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The role of personal resources in the JD-R model within a student-university context

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Abstract

Student well-being has become an increasing concern for universities both locally and internationally, with an increased interest in the prevention of academic burnout and the promotion of academic engagement due to their respective negative and positive influence on students. Accordingly, the Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model was developed as a theoretical framework, incorporating environmental characteristics that predict symptoms of engagement and burnout in individuals. A major criticism of the JD-R model is its lack of consideration for the impact of personal resources on individual well-being. Emanating from this concern, the current study used the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to empirically investigate whether the personal resource of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) interacted within the health impairment and motivation processes of the JD-R model. More specifically, it examined whether PsyCap mediated the relationship between demands/resources and burnout/engagement within a South African university environment. Few studies have attempted to integrate personal resources into the JD-R model, and no known studies have applied this integration within a student-university context. This provides a unique and novel context for application, warranting further research.

Research participants either accessed an online questionnaire via a web link made available to them on the university's student portal, or a hard copy version of the questionnaire was distributed during lecture time. The questionnaire included a self-developed demographic questionnaire, an adapted version of the Student Stress Scale (Da Coste Leite & Israel, 2011), an adapted version of the Factors of Academic Facilitators Scale (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martinez, & Breso, 2010), the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002), the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002), and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (Luthans Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). The final sample (N=331) consisted of both full-time and part-time undergraduate students in their first, second or third year of study at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Results of the current study demonstrated that PsyCap mediated the relationship between academic obstacles and academic engagement, as well as, the relationship between academic

facilitators and academic engagement. It also demonstrated, however, that PsyCap was not significantly related to academic burnout, and therefore was not a mediator in the relationship between academic obstacles/facilitators and academic burnout. Furthermore, results indicated that direct, positive relationships between academic obstacles and academic burnout; academic facilitators and PsyCap; and PsyCap and academic engagement existed, while a direct, negative relationship between academic obstacles and PsyCap existed. These findings were supported with previous research and literature. In addition, the current study also produced some non-hypothesised, but not unexpected, findings. Firstly, academic burnout and engagement was found to be moderately and negatively related, and secondly, engagement appeared to mediate the relationship between PsyCap and academic burnout. Additionally, an indirect, positive and weak relationship was found to exist between academic obstacles and burnout, while an indirect, negative and weak relationship was found between academic facilitators and academic burnout.

In conclusion, the current findings provide support for JD-R and COR theoretical assumptions, as well as the significant role personal resources play in the JD-R model in predicting student well-being.