



The effect of social support in the workplace on job satisfaction

Exploring the mediating role of gender

Bachelor thesis Personeelwetenschappen

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Abstract

Job satisfaction is an important factor for many organizations as a lack of it can have a lot of negative consequences for both employees and organizations. In line with previous research, social support is an important indicator of job satisfaction. This study aimed to gain more insight into the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction, and how gender influences this relationship. To gain insight into this relationship, this research made use of various theories, such as the Self-Determination theory, Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment, and the process of socialization. Based on these theories, it was argued that there is a positive relationship amongst social support and job satisfaction and that this relationship is stronger for women, compared to men. To test the conceptual model of this research, a sub-dataset of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS, 2015) was used. A total of 32,539 respondents were included in the analysis of this research. A positive significant relationship was found between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. This indicated that high levels of social support go together with high levels of job satisfaction. Next to that, a positive moderation effect of gender on the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction was found, which indicated that this relationship is stronger for women, compared to men. In conclusion, this study provides some evidence on the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction and in what way gender influences this relationship.

Keywords: Social support, job satisfaction, gender, self-determination theory, Kanter's theory of structural empowerment, socialization

Introduction

In research conducted by World of Work commissioned by Monster Worldwide, Inc (2018) it is found that people in Europe have become less satisfied with their job. While in 2017 71% said to be satisfied with their job, in 2018 this was only 67%. This decrease in job satisfaction has raised several questions within organizations, as: why is this number decreasing? And what can we do about this? These questions were raised because job satisfaction amongst their employees is quite important to organizations as it is, on the one hand, an important outcome to measure the organizational life within the company, and on the other hand, in case of the lack of job satisfaction, it predicts a lot of behaviors organizations want to avoid such as absenteeism, turnover intentions and changing between jobs (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2011).

In the research mentioned above, respondents have written that one of the things they would need to have a higher job satisfaction was more support in their successes in the workplace. This is, relatively, an easier way for an organization to increase job satisfaction within their organization. Most of the people spend on average more time interacting with their colleagues at work than at home with their family. Logically, social support in the workplace is an important factor affecting employee's health, well-being, and job satisfaction (International Labour Organization, 2020). Research has shown that social support helps to reduce negative factors like stress, depression, anxiety, and isolation, as well as promotes a lot of factors, including satisfaction (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2013). Similarly, social support promotes job satisfaction in a way that social support is an empowerment resource for an employee (Kanter, 1977). The employee uses this feeling of empowerment to do their job to the best of their ability, which results in a higher level of job satisfaction as the employee most likely experiences a positive affective state that results from an individual's appraisal of his or her own work (Locke, 1976).

However, based on the different socialization process for men and women, the relationship between social support and job satisfaction is possibly different for the different genders. The differential socialization of both genders is a well-researched concept where the male socialization often does not emphasize on feelings, but on autonomy and independence (Deaux, 1984; Vaux, 1988; Deaux & Lewis, 1984). On the contrary, female socialization emphasizes on warmth and the search for intimacy. Therefore, women might be more likely to react to socially supportive relationships within the workplace, compared to men.

Gender differences in the relationship amongst social support in the workplace and job satisfaction have rarely been addressed in research especially in the past two decades. However, looking at research done on gender differences earlier like the research of Deaux (1976), Vaux (1988), and Deaux & Lewis (1984), theories are suggesting that gender is indeed an important concept in this relationship. The rise of the LGBTQ+ community has shaken up the traditional view on men and women, resulting in a different view on the concept of gender. Despite this, the traditional process of socialization might still play a large role in society. Given the above, this paper aims to research whether the traditional socialization process still has the traditional gender effect on the relationship between social support and job satisfaction, even though the view on gender in society has changed.

Next to theoretical contributions, this paper also has practical contributions for organizations. As shown above, job satisfaction has an influence on a great number of things within an organization and is therefore very important to maintain in high numbers. This paper aims to make organizations aware of the importance of job satisfaction and the positive effect it could have on the organization if employees have high levels of job satisfaction. Next to that, if there is a significant relationship, organizations can use social support to increase job satisfaction amongst their employees. Social support can be triggered by little things within the organization: making sure useful information is easily shared, creating a feedback tool, or other HR-interventions. If this relationship is significantly different for men, compared to women, a company could use this information to implement different kinds of interventions to make sure job satisfaction levels increase for both men and women.

Based on the previous, this study aims to look at the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction with the influence of different genders. This results in the following research question: *“To what extent does social support in the workplace lead to job satisfaction, and is this relationship influenced by being a man or a woman?”*

Theoretical Framework

The relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction

The focus of this paragraph of the research is the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. Etzion (1984) defines social support in the workplace as support that focuses on consensual problem solving, or sharing useful information, and giving and/or receiving advice from different persons, including your colleagues, supervisors, and managers. This definition provided by Etzion is specifically for social support in the workplace, rather than social support in general. Next to that, Locke (1976) explained job satisfaction as a pleasurable or positive affective state that results from an individual's appraisal of his or her own work.

First of all, the positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction is explained by the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory suggests that individuals have three basic needs which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three psychological needs are required for intrinsic motivation which Deci and Ryan (1985) define as the engagement in a task for the rewards inherent in the task, such as interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction. Specifically relevant for this research is the concept of relatedness. Relatedness is the feeling of being cared for and connected to others. This feeling of relatedness is in line with the definition of social support in the workplace provided by Etzion (1984). Whenever a colleague or supervisor puts time and effort in giving advice or sharing useful information, it gives the employee the feeling of being cared for and being connected, which is the feeling of relatedness. Thus, this feeling of relatedness, which is in line with social support in the workplace, is an important factor in creating intrinsic motivation. According to Deci & Ryan (1985), one's intrinsic motivation consists of three things: interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction. It is likely to expect that, as satisfaction and motivation are very closely defined, job satisfaction will have a similar effect as intrinsic motivation. That is the feeling of relatedness, which is in line with social support, as one of the three basic needs required for intrinsic motivation and thus an important factor in predicting this intrinsic motivation. This effect of relatedness on intrinsic motivation will be similar to the effect on job satisfaction. All things considered, the Self-Determination Theory describes why a positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction can be expected.

Another theory that supports the positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction is Kanter's theory of structural empowerment (1977) which explains that structural empowerment ensures that employees do their job to the best of their ability. Kanter (1993) defined the power in empowerment as the "ability to mobilize resources to get things done" (p. 201). This power consists of information, support, resources, and opportunities to learn and grow. When these power resources are unavailable, the power is 'off' and effective work is not possible. Specifically relevant for this research is the power source of support. Kanter (1977) and Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk (2001) describe this power resource as receiving feedback and guidance from subordinates, peers, and superiors. This is in line with the definition of social support in the workplace by Etzion (1984) as it includes giving and receiving feedback from colleagues, supervisors, and managers. Alongside this, job satisfaction also has a place in this theory of structural empowerment. According to the definition of Locke (1976), job satisfaction includes both intrinsic job satisfiers and extrinsic job satisfiers. Relevant to this research are the intrinsic job satisfiers. These are triggered when there is a fit between your job abilities and the performance requirements on your job. Thus, whenever an employee does their job to the best of their ability, the fit between their job abilities and the performance requirement is better. This fit is also known as a person-job fit (Kristof-Brown, 2007). This good fit triggers the intrinsic job satisfiers, which make sure one's job satisfaction gets higher. Thus, social support makes up a part of structural empowerment and acts as a power source to trigger employees in doing their job to the best of their ability. Whenever this occurs, intrinsic job satisfiers are triggered and increase job satisfaction. In summary, the structural empowerment theory supports the positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction.

Social support has been shown to have a positive effect on job satisfaction by many earlier studies. These studies showed that social support in the workplace had a positive outcome on job satisfaction among individuals in various workplaces (e.g. Rashied & Sultan, 2014; Brown et al., 2014; Brough & Pears, 2004; Charonsukmongkol, et al., 2016; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013).

According to the theories stated above and the results of previous research, social support in the workplace has a positive effect on employees' job satisfaction.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Social support in the workplace is positively related to employee's job satisfaction.

The relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction moderated by gender

In this paragraph, we will look at how gender influences the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. In this research, the definition of gender is the biological definition: being born male or female (World Health Organization, 2002). This concept of gender is an important influence on support-relevant social interactions. This influence will be explained below.

As proposed by different researchers (Deaux, 1984; Vaux, 1988; Mathud, Ibanez, Bethencourt, Marrero, & Carbelleira, 2003; Olson & Schultz, 1994) one of the reasons why gender differences in the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction might occur is the phenomenon of socialization. Socialization is the process through which people are educated to be proficient members of society. It describes the way that people come to understand the expectations and norms of society, to be aware of societal values, and to come to accept society's beliefs (Introduction to Sociology, 2013). As described by Olson and Schultz (1994), female socialization often emphasizes warmth and search for intimacy whereas male socialization often deemphasizes the expression of feelings, focusing more on independence. Furthermore, Defares, Brandjes, Nass, and van der Ploeg (1984) found in their research that men, due to their socialization process, more often used an active cognitive strategy to solve their problems or to find solutions for a case, whereas women tended to seek out social support. This general tendency for both genders is reinforced through all developmental stages for human beings. Therefore, by the time adulthood is reached, these tendencies of active cognitive strategies or seeking social support is quite likely to be a well-learned behavior pattern. Thus, this likely means that compared to men, women tend to value social support differently than men do overall. Because of their socialization process, social support comes in very valuable when wanting to find a solution for a case while men, on the other hand, are not as likely to value social support as much when wanting to find solutions for a case.

In the past, a lot of research is done on gender differences in societal behaviors (Deaux, 1984; Olson & Schultz, 1994; Defares et al., 1984; Schumaker & Hill, 1991). These studies give a basis for the gender differences being studied in this research. All of the studies found that

compared to men, women were more likely to seek out and react to support from others. Thus, it is in line with previous research, to assume that the positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction is stronger for women compared to men.

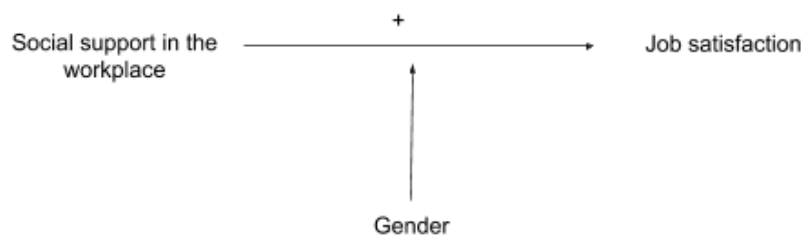
Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Gender moderates the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction in such a way that the effect between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction will be weaker for male employees in comparison to female employees

All the hypothesis will lead to the following conceptual model:

Figure 1

Conceptual model



Methods

Research design

The current research has used the data of 35 countries that have taken part in the 6th edition of the European Working Condition Survey (EWCS) carried out by Eurofound. The ECWS is carried out every five years since 1990 to develop policies to improve the living and working conditions of inhabitants of Europe (Eurofound, 2017b). This study is a cross-sectional survey study (Levin, 2006) because the data used for this study was collected at one point in time between February and December of 2015 (Eurofound, 2017b). This survey falls under quantitative research and has an explanatory approach.

Sample

The sample of the ECWS covered 35 countries. Most countries within the ECWS are member states of candidate members of the European Union, except for Switzerland and Norway. The target population within these countries included individuals who were 15 years or older at the time of the survey, except for the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Norway, and Spain. The required age for these countries was 16 years or older because of the minimum legal working age. Eurofound required each country to have a sample size of at least 1000 participants (Eurofound, 2017a). For some countries, this number was larger to guarantee an accurate representation of the workforce (Eurofound, 2017a). Countries who enlarged their sample size to guarantee an accurate representation of the workforce were countries like Poland (1200); Spain (1300); Italy (1400); France (1500); United Kingdom (1600); Germany (2000) and Turkey (2000). In the same way, other countries were allowed to increase their minimum sample size, but only Belgium (2500); Slovenia (1600) and Spain (3300) did so. In the end, this resulted in a total sample size of 43,850 respondents (Eurofound, 2017a).

The sample used in this research had a response rate of 74.21% and thus consisted of 32,539 respondents of whom 48.6% were male and 51.4% were female. The average age of the respondents was 42 years ($M = 42.11$). The majority of the respondents worked full-time (81.7%) and had a permanent contract (79.4%).

Table 1
Demographics

Characteristics	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age		42.11	11.75
Gender			
Male	48.6%		
Female	51.4%		
Type of contract			
Permanent	79.4%		
Fixed-term	11.5%		
Temporary	1.2%		
Apprenticeship	.5%		
No contract	6.7%		
Other	.6%		
Contract hours			
Full-time	81.7%		
Part-time	18.3%		

N = 32539

Procedure

According to Eurofound (2017), the respondents were selected based on a multistage random sampling design. The first stage included the stratifying of the sample into strata based on region and urbanization in each country (Eurofound, 2017a). Based proportionally on the number of people employed within each stratum the sample was allocated to the strata. Secondly, Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were randomly selected using probability proportionate to size (Eurofound, 2017a). To make sure there was a maximum of 20 surveys within one PSU, Ipsos used a minimum of 50 PSUs for each country. Within every PSU, households or addresses were selected from a country's register. If this was not available, Ipsos used enumeration for selection instead of the register. Lastly, Ipsos included a step-by-step guideline for the selection of individuals within these households or addresses. From every country, a national fieldwork partner agency cooperated with Ipsos for this research (Eurofound, 2017a). As the surveys were done in a face-to-face interview, there were certain principles every interviewer had to follow. This included that every interviewer made at least four attempts to contact an address by an unplanned visit and left at least two weeks between the first and second attempt. Whenever recruitment via phone was used in a country, at least 10 phone calls had to be made to contact the respondent.

Next to the principles that needed to be obligated by the interviewers, they also had to take training in interviewing (Eurofound, 2017a). Besides, the interviewers had to sign a confidentiality agreement and had to explain to the respondents that they were guaranteed anonymity over their answers. Also explained was that participation was voluntary but encouraged and could withdraw from answering any question.

Across almost all countries for all surveys, the study used computer-aided personal interviewing software (CAPI). Luxembourg used their own system which is called Nipofield (Eurofound, 2017). The original language of the EWCS is English, but the survey was translated into 49 different languages to ensure every respondent could be asked all questions. The main approach used concerning translation relied on the TRAPD model, which means: Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting, and Documentation. (Eurofound, 2017). This approach took two independent translations which are then combined and fused into a third version. Whenever languages were spoken in two or more countries, the process of harmonization of the surveys relied on the discussion between the teams accountable for the different versions, before the fused version. Whenever languages were spoken in various countries but were no substantial differences in the language, the translation used TRAPD in the country where there is a higher number of respondents speaking the language. To maintain consistency, the translation of the so-called trend questionnaire was reformed only in case of substantial inconsistencies between the English version and the translation.

The survey was done face-to-face in an interview, in combination with an introduction letter to stress the importance of taking part in the study. The interviews took between 20 and 120 minutes, but the average length was around 40 minutes although this average differed per country (Eurofound, 2017).

To ensure the quality of the ECWS, 146 quality control targets supervised all the stages of the research. The dimensions being monitored were: timeliness and punctuality, coherence, accessibility, comparability, accuracy and relevance. (Eurofound, 2017).

Instruments

For almost all variables, respondents could answer '(8) DK', '(9) refusal', or '(7) not applicable'. These answers were taken into this research as missing values and were deleted list-wise in the data analysis.

Social support: The variable social support in the workplace was measured by five items (Appendix 1). An example of one item was: “Your colleagues help and support you”. The five items were scored on a 5-Likert scale: ‘(1) always’, ‘(2) most of the time’, ‘(3) sometimes’, ‘(4) rarely’, and ‘(5) never’. A Principal Axis Factor analysis with an Oblimin rotation was done. Within the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) was .714, which indicated a good fit (Glen, 2016), and Barlett’s Test of Sphericity (χ^2) was significant ($p < .001$). According to the Principal Axis Factor analysis, there was a 1 factor-solution when looking at the eigenvalue (> 1) and the scree plot. The explained variance of this factor is 52.28%. Lastly, within the reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha has shown that the scale of social support in the workplace has an internal reliability of .772. All items, except for Q89D “I generally get along well with my work colleagues”, contributed positively to the reliability of the scale. The Cronbach’s alpha (.768) of Q89D indicated that the item should be deleted. Contradictory, this was not done. This item is very important to the scale in terms of content because it keeps the balance between items related to managerial social support and collegial social support. Therefore this item was kept in the scale. Concluding, based on the factor analysis and the reliability analysis, the scale of social support in the workplace with the five items included were accepted for this research.

Job Satisfaction: The variable of job satisfaction was measured by four items (Appendix 1). An example of one item was: “I am enthusiastic about my job”. Three out of four items were measured on a 5-Likert scale: ‘(1) always’, ‘(2) most of the time’, ‘(3) sometimes’, ‘(4) rarely’, and ‘(5) never’. One item was measured on a 4-point scale: ‘(1) very satisfied’, ‘(2) satisfied’, ‘(3) not very satisfied’, and ‘(4) not at all satisfied’. To conduct one scale of items with different measuring scales, the scores of the 4-point scale were multiplied by 1.25 to make sure they were in line with the scores of the 5-Likert scale. A Principal Axis Factor analysis with an Oblimin rotation was used. Within the factor analysis, the KMO was .709 which indicated a good fit (Glen, 2016), and Barlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). The Principal Axis Factor analysis showed that there was a 1 factor-solution when looking at the eigenvalue (>1) and the scree plot. The explained variance of the scale was 50.61%. Within the reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha showed that the internal reliability of this scale was .636 and all items contributed positively to this internal reliability. Concluding, based on the Principal Factor

Analysis and reliability analysis, this research has resulted in two factors: Job satisfaction and Social support in the workplace.

Gender: The variable gender was measured by one item. The respondent was asked by the interviewer to fill in a household grid which included: '(1) male', '(2) female', and '(9) DK'. The item of gender was recoded into 1 = 0; 2 = 1, because we expect that females experience a stronger relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction.

The research also included two control variables: age and contract hours. First of all, the variable age was measured using one item: "Starting with yourself, how old are you?". According to Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi & Jeswani (2014) age can have impact on the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction because people's desire to interact with one another and their satisfaction level they receive from this interaction decline when they get older. Contract hours were measured also by one item: "And do you work part-time or full-time?" Contract hours were included in this research, because part-time employees are typically less involved with their colleagues, as they spent fewer hours per week at work.

Analysis

Firstly, the data were checked for errors and outliers, which were deleted or kept in the data based on each case. All data were deleted list-wise for all variables included in this research, which eventually came down to 32,539 respondents. This is explained by the fact that some of the items included in the research were not supposed to be filled in by every respondent. Specifically for this research, some of the questions included in this data were not supposed to be filled in by people who work on a freelance basis without managers or colleagues.

After this, several assumptions for linear regression analysis were tested. These included: linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, multicollinearity, and normality. The assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, and multicollinearity showed no significant abnormal results. Normality was checked through the Test of Normality. The significance value of the Test of Normality was $< .001$ from which we can conclude it was significant. This suggests a possible violation of the assumption of normality. This is reasonably common in larger samples as the Central Limit Theorem makes sure that the spreading of the disturbance term will approximate normality (Statistics Solutions, 2013). Therefore, nothing was done with the data against this violation of Normality.

Lastly, the hypotheses have been tested. A linear regression analysis was applied by making use of IBM SPSS Statistics in conjunction with the PROCESS (v3.5) macro of Hayes (Hayes, 2013). A moderation model (model 1) was used to test both hypotheses of this research. The control variable was added in the regression analysis to rule out the effect of this variable on the model being tested.

Results

Descriptives and correlations

Table 2 presents the means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and Pearson correlations (*r*) between all the variables in this research. The table shows a positive significant correlation between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction ($r = .53; p < .01$). This indicates that people who experience higher levels of social support in the workplace are also more satisfied with their job. Social support in the workplace also has a significant correlation with both age ($r = .05; p < .01$) and gender ($r = -.02; p < .01$). This correlation means that higher levels of social support go together with people higher of age. A positive significant correlation could indicate that age correlates with social support in the workplace and supposedly has an influence on the relationship being studied in this research. Furthermore, job satisfaction correlates, next to the correlation with social support, significantly with both contract hours ($r = .07; p < .01$) and age ($r = .04; p < .01$). This indicates that higher levels of job satisfaction usually go together with individuals who work full-time and that higher levels of job satisfaction usually go together with individuals higher of age. Gender has more significant correlations with both contract hours ($r = -.03; p < .01$) and age ($r = .02; p < .01$). This could indicate that the control variables contract hours and age might affect the relationships being studied in this research as the variable of age is significant with all variables in this research and contract hours with both job satisfaction and gender.

Social support consisted of five items, each scaled on a 5-Likert scale. Therefore, the minimum score for social support was 5 and the maximum score was 25. Concerning job satisfaction, it consisted of 4 items of which 1 item was scaled on a 4-point scale and the remaining items were scored on a 5-Likert scale. The 4-point scale was multiplied by 1,25 so that the scores were in line with the remaining items.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables

	Min	Max	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social support in the workplace	5.00	25.00	9.87	3.75	1				
2. Job satisfaction	4.25	20.00	9.44	2.92	.53**	1			
3. Gender ^a	0	1	X	X	-.02**	.00	1		
4. Contract hours ^b	0	1	.82	.39	.00	.07**	-.03**	1	
5. Age	15	86	42.11	11.74	.05**	.04**	.02**	-.02**	1

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** , Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

^a, Gender coded 0 (male), 1 (female)

^b, Contract hours coded 0 (parttime), 1 (fulltime)

N = 32539 (listwise)

Regression analysis

To test both hypotheses, the PROCESS macro in SPSS was used (Hayes, 2013). The moderation model (model 1) was used to test the conceptual model of this research. The analysis was controlled for the variables age and contract hours. The outcomes of this analysis done with PROCESS can be found in Table 3. The R^2 of the model was .28. R-squared is a statistical measure representing the amount of variance for a dependent variable, in this research job satisfaction, explained by independent variables which are, in this research, gender, social support in the workplace, age, and contract hours (Data Science, 2020). Therefore, the explained variance in this research of job satisfaction by gender and social support in the workplace is 28.49%. Next to this, the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), and p-values for the variables can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Regression analysis (model 1) – Outcome of job satisfaction

Predictor Variable	B	SE	P
Constant	5.383	.081	< .001**
Social support in the workplace	.422	.005	< .001**
Gender	.158	.077	< .05*
Social support in the workplace x Men	-.015	.007	< .05*
Age	.003	.001	< .05*
Contract hours	-.265	.036	< .001**

*, $p < 0.05$

**, $p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 1 proposed that social support in the workplace has a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees. As shown in table 2, it was found that social support in the workplace is significantly associated with job satisfaction ($B = .422$; $SE = .005$; $p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of social support in the workplace are positively linked with higher levels of job satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that gender moderates the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction in such a way that this relationship will be stronger for women in comparison to men. As shown in table 2, it was found that there is a significant negative interaction effect of social support in the workplace and men on job satisfaction ($B = -.015$; $SE = .007$; $p < .05$). This means that the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction is moderated by gender in such a way that the relationship is stronger for women, compared to men. This effect is shown visually in figure 2, in which [.00 = male] and [1.00 = female]. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported.

Figure 2

The moderation effect of gender

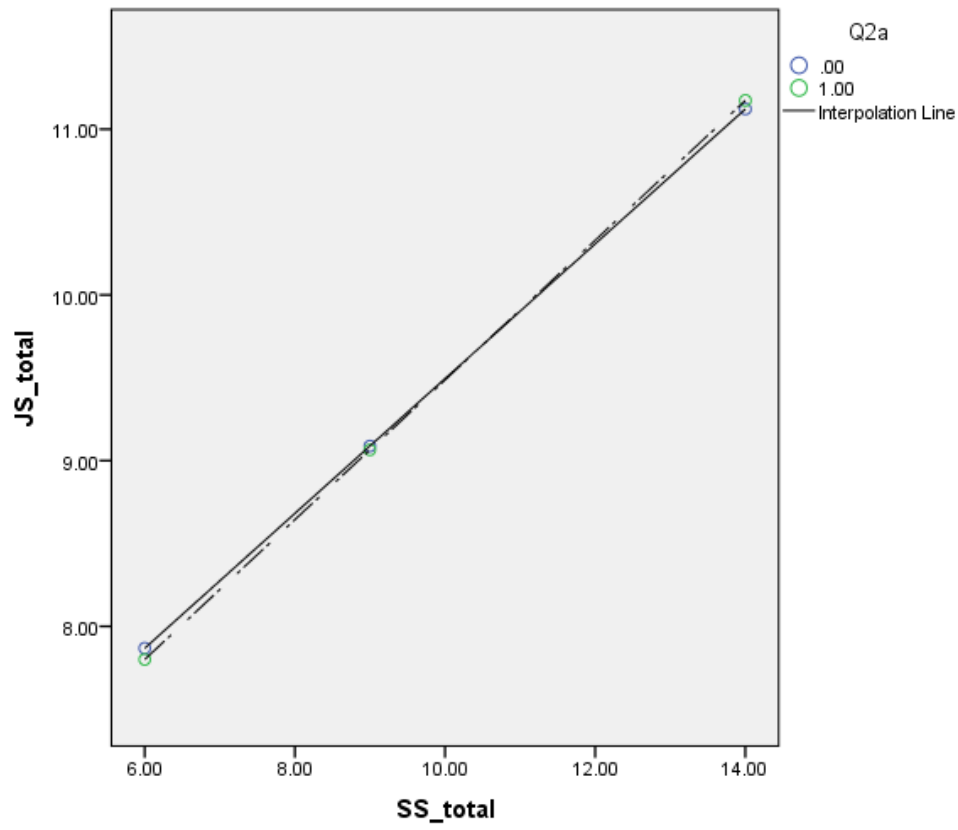
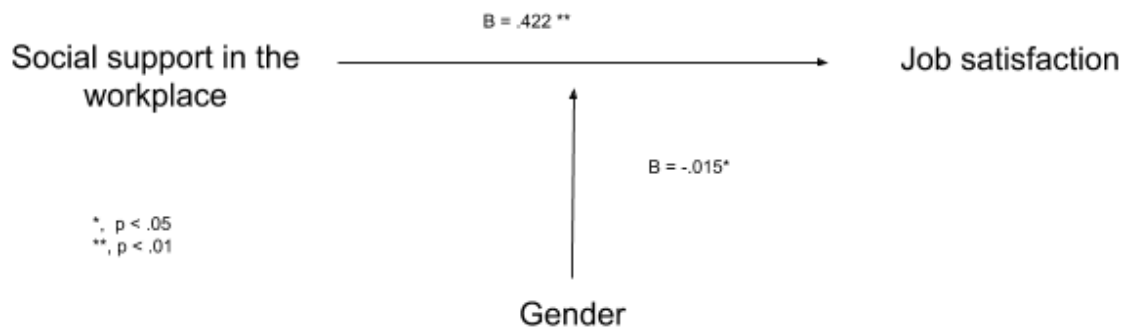


Figure 3

Summary results PROCESS analysis



Discussion

Job satisfaction has been decreasing among European people (Monster Worldwide Inc, 2018). Having low job satisfaction within your organization can harm your employees. Their turnover intention will go up, absenteeism will rise and there will be an increase in employees changing between jobs (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2011). Previous research showed that social support within the workplace could enhance job satisfaction amongst employees, as high job satisfaction has a lot of positive effects on employees within a company ((e.g. Rashied & Sultan, 2014; Brown et al., 2014; Brough & Pears, 2004; Charonsukmongkol, et al., 2016; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013). This research specifically focused on the influence of gender on this relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. Based on the literature, the effect of social support in the workplace on job satisfaction was expected to be higher for females, compared to males. Therefore, the following question was used in this research: *“To what extent does social support in the workplace lead to job satisfaction, and is this relationship influenced by being a man or a woman?”* To test this research question, a sub-set of the data of the European Working Conditions Survey (2015) has been used and analyzed. Correcting for missing values for the items relevant for this research, the sample used has a response rate of 74.21% and thus consisted of 32,539 respondents. The data gathered in the EWCS from these 32,539 respondents have been analyzed through IBM SPSS in combination with PROCESS v3.5 by Hayes (2013).

In agreement with hypothesis 1, it was found that there is a positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. In line with the theoretical framework provided in this research, both the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Kanter’s theory of Structural Empowerment (1977) explain this effect. In the research of Kanter (1977), social support makes up a part of structural empowerment. It also acts as a power resource to trigger employees in doing their work to the best of their ability. According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction consists of intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfiers. Intrinsic job satisfiers are triggered when there is a fit between your job abilities and the performance requirements on your job. Whenever the employee does their job to the best of their ability, this fit will be better. In conclusion, social support acts as a power source to make sure an employee does their job to the best of their ability, which makes sure there is a good fit. This good fit triggers one’s intrinsic job satisfiers, which make up a part of job satisfaction. Further explanation of the Self-Determination

Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Kanter's Theory (1977) can be found in the Theoretical Framework.

In line with hypothesis 2, it was found that the relationship between social support and job satisfaction is stronger for females, in comparison to males. In agreement with the theoretical framework presented in this research, this relationship is explained by the process of socialization (Deaux, 1984; Vaux, 1988; Mathud, et al., 2003; Olson & Schultz, 1994). In their research by Olson & Schultz (1994), it is described that female socialization tends to emphasize on warmth and search for intimacy whereas male socialization emphasizes on independence. By the time adulthood is reached, these tendencies are quite likely to be a well-learned behavior pattern. Therefore, it is likely that females tend to value social support differently than men do. In line with the theories and empirical research provided in this research, the effect of 'relatedness' and 'support as a power source' on job satisfaction as described are presumed to be lower for men, compared to women.

Limitations and further research

This study has a number of limitations. First of all, the data used in this research is gathered in a cross-sectional way, meaning the data is collected at one given point of time across the same population. As this method is used for gathering the data, it is important to be aware of its limitations. According to Solem (2015), there is no possibility to establish a true cause and effect relationship, because the cause-and-effect items are simultaneously assessed. Therefore, it is more difficult to draw causal conclusions. Thus, for future research, a recommendation is to use a longitudinal way of data gathering, meaning that data is collected over a given period (Sedgwick, 2014). This way of data gathering allows trends in an outcome to be monitored over time.

Secondly, the definition of gender could be considered not of this time. In the research of Schudson, Beischel, and van Anders (2019), they investigated how individuals define 6 gender/sex categories. These categories were: women, men, feminine, masculine, female, and male. The research showed that individuals define "woman" and "man" using both biological and sociocultural content, but define "feminine" and "masculine" with mostly sociocultural content, and define "female" and "male" using mostly biological content. These layers of

gender/sex have not been included in this research, but with the rise of the LGBTQ+ community, it might update the research to the current time and our current society to include different definitions or layers of gender/sex. Therefore, for further research, it is better to include a sociocultural aspect in the variable of gender, next to the biological aspect of gender.

Also, the variable of job satisfaction contains items with different measures. Three out of four items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and the remaining item was measured on a 4-point scale. To compute a scale score for this research, proportional transformation was used. According to Colman, Norris, and Preston (1997), standardization is a clear and natural approach that has been recognized valuable for analyzing empirical data, it certainly has disadvantages for comparing data from rating scales of different lengths. They argue that proportional transformation is likely to produce imprecise equivalences because they have concealed assumptions about human information processing. Therefore, for further research, it would be more accurate to use items that are measured on the same scales.

Next to that, this section provides a recommendation for further research concerning the construct of social support in the workplace. The questions included to measure the construct of social support in the workplace already indicated a bit that social support consists of different types. As this interview didn't focus on the differences within social support but on social support as a whole, it wasn't manageable to take a look at these differences. But, as explained by Brough and Pears (2004), on the one hand, you have differences in the person who gives you support and your relationship with this person. According to Brough and Pears (2004), this means there is supervisor social support, colleague social support, and managerial social support. On the other hand, there are different types of social support. The research of Brough and Pears (2014) indicates emotional social support and practical social support. For further research, it might be interesting to take into account whether different types of social support have different effects on social support and gender. Emotional social support could be a very interesting factor as it links with the socialization process (Olson and Schultz, 1994) explained in the Theoretical Framework.

Lastly, as explained by the HR professionals (appendix 2), it is very useful for organizations to know how different personalities respond to or perceive social support differently. In this way, they could use this knowledge to increase job satisfaction in different

ways. For example, it might be interesting to combine this research with personality tests such as the Big-Five Factor Structure (Golberg, 1992).

Theoretical implications

First of all, this research contributes to Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment (1977). This research connected Kanter's theory of Structural Empowerment to the definition of Locke (1976) in explaining why specifically this theory explains job satisfaction as a whole. In this way, the theory of Kanter (1977) is useable in a lot more research that is connected with job satisfaction. Concluding, Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment has been broadened by connecting it to the definition of Job satisfaction (Locke, 1976) making the Theory of Kanter applicable in more research.

Secondly, this research adds evidence to the process of socialization and how this affects the different genders in the present time. Even with the shift in society concerning the view on gender and sex because of the rise of the LGBTQ+ community, there still are these traditional kinds of socialization processes to be found across the population in the context of social support and job satisfaction.

Practical implications

This research has several practical implications. First of all, it can be helpful for organizations to know that social support in the workplace is a good strategy to increase job satisfaction amongst employees. The HR professionals interviewed (Appendix 2), also see the many positive outcomes of social support in the workplace. For organizations, there are many ways to make sure social support is implemented. HR professional B showed that the implementation of team coaches who guard the support within their team has shown positive outcomes in their organization. Next to that, HR professional A also acknowledges the importance of both social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. In FCMG companies job satisfaction must be high because employees cannot be negligent. According to Farrell (1983), there are different responses to job dissatisfaction, of which one is negligence. Because the FCMG companies have a lot of rules and regulations regarding food safety and hygiene, for this company job satisfaction amongst its employees is very important. Therefore, it is quite helpful to know that increasing social support is a good strategy for increasing job satisfaction. HR

professional B points out that the awareness of social support within the company is very useful. Usually, there are already some tools or persons within the organization which could work to enhance the social support within the organization, but employees simply have little or no knowledge about it. Therefore, it is useful for organizations to create awareness of the concept of social support within the company. In this way, organizations will not miss out on the benefits of the already implemented tools within their organizations.

Thirdly, in the last decade, there has been a tendency to use popular terms in your organization such as diversity and inclusion, according to HR professional A. Therefore, in the organization of HR professional A, there would be no division for males and females when wanting to implement an HR intervention or when creating a training or similar. Though, for the company of HR professional B, it comes in useful to know that males and females are different in perceiving social support. Organizations might create different interventions or a training to make sure the job satisfaction of both males and females possibly increases. Though, professional A and professional B argue that it is important that all employees can choose for themselves which training, or intervention, works best for them instead of the company choosing for the employees based on gender.

Lastly, this study analyses the relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction for a very large dataset, namely most of the European countries. Therefore, the generalizability of these results is strong and thus the outcome of this research can be used in many European countries. Concluding, this research adds more evidence for the relationship being studied, on a larger scale than one country.

Conclusion

Job satisfaction has been decreasing in Europe in the last decade (Monster Worldwide Inc, 2018). This research has taken a look into using social support in the workplace to increase job satisfaction. The findings in this research presented that there is a positive relationship between social support in the workplace and job satisfaction. This means that a high level of social support usually goes together with a high level of job satisfaction. High job satisfaction among employees is important for organizations as a low level of job satisfaction goes together with higher turnover intentions, more absenteeism, and more changes between jobs among employees (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013). Furthermore, this research also took

into consideration the influence of gender on this relationship. The findings indicated that this relationship, in general, is stronger for women, compared to men. This means that women, in comparison to men, benefit more from social support in the workplace to increase their job satisfaction.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Items EWCS

Table 4 – Question variable gender

Question	1	2
Gender?	Male	Female

Note: 9 was missing

Table 5 – Question control variable self-employment

Question	1	2
Are you working as an employee or are you self-employed?	An employee	Self-employed

Note: 8 and 9 were missing

Table 6 – Questions variable social support in the workplace

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Your colleagues help and support you	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Your manager helps and support you	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Your immediate boss provides useful feedback on your work	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Your immediate boss encourages and supports your development	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
I generally get on well with my colleagues	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree

Note: 7, 8 and 9 were missing

Table 7 – Questions variable job satisfaction

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Your job gives you the feeling of well done	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
On the whole, are you very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with working conditions in your main paid job?	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	X
My job offers good prospects for career advancement	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree not disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
I am enthusiastic about my job	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

Note: 7, 8 and 9 were missing

Appendix 2 – HR interviews

HR professional A

I have interviewed the HR Business Partner Supply Chain within Coca-Cola European Partners for the Netherlands. CCEP is a European bottler of the drinks that The Coca-Cola Company owns and advertises. CCEP is a leader in one of the largest FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) The organization offers consumers some of the world's leading brands and a wide choice of high-quality drinks. CCEP has 50 bottling plants within 13 countries in Europe. The Netherlands has one of the best performing bottling plants, located in Dongen. The interviewee is the HR business partner for this bottling plant. CCEP Netherlands has its headquarters in Rotterdam, where all of the supporting staff is located, such as marketing and finance. In Rotterdam another HR Business Partner is located as well, so the interviewee is not the only HR Business Partner of CCEP the Netherlands. Rules and legislation within CCEP are European minded because it is only located in European countries, but as the company is closely related to the American company the Coca-Cola Company, CCEP has to deal with rules from the American company as well. The interview aimed to make the connection between the theories discussed in this research and the practice in which HR employees operate. First, I have explained my research and the aim of this interview. Lastly, I have asked some questions about the content of my research in relationship with CCEP.

The interviewee sees social support as being there for one another or helping each other out when needed. For example, saying, "Thank you, you really helped me", is already an act of social support according to the interviewee. However, she feels like this act would be more satisfying for an employee when it comes from a manager or supervisor than from a colleague. Therefore, she makes a difference in collegial social support and managerial social support, because hierarchy is part of human nature. CCEP has several ways of helping to increase social support within the company. First, the company has an online feedback tool where every employee can give everyone within the company feedback if they want to, and they can ask someone to give them feedback as well. Before COVID-19, they used to have 'feedback Friday' at the office. Another point the interviewee made was that the organization is built in such a way that employees within teams are somehow dependent on each other, stimulating teamwork.

Everyone has their expertise, and therefore people within the team can help each other out most of the time.

Concerning gender, CCEP does not want to emphasize gender differences. The interviewee thinks that in practice, it should not matter whether someone is male or female. It matters more about how an individual experiences something and the differences between these individual experiences. Therefore, CCEP would not use the information that women and men differ in the relationship between social support and job satisfaction in practice, but would rather use the information that different people experience this relationship differently. Therefore, when wanting to increase job satisfaction by stimulating social support, CCEP would give employees different opportunities for trainings, HR interventions, or other implementations. In this way, every employee could see for him- or herself what suits them best, instead of creating a gap between the two genders. For future research, the interviewee recommends focusing on different personality traits or on cultural aspects. This would add more value to a company than focusing on only two groups, especially gender, as it is rather common within companies to focus on diversity and inclusion instead of differentiating between male and female. Especially culture is a big theme within large companies, because different cultures perceive certain things, for example, social support, in a different way. So for a company to support its employees in a good way, the interviewee feels like there should be more knowledge about how cultures perceive trainings, HR interventions, or other implementations.

When wanting to implement this research within CCEP, the interviewee says that other steps should be taken. For example, not all employees interpret job satisfaction the way that it is theoretically formulated. Therefore, there should first be research into what job satisfaction means to the employees of CCEP. A tool in which the company can measure job satisfaction could afterward be constructed. This makes sure that CCEP can keep track of job satisfaction at all times within different teams or across the whole company. This track record of job satisfaction could also signal whenever job satisfaction reaches a certain low. In this way, CCEP can do something about it on time and not when it is too late. Over a longer period of time, the organization could be able to see some patterns in when job satisfaction is high or when job satisfaction is low. When data like this is known, CCEP would be able to implement structural changes to the company to structurally have a high job satisfaction amongst the employees.

HR professional B

I have interviewed the HR adviseur organisatieontwikkeling of Centrum Indicatiestelling Zorg (CIZ). This is a Dutch foundation that determines which AWBZ (Algemene Wet Bijzondere Ziektekosten) care someone is entitled to. The assessors assess applications for AWBZ care. The following care could be indicated to an individual who applied: personal care, individual guidance, group supervision, and a short-term or long-term stay in a care facility that is funded by AWBZ, and lastly treatments that are funded by the AWBZ. The clients CIZ assess are chronically ill, have dementia, need psychiatric care, or have a physical, sensory, or mental disability. The client always needs someone around them to be able to function, therefore they mostly are extremely disable or ill individuals. Since 2020, CIZ have a share in the Wet zorg en Dwang, in which CIZ takes a look at whether individuals are willing to be hospitalized or not. When an individual is hospitalized, there will always be restraints to their freedom. If clients are willing to be hospitalized, the clients will always be hospitalized. If someone does not want to be hospitalized, it has to be decided in court whether this needs to happen against their will or not. Whenever individuals cannot decide for themselves, for example when someone has severe dementia, then CIZ decides on whether they need to be hospitalized or not.

CIZ is a national organization that is divided into four regions. All regions consist of different teams and each of these teams specifies a certain work area. A team, therefore, consists of different members who have expertise in their work area and also has a team coach. The function of the team coach is to make sure the work of the team is in line with the national operations. Staff support, for example, HR and finance, is on the national level instead of the regional level.

According to the interviewee, social support is a big factor within the organization. First of all, because the organization is split up into teams of 12-15 members who work on concrete goals together. The team coach supports the members of its team in a lot of ways, and the staff support on a national level helps the team coaches. The members of the teams work so closely together and get to know each other and each other's work so well, that it is quite easy for them to respond to each other quickly and helpfully. In this way, collegial social support is structurally enforced within CIZ. How CIZ would use social support to increase job satisfaction is, first of all, creating awareness for the support tools which are available within the company. HR can emphasize the important role of the team coaches in giving feedback and receiving feedback,

consensual decision-making, helping one another out with their job. CIZ, on the one hand, has a lot of pressure to handle as many files as possible in a short amount of time, but on the other hand, the team coaches and team members have to make sure they are on good terms with one another. This balance is quite hard for a lot of employees within the organization.

Concerning gender, CIZ would use the information that the relationship between social support and job satisfaction is stronger for women, compared to men. A thing to keep in mind though is that CIZ consists of 82% of female employees. But, the results from this research corresponds with what the interviewee sees whenever she visits different teams. Women tend to seek social support and empathy and men, overall, are more business formal. The interviewee argues that, whenever a company consists fifty-fifty of males and females, there would be other HR interventions to increase job satisfaction than is the case now. CIZ beliefs in 'maatwerk', so creating a division between males and females probably would not happen within the organization. CIZ would create a combination of interventions that is a mix of interventions on which females would respond better, in comparison to men, and interventions on which males would respond better, in comparison to women. The organization would allow individuals to choose which intervention, or training or similar fits the individual best.