



Teachers' perceived autonomy support and adaptability: An investigation employing the job demands-resources model as relevant to workplace exhaustion, disengagement, and commitment

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined a model of teachers' workplace experiences and outcomes.
- Perceived autonomy support (PAS) at work predicted greater adaptability.
- PAS predicted lower emotional exhaustion (EE) and work disengagement (DIS).
- Adaptability predicted lower DIS, but there was no relationship with EE.
- PAS (positively), EE, and DIS (both negatively) predicted organizational commitment.

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ABSTRACT

We investigated the extent to which perceived autonomy support (PAS) is associated with adaptability and, in turn, whether both are associated with emotional exhaustion and work disengagement. The associations that all four factors have with organizational commitment were also examined. With a sample of 164 Australian secondary school teachers, we conducted structural equation modeling. Findings showed that PAS was positively associated with adaptability, and negatively associated with exhaustion and disengagement. Adaptability was negatively associated with disengagement. Finally, PAS (positively), exhaustion (negatively), and disengagement (negatively) were associated with organizational commitment. Together, the findings shed light on teachers' workplace experiences and outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Teachers' psychological functioning has emerged as an important worldwide issue for educators, students, and schools alike. Researchers have highlighted that poor psychological functioning is linked with high rates of attrition, burnout, and lengthy stress leave among teachers (Albrecht & Marty, 2017; Marshall, 2012; Safe Work Australia, 2013). Despite these costly outcomes, in broader policy and practice, the significance of teachers' psychological functioning has not been a central focus. This may be due to the

emphasis on testing accountability that has featured in policy in Australia and other countries over the past two decades (e.g., von der Embse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, & Ryan, 2016). It may also be because it is only relatively recently that policy-makers are becoming aware of the costs of poor psychological functioning among teachers (e.g., teacher attrition; Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Clearly, this is an issue that requires greater attention in order to improve teachers' experiences at work, as well as outcomes for teachers, students, and schools.

A growing body of research on teachers' psychological functioning has yielded important knowledge about salient resources that are essential for promoting teachers' psychological functioning at work. This research has highlighted the complementary role of both job resources, as well as teachers' own capacities (i.e., personal resources; e.g., Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou,

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2007; Desrumaux et al., 2015; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Despite this, there remain notable gaps in knowledge in the area. In particular, research is needed to corroborate preliminary understanding about connections that job and personal resources have with workplace experiences to better understand how teachers can be supported in their work. Moreover, although certain factors of teachers' psychological functioning have received ample attention in the literature—such as emotional exhaustion—others have not. Thus, it is important to examine novel factors to further illuminate understanding of teachers' psychological functioning and the plethora of resources that play a role in supporting this. For example, limited research has considered disengagement among teachers; however, given substantial numbers of teachers report high levels of disengagement (e.g., Collie & Martin, 2017a), this is an issue that requires attention. Of note, examining novel constructs in relation to more established constructs promotes better understanding of salient factors in teachers' psychological functioning, their unique associations, and the related nomological network—that is, the ways in which teachers' workplace experiences and outcomes are associated. Such knowledge is essential for better understanding the complexity of teachers' psychological functioning and guiding intervention to promote positive experiences among teachers.

Thus, in the current study, our aim was to augment existing knowledge about several factors of teachers' workplace experiences and yield novel understanding about other, under-researched factors. We harnessed the job demands-resources model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) to examine associations between several workplace factors: perceived autonomy support, adaptability, emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and organizational commitment. More precisely, we examined the extent to which perceived autonomy support is associated with adaptability and, in turn, whether both are associated with emotional exhaustion and work disengagement. We also investigated the extent to which all four factors are associated with organizational commitment. Figure 1 demonstrates the hypothesized model under examination. Teachers' gender, teaching experience, and highest qualification were controlled for all factors.

1.1. Conceptual framework

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model has been used to predict personal and organizational outcomes across a range of cultures and occupations (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker, Van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010; Brough et al., 2013; Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It has also been deemed a valuable tool in helping to understand teachers' experiences at work (e.g., Bakker et al., 2007; Desrumaux et al., 2015; Hakanen et al., 2006). Two central components of this model are job resources and personal resources. Job resources are the aspects of a job that stimulate personal growth, enable employees to achieve their work goals, and to manage the

psychological and physical demands of the job (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Relevant job resources for teachers include supportive school leadership, immediate supervisor support, job control and, of relevance to the current study, perceived autonomy support (Devos, Tuytens & Hulpia, 2013).

Personal resources refer to the psychological aspects or skills of the self that influence an individual's perception of their ability to control and contribute to their environment successfully (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Like job resources, personal resources facilitate goal progress and stimulate growth and development (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Personal resources such as resilience, optimism, organizational based self-esteem, and self-efficacy have been shown to predict work engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007) and indirectly influence work satisfaction and wellbeing through positive evaluations of the environment (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). More recently, researchers have highlighted the role of adaptability as a personal resource that helps teachers to manage the changing demands they face in their work (Collie & Martin, 2017b).

The JD-R model thus functions as a suitable framework to understand teachers' workplace experiences and outcomes because it takes into account the influence of many different factors—both job-based and personal. In addition, the JD-R proposes various processes related to job and personal resources that shed light on the experiences and outcomes of teachers. Three, in particular, are relevant to the current study. The first is the link between job resources and personal resources. The JD-R model proposes that when individuals have high levels of job resources, this can promote personal resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Indeed, researchers from various countries have shown that principal support (a job resource) positively predicts personal resources including teachers' adaptability, optimism, work motivation, and emotion regulation ability (Collie & Martin, 2017b; Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010; Desrumaux et al., 2015; Dicke, Stebner, Linninger, Kunter, & Leutner, 2017; Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, & Levesque-Côté, 2016). The second process relevant to the current study is the motivational, or energetic, process, which proposes that job resources and personal resources lead to enhanced engagement (Bakker et al., 2007). In turn, this leads to more positive workplace outcomes—including enhanced motivation, attainment of work related goals, successful task completion and heightened organizational commitment (Collie & Martin, 2017b; Bakker et al., 2007; Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The third process that is relevant to the current model is the buffering role that job resources and personal resources play on the health impairment process. The JD-R model indicates that when an individual has access to supportive job and personal resources, this helps to reduce burnout (Bakker et al., 2007) and, in turn, promote positive workplace outcomes.

In the present study, we examined the role of job and personal resources in both the motivational and health impairment

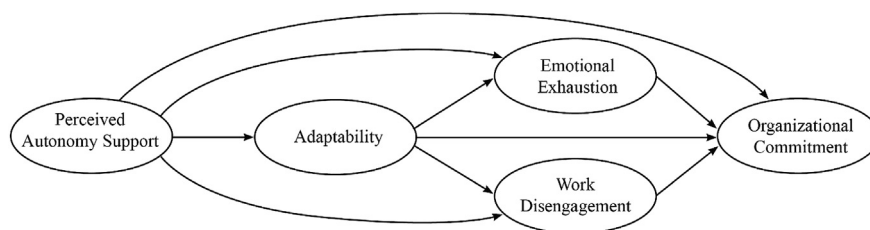


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model showing relationships between perceived autonomy support, adaptability, emotional exhaustion, work disengagement, and organizational commitment. Covariates (gender, teaching experience, highest qualification) were controlled for all substantive factors.

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