



Reciprocal relations among job demands, job control, and social support are moderated by neuroticism: A cross-lagged analysis

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Abstract

This study investigated whether neuroticism moderates the relations among social support (from coworkers and supervisors) and work strain characteristics (i.e. job demands and job control). A full cross-lagged panel analysis was used to test whether social support predicts job demands and control or whether job demands and job control predict support among individuals with high and low neuroticism. Workers ($N = 247$; 42.1% men) of five occupations filled out questionnaires twice, with a time gap of 1 month. Work characteristics (job demands, job control, and social support) together with age and gender were included in a two-group path model with neuroticism as a moderator. Neuroticism moderated relations between social support and work strain characteristics: among individuals with high neuroticism, high job demands predicted low support from supervisors and low job control predicted low support from supervisors. Among individuals with low neuroticism, high support from supervisors predicted high job control.

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1. Introduction

One of the most recognized and most frequently tested models of work stress, the Demand-Control-Support model (DCS; Johnson & Hall, 1988; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), assumes that employees who perceive high job demands, low job control (i.e., work strain), and low social support are likely to develop many health problems. Although these relations are assumed to be unidirectional, some researchers suggest that the relations between work characteristics (i.e., demands, control, and support) and wellbeing may be reverse, that is, wellbeing affects work characteristics (cf. De Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtmans, & Bongers, 2004; Zapf, Dormann, & Frese, 1996). Another stress model, the Michigan model (House, 1981) suggests causal relations among work characteristics: social support predicts work strain characteristics (i.e., job demands, control, or other work stress indices). Possible reciprocal relations between job strain characteristics (i.e. demands and control) and social support were not sufficiently investigated. The present study tests whether the relations among work strain (job demands and control) and social support may be reciprocal.

1.1. Relations between social support, and work strain characteristics

Some models of stress suggest unidirectional relations between social support and job demands or control (or other work stress dimensions) or no direct relations between these constructs. For example, the Michigan model hypothesizes that social support affects perception of work stress characteristics (cf. House, 1981). It is also possible, that the relations between social support and job demands or job control are bidirectional. The transactional perspective on stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) emphasizes the interaction between person and environment and reciprocity of the person-environment relation. In line with this approach high perceived social support may affect perceiving high job control or low job demands.

The majority of the research analyzing relations among work characteristics focused on effects of support on work strain characteristics. Social support from different sources predicted perception of lower work stress (Chen et al., 2003; Holder & Vaux, 1998). Workers with high support from managers were less likely to report role conflict, role ambiguity, or work overload (Swanson & Power, 2001). Academic managerial support predicted job control but not job demands among nurses during academic training (Jones, Smith, & Johnston, 2005). However, opposite relations were also found: high task related-overload predicted a lower level of social support 12 months later (Torsheim, Aaroe, & Wold, 2003).

1.2. Relations between personality, social support, and work strain

Personality variables might aid in resistance to stress or affect perceptions of support (Pierce, Lakey, Sarason, Sarason, & Joseph, 1997). Among others, personality factors are seen as responsible for the subjective appraisal of one's social resources (Cutrona, Hessler, & Suhr, 1997). Personality variables may constitute a group of the third variables in relations between work characteristics (demands, control, and support) and wellbeing (cf. Zapf et al., 1996); such third variables affect all variables in the model. Therefore, they have to be systematically tested.

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