



The moderating roles of job control and work-life balance practices on employee stress in the hotel and catering industry

Flora F.T. Chiang^{a,*}, Thomas A. Birtch^b, Ho Kwong Kwan^c

^a Department of Management, Hong Kong Baptist University, 34 Renfrew Road, Hong Kong

^b University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1RX, United Kingdom

^c Department of Management, University of Drexel, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Stress
Work-life balance practices
Job demands
Control

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships among job stressors, coping resources, and job stress. Data were collected from food service employees ($n = 255$) in the hotel and catering industry. Hierarchical regression showed main significant effects of job demands and job control and three-way (job demands \times job control \times work-life balance practices) interactions on job stress. The results further demonstrated that high job demands coupled with low job control and the availability of work-life balance practices resulted in a higher level of stress. Implications for Karasek's job demand-control model, managerial practice and future research are provided.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The prevalence of job stress is widely acknowledged in the hotel and catering industry (Kim et al., 2007; Papadopoulou-Bayliss et al., 2001; Wildes, 2007). Long and anti-social working hours, a lack of job control, and high and conflicting work demands are but a few of the frequently cited causes (stressors) of job stress (Bitner et al., 1994; Faulkner and Patiar, 1997; Karatepe and Uludag, 2007; Papadopoulou-Bayliss et al., 2001; Zohar, 1994). A historically high employee turnover rate (Wildes, 2007) also means that employees are often over-stretched in understaffed situations (Rowley and Purcell, 2001), thereby amplifying stress levels (Ross, 1997). Left unchecked, prolonged stress has been found to be detrimental to both the well-being of employees (e.g., anxiety, depression, and health problems) and organizations (e.g., increased turnover and sick leave, reduced motivation and morale, poor quality of service, and tarnished reputation) (de Croon et al., 2004; Kim, 1996; Noone, 2008). These and other ill effects underscore the need to better understand and alleviate excessive job stress in food services.

In general, prior research has focused on two dimensions of job stress: occupational stressors (Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003) and individual differences (e.g., self-determination, self-efficacy, locus of control, and personality) in coping with stress (Fernet et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2007; Schaubroeck and Merritt, 1997). However, as Jaffe (1996, p. 19) criticized, prior studies place too much emphasis on “individual coping and adaptation to stress

rather than on work environments and how they can produce or alleviate stress”. As Kompier et al. (2000) cautioned, individual coping is reactive and lacks the ability to produce sustained long-term benefits. Sparks and Cooper (1997) echoed this position, as did Cartwright and Cooper (2002) who proposed that “the most effective way in which organizations can reduce workplace stress is by eliminating or modifying the sources of stress inherent in the work environment”.

Among the various theoretical models that help us to understand job stress in relation to work environment, Karasek's job demand-control (D-C) model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990), is perhaps the most extensively tested and empirically validated (e.g., Noblet et al., 2001; Pelfrene et al., 2001). The job D-C model predicts that stress arises when job demands (e.g., workload and work pace) are high and job control and decision latitudes are low. It is this interaction between job demands and control on stress that has been extensively studied (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2001; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). The job D-C model was later extended to include support (Johnson and Hall, 1988), the emphasis being emotional and psychological support from supervisors and coworkers (e.g., Cieslak et al., 2007; Glaser et al., 1999; Rodriguez et al., 2001). In terms of organizational level support, among the workplace stress interventions (e.g., restructuring, training, and job redesign) studied, work-life balance policies and practices, which represent organizational efforts to improve workplace well-being through the provision of services and resources (e.g., employee assistance program), although being examined extensively elsewhere have been noticeably ignored in this stream of study (Giga et al., 2003; Grandey et al., 2007). Hence, there is a paucity of research that

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 3411 5214; fax: +852 3411 5583.
E-mail address: fchiang@hkbu.edu.hk (Flora F.T. Chiang).

investigates the influence of organizational level support, in particular work-life balance practices, which may act to buffer the impact of high job demands on job stress. Efforts to minimize employees' job stress are therefore being restricted by a lack of sound evidence on the moderating role that such practices play. To incorporate such practices into the job D–C model allows us to pull together the various dimensions of both job content and context factors cohesively in systematic theory building.

Although there is an extensive body of research dedicated to job stress, another surprising absence is that most prior studies are limited to the manufacturing (e.g., Conti et al., 2006; Wall et al., 1996) and health care (e.g., Schaubroeck and Merritt, 1997; Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003) settings. Few recent studies, if any, have been conducted in the hotel and catering industry context, which is uniquely different from other settings (Karatepe and Uludag, 2007). Addressing the above gaps is therefore particularly important given that food service work is typically associated with a high level of service failure (Miller et al., 2000; Yoo et al., 2006), frequent exposure to customer complaints (Wildes, 2007), limited job control and low decision latitude (Papadopoulou-Bayliss et al., 2001), and other work characteristics, which make these employees highly susceptible to elevated levels of job stress.

Building upon and extending previous research, our study contributes to the job stress literature in several ways. First, we extend the current job D–C model by incorporating human resource management practices, in particular, work-life balance practices and their potential impacts to alleviate the effects of job demands on job stress. Second, we address the impact of both job content (demands and control) and context (work-life balance practices) that may play in moderating the relationship between job demands and job stress. Since employees' affective and psychological evaluation of their job is shaped not only by job content (job demands and control) but also by their perceptions toward job context variables (i.e., the availability of organizational support such as work-life balance practices), these two components should be studied concurrently. Finally, our study addresses concerns noted by a number of researchers (e.g., Stamper and Johlke, 2003) that much of the past research has been conducted using subjects (e.g., manufacturing workers) which are quite different from those in food service industry (Karatepe and Uludag, 2008). Understanding and reducing employee stress is of growing importance to both hotel managers and researchers.

2. Stress literature

2.1. Understanding job stress and the job demand–control model

Stress is defined as the physiological and psychological reaction, either consciously or subconsciously, to a perceived threat or undesirable condition beyond one's immediate capacity to cope (Cranwell-Ward, 1998, p. 285). In the occupational setting, it is viewed as a reaction to demands (stressors) imposed by a work environment (Karasek, 1979).

Considerable research has sought to understand the nature of job stress and how various characteristics of a work environment create it. Karasek's (1979) D–C job stress model, for example, is one of the most influential guiding frameworks for the study of job stress (Butler et al., 2005; Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003). A critique of this and other stress models may be found elsewhere (see, for example, de Jonge and Kompier, 1997; Fletcher and Jones, 1993; Noblet et al., 2001; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999). The model primarily focuses on two sets of job characteristics, namely, job demands/work stressors and job control/work resources. As work stressors, job demands emanate from the physical work requirements (e.g., excessive workload and time constraints) and psychological aspects (e.g., repetitiveness) of a job. Although job

demands in their own right are not necessarily negative, they can become stressors when meeting these demands exceeds an employee's ability (Meijman and Mulder, 1998). Job control, in comparison, refers to one's control over his/her work processes and includes two salient dimensions: (i) skill discretion (i.e., require high skill level, need to learn new things, non-repetitive work and creativity) and (ii) decision authority (i.e., freedom in how to work, affords various levels of decision-making and have say over what happens).

Central to the job D–C model is the notion that it is not the high demands of work per se that cause stress but rather "the joint effects of the demands of a work situation and the range of decision making freedom (discretion) available to workers facing those demands" that are associated with individual job strain (Karasek, 1979, p. 287). When job demands and control interact, the D–C model hypothesizes that they may create job stress. High strain conditions (i.e., high demands and low control) are said to create high level of job stress (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). High strain jobs (e.g., telephone operator, factory worker and waitstaff) represent those environments where the demands of the job are not matched with adequate levels of control and decision latitude (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). In this sense, stress can occur when individuals in highly demanding jobs (high job demands) are unable to exercise discretion or make independent decisions (low control and decision latitude) (Fox et al., 1993).

By contrast, when job control is high, high demand jobs do not necessarily result in stress. Instead, feelings of competence and accomplishment may result when both job control and job demands are high (Fernet et al., 2004). In other words, job control, a favourable work resource and coping mechanism, may influence the extent to which objective job demands are perceived as stressful. A sense of control not only affords job incumbents with a greater degree of autonomy and discretion in deciding how to carry out their tasks (Batt and Valcour, 2003), thereby increasing their ability to manage and cope with work demands (Ganster and Fusilier, 1989) and adjust work demands according to personal needs, abilities, and circumstances (Wall et al., 1996) but it also fosters feelings of competence and accomplishment (Fernet et al., 2004). Employees tend to feel more positive when they perceive more control over their work environments. As Ryan and Deci (2001) asserted, the psychological experience of control over job demands helps to reduce stress and is associated with feelings of well-being and contentment. Brymer et al.'s (1991) study similarly concluded that stress management programs that afford employees with greater control over their work responsibilities play an essential role in reducing stress. Thus,

H1a. Job demands will be positively associated with job stress. Job control will be negatively associated with job stress.

H1b. Job demands and control will interact to affect job stress. The highest levels of stress will occur when job demands are high and control is low.

2.2. Work-life balance practices

While job control is considered an enabling psychosocial resource that can potentially alleviate job stress, work-life balance practices are also believed to moderate the relationship between job demands and stress outcomes. Work-life balance practices encompass a wide range of programs, including flexible scheduling and work arrangements, family leave, employee assistance programs, counseling services, child care services, and the like (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Increasingly, organizations have initiated work-life balance policies as part of their overarching efforts to increase employee commitment (Grover and Crooker,

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات