

Social Support, Job Demands and Work-Nonwork Balance

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Social Support, Job Demands and Work-Nonwork Balance

Marjolein C. J. Caniëls, Evi Herbots, Irina Nikolova, and Sara De Hauw

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Abstract

Job hindrances are demands that disturb the optimal functioning of an employee (e.g., administrative hassles), whereas job challenges reflect demands that require energy but are nevertheless stimulating (e.g., workload, task complexity). In this chapter, a literature review will be provided, describing existing studies and combining these into a conceptual framework and propositions for future research in the field of job demands and work-nonwork balance. It will be argued that job hindrances and challenges have different impact on work-nonwork balance, as experienced by employees. Furthermore, this chapter will reflect on the role of social support, as prior work has shown that organizational support (e.g., flexible working hours) as well as support from the direct supervisor (e.g., performance

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feedback) and from colleagues (e.g., emotional support) may positively influence work-nonwork relationships. Finally, the role of gender will be discussed, as presumably female employees may be coping with more challenges affecting their work-nonwork balance than male employees. Concluding, as indicated by literature, we expect that organizations may benefit from enhancing social support toward their managerial employees and at the same time lower the hindrance stressors to improve the experienced work-nonwork balance. An empirical investigation is needed to establish whether gender is a differential factor in how job demands and social support influence the experienced work-nonwork balance.

Keywords

Work-life balance · Job demands–resources model · Supportive work environment · Social support · Gender differences

Introduction

Nowadays organizations are operating in rapidly changing, globally competitive, high technological environments in which the boundaries between work and life are becoming increasingly fuzzy. Individuals are fulfilling multiple roles and responsibilities regarding their work (e.g., being a manager, team member, colleague) and nonwork (e.g., being a partner, parent, friend) environment simultaneously (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Greenhaus et al., 2012). Due to this proliferation of multiple roles, finding work-nonwork balance has become the ultimate goal for many to achieve, a fact that is widely discussed in the popular press and media.

In academic literature, the concept of balance between worktime and nonwork activities has been investigated broadly, mostly through the constructs of work-family conflict and enrichment (Casper et al., 2018). Yet, it can be argued that conflict and enrichment do not completely cover the concept of work-nonwork balance. A meta-analysis of Casper et al. (2018) shows that while balance has often been conceptualized and operationalized as conflict and enrichment, balance is more strongly related to satisfaction. Balance is a psychological construct, in the sense that it concerns the perception of the individual and not what others think it is or should be. Moreover, balance is a complex construct with multiple meanings, such as satisfaction, involvement, effectiveness, and fit. Hence, following recommendations of Casper et al. (2018) work-nonwork balance can be defined as “*Employees’ evaluation of the favourability of their combination of work and nonwork roles, arising from the degree to which their affective experiences and their perceived involvement and effectiveness in work and nonwork roles are commensurate with the value they attach to these roles*” (Casper et al., 2018, p. 16).

In sum, there is a need for a profound understanding of the concept work-nonwork balance. This chapter will investigate predictors that influence actual balance in the perception of individuals themselves. Several predictors will be discussed. Firstly, job hindrances and challenges are addressed in relation to

experienced work-nonwork balance. Secondly, the role of social support is described as well as the possible influence of gender. Subsequently, this chapter will discuss a conceptual model that connects all factors in relation to work-nonwork balance. Finally, implications for management will be identified as well as avenues for future research.

Job Demands as Contextual Predictors of the Experienced Work-Nonwork Balance

To understand the contextual work environment, the job demands-resources (JD-R) theoretical framework developed by Demerouti et al. (2001) is applied as a theoretical lens. JD-R is considered one of the leading models to explain negative (i.e., job demands) and positive job characteristics (i.e., job resources) within a work environment.

Studies have demonstrated that job demands do not always have a negative influence on employees (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Podsakoff et al., 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). For example, the challenge-hindrance stressors model (Van den Broeck et al., 2010) indicates that a differentiation needs to be made within the construct of job demands between job hindrances (or hindrance stressors) and job challenges (or challenge stressors). Hindrance stressors are job demands that require a certain level of energy and are therefore disturbing the optimal functioning and personal growth of an employee (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; LePine et al., 2005; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Examples are administrative hassles, role ambiguity, role conflict, resource inadequacies, interpersonal conflict, and organizational politics (LePine et al., 2005; LePine et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Challenge stressors, on the other hand, are job demands that require a certain level of energy but are also stimulating and as such have a positive influence on personal growth (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Crawford et al., 2010; LePine et al., 2005; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Examples are workload, time pressure, job complexity, and responsibility (LePine et al., 2005; LePine et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014).

Although both hindrance and challenge stressors are associated with higher strain, they show differential effects on attitudinal, emotional, motivational, and performance outcomes (LePine et al., 2016). The hindrance stressors are associated with exhaustion and cynicism, which are the main components of burnout, whereas the challenge stressors are associated with vigor and dedication, which are the main components of engagement (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). As such, hindrance and challenge stressors affect the personal growth and well-being of employees in a different manner.

The hindrance stressors are depleting the mental and physical resources (e.g., energy) which negatively affect job performance and job satisfaction (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Based on the work-home resources theory (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), there is likely to be a negative spill-over from the work environment into the nonwork environment (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Ilies et al., 2009), and as

such a depletion of the mental and physical resources of the person leading to lower levels of functioning and satisfaction in the nonwork domain. As work-nonwork performance (i.e., being successful) and satisfaction (i.e., being satisfied) are key components in the definition of the construct balance, it can be assumed that hindrance stressors have a negative influence on the experienced work-nonwork balance. Based on the above literature, we formulate the following theoretical proposition.

Proposition 1a: Hindrance stressors are negatively related to the experienced work-nonwork balance.

Some job demands are experienced as challenging, i.e., as challenge stressors (e.g., workload, job complexity, responsibility). A challenging environment has a motivational potential and stimulates the mental and physical resources leading to higher work engagement (i.e., vigor and dedication), lower levels of cynicism and higher performance. Challenge stressors are depleting the mental and physical resources (e.g., energy) leading to health impairment, but at the same time personal resources are gained which positively affect job performance and job satisfaction (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). The gain of resources (i.e., motivation) is higher than the loss of resources (i.e., health impairment) due to the promise of goal achievement, which is a motivational force provoking a feeling of involvement, engagement, and overall satisfaction. Moreover, based on the work-home resources theory (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), there is a positive spill-over from the work environment into the nonwork environment (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Ilies et al., 2009), and as such a reinforcement of the mental and physical resources of the person leading to higher levels of functioning and satisfaction in the nonwork domain. As work-nonwork performance (i.e., being successful) and satisfaction (i.e., being satisfied) are key components in the definition of the construct balance, it is likely that challenge stressors have a positive influence on the experienced work-nonwork balance.

Proposition 1b: Challenge stressors will enhance the work-nonwork balance experiences.

The Moderating Role of Social Support

Besides demanding job characteristics, the JD-R theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) also acknowledges the existence of resourceful job characteristics. These job resources refer to “*physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the work context that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development*” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 3; Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 4; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Examples are social support, performance feedback and autonomy. Job resources foster work engagement, leading to positive personal and organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction and performance (e.g., Demerouti

et al., 2001). In this research, the influence of social support on the relationship between job demands and the experienced work-nonwork balance is investigated.

To create a complete view on social support at work, three important sources of social support at work are incorporated: (1) social support from the organization; (2) social support from the supervisor; and (3) social support from colleagues (Dikkers et al., 2007). Social support from the organization is defined as the extent to which an employee perceives support from the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Mayo et al., 2012; Rhoades et al., 2001) taking into account personal goals, values, opinions, and well-being of all team members leading to increased commitment and positive outcomes. Social support from the supervisor is the extent to which an employee perceives support from the direct supervisor (Mayo et al., 2012) and thus whether a supervisor is approachable to get help or to discuss important issues, or shows appreciation for his/her team members. Social support from colleagues is the extent to which an employee perceives support from the colleagues (Mayo et al., 2012) and thus whether colleagues among each other are supportive in personal and work-related issues.

According to the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), job resources have a direct positive influence on the employee well-being and as such on the experienced work-nonwork balance. According to the JD-R model, job resources, such as social support, may have a moderating influence and consequently may buffer or reinforce the effect of job demands on job strain and eventually the experienced work-nonwork balance. Social support is expected to reduce the level of tension, dissatisfaction, and strain that follow from job hindrance demands (Blau, 1981).

The buffering effect of social support on the relationship between the hindrance stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance can be explained as follows. When the external environment lacks resources (e.g., social support from the organization, supervisor, and colleagues), individuals are unable to cope with the negative influence of the hindrance stressors (Dikkers et al., 2007). Consequently, these hindrance stressors may lead to a depletion of the mental and physical resources of the person (e.g., energy and motivation), which in turn may lead to lower work performance and satisfaction (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), as well as lower nonwork performance and satisfaction, due to the negative spill-over from the work environment into the nonwork environment (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Ilies et al., 2009; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), and thus to lower work-nonwork balance. However, when the external environment provides many resources (e.g., social support from the organization, supervisor, and colleagues), individuals are able to cope with the negative influence of the hindrance stressors (Dikkers et al., 2007). As such, the hindrance stressors may influence the mental and physical resources of the person (e.g., energy and motivation) to a smaller extent (i.e., buffering effect), and consequently, there is no or a lower negative effect on the work and nonwork performance and satisfaction, and thus the work-nonwork balance.

Proposition 2a: The expected negative relationship between hindrance stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance will be moderated by social support

(i.e., it will be stronger for those who experience low social support than for individuals who experience high social support).

The moderating or reinforcing effect of social support on the relationship between the challenge stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance can be explained as follows. When the external environment provides many resources (e.g., social support from the organization, supervisor, and colleagues), the positive influence of challenge stressors (e.g., energy and motivation) are likely to be reinforced. Consequently, the positive effect on the work and nonwork performance and satisfaction will be higher compared to situations with low social support. In turn, the perception of work-nonwork balance will be more prominent as well.

Proposition 2b: The positive relationship between challenge stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance will be moderated by social support (i.e., it will be stronger for those who experience high social support than for individuals who experience low social support).

The Joint Moderating Role of Gender and Social Support

In the academic literature, there are two main schools of thought influencing the perceptions about women and men in the work and nonwork environment: (1) the gender difference model (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Keene & Quadagno, 2004), and (2) the gender similarity model (Bielby, 1992; Keene & Quadagno, 2004). The gender difference model (Bielby & Bielby, 1989) argues that the differences between women and men remain significant due to the fact that the nonwork environment (e.g., family, home) continues to be predominantly managed by women, while the work environment (e.g., employment, career) continues to be primarily dominated by men. Contrastingly, the gender similarity model (Keene & Quadagno, 2004) demonstrates that there are no significant differences in gender anymore due to behavioral shifts and household arrangements leading to an equal contribution of both women and men to the work-nonwork environment. The question whether there are gender differences or similarities on the experienced work-nonwork balance remains undecided in the academic literature.

Following the theories of the gender difference model (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Keene & Quadagno, 2004), it is assumed that the interaction effect of social support and job demands on the experienced work-nonwork balance may be further moderated by gender. More specifically, the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between work demands and work-nonwork balance is expected to be stronger for female employees than for male. This assumption is based on the social role theory (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Kite, 1987), which states that the gender belief systems are strengthened by the roles that women and men occupy in society. Women tend to occupy roles that require interpersonally oriented characteristics (e.g., nurturance, empathy, sensitivity to the needs of others), which are consequently labelled as feminine, while men tend to occupy roles that require task-oriented characteristics (e.g., decisiveness, independence), which are labelled as masculine. From a gender stereotypic perspective (Eagly and Johnson, 1990),

women are to behave and lead in an interpersonally oriented style, while men are expected to behave and lead in a task-oriented style.

As women are predominantly relationship-oriented and men are predominantly task-oriented, it is expected that women may obtain more personal resources out of the social and interpersonal support from the organization, supervisor, and colleagues than men. As such, it is expected that a higher level of personal resources (e.g., energy, motivation, positive mood) leads to a higher work-nonwork functioning and satisfaction, and eventually to a higher work-nonwork balance for female employees than for their male counterparts. Consequently, a stronger buffering effect is expected on the negative relationship between hindrance stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance as well as a stronger reinforcing effect of social support on the relationship between challenge stressors and work-nonwork balance for female employees than male.

Proposition 3a: The buffering effect of social support on the negative relationship between hindrance stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance will be stronger for female employees than for male.

Proposition 3b: The reinforcing effect of social support on the positive relationship between challenge stressors and the experienced work-nonwork balance will be stronger for female employees than for male.

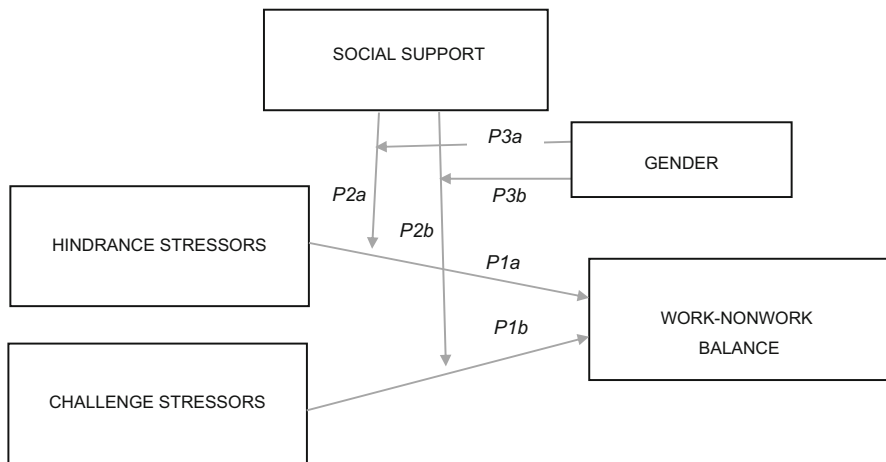


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework – The joint moderating role of gender and social support on the relationship between job demands and the experienced work-nonwork balance. Note: Hindrance stressors refer to job demands that require a certain level of energy and are therefore disturbing the optimal functioning and personal growth of an employee. Challenge stressors refer to job demands that require a certain level of energy but are also stimulating and as such have a positive influence on personal growth. Social support is defined as the extent to which an employee perceives support from (1) the organization; (2) the supervisor; and (3) from colleagues. Gender refers to male vs female. Work-nonwork balance is defined as “Employees’ evaluation of the favourability of their combination of work and nonwork roles, arising from the degree to which their affective experiences and their perceived involvement and effectiveness in work and nonwork roles are commensurate with the value they attach to these roles” (Casper et al., 2018, p. 16)

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework.

Discussion

The theoretical contribution of this chapter lies in extending current knowledge on the role of job hindrances and challenges for work-nonwork balance as experienced by employees. The conceptual model combines the propositions that followed from the literature. It was shown that in addition to job hindrances and challenges, social support from the organization, the direct supervisor and from colleagues may be positively related to the experience of work-nonwork balance. Moreover, the literature review indicated that female employees are thought to be experiencing more challenges affecting their work-nonwork balance than male employees.

In this study, it was proposed that the relationship between hindrance or challenge stressors and work-nonwork balance will be a linear one. Despite these theoretically supported expectations, one should note that it is possible that the association between these concepts could be quadratic in nature. Specifically, as indicated in literature, due to a positive spill-over between work and nonwork environment (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Ilies et al., 2009), challenge stressors can boost employees' balance experiences. Yet, this positive spill-over might have an optimal point wherefrom the positive working of the challenge stressors on employee work-nonwork balance experiences may take a turn. When the level of challenge stressors exceeds a certain point, negative spill-over experiences are likely to occur. Subsequently, one could reason that whereas low levels of challenge stressors can lead to lower work-nonwork balance due to scarce motivational incentives, medium level of challenge stressors can result in higher work-nonwork balance, and high level of challenge stressors can (again) trigger poor work-nonwork balance experiences, due to excessive time pressure and work duties. Finally, the assumptions in our model are not tailored to a specific function level (i.e., management vs non-managerial position). Yet, it is possible that compared to some types of non-managerial jobs, individuals who occupy managerial position may experience a higher level of challenge stressors (Courtright, Colbert, & Choi, 2014), which may imply that managers are more invested in dealing with these challenges and are investing more time and resources in their work.

Altogether, literature provides evidence for the positive effect of social support on work-nonwork balance. In this chapter, it was suggested that social support will buffer the relationship between job stressors and work-nonwork balance. However, when drawing conclusions on the effects of social support on individual outcomes, one should be mindful of the potential dark side of social support. For instance, similarly to the findings reported in the growing literature on the dark side of positive leadership styles (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016), it is possible that when employees feel supported, this support will trigger them (make them feel like they have) to invest even more energy in dealing with the work stressors, which may tax even further their experiences of balance.

In addition, when testing the potential of social support to alleviate the negative consequences of job stressors on one's work-nonwork balance, it is important to acknowledge that other confounders might co-shape this relationship. For instance, the moderating effect of social support may be contingent upon factors such as, just to name a few, mastery climate, trust in the social environment, and identification with the leader, the team and the organization. If one distrusts the management or colleagues, and does not identify him or herself with the team or the organization, (s)he will be less affected from the social support, and will be less likely to become overwhelmed trying to re-pay the invested in them trust and support.

Besides contextual factors (e.g., social support), we suggested that the way social support affects the relationship between job stressors and work-nonwork balance will be contingent upon the gender of the employee. Literature today provides two theoretical frameworks, building on two opposing assumptions: (1) the gender difference model (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Keene & Quadagno, 2004), and (2) the gender similarity model (Bielby, 1992; Keene & Quadagno, 2004). Empirical work is needed to show which of the two models would be valid in relation to our theoretical propositions. If future studies show that gender can significantly moderate the interaction effect between work stressors and social support on *work-nonwork balance*, this would give support for the gender difference model; however, if no significant effect of gender is found (i.e., it is not acting as a second-stage moderator in the two-way interaction of social support and job demands on work-nonwork balance), that would lend support for the gender similarity model (Bielby, 1992; Keene & Quadagno, 2004) that maintains that there are no significant differences in behavioral patterns between the two genders, because of behavioral shifts in the past few decades from the traditional gender roles (e.g., women taking on more household work, while men being the money providers) to more equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities in both work and nonwork environment.

Practical Implications

Despite its theoretical nature, this chapter may hint toward some implications for practice. Understanding which conditions at work lead to poor work-nonwork balance experiences, and which factors mitigate these negative effects is vital. In order for organizations to tackle quickly and efficiently adverse working conditions (mostly hindrance but also too high challenge stressors) and to prevent the harmful effects of work-life interference, they need to regularly screen (i.e., through an annual employee satisfaction survey) for the more prevailing stressors employees are confronted with. Identifying these stressors may help prevent energy depletion and may limit the chance of excessive disruptions in employee's functioning. As hindrance stressors typically drain the psychological, physical, and emotional resources and energy of people and lead to strain, exhaustion and decreased levels of engagement (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Crawford et al., 2010; LePine et al., 2004; LePine et al., 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007), organizations should strive to limit these as much as possible, and where it is not possible to do that, they should try to provide

those resources that are most efficient in helping individuals deal with the demands at hand.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings presented earlier in this chapter, and in line with existing empirical work (Dikkers et al., 2007), it is argued that high social support can engender high levels of work-nonwork balance. Implication of such positive causation would be that organizations are encouraged to invest in nurturing a positive and supportive work climate (ensuring that employees feel support from the organization, from management, and from colleagues), that can improve work-nonwork balance experiences. However, increasing social support as a stand-alone action may not give the desired outcome, if the hindrance stressors remain too high (Dikkers et al., 2007). Organizations may be able to increase perceptions of support by shaping a positive work environment in which trust and cooperation as well as open dialogue between supervisors and team members, and between colleagues are nurtured. An open dialogue could be stimulated as part of people performance management in which supervisors are providing a secure environment to their team members to speak up and to give feedback in a positive, constructive manner (Edmondson, 1999).

Conclusion

This chapter shed light on the role of job hindrances and challenges for the extent to which employees experience work-nonwork balance. Specifically, a reflection was given on the role of social support, as prior work has shown that organizational support (e.g., flexible working hours) as well as support from the direct supervisor (e.g., performance feedback) and from colleagues (e.g., emotional support) may positively influence work-nonwork relationships. Furthermore, the role of gender was discussed, as presumably female employees may be coping with more challenges affecting their work-nonwork balance than male employees. It was concluded that organizations may benefit from enhancing social support toward their managerial employees and at the same time lower the hindrance stressors to improve the experienced work-nonwork balance. To provide guidance to future studies concrete examples were given for future empirical investigations that could assess the role of job stressors and social support for work-nonwork balance as well as establish whether gender is a differential factor in how job demands and social support influence the experienced work-nonwork balance.

Suggestions for Future Research

As this chapter presents a conceptual model, future studies are encouraged to empirically test the assumptions that are put forward. A longitudinal research design is recommended that would provide insights into the extent to which hindrance and challenge stressors affect work-nonwork balance experiences across time. Longitudinal designs (including at least three wave data) would also allow testing of cross-

lagged effects. Even though based on prior research, in the theoretical model relationships are proposed with specific causality (i.e., job stressors predicting work-nonwork balance), one could argue that balance experiences could affect employee appraisal of their work context as high or low on certain job stressors and resources. A cross-lagged examination of such effects may be valuable in shedding light on these issues. Because of lacking knowledge on the suitable time lags for exploring the link between work stressors and work-nonwork balance, future research may benefit from a more explorative approach, testing data collected across multiple shorter periods of time (Dormann & Griffin, 2015). “Shortitudinal pilot studies” using short lags may help scholars to design an optimally spaced panel study that can provide further information about the causal effects over time.

In addition, it may be interesting to assess whether the needs of social support over the years and across their career evolve differently for men and women. If female employees experience more stressors (e.g., glass ceiling or role expectations that interfere with their functioning at work), they may require more social support, especially when they aspire to advance their careers (Jauhar & Lau, 2018). Yet, female employees may perceive social support as being less sincere and may have higher levels of distrust if they are confronted on the one hand with supportive environment, and on the other hand with experiences of a glass ceiling. Anti-discrimination and gender equality policies at work may help to counteract such experiences. Hence, it can be valuable for future studies to incorporate information about such organizational policies and their effect on female employees’ experiences of fairness and trust.

Last, to avoid common method bias (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012), studies may benefit from using multi-source data. For instance, experiences of work-nonwork balance could be measured using two sources (raters) – the individual and the partner (spouse or relatives in the close environment). Such measurement would allow an assessment of the degree of agreement between raters. Even though challenge and hindrance stressors are best surveyed among employees (as their own appraisal of these stressors is key to their experiences), one could argue that data including the assessment of these stressors by co-workers and managers is meaningful, because it will allow a comparison of the different perceptions of the work context. This could feed back to the larger discussion on the value of multi-source evaluations of work stressors and related outcomes (Heidemeier & Moser, 2009; Lance et al., 2008).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Combining Economic Work and Motherhood](#)
- ▶ [Impact of Dark Triad Personality Traits and Workplace Incivility on Employees Well-being](#)
- ▶ [Social Support of Seniors in Difficult Situations – Implications for Social Work](#)
- ▶ [Youth Entrepreneurship as a Panacea for Youth Unemployment: The Role of Social Workers](#)

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