

**DOES SOCIAL SUPPORT MODERATE BETWEEN JOB AUTONOMY  
AND JOB SATISFACTION?**

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## COMMENTS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The references as well as the editorial style as prescribed by the *Publication Manual (fifth edition)* of the American Psychological Association (APA) were followed in this dissertation. This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University to use APA style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.

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Through prayer God hears more than we say and answers more than we ask.*

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Opinions expressed and the conclusions arrived at are those of the author and not necessarily to be attributed to the North-West University or the School of Human Resource Sciences.

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## ABSTRACT

**Subject: Does social support moderate between job autonomy and job satisfaction?**

**Key terms: Banking group, job satisfaction, job autonomy, social support**

The success of the future for South African organisations relies heavily on its leadership, rather than on its management. Transformational leadership is critical to modern business, especially within the South African context. Transformational leadership is essentially about instilling a sense of purpose, in those who are led, and encouraging commitment by empowering employees through growth and development. This enables employees the opportunity to adapt and grow within organizations. The leader promotes change by creating a motivational climate which enhances growth, development, commitment, goal achievement and enjoyment. In order to facilitate the requirements of such an environment the employee needs social support that would enable job autonomy and ultimately job satisfaction.

The objective of this study was to investigate the moderating effect of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction, and to see if job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group can be predicted by their experience of job autonomy and social support in the workplace. The study was conducted within one of South Africa's leading financial institutions. In order to achieve the study objectives, data was collected from a sample ( $n=178$ ) which consisted of employees ranging from junior management (C/T levels) to middle management (M/P levels).

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Stepwise multiple regression analyses were carried out to determine whether the independent variables hold any predictive value regarding the dependent variable (job satisfaction). The results of the multiple regression revealed that gender had no effect in predicting participants' job satisfaction, indicating that effects for the other variables may operate similarly for males and females. It was found that participants' experience of autonomy, and the support they receive from colleagues are important in predicting their experiences of job satisfaction. However, the moderating effect of social support (from either colleagues or supervisor), was not supported in this research. This finding indicates that social support does not play a role in the translation of the experience of autonomy in job satisfaction.

Further research into the moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction is warranted.



## OPSOMMING

**Onderwerp: Kan sosiale ondersteuning modereer tussen werksoutonomie en werkstevredentheid?**

**Sleutelterme: Bankgroep, werkstevredentheid, werksoutonomie, sosiale ondersteuning**

Die toekomstige sukses van Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies steun swaar op die mate van leierskap wat toegepas word, eerder as slegs die aard van bestuur. Transformasie in leierskap is krities in moderne besighede, veral binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Transformatiewe leierskap se grondslag is gebaseer op die daarstel van 'n gevoel van waardigheid binne die werknemers wat aan leierskap onderwerp word.

Hulle verbintenis tot die maatskappy word verbeter deur bemagtiging, wat op sy beurt daargestel word deur groei en ontwikkeling. Dit skep die geleentheid vir aanpassing en groei in organisasies. Die leier dra by tot verandering deur aansporende werksomstandighede te skep, wat groei, ontwikkeling, verbintenis, die bereik van doelwitte en werkstevredentheid daarstel.

Om die benodighede van só 'n omgewing te fasiliteer benodig die werker sosiale ondersteuning wat werksoutonomie en uiteindelik werkstevredentheid tot gevolg het.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die modererende effek van sosiale ondersteuning tussen werksoutonomie en werkstevredentheid te ondersoek. Die studie wil bepaal of werkstevredentheid van werknemers in 'n groot bankgroep voorspel of bepaal kan word deur hulle ervaring van werksoutonomie en sosiale ondersteuning in die werkplek.

Die studie is onderneem binne een van Suid-Afrika se vooraanstaande finansiële instansies. Om die studie se uiteindelige doelwitte te bereik is inligting uit 'n voorbeeld (n=178) byeengebring wat uit werkers bestaan het wat wissel van junior bestuurvlakke (C/T-vlakke) tot middelbestuurvlakke (M/P-vlakke).

Beskrywende en afleibare statistieke is gebruik om die data te analiseer.

'n Stapgewyse, veelvoudige regressie-analise is onderneem om te bepaal of die afsonderlike veranderlikes enige water om as skattingsinstrument rakende die afhanklike veranderlike (werkstevredenheid) te dien dra.

Die resultate van die meervoudige regressie het bewys dat geslag geen uitwerking gehad het op die voorspelling van deelnemers se vlakke van werkstevredenheid nie. Dit is 'n aanduiding dat ander veranderlikes gelyksoortig vir mans en vroue bestudeer kan word.

Deelnemers se ervaring van outonomie en die ondersteuning wat hulle van kollegas ontvang speel 'n deurslaggewende rol in hulle ervaring van werkstevredenheid. Die modererende effek van sosiale ondersteuning (hetsy van kollegas of toesighouers) is nie binne hierdie navorsing ondersteun nie.

Die gevolgtrekking stel voor dat sosiale ondersteuning nie 'n rol speel in die ervaring van outonomie in werkstevredenheid nie.

Nadere ondersoek in die modererende uitwerking van sosiale ondersteuning in werksoutonomie en werkstevredenheid is geregverdig en nodig.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on the experiences of job autonomy and job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group. Also, the moderating effect of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction for this group of employees is investigated.

In this chapter, the problem statement is discussed, as well as the research objectives, the paradigm perspective of the research, the research design and method.

### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the most important challenges facing South Africa today is to respond to the changes in the way in which the world economy works. South African companies currently face many challenges which include strategic forces such as employment equity, diversity management, skills development, globalization, change management and the need to create a high performance organisation.

The South African economy which was once built purely on capital had to revolutionize. One of the factors contributing to these changes is globalization and an ever changing economic environment. Globalisation is complex and multifaceted (Fisher, 2003). De Wet (2002) explains that globalisation is a set of economic processes in which production, marketing and investment are increasingly integrated across borders and between institutions. The opening up of markets to the global economy is leading to the surfacing of a single market for goods, capital, technology, services, information and labour..

Efficiency is stimulated by unencumbered competition between economic players. This means removing barriers to trade and opening economies up to world markets by eliminating protectionist measures and minimising state interference in markets.

What does work mean for the present day employee? The modern day working environment is far from static and the supply and demand for certain skills and experience fluctuates. Occupations disappear and new ones emerge as technology influences the manner in which work is carried out. Our economy, both nationally and globally, also impacts on the needs of present day employees. The fundamental human capital challenges in South Africa today are to understand how people impact on the core business processes responsible for delivering the organisation's business strategies and goals. There is thus a greater demand for social support, job satisfaction and job autonomy.

This fluid working environment implies changing employee expectations of employers; they want greater social support, job autonomy and ultimately job satisfaction. Organizations are experiencing a rise of the career mercenary, where employees are acting independently and moving from employer to employer, in search of work that is more challenging, better development, exciting technology and improved financial rewards ([www.hrpractice.co.za](http://www.hrpractice.co.za)).

The organization that forms the subject of this research is a South African banking institute with 33 000 employees. The perceived leadership-operating model within the group, in order to achieve job satisfaction among employees, is illustrated in figure 1. According to the figure, creating a motivational climate that takes the needs of the employee into account (such as support and respect), could ultimately lead to achievement, commitment and ownership.

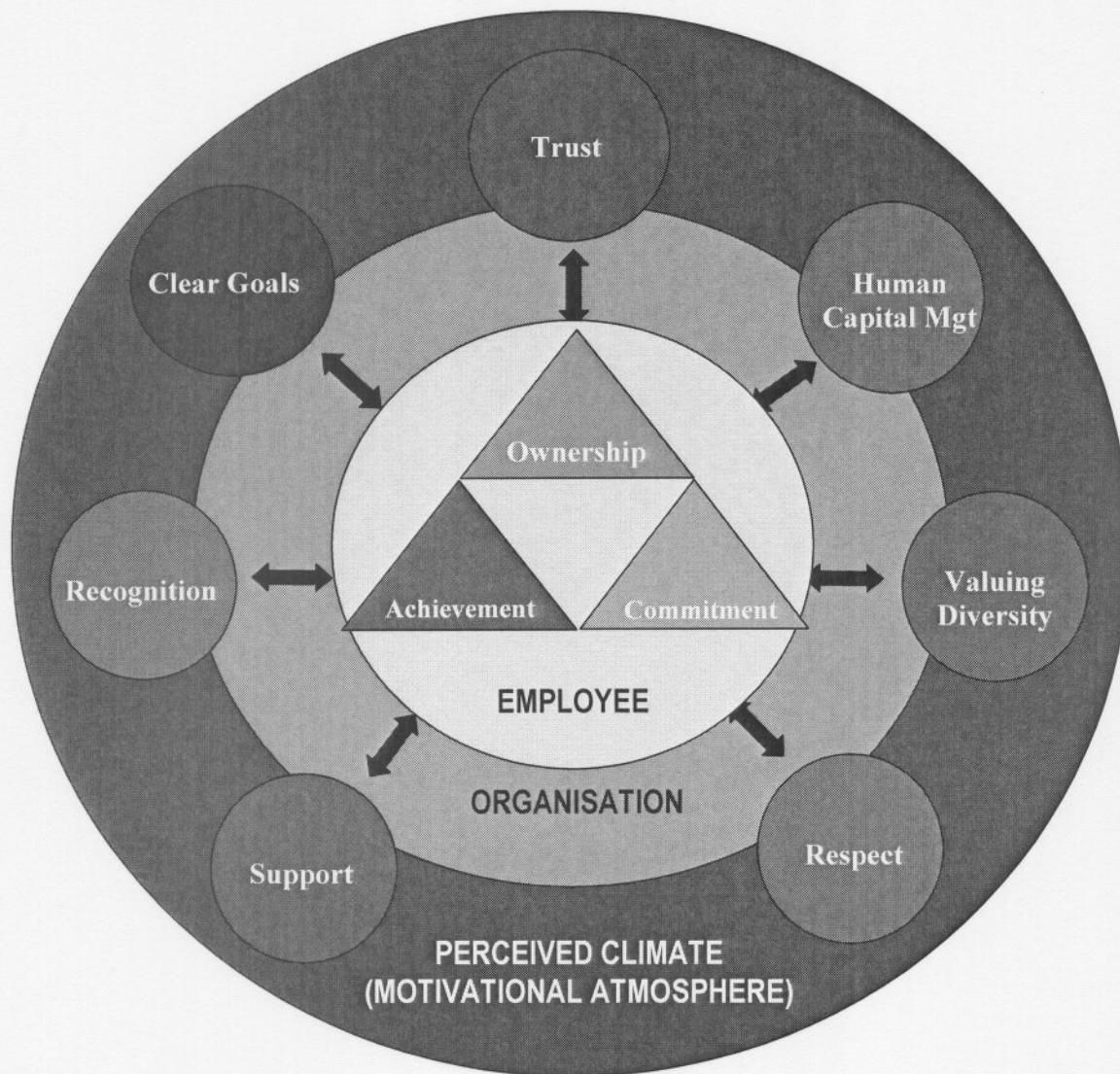


Figure 1. The perceived leadership-operating model (<http://portal.absa.co.za/>)

The world of work, and that of the current organization, has shifted to one in which job fulfilment and satisfaction is seen as organizational goals. Employees are looking not just for meaningful work, but a meaningful work climate/environment, which meets people's deepest needs for fulfilment - these will include relationships, spirituality, caring for the community, environment and humanity. In this environment, workers and management learn to transcend self-interests and take an active interest in other human beings, thereby creating a social environment that provides support and networks that enable job autonomy and satisfaction. Thus, studying the role of support in facilitation these 'higher' organisational goals of fulfilment and satisfaction seem of interest.

Social support is defined as the assistance (either tangible or intangible) and protection (shielding individuals from the adverse effects of life stress) given to others, especially individuals within the work environment (Maria, 2004). Organizational change has become an accepted component of today's occupational environment (Swanson & Power, 2001), and the demand for social support has therefore increased. Research has revealed that social support can have an impact on occupational stress and it is therefore hypothesized to have a positive effect on the experience of job satisfaction.

What in essence does social support mean for the employee? Social support is not a unitary concept. In an occupational environment, it definitely encapsulates the support given from immediate line manager to the employee, as well as support from co-workers to employees (Swanson & Power, 2001). Employees also gain support from family and friends external to the work environment. Swanson and Power, (2001) describe the content of support as either emotional (offering, caring, listening, giving advise) or instrumental (offering practical help in solving problems). This approach to categorizing support was however criticized as it did not take into account the specific content of support transactions, such as the characteristics of both the provider and receiver of the support. Support received in a work environment from line managers and co-workers reduce occupational stress, thereby increasing job satisfaction and job autonomy (Swanson & Power, 2001).

According to the Technological at Work e-newsletter (2004) employees require simple changes in their social support system to improve job satisfaction. The newsletter cited the example of Hewlett-Packard's Customer Engineering division, where in order to improve customer service, employees were given pagers. Employees were therefore expected to respond to customers outside business operating hours, resulting in increased overtime. However, the most severe consequence of trying to improve customer service was that employees lost quality time with their families, as they had to service these customer calls. Recognizing the problem, Hewlett-Packard therefore recognised this as a potential problem and managers therefore allowed employees to create their own work schedules. This created an improved social support system for the employee and provided the employee with a sense of job autonomy by allowing them to have freedom over their time schedules. The change to flexible working hours definitely allowed weekday customer engineers to make personal plans for weekends, with the understanding that their co-workers would assume responsibility

during that time. This study clearly illustrated that the flexible work hours (greater job autonomy) improved the social support system and possibly increased job satisfaction.

The definition of job autonomy extends to giving an employee who performs a task a considerable amount of discretion and control in deciding how to carry out the task (Langfred & Moye, 2004). Job autonomy is therefore, the degree to which an individual is given substantial freedom, independence and discretion in performing the assigned task (Langfred & Moye, 2004). Autonomy can include scheduling the work and/or determining the operations and/or procedures of the job. Thus, with a strong social support system, it could be hypothesized that employees who experience higher levels of job autonomy could ultimately also experience higher levels of job satisfaction.

According to Au and Cheung (2004), the loss of job autonomy leads to constant job stress, and continual strain on employees leads to lower levels of job satisfaction. This could impact on work behaviour and personal well-being. Research by Bandura (1986), Jackson (1983) and Kasl (1989) indicates that perceptions of control and mastery are associated with lower levels of psychological strains (in Au & Cheung, 2004), and a workplace with low levels of job autonomy produce high stress levels in employees. Increased stress levels reduce job satisfaction, as the employee experiences lower levels of confidence, learning initiative and work fulfilment (Au & Cheung, 2004).

Conversely, an increase in job autonomy could lower work stress (Au & Cheung, 2004). When the entire workforce experiences greater job autonomy, the entire workforce experiences lower levels of industrial stress. Thus when employees find that others around them are less stressed, their behaviour is inclined to improve, and they should be inclined to show more help-seeking and support-giving behaviour. A mutual readiness to help will definitely lead to increased levels of social support (Au & Cheung, 2004). According to Wellman, Carrington, & Hall (1988, in Au & Cheung, 2004) this increase in level of social support could lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and quality of life.

Work creates a sense of belonging; it meaningfully integrates people into society. People develop a sense of purpose, collectiveness and value as they deliver their tasks in society (Schreuder & Theron, 2004). Therefore, the personal meaning of work is aligned to the context of a societal meaning of work. Sigmund Freud nominated work and love as the two

essential ingredients of a happy and well-adjusted personality (Schreuder & Theron, 2004). In order to attain job satisfaction from work, people need to become more competent in influencing the direction of their working lives; to become less reliant on their employer for job satisfaction and to make efforts themselves to determine what it is that they want (Schreuder & Theron, 2004).

Job satisfaction is the mostly widely researched psychological variable (Lee, 2004), and most studies indicate a relationship between job satisfaction and job autonomy. Job satisfaction can be described as an affective or emotional response towards various aspects of one's job (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). It is described as a positive or negative attitude that employees have about their jobs. It results from how employees perceive their job and related matters such as supervisory style, social support, challenge, autonomy, pay and benefits (Coetsee, 2002). Research has revealed that in work environments where the potential realization of employees is inhibited; where they are threatened, over-controlled and pressurized consequences such as increased stress levels, burnout, absenteeism, increased turnover and a lack of commitment to the organization are apparent (Coetsee, 2002).

As technological societies advance more to a labour-base of skilled knowledge workers, economic-survival necessity and quality of life priority choices assume new meanings. In the early 20th century, immigrants worked long hours in factories for a minimum wage. It was hard, physical, often hazardous employment (Schreuder & Theron, 2004). Today's path of satisfaction in jobs and careers not only involves a better quality work environment, but also a deep respect for the human subject and social support. At a time of globalization, where mergers and split-offs occur, employees could sometimes feel insecure about future prospects of their career. In developing economies, such as South Africa, social support could therefore have a stronger relation with job satisfaction.

Prior research findings have often correlated social support with general well-being, stress and positive health. Social support could lead an employee to believe that he or she is cared for by the organization. Social support could lead to feelings of esteem and value, and give the employee a feeling of belonging to a network of communication and mutual obligation (Lee, 2003). Lee (2003) revealed that social support received from the immediate line manager, colleagues as well as friends and family, are positively related to job satisfaction.



In the research conducted by Nguyen, Taylor and Bradley (2003), it is clear that the degree of job autonomy is strongly related to overall job satisfaction. Their study reveals that as job autonomy increases, the probability of the employee experiencing job satisfaction increases, and even more for females than males (Nguyen, Taylor, & Bradley, 2003).

The objective of this research is thus to study the relationship between the experiences of job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group, and to test whether social support plays a moderating role in predicting employees' experience of job satisfaction.

The following research questions are indicated:

- How is the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction conceptualised in the literature?
- How can the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction be described in a large banking group?
- Can job autonomy and social support be used to predict job satisfaction?
- Does social support have a moderating role on the relation between job autonomy and job satisfaction?

## **1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this research is to investigate if job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group can be predicted by their experience of job autonomy and social support in the workplace. Specifically, the moderating effect of social support on the relation between job satisfaction and job autonomy will also be investigated.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

- To conceptualise the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction from the literature.
- To describe the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction in a large banking group.
- To test whether job autonomy and social support can be used to predict job satisfaction.
- To test whether social support has a moderating role on the relation between job autonomy and job satisfaction.

### **1.3 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH**

A certain paradigm perspective that includes the intellectual climate and the market of intellectual resources (Mouton & Marais, 1992) directs the research.

#### **1.3.1 Intellectual climate**

The intellectual climate refers to the variety of non-epistemological value systems/beliefs that are underwritten in any given period in a discipline. It is a collection of beliefs, values and assumptions that do not directly deal with the epistemological views of the scientific research practice because it normally originates in a non-epistemological contexts (Mouton & Marais, 1992). In order to determine the intellectual climate of this research, the disciplinary relevance and meta-theoretical assumptions are discussed.

#### **1.3.2 Discipline**

This research falls within the boundaries of the behavioural sciences and more specifically Industrial Psychology. Industrial Psychology refers to the scientific study of people within their work environment. This implies scientific observation, evaluation, optimal utilization and influencing of normal and to a lesser degree, deviant behaviour in interaction with the environment (physical, psychological, social and organisational) as manifested in the world of work (Munchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002).

The sub-discipline of Industrial Psychology that is focused on this research is Personnel psychology. Personnel psychology is concerned with all aspects of theory of psychology applied to understanding differences between individuals, that is, it is an applied discipline that focuses on individual differences in behaviour and job performance and on methods of measuring and predicting performance (Munchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002).

### **1.3.3 Meta-theoretical assumptions**

Five paradigms are relevant to this research. Firstly, the literature review is done within the humanistic paradigm and systems theory, and secondly the empirical study is done within the behaviouristic, positivistic and functionalistic paradigms.

#### **1.3.3.1 Literature review**

The humanistic paradigm emerged in the 1950's and has continued as a reaction to positivistic and scientific approaches to the mind (<http://www.answers.com/topic/psychology>). Humanistic psychology is a psychological perspective that emphasizes the study of the whole person. Humanistic psychologists believe that an individual's behaviour is connected to his inner feelings and self-image (Penny, Perlow, & Ruscitto, 1996).

According to the humanistic paradigm, there is a strong focus on human meaning, understandings and experiences involved in growing, teaching and learning. Thus unlike the behaviourists, humanist's believe that humans are not solely the product of the environment (Penny et al., 1996). There is a strong emphasis on characteristics such as love, grief, caring and self worth, and within this paradigm, it is believed that people are influenced by their self perceptions and the personal meanings attached to their experience.

The following basic assumptions are relevant in this regard (Penny et al., 1996):

- An individual's behaviour is primarily determined by his perception of the world around him
- Individual's are not solely the product of their environment

- Individual's are internally directed and motivated to fulfil their human potential
- An individual is more than just the sum of his/her parts. The person must be viewed holistically
- People are social by nature and their interpersonal interactions are a part of their development
- How a person reacts to a situation will depend or be partly influenced by previous events
- People are aware of themselves, therefore they make conscious choices
- A person seeks certain things for oneself such as value or meaning in life

Thus humanistic psychology centres on the holistic development of a person towards three critical components: Self actualization, self-fulfilment and self-realization.

Systems theory was proposed in the 1940's by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_theory)). This theory focuses on organization and interdependence of relationships. A system is composed of regularly interacting or interdependent groups of activities/parts the emergent relationship(s) of which form the (a) whole. Part of systems theory, system dynamics is a method for understanding the dynamic behaviour of complex systems. The basis of the method is the recognition that the structure of any system — the many circular, interlocking, sometimes time-delayed relationships among its components — is often just as important in determining its behaviour as the individual components themselves ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_theory))

He emphasized that real systems are open to, and interact with, their environments, and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution. Rather than reducing an entity (e.g. the human body or an organisation) to the properties of its parts or elements (e.g. organs or cells, or specific departments or functions, in the case of an organisation), systems theory focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts which connect them into a whole. This particular organization determines a system, which is independent of the concrete substance of the elements. Thus, the same concepts and principles of organization underlie the different disciplines, providing a basis for their unification. Systems concepts include: system-environment boundary, input, output, process, state, hierarchy, goal-directedness, and information.

### **1.3.3.2 Empirical study**

The behaviouristic paradigm is a philosophy that assumes the following (<http://web.umn.edu/pfyc212b/behaviourism.htm>):

- Focuses on the study of observable behaviour and responses.
- People are born as blank slates. This is a philosophy proposed by John Locke (1690) who described the mind as a tabular as, meaning that whatever people learn to do depends on the interaction and experience with the environment.
- Changes in behaviour are based on the law of effect. EL Thorndike (1898) defined this law as; behaviour that is followed by satisfying consequences will be more likely to be repeated and behaviour that is followed by unsatisfactory consequences, will be less likely to be repeated.
- Changes in behaviour or learning can occur automatically as people discover contingency relationships. The occurrence of one event is dependant on or determined by the occurrence of another event

The positivistic paradigm emphasizes the supremacy of human reason and that there is a single, objective truth, which can be discovered by science. This paradigm regards the world as a rational and ordered place with a clearly defined past, present, and future (May, 1998).

The functionalistic paradigm emphasises the possibility of objective inquiry capable of providing true explanatory and predictive knowledge of an external reality. Functionalists tend to assume the standpoint of the observer, attempting to relate what they observe to what they regard as important elements in a wider social context (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

### **1.3.4 Market of intellectual resources**

The market of intellectual resources refers to that collection of beliefs that directly involves the epistemological status of scientific statements. The two main types of epistemological beliefs are the theoretical beliefs and the methodological beliefs (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

### **1.3.4.1 Theoretical beliefs**

Theoretical beliefs can be described as all beliefs that can make testable judgments regarding social phenomenon. These are all judgments regarding the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of human phenomenon and include all conceptual definitions and all models and theories of the research (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

#### **A. Conceptual definitions**

The relevant conceptual definitions are given below:

**Social Support:** Social support is defined as the assistance (either tangible or intangible) and protection (shielding individuals from the adverse effects of life stress) given to others, especially individuals within the work environment (Maria, 2004).

**Job Autonomy:** Job autonomy is the degree to which an individual is given substantial freedom, independence and discretion in performing the assigned task (Langfred & Moye, 2004).

**Job Satisfaction:** Job satisfaction can be described as an affective or emotional response towards various aspects of one’s job (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

**Banking:** This refers to a financial institution within South Africa

#### **B. Models and theories**

A model is aimed at ways of answering questions. It tries to reproduce the dynamics of an occurrence thru the relation between the main elements in a process and to represent it on a simplified way (Mouton & Marais, 1992). A theory is defined as a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena (Mouton & Marais, 1992). The Effort-Recovery (E-R) model as well as the job demands (JD-R) model is relevant to this research.

Meijman and Mulders' (1998) Effort Recovery Model describes how work and private life may interact and which mechanisms may affect wellbeing during this process (van de Hulst, Veldhoven, & Beckers, 2006). The possible negative consequences of a lack of job satisfaction and job autonomy depend on the possibilities for recovery in the course of a working day (internal recovery) and after work (external recovery). Effort expenditure is associated with specific load reactions that transpire within employees. Workload implies that the duration of effort investment is prolonged, while the time left for external recovery is shortened (van de Hulst et al., 2006). Thus, without social support little internal recovery may exist. Against the background of the effort-recovery model, it would be expected to see a positive relationship between effort put into a job and the need for recovery, and eventually adverse outcomes on health and wellbeing. Recent studies have shown that an increase in demands in the workforce, are indeed associated with a higher need for recovery from work in both genders (van de Hulst et al., 2006). Effort expenditure is associated with positive work load reactions; in a sense that if one feels competent and satisfied in their job, these positive feelings will enhance the individual's self-worth (van de Hulst et al., 2006).

An important model in the context of this research is the Job-Demand Control (JDC) model. This model focuses on job characteristics, job strain and job satisfaction (van de Hulst et al., 2006). According to the model, there are two important psychosocial work characteristics that determine wellbeing and that includes job demands and control. Control comprises of two constructs, namely job autonomy and skill discretion (van de Hulst et al., 2006). The JDC model is thus critical as it predicts that the combination of increased task demands and low job autonomy results in increased stress levels, while a combination of high job demand and increased job autonomy results in increased job satisfaction (van de Hulst et al., 2006)

#### **1.3.4.2 Methodological beliefs**

Abraham Maslow is considered the father of Humanistic Psychology. Maslow's motivational theory (Huitt, 2004) states that man's behaviour is controlled by both internal and external factors. In addition, he emphasizes that humans have the unique ability of choice and free will. He believed that people possess needs which are fixed and genetic in origin. He described these needs as biological and psychological. He described these needs as being

hierarchical in nature; some needs are more basic or more powerful than others are, and as these needs are satisfied, other higher needs emerge.

One must satisfy the lower level basic needs before moving to the higher-level growth needs. He describes the basic needs as physiological (i.e. sleep, food, drinking, shelter, sex and oxygen). Another basic need is safety (i.e. the need to be safe and free from danger and to have a sense of stability and security). The growth needs include love and belonging, which describes a need for love and affectionate relationships; esteem which describes self-respect, desire for confidence, competence, adequacy, achievement, desire for acceptance, recognition, reputation, appreciation, status and prestige; understanding and knowledge which he describes as the need to satisfy curiosity, explore, discover, find solutions, look for relationships and meaning and to seek intellectual challenges; aesthetics, which is described as a need for beauty in surroundings and the last growth need is self actualization, which is the need for growth, development and utilization of one's potential.

If motivation is driven by the existence of unsatisfied needs, then it is worthwhile for a manager to understand which needs are more important for individual employees. According to Maslow (Huitt, 2004), if the basic physiological needs of an individual are not met, then one's motivation level will arise in a task to satisfy them. Higher needs such as esteem will not be experienced until one meets the basic need to bodily functioning. Once the biological needs are met, one's attention is drawn to safety and security in order to be free from the threat of physical and emotional harm. These needs might be fulfilled by living in a safe area, or medical insurance or job security. If a person feels that on this level he/she will be harmed he cannot progress to the next level. Social needs are on the higher level and these include the need for friends, belonging, and the need to give and receive love. Once a person feels a sense of belonging, the need to feel important arises. Self-actualization is the peak of Maslow's needs. Compared to the lower level needs, this is a need that is never fully satisfied, ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs)) and as one grows psychologically, there are always new opportunities to continue to grow.

Herzberg on the other hand proposed the motivation-hygiene theory about job factors that motivate employees (<http://www.netmba.com/mgmt/ob/motivation/herzberg> ). According to Herzberg (Gawel, 1999), factors such as company policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions and salary are hygiene factors rather than motivational factors. If any of



the factors are absent, however, there would be job dissatisfaction, but what is important is that these factors do not motivate or create job satisfaction. He concluded that what motivated job performance were the elements that enriched a person's job. These elements are achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. These motivators, which he termed satisfiers, were associated with long-term positive effects in job performance (<http://www.netmba.com/mgmt/ob/motivation/herzberg/>) while the hygiene factors/dissatisfiers consistently produced only short-term changes in job attitudes and performance

According to the Herzberg's theory of (Herzberg, 1959) the factors that lead to dissatisfaction and those that lead to satisfaction are factors that affect job attitudes (Gawel, 1999). He argued that there are two distinct human needs, i.e. the physiological needs that can be fulfilled by money, for example to purchase food and shelter. The second, psychological need is to achieve and grow, and this need is fulfilled by activities that cause growth.

Herzberg argued that job enrichment is required for intrinsic motivation, and that it is a continuous management process. The job should have sufficient challenge to utilize the full ability of the employee, employees who demonstrate increasing levels of ability should be given increasing levels of responsibility, if a job cannot be designed to maximize an employee's potential, low levels of motivation are experienced by the employee.

Herzberg's paradigm of hygiene and motivating factors and Maslow's hierarchy of needs is broadly applied in the business world. Employee satisfaction and retention have always been important issues, high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover can have a negative impact on an organization. Satisfied employees tend to be more productive, creative and committed to their employers (Gawel, 1999). Both Herzberg and Maslow to some extent linked the basic and growth needs of people to job satisfaction.

#### **1.4. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The aim of the research design is to study the relationship between the experiences of job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group, and to test whether social support plays a mediating role in predicting employees' experience of job satisfaction.

The research can be classified as descriptive research which provides data about the population or universe being studied. It is used when the objective is to provide a systematic description that is as factual and accurate as possible. It provides the number of times something occurs, or frequency, lends itself to statistical calculations such as determining the average number of occurrences or central tendencies.

A research design commonly used in the field of psychology, and which will also be applied here, is the cross sectional design. This design enables samples of research participants or subjects of different ages or from different groups to be studied simultaneously and their behaviour compared (Colman, 2003). This design does however not control for cohort effects.

Data-gathering will be done by means of a survey. Survey research includes research methods for investigating the distribution of attitudes, opinions, mental disorders and other characteristics of individuals in specific sections of a population, or in a whole population, often broken down into demographic groups defined by geographical location, ethnic identity, age, sex, social class, marital status, education and similar criteria (Colman, 2003).

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHOD**

This research, pertaining to the specific objectives, consists of two phases, namely a literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.5.1 Phase 1: Literature review**

In phase 1, a complete review regarding the following is done:

Social Support, defined as the assistance (either tangible or intangible) and protection (shielding individuals from the adverse effects of life stress) given to others, especially individuals within the work environment (Maria, 2004).

Job Autonomy, defined as the degree to which an individual is given substantial freedom, independence and discretion in performing the assigned task (Langfred & Moye, 2004). Job

autonomy is defined as a work experience variable which describes individuals' feelings of personal responsibility for their work (Hackman & Lawler, 1971). Hackman and Lawler, (1971) proposed that employees in autonomus positions experience more favourable attitudes towards their company.

Job Satisfaction is described as an affective or emotional response towards various aspects of one's job (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). Job satisfaction can be inferred from the individuals' attitude towards his/her work (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951).

## **1.5.2 Phase 2: Empirical study**

Phase 2 consists of the following steps in the form of descriptive research:

### **1.5.2.1 Participants**

Participants will be randomly selected from within the financial group. Random selection is critical to the research process in order to draw generalised conclusions (Wisniewski, 2002). A sample will be drawn across all job levels excluding E,S, F, G (senior management). Job levels will include A, B, C, T (Junior/Supervisory levels) and M, P (middle management).

In total, 300 employees will be contacted to participate in the research.

### **Measuring Instruments**

Three scales were included in this research. Job autonomy was measured with a four item scale adapted by Sverke and Sjoberg (1994). The three items comprising the scale measuring satisfaction with the job were developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg and Sverke (1997). Social support from colleagues and supervisor were assessed with 6 items (3 for each source of social Support), developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison and Pinneau (1975), and other social support literature. A biographical questionnaire was also included.

Job Autonomy. This four-item scale was adapted by Sverke and Sjoberg (1994), based on Hackman and Oldham (1975) and Walsh, Taber and Beehr (1980), and measures the extent of job autonomy and influence over how the work is carried out. The response alternatives range from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree); a high score indicates a stronger sense of autonomy. An

example of an item used to measure this construct is: “I can make my own decisions on how to organize my work”.

**Job Satisfaction.** The three items comprising the scale measuring satisfaction with the job were developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg and Sverke (1997). The response alternatives range from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree); a high score reflects satisfaction with the job. “I enjoy being at my job” is a typical item designed to gauge participants’ job satisfaction.

**Social Support.** This scale comprises of 6 items and 2 factors, based on Caplan et al. (1975), and other social support literature. This scale consists of two factors based on the source of the support: Colleagues’ or supervisor support. The response alternatives range from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), and a high score on either scale reflects a sense that support is available. A typical item used to gauge collegial support is “When I encounter problems at work, there is always a colleague to turn to”, and supervisor support “I always receive help from my manager when difficulties in my work arise”.

### **Statistical analysis**

The statistical analysis will be carried out with the SPSS-program (SPSS, 2005). Cronbach alpha coefficients will be used to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs that are measured in this study. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics will be used to analyse the data.

Correlation coefficients will be used to specify the relationship between the variables. In terms of statistical significance, it will be decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval level ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). Effect sizes (Steyn, 1999) will be used to decide on the practical significance of the findings. A cut-off point of 0,30 (medium effect, Cohen, 1988), will be set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used to determine the significance of difference levels of different demographic groups. MANOVA tests whether mean differences among groups on a combination of dependent variables are likely to have occurred by chance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). MANOVA analysis will be used to determine the relationship

between the different demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, language, marital status, parental status and work-contract status. Demographic characteristics will firstly be analysed for statistical significance using Wilk's Lambda statistics.

The purpose of multiple regression is to learn more about the relationship several independent or predictor variables and a dependant variable. Thus the main and interactive effects of social support will be tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Gender will be controlled for in the first step. Job autonomy and social support variables will be entered in the second. Interaction terms of job autonomy with each of the social support variables will be entered in the third step to test for the hypothesized moderating effect of social support on the relation between job autonomy and job satisfaction. The predictor variables will be centered, i.e. the means of these variables will be set to zero while the standard deviations are kept intact.

## **1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION**

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

## **1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter outlined the problem, and dealt with the experiences of job autonomy, job satisfaction and social support of employees, as reflected in the literature. The moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction was also investigated. Chapter 2 will be an empirical article, investigating these variables in a large banking group.

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**CHAPTER 2**

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT BETWEEN JOB AUTONOMY AND JOB SATISFACTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

What does work mean for the present day employee? The modern day working environment is far from static and the supply and demand for certain skills and experience fluctuates. Our economy, both nationally and globally, also impacts on the needs of present day employees. The objective of this study was to investigate the moderating effect of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction. The general objective of this research was to investigate if job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group can be predicted by their experience of job autonomy and social support in the workplace. The study was conducted within one of South Africa's leading financial institutions. In order to achieve the study objectives, data was collected from a sample ( $n=178$ ). Conclusions from the results are that job satisfaction can be predicted by social support from colleagues as well as level of job autonomy. The moderating effect of social support was however not supported.

## **OPSOMMING**

Wat behels die begrip "werk" vir hedendaagse werknemers? Die moderne werksomgewing is gedurig aan die verander en die vraag en aanbod vir spesifieke vaardighede verander chronies. Die ekonomie, nasionaal en internasionaal, steun swaar op die behoeftes van hedendaagse werknemers. Die doel van die studie is om die modererende uitwerking van sosiale ondersteuning tussen werksoutonomie en werkstevredenheid te bepaal. Dié studie het 'n ondersoek onderneem om te bepaal of die werkstevredenheid van werknemers in 'n vooraanstaande bankgroep bepaal of voorspel kan word deur hulle ervaring van werksoutonomie en sosiale ondersteuning binne die werkplek. Die studie is onderneem binne een van Suid-Afrika se mees vooruitstrewende finansiële

instellings. Ten einde die studiedoelwitte te bereik is inligting uit die voorbeeld ( $n=178$ ) versamel. Die gevolgtrekking gemaak uit resultate verkry is dat werkstevredenheid voorspel kan word uit ondersteuning deur kollegas verskaf asook die mate van werkoutonomie wat ervaar word. Die modererende effek van sosiale ondersteuning is egter nie onderskraag nie.

The success of the future for South African organizations lies heavily on its leadership, rather than on its management. Transformational leadership is critical to modern business, especially within the South African context (Kotze, 2005). Transformational leadership is essentially about instilling a sense of purpose, in those who are led, and encouraging commitment by empowering employees through growth and development (Kotze, 2005). This enables employees the opportunity to adapt and grow within organizations. The leader promotes change by creating a motivational climate which enhances growth, development, commitment, goal achievement and enjoyment. In order to facilitate the requirements of such an environment the employee needs social support that would enable job autonomy and ultimately job satisfaction (Kotze, 2005)

The Employment Equity Act includes all forms of diversity and accommodates for equal opportunities. The Employment Equity (EE) Act, nr. 55 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998) was introduced to remove unfair discrimination. The growth of the South African economy will largely depend on the extent to which black South Africans participate in the economy. The financial institution that forms the subject of this research aims to facilitate increased participation by enhancing its engagement with black individuals and black-owned companies as shareholders, customers, suppliers, employees and communities. Growing the black banking market is an important way of supporting sustained economic growth, development and social transformation in South Africa. Capturing an increased share of that market is a key business imperative.

Employment Equity places emphasis on institutional transformation and other positive measures that seek to proactively equalise employment opportunities by redressing the legacy of systematic imbalances in the workplace. Ten years ago, the structural make-up of the South African workforce was distinctly white in terms of its upper echelons, while blacks populated the bottom levels of organisations. These positions for white middle and senior managers were entrenched and no, or very limited, opportunities existed for blacks to become involved in management. This was all too clear in the scramble that the new government had in finding suitable candidates to lead some of the parastatals after the first democratic elections (Mabaso, Meyer, Lanster & Nenungwi, 2004).

Analysis of the structural make-up of organisations after a decade of democracy reveals an unnerving picture. Examples of excellent black business leaders proliferate, however, the impact that apartheid policies had on the experience levels of black leaders seems obvious as these new cohorts are only starting to make its presence felt (Meyer, 2002).

Given the challenges facing South Africa, financial institutions operating in South Africa have to comply with the legislative requirements of the Financial Sector Charter (<http://portal.absa.co.za/>). With increasing pressure on the financial sector to address the needs of low-income earners, the financial services industry, including life assurance companies, proactively approached the Black Business Council with the aim of addressing the issue (<http://portal.absa.co.za/>). The FSC was formally implemented on 1 January 2004 and is a voluntary agreement between the South African government and the financial services sector to promote black economic empowerment. The FSC provides for significant increases in black ownership, control, management and skills development over a 10-year period, effective from January 2004 to December 2014. Interim targets for employment have been set for 2008, with improved diversity in the group, with 47.8% of employees from the Black, Coloured and Indian race groups as target. Given the challenge of diversity management the financial company has embarked on, job satisfaction, job autonomy and social support become variables of interest.

In order for organizations to promote job autonomy, job satisfaction and social support the right of leadership is required. In order for successful transformation of South Africa, organisations will have to be a function of the leadership behaviour of top management as well as of the strategies, structures and systems introduced (Bateman & Snell, 2004).

South Africa faces ever-declining natural resources, where mining and agriculture account for less than twenty percent of our gross national product. In the future, South Africa's growth will be reliant on the marriage between applied technology and the quality of human competence (<http://portal.absa.co.za/>). Therefore, the competence of managers determines the returns that organisations realise from their human capital,

or human resources. The domain of leaders is in creating the future: the unique legacy of the leader is the creation of new institutions that survive over time, through constant organisational growth and renewal. Survival is dependent on the quality of organisations' leaders and their ability to optimise human resources. This necessitates the empowering of people as a primary competitive strategy (Moxley & Pulley, 2004).

The definition of job autonomy extends to giving an employee who performs a task a considerable amount of discretion and control in deciding how to carry out the task (Langfred & Moye, 2004). Job autonomy is therefore, the degree to which an individual is given substantial freedom, independence and discretion in performing the assigned task (Langfred & Moye, 2004).

According to Au and Cheung (2004), the loss of job autonomy leads to constant job stress, and continual strain on employees leads to lower levels of job satisfaction. This could impact on work behaviour and personal well-being. Research by Bandura (1986), Jackson (1983) and Kasl (1989) indicated that perceptions of control and mastery are associated with lower levels of psychological strains (in Au & Cheung, 2004), and a workplace with low levels of job autonomy produce high stress levels in employees. Increased stress levels reduce job satisfaction, as the employee experiences lower levels of confidence, learning initiative and work fulfilment (Au & Cheung, 2004).

The changing workplace has resulted in new demands for employees; employees need to define, structure and carry out their own work in a self-directed and flexible manner. This results in a shift from production to service, which places demands on employees to cultivate their goal-directed behaviour and be more autonomous. Employees perceptions on the organization also have an effect on employee attitude, behaviour and well-being. Thus work and organisational attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organization commitment are negatively related to work stress (Coetsee, 2002).

Research conducted simultaneously in the US, Australia and India suggests that job autonomy is an important predictor of job satisfaction (De Carlo & Agarwalo, 1999).

Allowing sales-persons to plan and control their work leads to increased motivation levels and job satisfaction (De Carlo & Agarwalo, 1999). These research findings can be applied to the South African context where job autonomy forms part of creating a motivational climate for employees. Research findings suggest that an increase in job autonomy promotes a feeling of personal responsibility for job output and that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction (De Carlo & Agarwalo, 1999). In general, their research suggests that feelings of autonomy positively reinforce job satisfaction, irrespective of cultural differences.

The changes that are shaping the nature of work in today's challenging organisations require that we develop the political will, expertise and personal skills to become more flexible, empowered and adaptive. Without a change in leadership towards empowering and creating an adaptive workforce, South Africa would face the inevitable reality of becoming immersed in a bureaucratic and destructive power struggle (Kotze, 2005). This would greatly retard organizational growth and performance.

The ability to learn is the most important skill that employees and organisations need to acquire (American Society of Association Executives, 2005). With the embarkment of an era of rapid change and growth such as technologies, social structures, generational and cultural differences, job autonomy plays a critical role in enhancing an adaptive culture (American Society of Association executives, 2005). The workforce which was once based on command and control management is over. Under stress, rigid systems break and fail. In order to accommodate for an ever-changing work environment, management style needs to be more fluid, flexible and adaptive in its approach, thus allowing for empowered self-organizing teams (American Society of Association Executives, 2005). This in essence means that organizations will need to create a work climate that promotes employee independence and individual responsibility.

Conversely, when employees reach a stage of dissatisfaction, it has unnecessary cost implications as it results in excessive absenteeism, high turnover and grievances. Job satisfaction is defined as the difference between the amount of some valued outcome a person receives and the amount of that outcome the person think he/she should

receive. Job satisfaction can be described as an affective or emotional response towards various aspects of one's job (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). It is described as a positive or negative attitude that employees have about their jobs. It results from how employees perceive their job and related matters such as supervisory style, social support, challenge, autonomy, pay and benefits (Coetsee, 2002).

Job satisfaction can also be described as an affective reaction to a job that results from the comparison of perceived outcomes with those that are desired (Fung-kam, 1998). Job satisfaction is an attitude towards ones' work that is defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of ones' job experience. Brough and Frame (2004), suggested that high levels of job satisfaction is associated with high levels of employee well-being.

Nguyen, Taylor and Bradley (2003) find that job autonomy is strongly related to overall job satisfaction. As job autonomy increases, the probability of the employee experiencing job satisfaction also increases, and even more so for females than for males (Nguyen et al., 2003).

According to the survey report on job satisfaction released by the Society for Human Resource Management, 8 out of 10 employees experience overall job satisfaction, however only 18% reported extreme job satisfaction. One of the factors that contributed to the results was work-life balance (Clark, 2005). A lack of social support can lead to depression, which is one of the most serious psychological strains of work-stress (Park, Wilson and Lee, 2004). Depression in turn leads to lower levels of organizational productivity due to medical cost, absenteeism and poor performance. Social support at work and job satisfaction is both positively related to job performance Social support is also positively related to job autonomy (Park et al., 2004).

Due to the changing workplace, the relationship between the line manager and the employee also warrants change. Managers of today cannot rely on their legitimate power to persuade people to do as they are told (Bass, 1990). Leaders of today need to take initiative and show consideration towards others, by providing social support towards employees. Bass (1990) indicates that leaders, who provide social support,



actually broaden and elevate the interests of their employees when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the organization. Through the journey of social support, employees are empowered to look beyond their own self-interest for the betterment of the organization. Leaders can, through social support, meet the emotional needs of employees. Through job autonomy, they can intellectually stimulate and empower employees (Bass, 1990). These research findings support the hypothesis that social support could have an effect in the translation of job autonomy in job satisfaction.

Social support has emerged as an important factor in predicting job satisfaction and employee wellbeing (Limbert, 2004). Research findings have stressed the importance of social support as a coping mechanism in dealing with an ever-changing and stressful work experience (Limbert, 2004).

Social support has beneficial effects on the well-being of employees. Support at work is positively correlated to job autonomy, low levels of depression and high job performance (Park et al., 2004). The research of Park et al. (2004) revealed a strong relationship between social support and job autonomy. Lee (2004) revealed that social support received from the immediate line manager, colleagues as well as friends and family, are positively related to job satisfaction. Thus, if employees receive social support from line managers it could ultimately lead to job satisfaction (Park et al., 2004). It is thus hypothesised that increased levels of job autonomy results in increased levels of job satisfaction. Eisenberger, Stinglahamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) have indicated a strong positive relationship between social support and turnover (Brough & Frame, 2004).

The relationship between occupational stress and health and wellbeing is critical in an ever-changing work environment. As the demand for adapting to a changing environment is constant, a balance needs to be struck at the individual level and on the organizational level (Code & Langan-Fox, 2001). The role of social support in reducing occupational stress is paramount to the emotional well-being of the employee (Code & Langan-Fox, 2001). Thus, there is a desperate need for employees to receive social support from managers/leaders. By providing social support and allowing the employee to experience job autonomy in the work environment, job

satisfaction will be realised. This in essence could reduce occupational stress and promote employee wellbeing.

Jobs that provide opportunity for autonomy and individual responsibility are likely to be more satisfying and this can be clearly linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Carlson & Mellor, 2004). Maslow postulates that the need for self-actualization begins with a separation of the self from the constraints of others. The actualised – self is realised through open-ended growth towards autonomy and the capacity to experience individuality (Carlson & Mellor, 2004). Fredrick Herzberg suggested that job satisfaction depended on two sets of issues; hygiene and motivators. He proposed that once the hygiene issues were addressed, the motivators create satisfaction for the employee (Syptak, Marsland, & Ulmer, 1999).

In order to relate the hygiene issues to job satisfaction, we must note that the hygiene issues are not really a source of satisfaction. However, although employees will never feel a great sense of motivation or satisfaction due to company policies/procedures, job satisfaction levels can decrease if employees view these policies and procedures to be unfair and not equitable to all (Gawel, 1999). Other hygiene issues such as the appointment of leaders/supervisors and salary will reduce job satisfaction if employees view it as unfair. Other hygiene issues include the working conditions and this, depending on the environment, can either reduce or increase levels of job satisfaction (Gawel, 1999). Once these hygiene issues are addressed, the motivators create satisfaction among employees.

Employees need to believe that the work that they are doing is important and that their tasks are meaningful. Employees will be motivated to do their jobs, if they take ownership for the outcome (Gawel, 1999). This means giving employees the freedom and power to carry out their tasks, such that they own the result. Leaders should thus give employees job autonomy in order to realise job satisfaction (Gawel, 1999). Factors that will lead to job satisfaction are the motivators and these include the work itself, achievement, recognition, responsibility (job autonomy) and career advancement. By creating an environment that promotes job satisfaction, employees are developed to be motivated, productive and fulfilled (Gawel, 1999). Thus, the

hygiene issues address the need for social support as a basic condition to fulfil the motivators (satisfiers) of job autonomy and job satisfaction.

A lack of job satisfaction is definitely detrimental to economic growth, as a decrease in job satisfaction results in a decrease in production, and a less empowered workforce (Heathfield, 2006). Based on all research findings, it is proposed that by providing social support, organizations and its leadership can provide employees with job autonomy. This will lead to greater job satisfaction and will facilitate adaptation to a transforming workforce, thereby promoting employee well-being. The aim of the research is therefore to study the relationship between the experiences of job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group, and to test whether social support plays a moderating role in predicting employees' experience of job satisfaction.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The research can be classified as descriptive research which provides data about the population or universe being studied. It is used when the objective is to provide a systematic description that is as factual and accurate as possible. It provides the number of times something occurs, or frequency, lends itself to statistical calculations such as determining the average number of occurrences or central tendencies.

A cross-sectional survey design, by means of which a sample is drawn from a population at a particular point in time, was used to achieve the research objectives. A cross-sectional design is advantageous when it comes to participant attrition. Comparisons can be made between different biographical groups (for example age and gender groups) as to the differences in responses given on the survey instruments. It is practically useful for organisations and not scientifically problematic (Wisniewski, 2002).

## **Participants**

The participants were junior and middle-management employees from a South African financial company. In total, 300 employees were contacted to participate in the research. Of those contacted, only 178 responded, leading to a response rate of 59%. This research was conducted in the province of Gauteng only, and the financial group in this province has a total complement of 20 523 employees. The latter figure presents 62% of the total workforce ( $N = 33\ 152$ ).

Table 1 gives the reveals the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1  
*Characteristics of the Participants (n=178)*

Item	Category	Percentage*
Gender	Male	60,70
	Female	39,30
Children younger than 12 living with you	No	55,60
	Yes	44,40
Household	Singe (Living alone)	18,00
	Married/living with partner	62,90
	Living with parents	10,70
	Divorced or separated	5,10
	Remarried	2,80
Educational qualifications	Grade 10 (Standard 8)	0,60
	Grade 11 (Standard 9)	0,60
	Grade 12 (Matric)	42,70
	Technical College Diploma	14,60
	Technicon Diploma	14,60
	University degree	14,60
Language	Postgraduate	10,70
	Afrikaans	53,90
	English	23,00
	Sepedi	5,10
	Sesotho	1,10
	Setswana	6,70
	IsiSwati	0,60
	Tshivenda	0,60
	IsiNdebele	0,60
	IsiXhosa	2,20
	IsiZulu	3,90
	IsiTsonga	0,60
	Other	0,60
	Employment status	Permanent
Substitute position		1,70
Employed by the hour		2,20
Employed for a project		0,60
Trainee		2,20
Type of Employment	Other	0,60
	Full Time	96,6
Union member	Part-time	2,80
	Yes	51,70
	No	47,80

The sample consisted mostly of males (60,70%), which is an over-representation of the gender spread of the total population in the banking group, where 38% of

employees ranging from junior management to senior in the province of Gauteng are male . About half of the participants (53,90%) were Afrikaans speaking, while in the total population, 53% of employees are Afrikaans-speaking. If language is taken as a proxy of racial group, the sample seems rather representative of the total population, where 9663 are white and 10 860 are black. Of the participants, 42,70% of participants have at least completed high school, while 54,50% have tertiary qualifications. Most participants (91,00%) are permanently employed, and nearly all the participants (96,60%) are employed full-time. Of the participants, 51,70% belong to a union. A large amount of participants (62,90%) are married or live with a partner. Almost half of the participants (44,40%) have children younger than 12 living with them.

### **Measuring instruments**

Three scales were included in this research. Job autonomy was measured with a four-item scale adapted by Sverke and Sjöberg (1994). The three items comprising the scale measuring satisfaction with the job were developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg and Sverke (1997). Social support from colleagues and supervisor were assessed with 6 items (3 for each source of social Support), developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1975), and other social support literature. A biographical questionnaire was also included.

**Job Autonomy.** This four item scale was adapted by Sverke and Sjöberg (1994), based on Hackman and Oldham (1975) and Walsh, Taber and Beehr (1980), and measures the extent of job autonomy and influence over how the work is carried out. The response alternatives range from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*); a high score indicates a stronger sense of autonomy. A typical item is “I have a job where I can really prove my ability”.

**Job Satisfaction.** The three items comprising the scale measuring satisfaction with the job were developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg and Sverke (1997), based on Brayfield and Rothe (1951). The response alternatives range from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*); a high score reflects satisfaction with the job. “I enjoy being at my job” is a typical item.

Social Support: This scale comprises 6 items and 2 factors, and is based on Caplan et al. (1975), and other social support literature. This scale consists of three factors based on the source of the support: co-worker support or supervisor support. The response alternatives range from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*), and a high score on either scale reflects a sense that support is available. A typical item relating to support from colleagues is “I usually receive help from my co-worker when something needs to be done quickly”, while supervisor support is gauged with items such as “When I encounter problems at work, I can always ask my manager for advice”.

The biographical questionnaire asked individuals to supply their personal information such as gender, year of birth, marital status, status in terms of dependants, educational qualifications and home language.

### **Statistical analysis**

The statistical analysis was carried out with the SPSS-program (SPSS, 2005). Cronbach alpha coefficients were used to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs that are measured in this study. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data.

Correlation coefficients will be used to specify the relationship between the variables. In terms of statistical significance, it will be decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval level ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). Effect sizes (Steyn, 1999) will be used to decide on the practical significance of the findings. A cut-off point of 0,30 (medium effect, Cohen, 1988) will be set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used to determine the significance of difference levels of different demographic groups. MANOVA tests whether mean differences among groups on a combination of dependent variables are likely to have occurred by chance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). MANOVA analysis will be used to determine the relationship between the different demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, language, marital status, parental status and

work-contract status. Demographic characteristics will firstly be analysed for statistical significance using Wilk's Lambda statistics.

The purpose of multiple regression is to learn more about the relationship several independent or predictor variables and a dependant variable. Thus the main and interactive effects of social support were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Demographic characteristics were controlled for in the first step. Job autonomy and social support variables were entered in the second. Interaction terms of job autonomy with each of the social support variables were entered in the third step to test for the hypothesized moderating effect of social support on the relation between job autonomy and job satisfaction. The predictor variables were centered, i.e. the means of these variables are set to zero while the standard deviations are kept intact.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics are given for the different variables in table 2 below.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Coefficients of the Measuring Instruments*

Factor	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	<i>A</i>
Supervisor Support	3,51	1,08	-0,50	-0,22	0,90
Colleague Support	3,72	0,90	-0,46	-0,29	0,82
Job satisfaction	3,57	0,88	-0,28	-0,41	0,82
Autonomy	3,77	0,78	-0,47	0,17	0,65

Inspection of Table 2 shows that acceptable Cronbach Alpha coefficients were obtained for all the scales (All the alpha coefficients were higher than the guideline value of  $\alpha \geq 0,70$ , Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), except Autonomy. The scores on the factors are normally distributed, as indicated by normal skewness and kurtosis. It therefore appears that all the measuring instruments have acceptable levels of internal consistency, while some caution may need to be exercised in interpreting the Autonomy factor.



The product moment correlation coefficients between the constructs are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

*Correlation Coefficients between Job satisfaction, Social Support and Autonomy*

	Supervisor Support	Colleague Support	Job Satisfaction
Colleague Support	0,57**	-	-
Job satisfaction	0,38*	0,43*	-
Autonomy	0,42*	0,36*	0,53**

\*Correlation is practically significant  $r > 0,30$  (medium effect)

\*\*Correlation is practically significant  $r > 0,50$  (Large effect)

Table 3 indicates that support received in a work environment from supervisors (line managers) and colleagues are practically significantly related, with large effect. Support from the supervisor also correlates practically significantly (medium effect) with Job satisfaction and Autonomy.

Support from colleagues is practically significantly related to job satisfaction and Autonomy (both with medium effect). Job satisfaction is practically significantly related to job autonomy (large effect).

The results of a multiple regression analysis with job satisfaction as dependent variable and participants' gender, autonomy, supervisor support and colleague support, as independent variables, are reported in Table 4. Gender was entered in the first step as a biographical control variable.

Table 4

*Multiple Regression Analysis with Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		B	SE	Beta					
1	(Constant)	-0,15	0,20	-	-0,75	0,45	0,57	0,00	0,00
	Gender	0,10	0,13	0,58	0,75	0,45			
2	(Constant)	0,22	0,16	-	-1,35	0,17	22,69	0,35	0,35
	Gender	0,15	0,11	0,08	1,39	0,16			
	Autonomy	0,47	0,08	0,40	5,85	0,00*			
	Supervisor support	0,06	0,06	0,08	1,06	0,29			
	Colleague support	0,23	0,07	0,23	3,08	0,00*			
3	(Constant)	0,22	0,16	-	-1,36	0,17	14,98	0,35	0,00
	Gender	0,15	0,11	0,08	1,35	0,17			
	Autonomy	0,48	0,08	0,40	5,79	0,00*			
	Supervisor support	0,07	0,06	0,08	1,06	0,28			
	Colleague support	0,22	0,07	0,23	3,01	0,00*			
	Autonomy x Supervisor support	0,00	0,08	0,00	0,08	0,93			
	Autonomy x Colleague support	0,02	0,08	0,01	0,24	0,80			

\*  $p \leq 0,01$ 

Table 4 shows that gender had no effect in predicting participants' job satisfaction, indicating that effects for the other variables may operate similarly for males and females. When job autonomy and social support variables were entered in step 2, 35% of the variance in job satisfaction could be explained. Supervisor support did not make a significant contribution to the variance explained. In step 3, where the interaction terms were entered, it can be seen that Autonomy and support from colleagues remain statistically significant predictors and that none of the interaction terms reach significance. This finding indicates that social support does not play a role in the translation of the experience of autonomy in job satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to investigate if job satisfaction of employees in a large banking group could be predicted by their experiences of job autonomy and social

support in the workplace. Specifically, the moderating effect of social support on the relation between job satisfaction and job autonomy was also investigated.

The measuring instruments presented sufficient levels of internal consistency, although the Autonomy scale's alpha-coefficient was somewhat low. Regarding the relationship between the variables, it was seen that support received from supervisors (line managers) and co-workers were strongly related. This indicates that employees who experience high levels of support from their supervisors, in all likelihood also experience high levels of support from their colleagues. A major finding of Shirey (2004) is that the support derived from supervisors and colleagues has a significant and positive influence on coping, job satisfaction and well-being. Shirey (2004) suggested that job autonomy acts as a means of social support to mediate stress in the work environment. Research indicates that much of this autonomy is derived from access to information, knowledge transfer and close personal relationships that enhance both supervisor and colleague support (Shirey, 2004). The research of Chapman (1993) suggested that a decrease in colleague support results in an increase in occupational stress (Shirey, 2004).

Support from the supervisor was also related to participants' experiences of job satisfaction and autonomy. The findings of the research indicate that employees who experience supervisor support are also likely to experience greater job satisfaction. In the study conducted by Park et al., (2004) social support at work shared a strong relationship with job autonomy. Social support is an important resource that has been associated with positive individual and organizational outcomes (Brough & Frame, 2004). The findings of this research show a positive correlation between supervisor support and job satisfaction, indicating that receiving social support from the supervisor is also related to increased job satisfaction. Brough and Frame (2004) demonstrated similar results with the use of structural equation modelling.

Support from colleagues was related to both job satisfaction and autonomy. An increase in job autonomy could lower work stress (Au & Cheung, 2004). Thus, when employees find that others around them are less stressed, their behaviour is inclined to improve, and they should be inclined to show more help-seeking and support-giving (collegial support) behaviour. A mutual readiness to help could lead to increased

levels of colleague support (Au & Cheung, 2004), and as results here suggest, autonomy. According to Wellman, Carrington, and Hall (1988) an increase in level of colleague support could lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and quality of life (in Au & Cheung, 2004). Thus, the current research supports previous findings (Au & Cheng, 2004; Wellman et al., 1988), in indicating that social support from colleagues is related to job autonomy.

In this research, the finding was made that colleague support is significant in predicting job satisfaction. Lee (2004) revealed that social support received from the immediate line manager, colleagues as well as friends and family, were positively related to job satisfaction. Conversely, the research of Brough and Pears (2004) indicates that the impact of colleague support in predicting job satisfaction is minimal.

Employees in this banking group who experience autonomy in performing their duties seemingly also experience greater job satisfaction. Research has revealed that in work environments where the potential realization of employees is inhibited; or where they are threatened, over-controlled and pressurized, consequences such as increased stress levels, burnout, absenteeism, increased turnover and a lack of commitment to the organization are apparent (Coetsee, 2002). Research findings suggest that increased levels of job autonomy could result in enhanced employee feelings that job outcomes are a product of the employee's effort (DeCarlo & Agarwalo, 1998). This sense of personal responsibility leads employees to develop affective and behavioural reactions to their jobs which promote increased feelings of job satisfaction. In fact, previous studies have found that an increase in job autonomy is significant in predicting an increase in job satisfaction (DeCarlo & Agarwalo, 1998). The results of the research of Decarlo and Agarwalo (1998) thus support the current research findings that employees who experience greater autonomy could ultimately experience greater job satisfaction.

In predicting job satisfaction of employees in this banking organisation, it was found that autonomy and support from colleagues were significant predictors, while none of the interaction terms were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Previous studies with nurses have shown that social integration and colleague support was important in predicting overall job satisfaction (Fung-kam, 1998). Research findings suggest that

the social support received from colleagues positively influence affect, coping and well-being (Shirey, 2004). Social support has also been highlighted as an important factor in predicting job satisfaction (Limbert, 2004). Although literature thus seems to suggest that social support as significant in reducing stress and promoting job satisfaction, the moderating effect thereof on job autonomy is not supported by the current findings. The amount of social support that one receives from colleagues may depend on how one behaves towards those colleagues (Bowling, Beehr, Johnson & Semmer, 2004). Research findings suggest that colleagues who do not display organizational citizenship behaviours directed at individuals and social competence are less likely to experience colleague support (Bowling et al., 2004).

### **LIMITATIONS**

Based on the review of literature, there is evidence to support a hypothesis for the moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction. However, based on the findings of this research, no evidence to support this moderating effect was found. The difficulty of demonstrating significant moderation results is acknowledged and can be attributed to the small sample size. In previous literature, such difficulty has also been demonstrated due to the poor operationalisation of the concepts, low statistical power to detect interactive effects and a failure to take into account the non-linear relationship that may exist between the measures (Brough & Pears, 2004). It is therefore suggested that the apparent lack of evidence to support this hypothesis requires further investigation.

An acknowledged limitation of this research is the small sample size. The current sample represents only 0.86% of the organisation's total number of employees. This research requires confirmation in a larger sample and in samples of different occupations in order to determine generalizability.

A third limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the research; a longitudinal design would have demonstrated stronger causal relations and conclusions. The moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction still requires further research. Longitudinal research is a design that allows for the same sample of participants to be examined repeatedly over an extended period of time, thereby

enhancing the validity of the design (Colman, 2003). A longitudinal design would have enabled stronger causal conclusions to be drawn.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The competitive effects of the global marketplace, information technology and the workforce revolution have combined to produce change (Kotze, 2005). The evolving business environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is making new and unique demands on the modern manager and leader. Today's executive needs to be competent in leadership, which is defined as, influencing and directing the behaviour of individuals and groups in such a way that they work willingly to pursue the objectives of the organization (Smit & Cronje, 2000).

To adapt to change successfully organizations need to address the wellbeing and effectiveness of employees and teams, and to develop leadership and policies central to this (Moore, 2003). A compelling association with job satisfaction is supervisor support and then job autonomy (Moore, 2003). Research has revealed that a lack of supervisor support and job autonomy leads to increased stress levels.

It is evident from the study, that the employees from this financial industry require a strong social support system. In order to deal with the dynamics of a changing work environment, jobs need to provide opportunity for autonomy and individual responsibility. How this is achieved, is through social support. Especially the fostering of social support from colleagues needs to receive attention.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter encompasses conclusions regarding the literature review and the empirical study. The limitations are highlighted and recommendations are made for further research.

#### **3.1 CONCLUSIONS**

In this section, conclusions are drawn in terms of the literature review and the results of the empirical study.

##### **3.1.1 Conclusions in terms of the literature review**

The first objective was to conceptualise the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction from the literature.

Job autonomy is described as the degree to which an individual is given substantial freedom, independence and discretion in performing the assigned task (Langfred & Moye, 2004). The need for autonomy is a personality trait that could contribute to individual differences and affect job satisfaction. Research suggests that employees who experience satisfaction with pay, autonomy and professional status are more prone to experiencing greater job satisfaction (Fung-kam, 1998).

Job satisfaction can be described as an affective or emotional response towards various aspects of one's job (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). It is described as a positive or negative attitude that employees have about their jobs. Job satisfaction can also be described as an affective reaction to a job that results from the comparison of perceived outcomes with those that are desired (Lee, 2004). Job satisfaction is an attitude towards ones' work that is defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of ones' job experience.

Social support has beneficial effects on the well-being of employees. Support at work is positively correlated to job autonomy, low levels of depression and high job performance (Park, Wilson, Lee, 2004). The research of Park et al. (2004) revealed a strong relationship between social support and job autonomy. Lee (2004) revealed that social support received from the immediate line manager, colleagues as well as friends and family, are positively related to job satisfaction

The number of studies that investigated the relationship between these three variables has revealed a positive relationship. A major finding of Shirey (2004) is that the support derived from supervisors and colleagues has a significant and positive influence on coping, job satisfaction and well being. Shirey (2004) suggested that job autonomy acts as a means of social support to mediate stress in the work environment. Lee (2004) revealed that social support received from the immediate line manager, colleagues as well as friends and family, are positively related to job satisfaction. Previous studies have also found that an increase in job autonomy is significant in predicting an increase in job satisfaction (DeCarlo & Agarwalo, 1998).

### **3.1.2 Conclusions in terms of empirical objectives**

The second objective was to describe the relationship between job autonomy, social support and job satisfaction in a large banking group.

The correlation coefficients between the variables revealed that support derived from supervisors and colleagues are significantly related. Support from the supervisor was also positively related to experiences of job satisfaction and perceptions of autonomy. Support from colleagues was also positively related to both job satisfaction and autonomy. In turn, job satisfaction and job autonomy were positively related. The suggestion is thus that any increase in any of these variables, may be associated with a similar increase in the other variables.

The third objective set for this research was to test whether job autonomy and social support can be used to predict job satisfaction.

Job autonomy and social support from colleagues explained 35% of the variance in job satisfaction. Supervisor support did not make a significant contribution to the variance explained. When the moderating effect of social support was investigated, none of the interaction terms reached significance. This finding indicates that social support does not play a role in the translation of the experience of autonomy into job satisfaction, although autonomy makes a direct contribution to job satisfaction.

The final objective set for this research was to test whether social support has a moderating role on the relation between job autonomy and job satisfaction.

The finding indicates that social support does not play a role in the translation of the experience of autonomy in job satisfaction. Social support has also been highlighted as an important factor in predicting job satisfaction (Limbert, 2004). Although literature suggests that social support is significant in reducing stress and promoting job satisfaction, the moderating effect thereof between job autonomy and job satisfaction is not supported by the current findings.

### **3.2. LIMITATIONS**

Based on the review of literature, there is evidence to support a hypothesis for the moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction. However, based on the findings of this research, no evidence to support this moderating effect was found. The difficulty of demonstrating significant moderation results is acknowledged and can be attributed to the small sample size. In previous literature, such difficulty has also been demonstrated due to the poor operationalisation of the concepts, low statistical power to detect interactive effects and a failure to take into account the non-linear relationship that may exist between the measures (Brough & Pears, 2004). It is therefore suggested that the apparent lack of evidence to support this hypothesis requires further investigation.

An acknowledged limitation of this research is the small sample size. The current sample represents only 0.86% of the organisation's total number of employees. This research requires confirmation in a larger sample and in samples of different occupations in order to determine generalizability.

A third limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the research; a longitudinal design would have demonstrated stronger causal relations and conclusions. The moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction still requires further research. Longitudinal research is a design that allows for the same sample of participants to be examined repeatedly over an extended period of time, thereby enhancing the validity of the design (Colman, 2003). A longitudinal design would have enabled stronger causal conclusions to be drawn.

## **3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for the organizations and for future research are made in this section.

### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organization**

Based on the results obtained in this study, it is recommended that the need and importance of colleague support in the work environment be recognised. The world of work, and that of the current organization, has shifted to one in which job fulfilment and satisfaction is seen as organizational goals. Employees are looking not just for meaningful work, but a meaningful work climate/environment, which meets people's deepest needs for fulfilment - these will include relationships, spirituality, caring for the community, environment and humanity. In this environment, workers and management learn to transcend self-interests and take an active interest in other human beings, thereby creating a social environment that provides support and networks that enable job autonomy and satisfaction.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

Based on the results obtained in this study the following recommendation is made with regard to future research:

- Further research into the moderating effects of social support between job autonomy and job satisfaction is warranted. This will be addressed by using a

larger sample and a longitudinal design, as this will make generalisations, conclusions and recommendations more relevant and appropriate.

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