may interact. For example, an employee who is experiencing high stress, low POF may experience double impact on the primary relationship (PCO with WLB). The low POF may induce further stress [37]. Hence, the positive benefits of POC on WLB maybe be lost due to the high stress, low POF and the special effect that low POF may have on stress.

Women in developing countries, like Pakistan, suffer from stress and pressure due to the unfair distribution of family and child's responsibilities [4]. Fit perception speculates employees suffering from imbalance in work-life [35], alongside an increased strain wherein there exists a nonconformist amid the resources to deal with stresses from work settings. 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 (Figure 1).

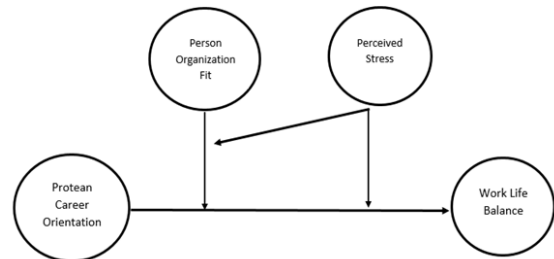


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework.

## Materials and Method

### Sample and data collection

Women respondents were selected from the telecommunication industry. Minimum sample of 200 responses was proposed [38-40]. Out of the 373 responses gathered, 352 were considered to be utilizable. 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 [22]. Location and geographical area selected for data collection included Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, the three major cities of Pakistan. Telecommunication firms like Mobilink, Ufone and Warid, were contacted and upon asking for consent from the managerial staff, conduction of the surveys took place. Further, within the companies, an online questionnaire was distributed, and an online survey was conducted since it allows for ease in data accumulation alongside cost reduction. Moreover, in comparison to traditional paper surveys, online surveys have a higher response rate.

### Measures

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure all indicators, where higher values represented agreement. Respondents were instructed to rate the degree to which they represented their situation in their organization, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A three-item scale was used to measure protean career orientation (PCO). The items were adapted from Baruch and Yehuda, (2014). Sample item includes "I take responsibility for my own development" [41]. A three-item scale was used to measure person organization fit (POF). The items were adapted from

Valentine et al., (2002). Sample item includes “I feel that my personal values are a good fit with this organization” [42].

A three-item scale was used to measure work-life balance (WLB). The items were replicated from Shukla et al, 2016. Sample item includes “Sample question is, “I am able to balance between time at work and time at other activities” [43]. A four-item scale was used to measure perceived stress (PS). The items were adapted from Cohen, (1983). Sample item includes “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in life?” [27].

Composite reliability (CR) was used to compute the core dependability of the latent constructs. CR value was higher than 0.7 for all the constructs as shown below in table 1 as proposed by Hair [44].

### Data Analysis

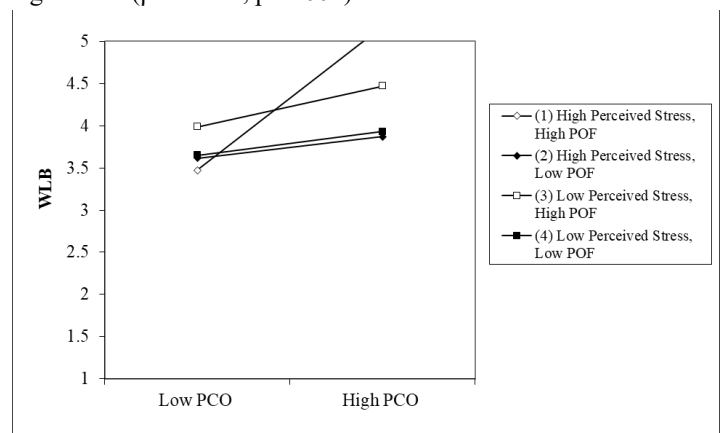
Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the model. Additionally, convergent validity was also tested with the help of average variance extracted (AVE). It usually holds when AVE is greater than 0.5 [45]. AVE was greater than 0.5 for all the variables. The current research, tested hypotheses in four interlinked steps. Firstly, the direct relationship between PCO with WLB was studied with the help of regression analysis (H1). In this model work-life balance was specified as dependent variable, while the control variables (age, monthly income and education of female employees) were added as predictor variables and PCO was considered as the independent variable. Secondly the moderator, person organization fit (POF) was also added in the model (H2). Thirdly, the second moderator, perceived stress was also added in the model (H3). Fourthly, the three-way interaction between PCO, perceived stress (PS) and person organization fit (POF) was also evaluated in the model (H4). In order to understand the effects of moderation and three-way interaction, PROCESS model was used in SPSS software [46].

Model 3 denotes two interacting moderators, was specified, where protean career orientation was exogenous variable, work-life balance was endogenous variable, perceived stress was first moderating variable and person organization fit was specified as the second moderating variable.

### Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations and table 3 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. (Tables 1-3) 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 work-life balance and protean career orientation ( $\beta = - 1.424, p < .001$ ). Hence it supports hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 stated that person-organization fit moderates the relationship between work-life balance and protean career orientation, 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), respectively, combined with a simple slope analysis for each [47,48]. 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 ( $t = 4.3190, p = < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 4 was also supported and accepted as the three-way interaction between PCO, POF and perceived stress came out to be significant ( $\beta = .4122, p < .001$ ).



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

This study adds to the theoretical perceptive 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 pervious 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 [28],

highlights the importance of studying this phenomenon. Perceived stress refers to an individual’s perception of the degree of stressfulness in their lives and their subsequent capacity to deal with the resulting anxiety. On the other hand, POF means that there is good congruence between the person’s abilities and the

organization [49-53]. It was posited that perceived stress challenges the positive relationship between protean career-oriented women and work-life balance, however POF enhances the relationship.

*Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis.*

Variable	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Model Fit
		(> 0.40)	(>0.7)	(>0.5)	CFI = 0.907
<b>Protean Career Orientation</b>			0.9	0.750	IFI = 0.908
	PCO1	0.890			
	PCO2	0.896			
	PCO3	0.809			
<b>Work Life Balance</b>			0.828	0.620	
	WLB1	0.665			
	WLB2	0.910			
	WLB3	0.768			
<b>Perceived Stress</b>			0.843	0.573	
	PS1	0.774			
	PS2	0.749			
	PS3	0.726			
	PS4	0.778			
<b>Person Organization Fit</b>			0.811	0.589	
	POF1	0.718			
	POF2	0.827			
	POF3	0.754			

*Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Work-life balance	4.168	.8087						
2. Protean Career Orientation	4.2859	.8019	0.662*					
3. Perceived Stress	4.4680	.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

## 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 balance of women employees in the telecommunication sector (H1).

**Table 3: Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Work Life Balance).**

	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 <sup>2</sup>	0.5931
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.0223
Notes: N = 352; ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05	

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 [22]. 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 [4]. 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 [9]. 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, a gap exists for when it comes to assessing the influence 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 associated with the acquisition of resources (e.g. person organization fit). People should acknowledge the advantages of implementing the self-directed approach for handling their jobs. A solid PCO can be attained by careful analysis of one's profession alongside the aid of developmental relationships. For example, managers could help subordinates in the latter cultivating their own explanation of what it means to have a successful career alongside developing practical approaches to achieve personal targets.

Many informal and formal policies exist that could help in attaining better work-life balance for employees of that organization. Informal policies include family-supportive organizational cultures and supervision, and formal policies comprise flexibility policies. Together, both formal and informal policies allow for a reduction in conflicts revolving around work family conflicts, which would eventually lead to a balanced work-life. Consequently, business schools should acknowledge that they have a considerable influence on how enrolled students choose their career paths in a self-direct (protean) manner so as to accomplish their job goals and lead a balanced life. Institutions can assist students by providing opportunities for them to develop a proactive approach toward the development of their careers, learn what it is like to work in a practical setting, and simultaneously gain an understanding of their values. Career management coursework, small group workshops, individual career counselling, and internships and organizational experiences through education work assignments can all be used to provide such opportunities.

### Limitations and Future Research Direction

Some limitations to the existing current study comprise the fact that data has been gathered from the telecommunication industry only which has led to the results only being applicable for that respective industry. It is advised that future studies include the relation between PCO with other job and professions, for instance, subjective and objective career success, job engagement, and different career planning behaviors. Employment-related resources, such as individuality, may interact with motivational factors such as felt duty for dependents, to anticipate workers' work-life balance. Evidently, future studies should include such motivators and career-related resources to evaluate the accomplishment of a balanced life. Furthermore, this study has only concentrated on the favorable outcomes of PCO. Future research should look into what occurs when self-motivated workers fail to meet their objectives. The negative effect of PCO on a

person's character is yet to be studied. The study should also look into the effects of PCO on part-time workers, as their work-life balance will differ from that of full-time workers.

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