



Jobs and safety: A social exchange perspective in explaining safety citizenship behaviors and safety violations

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we extend the Job Demands Resources model of situational and routine safety violations proposed by Hansez and Chmiel (2010) to incorporate contextual variables (participation in voluntary safety activities and the perspective employees take on whether such activities are part of their job or not). We draw on a Social Exchange Theory (SET) perspective of job resources (JR) to test important new relationships between safety specific and non-safety specific processes. We build on prior observations that safety participation (SP) predicts lower safety violations, and that employee perspectives on such discretionary activities predicts their discretionary safety behavior (Neal and Griffin, 2006; Chmiel et al., 2017). We adopt a SET perspective for two reasons. First, because SP is discretionary, it can be reciprocated by employees, and reciprocation is central to SET perspectives (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al, 1986). Second, because Hansez & Chmiel showed that a safety-specific variable, Perceived Management Commitment to Safety (PMCS), explained additional variance in safety violations over the JDR model. PMCS can be regarded as reflecting anticipated rewards for behaving safely, another key psychological process connected to SET (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). Structural analyses used a sample of 1922 workers from a Belgium steel company. Results add to the understanding of processes predicting safety violations, suggesting that JR promote, not just engagement and anticipatory rewards for acting safely, but important additional reciprocation processes deserving further exploration.

1. Introduction

Models of safety behaviors based on work performance approaches consider both task (i.e. violations) and contextual (i.e. voluntary safety activities) behaviors (Beus et al., 2016; Christian et al., 2009; Neal et al., 2000). Chmiel and Hansez (2016) have identified four distinct psychological processes they considered as fundamental to explain safety behaviors, namely, cognitive-energetical, motivational, instrumental and obligation processes. Hansez and Chmiel (2010) demonstrated that the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model could be extended to Safety Violations. The JDR entails two non-safety-specific processes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007); a motivational one related to work engagement, and a cognitive-energetical one related to job strain. Both variables were found to be related to safety violations, although, as expected, job strain was only related to effort-based violations. When Hansez and Chmiel (2010) considered the addition of a safety-specific variable, that of perceived management commitment to safety (PMCS), additional variance in safety violations was explained. Of particular interest for the present paper, those authors found that PMCS partially

mediated the effect of job resources on safety violations. PMCS is hypothesized to entail an instrumental process (Chmiel and Hansez, 2016): employees' safety behavior is predicted by whether they expect such behavior to be rewarded or punished. That is, PMCS reflects an anticipation by employees that their safety-related behaviors will be approved of to a greater or lesser extent. Hansez & Chmiel focused on task-related safety violations, however there are also contextual or citizenship behaviors, such as participating in voluntary safety activities, to consider. The latter feature as an outcome in models of safety behaviors based on work performance approaches (Beus et al., 2016; Christian et al., 2009; Neal et al., 2000). However what makes their consideration especially relevant is that safety participation has been shown, not just to correlate with, but to be an antecedent of safety violations (Chmiel et al., 2017; Neal and Griffin, 2006). In other words participation in discretionary safety activities is not just a good thing to do, and potentially beneficial to the organization, it also has a bearing on the individual's task-related safety.

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1.1. The relationship between PMCS, safety citizenship role definitions, safety participation, and safety violations

Taking part in discretionary safety activities, or safety participation, strongly depends on the perspective employees take on such participatory activities. Indeed, researchers have identified safety citizenship role definitions (SCRDs, i.e. considering discretionary safety activities such as volunteering for safety committee as part of one's job role) as a key predictor of employees' engagement in such voluntary safety activities (Hofmann et al., 2003; Chmiel et al., 2017). Chmiel et al. (2017) further showed that SCRDS were associated with situational violations (but not routine violations), indirectly through the mediating role of safety participation. Situational violations are those provoked by organizational failings and seen as essential to get the job done, whereas routine violations are violations of safety rules by taking the path of least effort, by taking 'short cuts', and conceptualized as related to an individual's available cognitive energy (Reason, 1990). Given these definitions, the finding that SCRDS and safety participation were not related to routine, or effort-based violations (Chmiel et al., 2017) support the view that processes involving these discretionary safety-specific aspects are not cognitive-energetical in nature. This finding also allowed a plausible explanation of the unexpected path discovered by Neal and Griffin (2006) between safety participation and future safety compliance. While participating in safety activities (eg. joining safety committee) employees could encourage changes regarding organizational constraints likely to provoke situational violations.

In their Job Demands-Resources model of safety violations, Hansez and Chmiel (2010) considered the addition of a safety-specific variable, perceived management commitment to safety (PMCS), and additional variance in safety violations was explained. PMCS involves perceptions that inform employees' expectations regarding organizational approval or disapproval for safety behaviors. Chmiel et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between PMCS and SCRDS, by arguing that workers could consider discretionary activities as part of their job role because they believe it's expected of them, on the basis of their perception that safety is important for their organization (Didla et al., 2009). On the basis of the previous considerations, we believe that:

Hypothesis 1a.. PMCS will be related to situational violations, indirectly through SCRDS and safety participation (double mediation).

Hypothesis 1b.. PMCS will be directly related to situational violations.

Hypothesis 1c.. PMCS will be directly related to routine violations.

Hypothesis 1d.. Safety participation will mediate the relationship between PMCS and situational violations (simple mediation).

1.2. Job resources and social exchange processes

As noted above, perceptions that management is committed to safety are taken by employees to inform their expectations regarding organizational approval or disapproval for safety behaviors. Zohar (2008) interpreted the association between safety climate and safety behaviors by individual perceptions of safety climate as informing behavior-outcomes expectancies. As PMCS is considered as a core dimension of safety climate (eg. Griffin and Neal, 2000), the interpretation of management attitude and behaviors towards safety may directly affect employees' safety behaviors, according to what they think is expected of them and the rewards they may expect by behaving accordingly. Hansez and Chmiel (2010)'s key finding was that PMCS mediated the relationship between job resources and safety violations. In this case, on the basis of the assumption that the perceptions of wider organizational factors, such as general organizational climate predicted more specific safety climate (Clarke, 2010; Neal et al., 2000), job resources may be considered by workers as a favorable general organizational context that will promote positive safety specific perceptions.

These perceptions are interpreted by workers as a safety specific signal that rewards can be expected if they behave safely. This instrumental interpretation of the relationships between job resources, PMCS and safety behaviors is in line with a key Social Exchange Theory (SET) postulate, stipulating that, in the context of social interactions, actors behave in terms of anticipated rewards (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Emerson, 1976). The reinforcement idea underlying instrumental processes implies a consistent pattern of actions between the two parties, as behavior that generates positive consequences is likely to be repeated in the same circumstances (Homans, 1961). In the same vein, Zohar (2008) argued that, "from a functional perspective, climate perceptions should refer to policies-in-use, or enacted policies, rather than to their formal counterparts, because only the former inform employees of the probable organizational consequences of acting safely (vs. speedily). Thus, a consensus should occur when management and peers display an internally consistent pattern of action concerning safety, even if it differs from the formally declared policy. For example, site managers might expect workers to cut corners whenever production falls behind schedule, despite official claims to the contrary" (p.377).

We believe that, by adopting a social exchange perspective, job resources could be considered as (1) an evaluation context for workers for management approval or disapproval regarding safety, and thus for rewards/punishment expectations, i.e. PMCS; but also as (2) a form a support received by the organization and to be reciprocated. Indeed, another key postulate of SET, illustrating reciprocation processes, is that if workers perceive that their organization takes care of their well-being, they will feel an obligation to reciprocate this support (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). In the general organizational literature, extra-role behaviors have been frequently investigated as a key way for workers to reciprocate to their organization for the positive treatment they received, since Organ (1988, cited by Konovsky and Pugh, 1994) suggested that organizational citizenship behavior is one likely avenue for employee reciprocation. Also in the safety specific literature, safety citizenship behaviors have been identified as the result of a reciprocation process. For example, Mearns and Reader (2008) found that employees in the offshore oil and gas industry perceiving high levels of support from their organization and from their supervisor reported higher levels of safety citizenship behaviors. More recently, Reader et al. (2017) showed that, in the same population, activities supporting workforce health increased perceptions of organizational support, which resulted in more safety citizenship behaviors through increased levels of commitment to the organization. These authors interpreted these relationships through social exchange theory. Hofmann et al. (2003) also showed that, in a context where safety is considered as important (i.e. good safety climate), high quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships were associated with SCRDS and, in turn, SCRDS predicted corresponding discretionary safety behaviors, i.e. safety participation. These results illustrate the importance of the perspective on the role employees are willing to adopt concerning safety (SCRDS), besides adopting safety citizenship behaviors (i.e. extra-role behaviors) as a way of reciprocation. In addition to the quality of the relationship between employees and their supervisor (Hofmann et al., 2003), an important resource predicting employees' flexible role orientation is job autonomy (Parker et al., 2006), and employees perceiving high job control are more likely to define safety as part of their job role (Chmiel et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2005). Moreover, Chen and Chen (2014) found a positive direct effect of job resources on safety participation and, as emphasized by Yuan et al. (2015), the direct relationship between job resources and safety performance should be interpreted through social exchange as a way used by workers to reciprocate the support they receive from their organization. Given the previous assumptions, we have reasons to believe that, if employees perceive that their organization take care of them, by providing them general resources, they will reciprocate by considering discretionary safety activities as part of their role, and so effectively execute such discretionary activities, which are viewed as beneficial for the

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