



**PERCEIVED SUPPORT, RECEIVED
SUPPORT, AND SOURCE OF STRAIN: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE
CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE
RELATIONSHIPS FOR MANAGERS**

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Abstract

This research explores two areas of social support and social relationships that have remained relatively unexamined: the characteristics of workplace social relationships, and the association between perceived available social support and the social support received when under stress. Firstly, few of the 572 managers in the sample regarded work relationships as a source of available support, and frequently indicated that such relationships contributed to their stress. Secondly, workplace relationships primarily provided support for work, rather than nonwork, stressors. Thirdly, when confronted with a stressful event those with larger support networks sought support from a larger number of relationships, and received more emotional and informational support; those who were satisfied with their available support sought support from a larger number of relationships, and received more emotional support.

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Twenty-five years of empirical and theoretical research has demonstrated the complexity of social relationship processes. This issue is particularly relevant within the work setting, where social relationships have been viewed mainly as a source of support (Ford, 1985), although there is evidence that they play a role in the stress process and may act as a source of strain (Buunk & Peeters, 1994; Keenan & Newton, 1985; Sutherland & Davidson, 1989). These mixed findings suggest that there is a need for research that attends to both the problematic and the positive aspects of social relationships (Rook, 1992).

One area worthy of further study is that of the role of workplace relationships for managers and supervisors. Theoretically, provision of information and personal support to subordinates are core managerial tasks, and there is a strong tradition within leadership theory that relationship- or employee-centered leadership behaviors are helpful (e.g., in the theories of Blake & Mouton, 1978; Likert, 1961; and Stogdill, 1974). Additionally, it has been claimed that work superiors and colleagues are in a better position to provide work-related support than are non-organizational members (Ray, 1987).

Moreover, research on social support has demonstrated the beneficial consequences to subordinates of support from managers. Management support has been associated with work adjustment (Fisher, 1985), reduced anger (Greenglass, 1987), job and life satisfaction (Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986; Kaufmann & Beehr, 1989; Terry, Neilsen & Perchard, 1993), well-being (Kaufmann & Beehr, 1989; Terry et al., 1993), and decreased burnout (Constable & Russell, 1986; Eastburg, Williamson, Gorsuch, & Ridley, 1994). Additionally, managerial support appears to be effective in reducing stress reactions among subordinates (Dunseath, Beehr & King, 1995; Israel, House, Schurman, Heany, & Mero, 1989; Wolken & Good, 1995).

These positive findings have led to suggestions that managers should provide high levels of social support to their subordinates (e.g., Albrecht & Halsey, 1992; Constable & Russell, 1986; Dunseath et al, 1995; Fisher, 1985; Ford, 1985; Heaney, Price, & Rafferty, 1995). However, this provision of support may be problematic for the managers themselves. First, the nature of the superior-subordinate relationship may result in a nonreciprocal relationship where support is provided by managers, but is unavailable to them, thus emotionally isolating them within the workplace. Second, the interactions required to provide this support may be a source of strain.

Although little research has used managers as the focus of study, there is some evidence that they are socially isolated at work. For example, Frankenhaeuser et al. (1989) reported that approximately 75% of managers believed that others in their place of work did not care about them as a person. Although this finding was not confined to managers (for example, approximately 90% of male and 55% of female clerical workers felt the same way) it does suggest that managers may find workplace relationships unsupportive.

Additionally, there is evidence that social experiences at work may not only fail to provide support, but may also act as a source of stress. Interpersonal conflicts at work have been found to be major sources of stress for other occupational groups such as police officers, secretaries, correctional officers (Buunk & Peeters 1994), and engineers (Keenan & Newton, 1985), and there is additional potential for difficulty in the social relationships required as part of the managerial role. This was

demonstrated in a study by Sutherland and Davidson (1989) in which it was reported that 73% of the construction site managers on a large site (and 57% of those on a small site) found that dealing with staff who were incompetent was a significant source of stress.

Moreover, managers may be vulnerable to strain from situations that change, or threaten to change, existing relationship patterns. Rook (1992) has argued that "relationships can adversely affect health and well-being even when criticism, exploitation, betrayal, and other social wounds are not implicated" (p. 158). One way that this may occur is through the breaking of existing social ties that occur as a consequence of changes to the management role; for example a transfer to another division may be appraised as stressful, at least in part, because it involves the loss of significant and useful current relationships, and the need to deflect energy into the establishment of new relationships. Another avenue through which strain may occur is through the potential of events to influence relationships by lessening the positive views held by others; a presentation at work, or performance on a difficult technical task, for example, may be stressful because of a fear that others may consider one incapable or foolish. Additionally, concern for the well-being of others who are undergoing difficulties may itself be stressful. In each case, issues associated with work relationships have played a significant part in the stress process.

It can be seen from the examples given above that interpersonal relationships have the potential to negatively affect managers. However, relationships that provide support appear to be as beneficial to managers as they are to subordinates. For example, workplace support to managers has been associated with humor, optimism (Fry, 1995), and pretraining motivation (Faction et al., 1995); successful transfer of training of supervisory skills (Faction et al., 1995; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995); reduced depression (DeJong & Verhage, 1987; Greenglass, 1993), burnout (Dolan & Renaud, 1992), and work stress (van der Pompe & de Heus, 1993; Sen, 1992); and lower anxiety (Greenglass, 1993), anger in discriminatory situations (Greenglass, 1987), and illness scores when under stress (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983). Outside the psychosocial arena, psychological support from a supervisor or mentor has also been associated with higher salary level (Scandura, 1992).

The evidence suggests, then, that workplace relationships may have a mixed effect upon managers, and, as a consequence, research needs to consider both the positive and negative aspects of these relationships. Relationships that provide support to the manager are likely to have positive consequences; however, day-to-day interactions with subordinates, and situations where the manager is either required to provide support to others, or that have the potential to change existing relationships, may contribute to stress and isolation.

However, research to date has tended to focus upon the quantitative aspects of supportive relationships, and upon the association between social support, stress, and well-being. Furthermore, the resultant findings have been difficult to compare due to the different ways in which social support has been conceptualized and operationalized (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1989). The present study is designed to fill the resultant gap in the literature, and to explore the qualitative aspects of work and nonwork relationships and social support.

In order to do this, a clear theoretical model of social support is required. This is provided by Sarason and Sarason's (1994) conceptualization of social support as a construct that contains three major subconstructs: (a) degree of embeddedness in a support network and characteristics of that network, (b) perceptions of support held by the individual (perceived available support), and (c) interactions that are intended to provide support (received support). Additionally, three major types

of social support can be thought of as being perceived or received: emotional support, information, and tangible assistance (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987).

As prior research has not elaborated upon the empirical relations between social network roles (ie, the relationships that provide support) and perceived social support (Laireiter & Baumann, 1992), this will be the first focus of this study. The first component of this is a response to the call of Buunk (1990) for systematic investigation of the different sources of support; that is, the perceived support available from different support network members. As emotional support is the core of supportive relationships (see Sarason, Shearin, Pierce & Sarason, 1987; Turner, 1992), the focus will be upon the perceived availability of this type of support from different network members. For, although support may be communicated through the provision of advice or tangible assistance, the availability of these may not indicate the presence of a supportive relationship. This applies particularly within the workplace, where they may be available as part of work processes, but in a nonsupportive manner. Evidence from other studies, mostly using other occupational groups, leads to the hypotheses that: (a) the central support network will consist of family members and close friends, with work colleagues of minimal importance (Bamberg, Ruckert, & Udris, 1986; Burke & Weir, 1975; Lairetter & Baumann, 1992; Sutherland & Davidson, 1989); and (b) workplace support will be more frequently available from subordinates or co-workers than from superiors (Erera, 1992; Marcelissen, Winnubst, Buunk, & de Wolff, 1988; Savery, 1988).

The second component is a response to the call by Antonucci and Johnson (1994) that it is not merely the quantity, but the quality, of social relationships that need to be measured; therefore the form of emotional support provided by different network sources will be examined. One way that this can be done is to examine the nature of the support available from each source, for it is possible that different sources may provide different forms of support. For example, it may be that a spouse or partner can be counted on for care or consolation, whereas friends provide relaxation. It is therefore hypothesized that different forms of emotional support will be available from different support sources.

The second focus of this study will be the relationship between perceived support availability and the receipt of support, which Dunkel-Schetter and Bennett (1990) claim has been neglected in the literature. However, at least one study has found that higher levels of workplace support use are associated with a perception that the workplace is supportive (Jayaratne, Himle, & Chess, 1988). It is therefore hypothesized that perceptions of support availability from a source will be associated with receipt of support from that source.

The third focus of this study will be the nature of received support, an area that also has been rarely studied (Buunk, 1990; Winemiller, Mitchell, Sutliff, & Cline, 1993). Basic issues yet to be resolved include the extent to which support is sought for stressful events, the identity of the network relationships from whom support is sought, the relationship between sought and received support, and the degree to which support receipt depends upon the structure of an individual's social network (Thoits, 1992).

If support seeking mirrors perceived support availability, it is hypothesized that support in stressful situations will be sought mostly from a central support network of family and close friends (Lairetter & Baumann, 1992). Similarly, if support seeking is based upon a rational assessment of the ability of others to provide support, it is hypothesized that the majority of those who are approached for support will provide assistance.

An additional area that the literature has tended to ignore is the frequency with which relationships are involved in stressful transactions. Relationships may be part of what is at stake in such transactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and so theoretically constitute a component of the primary appraisal process. The final aim of this study will therefore be to examine the frequency of relationship appraisals in stress transactions. As managers are part of a social network within and outside work, it is predicted that the majority of stressors nominated by managers will contain relationship-related appraisals. However, as people inside the workplace are unlikely to be regarded as emotionally significant in the same way as a partner or spouse, relative, significant other, friend, or confidant (Laireiter & Baumann, 1992), it is further predicted that fewer work-related stress transactions than nonwork stress transactions will contain relationship appraisals.

The purpose of this study is therefore to explore, for managers, the role of social relationships, particularly those in the workplace. Specifically, it aims to compare the degree to which perceived support is available from work and nonwork relationships; to study the relationship between perceived and received support; to review the strength of support seeking under stress; to examine the association between sought and received support; and to examine the role of relationship appraisals in stressful transactions.

Method

Sample

Managers from 41 organizations participated voluntarily in this study. The organizations were chosen to represent the major organizational groupings, and managers employed full-time within these organizations were randomly chosen for inclusion. Of the 1021 asked to participate anonymously, 572 returned completed questionnaires, a response rate of 56%. The majority of the sample were male (78%) upper middle managers, and 76% of the sample were aged between 30 and 50.

Measures

Perceived Support Availability and Support Network

The six-item short form of the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ6; Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987), which has been classified by the authors (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990) as a strong measure of emotional support, was used to measure perceived support and perceived network size. The six items require respondents to list, and nominate their relationship with, up to eight individuals whom they can "count on for help or support in the manner described". The full scale was used as an indicator of perceived emotional support; the items were also used separately to study forms of perceived support.

Perceived support. Respondents nominated their satisfaction level with each of the six items from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied); Chronbach's alpha for this scale was .93. Mean responses were recoded into two categories for later analysis: 1-3.49 (dissatisfied with support; $n = 58$); 3.50-6 (satisfied with support; $n = 492$)

Network size. Mean number of supporters available across the six items was calculated to give an indicator of network size (see Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett, 1990, for a rationale). Chronbach's alpha for this scale was .88. Perceived support and network size correlated $r = .21$ ($p < .01$).

Characteristics of the perceived support network. The list of those available to provide support were coded into seven relationship categories: outside the workplace these were spouse/partner,

family, friends, and other; within the workplace these were colleagues, superiors and subordinates. The number of supporters in each of these categories, and the total number of support resources in the work and nonwork domains were also calculated to provide measures of available support resources.

Stressful event

Respondents were asked to describe the most stressful event that had occurred in the past month; of the 572 respondents, 492 were able to describe an event, 14 reported the presence of a stressful event but did not describe it fully, 28 said that they had not had a stressful event, and 38 left the stressful incident section unanswered.

Event domain. Three hundred and thirty-three (68%) of the described stressors were work-related; one hundred and fifty-nine (32%) occurred outside work.

Event appraisal. Respondents completed the primary appraisal form of the Stressful Incident Record (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). The presence of one of the following eight appraisals was taken to indicate that the stressor contained a relationship component: "Losing the affection of someone important to you"; "Harm to a loved one's health, safety or physical well-being"; "A loved one(s) having difficulty getting along in the world"; "Harm to a loved one's emotional well-being"; "Losing respect for someone else"; "Appearing to be uncaring"; "Appearing unethical"; and "Losing the approval or respect of someone important to you".

Received Support

Support receipt was assessed using the social support scale of Dunkel-Schetter et al. (1987). Respondents were asked to think about the stressful situation nominated, and to indicate if at least one person within each of 15 relationship categories was spoken to about the situation.

Characteristics of the received support network. To provide a measure of received support from each network role, the categories were recoded to indicate the presence of support from each of the relationship categories used in the perceived support measure: superiors, subordinates, colleagues, spouse or partner, other family, friends, or other.

Intensity of received support. Respondents were asked to list the three most helpful persons, and rate on a 5-point scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (a lot) the extent to which each provided information or advice, tangible assistance or aid, and emotional support. This provided two measures of received support intensity for each type of support: from the most effective support provider, and the mean level of support from the three most helpful persons.

Results

Sources of Perceived Support

The number of respondents reporting available support (taken from the SSQ6) from at least one person in the work domain was compared to the number reporting available support from the nonwork domain. Support was more often available from outside the workplace (to 97% of respondents) than from inside (to 72% of respondents), Cochran's $Q = 114.61$, $p < .001$. Within the workplace, support was more often available from colleagues (to 62% of respondents) than from subordinates (to 35% of respondents) or superiors (to 20% of respondents), Cochran's $Q(2) = 233.80$, $p < .001$.

The percentage of respondents reporting the availability of each form of emotional support from at least one person in the work and the nonwork domains is shown in Table 1. A series of Cochran's Q tests indicated that each form of perceived support was significantly more likely to be available outside the work domain than within it (in all cases $p < .001$). All forms of support were available to most respondents (more than three-quarters) outside the workplace, although within the workplace care, consolation, acceptance, and help when down were available to less than a quarter of the sample. Distraction from stress was the most frequently nominated form of workplace support, and was available to approximately two-thirds of the respondents.

Table 1
The percentage of respondents reporting forms of perceived support from at least one person in each domain

Form of perceived support	Available from		Q
	Work	Non-work	
Distract from worries when you feel under stress	66%	88%	81.78***
Help feel more relaxed when under pressure and tense	34%	77%	188.81***
Accepts you totally, including worst and your best points	25%	88%	305.98***
Really count on to care about you, regardless	17%	94%	414.57***
Really count on to help you feel better when down	25%	85%	298.84***
Count on to console you when you are very upset	15%	84%	350.67***

*** $p < .001$

A further series of Cochran's Q tests indicated that the nature of the network relationship influenced support availability for each form of support (Figure 1; distraction, $Q [6] = 798.05$, $p < .001$; relaxation, $Q [6] = 750.98$, $p < .001$; acceptance, $Q [6] = 923.48$, $p < .001$; care, $Q [6] = 1232.98$, $p < .001$; improve mood, $Q [6] = 900.17$, $p < .001$; consolation, $Q [6] = 1052.40$, $p < .001$). For most support forms, spouses and partners were most frequently nominated as providing support, followed by friends and other family members.

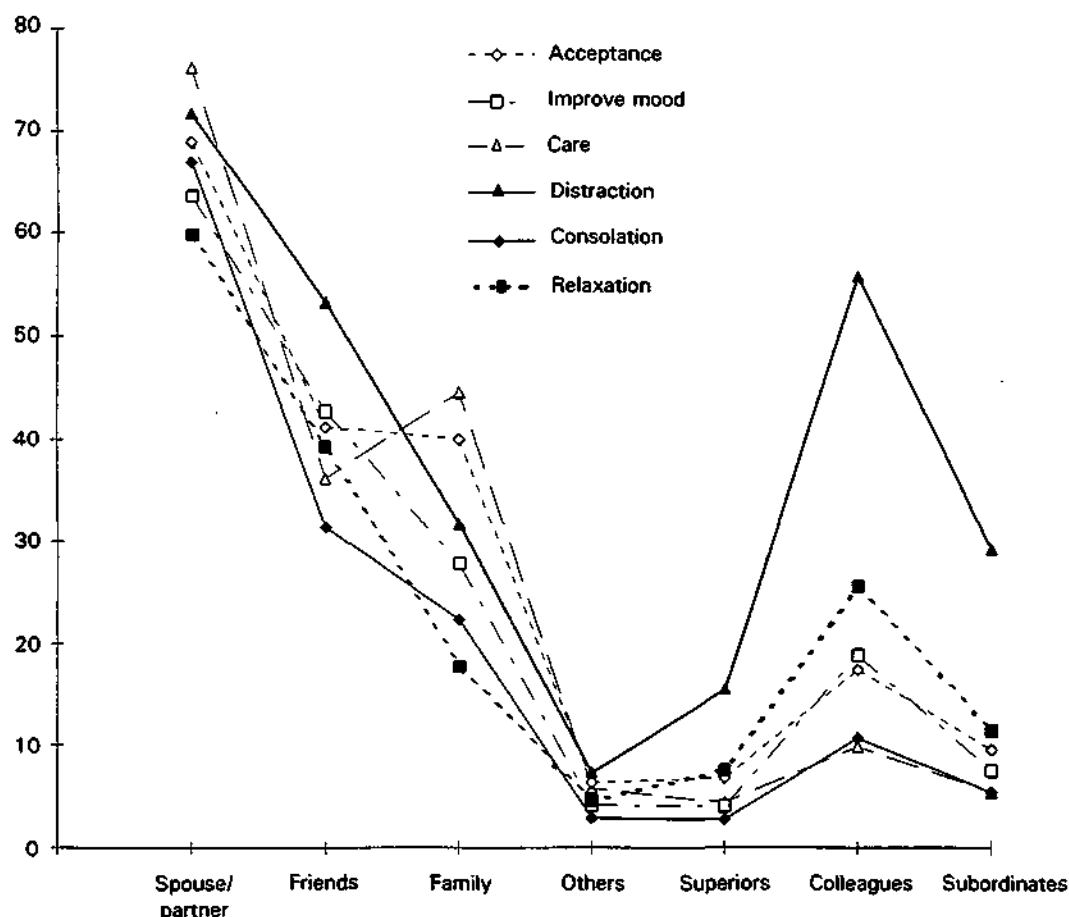


Figure 1
Percentage of respondents reporting each form of perceived support from network relationships.

The Relationship between Perceived Support and Received Support

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who sought support for the nominated stressor from network relationships perceived to provide support, and compares this to the percentage of respondents who sought support from relationships where support was not perceived to be available. A series of chi-squared tests showed that, in each case, support was more likely to be sought from network relationships from which support was perceived to be available, although for family support this difference was only marginal: Spouse/partner $\chi^2 = 59.09$, $p < .001$; Friends $\chi^2 = 35.09$, $p < .001$; Family $\chi^2 = 3.91$, $p < .05$; Others $\chi^2 = 5.09$, $p < .01$; Superior $\chi^2 = 12.70$, $p < .001$; Colleagues $\chi^2 = 11.57$, $p < .001$; Subordinates $\chi^2 = 20.06$, $p < .001$.

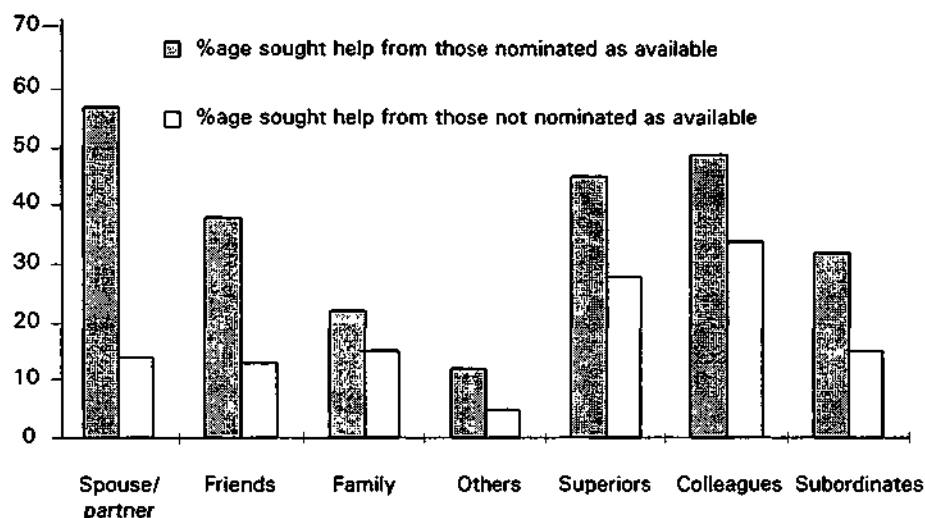


Figure 2

Comparison of the percentage of assistance sought from each source if the support perceived to be available, and not perceived to be available.

Received Support

The Strength of Support Seeking under Stress

Only nine respondents (2%) did not report speaking to any others about their most significant stressor, and the mean number of relationships from which support was sought was 4.60 ($sd = 2.36$).

The identity of network relationships from whom support is sought

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents with work stressors who sought support from each network relationship (black bars), and compares this to the percentage of respondents with nonwork stressors who sought support from each relationship (unshaded bars). The nature of the network relationship influenced support seeking behavior for both work stressors $Q(6) = 600.87, p < .001$, and nonwork stressors, $Q(6) = 235.48, p < .001$. For work stressors, support was most frequently sought from colleagues, superiors, a spouse or partner, or subordinates; for nonwork stressors, assistance was most frequently sought from a spouse or partner, other family members, or friends.

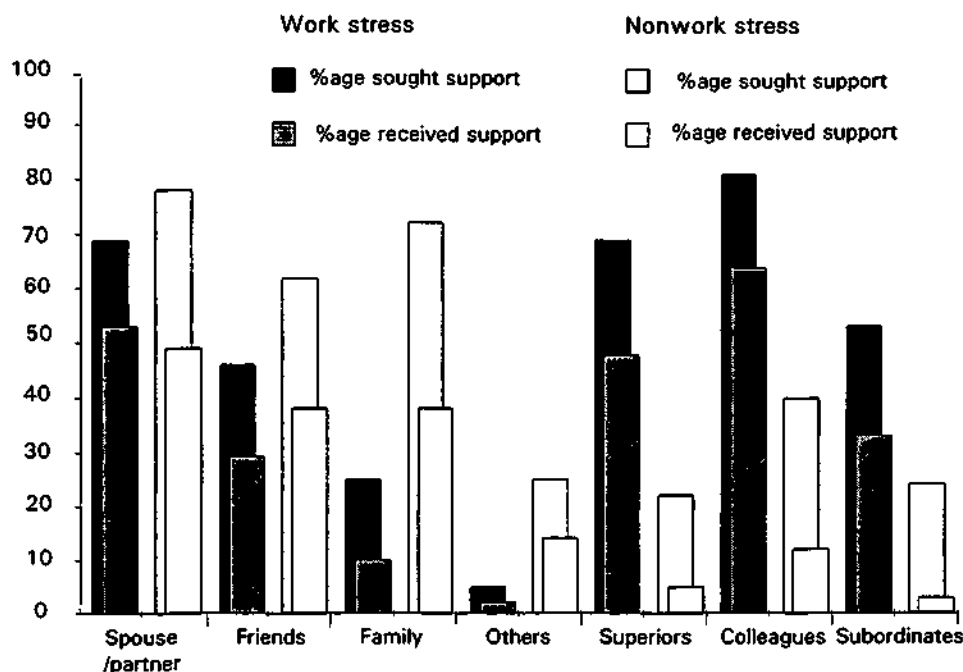


Figure 3

The percentage of respondents with events in each domain who sought, and received, support from each relationship

Additionally, when the network relationship was used as the focus, significantly more respondents approached superiors ($\chi^2 = 97.79$, $p < .001$), colleagues ($\chi^2 = 86.33$, $p < .001$), and subordinates ($\chi^2 = 34.54$, $p < .001$) for support for work stressors than for nonwork stressors; and significantly more respondents approached friends ($\chi^2 = 11.49$, $p < .001$), family ($\chi^2 = 92.59$, $p < .001$), and others ($\chi^2 = 45.92$, $p < .001$) for support for nonwork stressors than for work stressors. However, although more respondents sought assistance from a spouse or partner for nonwork stressors than for work stressors, this difference was only marginally significant ($\chi^2 = 4.29$, $p = .04$).

The Relationship between Sought and Received Support

The correlation between sought and received support from each source for events in the work and nonwork domains is shown in Table 2. In all cases the correlation between seeking and receiving support was significant $p < .001$. However, this statistical significance is, at least in part, a probable consequence of the large sample size. This can be seen by examining the percentage of respondents reporting work and nonwork stressors who sought, and received, support from each network relationship (Figure 3). This shows in percentage terms, that the support sought from others in the workplace for nonwork events was rarely received.

Table 2

The correlation between support sought and received from each source for events in the work and nonwork domains

Network relationship	Correlation (<i>r</i>) between sought and received support	
	Nonwork events	Work events
Spouse or partner	.66***	.71***
Friends	.73***	.64***
Family	.59***	.58***
Others	.81***	.65***
Superior	.48***	.63***
Colleagues	.52***	.60***
Subordinates	.28***	.66***

*** $p < .001$

Relationship between Social Network characteristics and Received Support

A series of correlations between network size and the received support variables indicated that a large network size was associated with support seeking from a greater number of network relationships ($r = .17, p < .01$), and receipt of more information and emotional support from the most helpful supporter and from the three most helpful supporters (information $r = .12, p < .01$, and $r = .13, p < .01$; emotional support $r = .12, p < .05$, and $r = .13, p < .01$, respectively); it was not associated with the receipt of tangible assistance. A series of ANOVA's showed that satisfaction with perceived support resulted in support seeking from a larger number of relationships, $F(1, 480) = 8.10, p < .01$, and receipt of marginally higher levels of emotional support from the most helpful supporter $F(1, 480) = 4.00, p < .05$; it did not influence level of information or tangible assistance received from either the most helpful supporter or the three most helpful supporters, or the level of emotional support received from the three most helpful supporters.

The Contribution of Relationship Appraisals to Stressful Situations

Concerns about relationships contributed to most of the nominated stressful situations; 410 (79%) of the described stressors included such appraisals. Additionally, although the majority (75%) of work-related stressors contained relationship appraisals, such appraisals were significantly more likely to be involved in nonwork stressors (89%), $\chi^2 = 13.28, p < .001$.

An examination of the event descriptions provided greater information about the nature of these appraisals. For example, issues relating to superiors included the superior's failure to provide support, assistance, or understanding; failure to manage adequately; failure to communicate sufficiently; lack of knowledge of the work situation; and "poor leadership". Similarly, stressors associated with dealing with subordinates included the conduct of performance appraisals in which manager and subordinate had differing perceptions of the subordinate's performance, "one-off" confrontations over performance issues, and ongoing issues involving trust and loyalty were mentioned.

Moreover, issues that would not normally be considered relationship-related were often appraised, and described, this way. For example, when commenting upon the stress associated with assignment to a new position one respondent wrote that the problem was "lack of support and guidance", another wrote of the stress of "winning respect of a new team of subordinates", and a

third of the strain of "impressing new subordinates and superiors". Similarly, organizational restructures were appraised as creating relationship-related difficulties such as managing staff resistance or new staff, tensions with new reporting relationships, and perceived political behavior by others.

Discussion

This study, although exploratory, shows the benefits of specifically conceptualizing and operationalizing the different components of social support and social relationships. As a result, it increases our knowledge of the characteristics of workplace relationships for managers, and provides support for several theoretical explanations of the support process.

Firstly, the findings support the model of support relationships put forward by Lairetter and Baumann (1992), in which a small number of close persons (family and friends) develop into a core support network, and more distant persons provide a smaller range of support functions when required. As hypothesized, the workplace provides relatively little support when compared to other potential support sources. Superiors, colleagues, and subordinates are unlikely to be regarded as emotionally supportive in the same way as a partner or spouse, relatives, or friends. Less emotional support of all forms is available from the workplace, and the most frequent way that this support is expressed is by distraction from worries; in contrast, family members and friends also provide care, acceptance, and consolation, and improve mood. Moreover, when faced with nonwork problems, managers seldom turn to the workplace for assistance; for work problems, they turn either to others in the workplace or to a spouse, partner, or friends.

Although Ray (1987) has claimed that managers and colleagues are in a better position to provide work-related support than non-organizational members, these findings suggest that managers turn to nonwork relationships for support that cannot be, or is not, provided at work. As it is unlikely that nonwork relationships are in a position to provide tangible assistance for, or specific information upon, work problems, it is probable that it is emotional support that is sought.

The need for information or assistance that can be provided only from within the workplace explains the finding that, in stressful situations, support for work problems is sought from within the workplace when sources from this domain are seldom nominated as emotionally supportive. This suggests that the assistance, although useful, may be provided by others in an instrumental way as part of their work role, rather than as an emotionally supportive interaction. Therefore it is probable that the support provided by workplace relationships is primarily informational or instrumental, whereas that provided by nonwork relationships has a component of emotional support. A consequence of the emotionally supportive interactions with close family and friends is that they come to be viewed as emotionally significant in a way that others, such as co-workers, are not, and develop into a primary support network (Lairetter & Baumann, 1992).

Furthermore, the finding that managers lack emotional support within the workplace may be explained theoretically by their placement within the organizational hierarchy. Johnson and Hall (1994) have argued that equality is a contributor to a collective identity, and that this in turn leads to the availability of support; thus, support is more likely to be provided by colleagues than by superiors or subordinates. Consequentially, if managers do not have a suitable group of equals with whom to form social links, there is potential for them to be unsupported. The present findings are consistent with this model.

The model of Johnson and Hall, and the current findings, are not consistent, however, with those models of leadership that view provision of support to subordinates as one of the major managerial tasks (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1978; Likert, 1961; and Stogdill, 1974), at least when applied to the relationship between managers and their superiors. Although it is possible that managers provide this support to their own subordinates, such support is seldom available to them from their own superiors. This may lead to support seeking from sources outside the workplace, and with the receipt of that support to the perceptions of higher support availability outside the workplace that were found in this study. As other research has demonstrated the beneficial consequences of the provision of workplace support, the current findings have consequences for the work effectiveness and well-being of this organizational group.

Other findings increase our understanding of the nature of the support received for stressful events. It can be seen that individuals communicate with, and seek support from, others in times of crisis. Additionally, support was provided for the hypotheses that perceptions of support availability from a particular source lead to support seeking behaviors from that source in stressful situations, and to the receipt of higher levels of support from that source. Moreover, those with larger emotional support networks use this network when requiring support, and receive higher levels of emotional and informational support from the most useful support providers as a consequence; probably because they are able to select from their network those who are able to give the most appropriate support. Moreover, those who are satisfied with the support available seek support from a larger number of relationships, and receive more emotional support from the most effective support provider; however, their average level of emotional support from the three most effective support providers is no higher than it is for those who are dissatisfied with the support available. This latter finding suggests that satisfaction is not directly proportional to network size; rather, it occurs with the belief that there is one person who is able to provide support when required, and a larger emotional support network increases this probability.

Other findings are consistent with the findings of Buunk and Peeters (1994) and Sutherland and Davidson (1989) that workplace relationships may act as a source of strain. Although nonwork stressful situations are more likely to contain relationship elements than are work situations, relationship issues are a significant component of most stressful occurrences at work. Theoretically, the descriptions provided of stressful situations supports Rook's (1992) argument that it is not only conflict relationships that are problematic; both conditions that change existing relationships, and relationships that moderate the attainment of personally valued goals, contribute to the stressfulness of events.

The major implications of this research for organizations and management rest upon the finding that emotional support is seldom provided to managers by workplace relationships. Therefore if managers are to receive the beneficial consequences of such support, intervention strategies such as formal mentoring programs (Scandura, 1992), or leadership programs that include components designed to increase relationship-oriented behaviors, may need to be established.

Theoretically, the research provided empirical support for Lairetter and Baumann's (1992) theory of support availability and provision, and Johnson and Hall's (1994) theory of workplace support. However, the study had some limitations. It was cross-sectional in nature, relied upon self-reported data, and its sample consisted only of managers. However, given the complex phenomena of social relationships and social support, it has gone some way toward increasing our understanding of the role of workplace social relationships, and the association between perceived available support and received support. In particular, it demonstrated that the presence of others in the workplace does not automatically lead to the availability of social support, and that such relationships can act as a

source of strain. As such, it provides a caution to the use of measures of network size, or instrumental or informational support, as indicators of social support receipt.

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