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Role ambiguity, group cohesion and job satisfaction: A Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) Study from Mexico and Spain

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Abstract In line with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, this paper studies the relationship between role ambiguity (Demand) and group cohesion (Resource) to predict job satisfaction. This study was carried out at the same multinational company in Mexico and Spain ($N = 537$), where blue-collar workers are organized in work groups. It is hypothesized that high levels of role ambiguity are related to low job satisfaction whereas positive high levels of group cohesion are related to high job satisfaction. In addition, it is posited that group cohesion could buffer the relationship between role ambiguity and job satisfaction. Results confirm the JD-R theory with regard to direct effects. Moderating effects have been found in both countries but, contrary to the hypotheses, since these strengthen the negative effect of role ambiguity on job satisfaction. These results are relevant since nowadays, organizations need to deal with increasingly higher levels of ambiguity. The results are also being commented from a cross-cultural research perspective.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Ambigüedad de rol;
Cohesión de tarea;
Cohesión social;
Satisfacción laboral;
Investigación
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Ambigüedad de rol, cohesión grupal y satisfacción laboral: un estudio con el modelo demandas y recursos laborales (JD-R) en México y España

Resumen Siguiendo la teoría de las demandas-recursos laborales, este trabajo estudia las relaciones entre la ambigüedad de rol (demanda), y la cohesión grupal (recurso) para predecir la satisfacción. El estudio se ha realizado en la misma multinacional en México y en España ($N = 537$), donde los operarios trabajan en grupos. Las hipótesis plantean que los altos niveles de ambigüedad de rol se relacionarán con una baja satisfacción laboral, mientras que

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altos niveles de cohesión grupal estarán relacionados con una elevada satisfacción laboral en ambos países. Además, se plantea que la cohesión grupal amortiguará la relación entre la ambigüedad de rol y la satisfacción. Los resultados confirman la teoría demandas-recursos en relación con los efectos directos. También se han encontrado efectos moduladores en los dos países, aunque en contra de las hipótesis, pues potencian el efecto negativo de la ambigüedad en la satisfacción. Estos resultados pueden ser relevantes para las organizaciones actuales dado el creciente nivel de ambigüedad. Los resultados también se comentan desde la perspectiva de la investigación transcultural.

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The Demands-Resources, model first, theory now -JD-R- (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2013), posits that working in highly demanding contexts where jobs require sustained physical and/or cognitive and emotional effort or skills caused by role ambiguity or time pressure, may produce over consumption of energy. These conditions could undermine employees' wellbeing, resulting in negative outcomes (e.g., lower levels of performance, job dissatisfaction, etc.). On the other hand, this theory indicates that job resources (physical, psychological, social and organizational facets of the job) may reduce job demands (i.e. buffering effect), can contribute to achieve work aims or can promote personal growth. Supportive peers, job control or group cohesion are examples of job resources.

The generalization of work groups in organizations as a management tool has provided an opportunity to study the JD-R theory since, work groups cannot only increase job' demands (e.g. task intensification, cognitive and social tasks) (Parent-Thirion et al., 2012), but also provide individual and group resources (e.g. peers support, more autonomy, task and social cohesion) (Treville & Antonakis, 2006). Thus, work groups could exert a double effect on workers as JD-R theory points out, depending on the balance between demands (ambiguous roles, etc.) and resources (group cohesion, etc.).

Literature on work groups underlines that role ambiguity (or absence thereof) and group cohesion are among the essential variables that contribute to successfully achieve goals (Carron, Eys, & Burke, 2007). Role ambiguity is a main demand in organizations subject to change (Antoniu, Davidson, & Cooper, 2003). Traditionally, blue-collar jobs tend to be simple, well structured, and stable over time; however, work groups seem to have altered this condition – thereby increasing job ambiguity (Kim, 2000).

In line with JD-R theory, this study seeks to test the effects of role ambiguity (demand) and group cohesion (resource) to explain job satisfaction in a multinational company from Mexico and Spain.

The Fifth European Working Conditions Survey (Parent-Thirion et al., 2012) reports that 67% of the European employees work in groups and 20% of the initiatives stored in the Bank of Best Practices of the Secretariat of Work and Social Prevention of Mexico (2013), are also based on work-groups. Moreover, the aforementioned work conditions survey includes poor social relationships and ambiguous

expectations in the psychosocial risks' category (Parent-Thirion et al., 2012).

According to Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2013) when job resources increase, job satisfaction tends to increase too. One important social resource in order to deal with organizational demands is group cohesion. With regard to direct relationships, cohesion is one of the most important determinants of success in groups (Evans & Dion, 2012; Rico, Alcover, & Tabernero, 2011; Smith, Arthur, Callow, Hardy, & Williams, 2013). Positive relationships have consistently been found between cohesion and job satisfaction (Picazo, Gamero, Zornoza, & Peiró, 2015; Roulin, Mayor, & Banger, 2014) and recent meta-analyses also show the relevance of this construct to explain job results (Castaño, Watts, & Tekleab, 2013). However, other studies find that not always does cohesion have a positive impact on job outcomes pointing to a more complex relationship between these two constructs (Ahronson & Cameron, 2007; Salas, Grossman, Hughes, & Coultas, 2015; Wise, 2014). JD-R theory's indirect effects could contribute to the explanation of these complex relationships, since group cohesion may exert a buffering role between job demands and job satisfaction (Jimmieson, McKimmie, Hannam, & Gallagher, 2010).

Cross-cultural studies – including data from Mexico and Spain – suggest maintaining the focus of research on the differences amongst countries (Minkov, Blagoev, & Hofstede, 2013). Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002) compared forty-two countries and found that motivational methods may not be straightforwardly transferrable among regions and Ng, Sorensen, and Yim (2009) observe that the relationship between satisfaction and performance is influenced by cultural values. JD-R theory also posits the relevance of analysing this subject, but there are not many studies addressing these differences. On exception is the research paper of Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, and Salanova (2006), which posits that JD-R theory, could be applied to various national contexts. Even though no specific study comparing Mexico and Spain has been found, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1993), Mexico and Spain are closed in relation to uncertainty avoidance whereas when it comes to power distance, Mexico seems to be a more hierarchical society, so that subordinates could expect to be told what to do in their jobs. Similarly, both countries score differently with regard to collectivism, Mexico scoring higher than Spain.

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