**Increasing the job success of people with disabilities: The interplay of interpersonal and intrapersonal resources**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose**

What makes an employee with disabilities successful in his or her job? This paper investigates individual job performance differences among employees with disabilities as a function of intra- and interpersonal resources. Hereby, we add evidence to the literature by focusing on the interplay of social support as an interpersonal resource and self-efficacy as an intrapersonal resource in predicting job performance of people with disabilities.

**Design/methodology/approach**

Data were collected in an Israeli call center employing mostly people with disabilities. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test our hypotheses.

**Findings**

The relationship between social support and job performance was conditionally supported (p=.06). The second main effect hypothesis, stating a positive relationship between self-efficacy and job performance, did not gain support. As postulated, we found a significant interaction effect of social support and self-efficacy, illustrating that the influence of social support on job performance depends on the level of self-efficacy. Whereas the job performance of low self-efficacious employees increases with increasing levels of social support, this relationship does not hold for high self-efficacious individuals.

**Research limitations/implications**

We use a cross-sectional survey design and have a relatively small sample size. However, we provide evidence for the importance of accounting for the interplay of inter- and intrapersonal resources when investigating the job performance of people with disabilities. The way social support relates to the outcome variable job performance depends on the level of self-efficacy.

In sum, it seems as if the relationship between interpersonal resources and job performance is way more complicated than sometimes assumed. Therefore, companies should not simply provide support to every employee having a disability, but instead take into account the individual differences in intrapersonal resources, such as self-efficacy. Meeting personal needs of people with disabilities can help to unleash their full working potential, making them effective members of the workforce.

**Originality/value of the paper**

We add evidence to the literature by demonstrating that intrapersonal as well as interpersonal resources need to be considered when investigating the job performance of people with disabilities. Thereby we show that the general assumption that help is equally beneficial for people with disabilities may not be true.

**Keywords:** disability, job performance, social support, self-efficacy

**Introduction**

Approximately 15%, or more than a billion people in the world have some form of disability (WHO, 2011). Thus, people with disabilities represent the world's largest minority (United Nations, 2006). Since this demographic group of people has become more and more important for organizations and will become even more in the future, the present study aims at investigating factors that influence their job performance. There are several reasons why employees with disabilities are particularly relevant for companies. First, due to the ongoing demographic change, leading to an extension of the working age (Dychtwald et al., 2006, Tempest et al., 2002), and the correlation between age and disability (UN, 1993), the amount of employees with health restrictions or disabilities is increasing in most organizations. At the same time, caused by low birth rates, firms expect a lack of talent in the future (Michaels et al., 2001), resulting in a need to use the potential of "alternative" demographic groups such as older employees or employees with disabilities (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). Second, both scholars and practitioners have repeatedly pointed to the potentially positive effects of a diverse workforce (Robinson and Dechant, 1997), especially since customers are getting increasingly diverse as well. Finally, there are legal (Lalive et al., in press) and moral (Markel and Barclay, 2009) obligations to retain and employ people with disabilities. While the need for a better vocational integration of people with disabilities is generally acknowledged, comparably little is known about the success factors of a sustainable inclusion in firms (Schur et al., 2009, Gilbride et al., 2003). However, companies can only capitalize on the skills of people with disabilities if they provide them with the required conditions allowing them to perform at their best. Moreover, demonstrating good job performance is extremely important for a long-term inclusion of people with disabilities since, if they cannot live up to their full potential, employers may come to think that they are a poor investment and will not consider this demographic group for future open positions (Colella, 1994).

Which factors influence the job performance of people with disabilities?

First, as demonstrated by numerous studies on supported employment, social support is considered to be a key success factor for people with disabilities when it comes to job performance (Burns et al., 2007, Gutman et al., 2009, Tsang et al., 2010). The support of others, that is, having additional interpersonal resources available, seems to spur the performance of employees with disabilities. But is more social support always better for the performance of people with disabilities or are there potential boundary conditions that moderate this relationship?

Second, the positive link between self-efficacy and performance is a well-established one for people without disabilities (e.g., Bandura and Jourden, 1991, e.g., Judge and Bono, 2001). Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce certain effects by their actions (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs not only determine which behaviors will be initiated, but also whether the effort to carry them out will be increased or decreased (Bandura, 1977). Studies focusing on people with disabilities provide evidence for the usefulness of the self-efficacy construct in determining other performance-relevant outcomes (e.g., Brouwer et al., 2009), but to the knowledge of the authors, no study has directly investigated the efficacy-performance relationship so far.

Third, and in the focus of the present study, reviewing the literature reveals that there is a need to account for intrapersonal resources when aiming to understand the influence of interpersonal resources such as social support (Warner et al., 2011). With this study, we aim at addressing this gap, using a sample of people with disabilities. One of the most important intrapersonal resources in this regard is self-efficacy (Judge et al., 1997, Judge and Bono, 2001).

In this study, we focus on the *compensation hypothesis* (Schröder, 1997) to explain the assumed interaction between social support as an interpersonal resource and self-efficacy as an intrapersonal resource. The compensation hypothesis assumes that the effect of social support varies as a function of different levels of self-efficacy. More specifically, social support is assumed to be especially beneficial for those employees low in self-efficacy perceptions because it compensates these intrapersonal deficiencies. We strive to transfer and extend this line of research to the employment of people with disabilities by arguing that individual differences in self-efficacy affect the social support-performance relationship. Investigating the interplay of intrapersonal (i.e., self-efficacy) and interpersonal resources (i.e., social support) seems to be promising in informing our understanding of factors contributing to the performance of people with disabilities. This knowledge may help to design the working context for this group of employees more purposefully and unleash their full working potential. More specifically, we argue that employees with disabilities low in self-efficacy benefit more from social support, whereas those high in self-efficacy benefit less. Thus, for individuals who lack a necessary level of self-efficacy, social support might be a key intervention to help them perform best in their job.

**Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as “[…] the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)” (WHO, 2011: 4). One important context for every person is work. Within the working context, companies create certain environmental factors, which are covered by this WHO definition. Creating a culture which fosters social support is one option for companies to create an enabling context for employees with disabilities and support them to show their full working ability.

**The Construct of Social Support**

For the purpose of this study, it seems beneficial to differentiate between different types of social support and address issues related to the perception of social support by the receiver. First, the difference between constructive support and over-support, such as paternalism needs to be acknowledged (Braithwaite and Eckstein, 2003, Proot et al., 2007). Whereas constructive support is targeted at practically assisting with a problem, over-support is viewed as rather counterproductive. Indeed, when social support was related to negative outcomes, it was perceived as an intervention that restricts a person's freedom (e.g., Brehm and Cole, 1966), providing unsolicited social support which is interpreted as implied incompetence by the receiver (Smith and Goodnow, 1999).

Second, it is important to further conceptually differentiate between the different types of social support which are assumed to differently relate to certain outcomes. House (1981), for example, assumes that there are at least four aspects of social support: (1) instrumental aid, (2) information, (3) appraisal, and (4) emotional sustenance. Similarly, Schwarzer differentiates between instrumental, informational, and emotional support (BSSS, Schwarzer and Schulz, 2000). Instrumental support is defined as practically assisting with a problem, such as providing concrete help. Informational social support refers to giving advice, making suggestions, etc. Emotional social support covers the emotional side of support, such as comforting and cheering up.

Thus, we assume that the most relevant type of support for predicting job performance is *instrumental social support* because of its strong reference to an action orientation. Consequently, for the purpose of this study, social support is conceptualized in a constructive non-paternalistic way. In this sense, it is understood as providing the opportunity to gain support if help is actually needed. By defining it like this, social support can be viewed as a coping resource (Schwarzer and Knoll, 2007, Schulz and Schwarzer, 2004) which leads to adaptive and proactive behaviors (Schröder et al., 1998). Thus, we consciously operationalize social support as instrumental for the purpose of this study.

**The Relationship Between Social Support and Job Performance**

When employees with disabilities have access to social support, they can rely on the help of their social environment, including job coaches, supervisors, and colleagues. This provides them with a supporting network in case they need help, for instance, when encountering challenging situations at work. Having the possibility to seek out for instrumental help, they avoid making mistakes or being stuck in a work-related problem. Thus, they tend to be more efficient and productive in what they are doing. Social support is considered to be the central success factor in the concept of supported employment (e.g., Burns et al., 2007, Gutman et al., 2009, Tsang et al., 2010). The basic idea of supported employment is that people with disabilities do not work in a protected but in an integrated job environment and are provided with on-the-job support (Corrigan and McCracken, 2005).

Generally, among people without disabilities, social support has been found to have positive effects on health outcomes. Cohen and Wills (1985: 310) conclude that "social support is a causal contributor to well-being." In contrast to health-related or psychological outcomes, performance outcomes have received less attention (Hauck et al., 2008). However, studies investigating the relationship between social support and performance usually find a positive relationship between the two variables in samples of people without disabilities (Hauck et al., 2008, Fisher, 1985). Sarason and Sarason (1986) experimentally provided social support and showed that high social support is associated with higher performance in an anagram problem-solving task. Besides laboratory studies, there are also several studies using a field setting: In a study investigating the performance of book dealers, for instance, Beehr and colleagues (Beehr et al., 2000) found a positive though weak relationship between social support and performance. Global functional support had a positive effect on a monetary sales indicator as well as on the cumulative number of demonstrations of the books to customers. In a longitudinal study, Fisher (1985) provided evidence of a main effect of social support on performance in a sample of nurses. The positive relationship between social support and performance was also demonstrated by studies within the context of professional sportsmen (Freeman et al., 2009, Rees and Freeman, 2010).

Moreover, social support plays a significant role when it comes to organizational socialization, “the process by which newcomers make the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders” (Bauer et al., 2007: 707). In her longitudinal study, Fisher (1985) provided evidence for the importance of social support for organizational adjustment. Major, Kozlowski, Chao, and Gardner (1995) provided evidence for the role of leader-member and team-member exchange for socialization outcomes. A more recent study of Jokisaari and Nurmi (2009) also provided evidence for the importance of supervisor support for socialization outcomes. According to Fisher (1985: 39), the final step of socialization is adjusting to an organization “by learning both how to do the job and how to function in the social/cultural environment of the organization”. This learning, in turn, is related to outcomes such as information acquisition (Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992, Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1993) and job performance (Mulford et al., 1972, Fisher, 1985, Reio and Callahan, 2004) The socialization process influences “how well an individual masters the required knowledge, skills, and abilities” (Chao et al., 1994: 731).

Colella (1994) emphasizes that being fully socialized in an organization in order to ensure full participation is especially important for people with disabilities since they encounter more barriers than people without disabilities.

Social support is a central element in the concept of supported employment, which has been proven to be an effective rehabilitation method for the job performance of people with disabilities across many studies (e.g., Burns et al., 2007, Gutman et al., 2009, Tsang et al., 2010). In a similar vein, a recent study of Haugli and colleagues (2011) underlines the importance of social support in the process leading to return to work.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical reasoning as well as on empirical evidence from related studies on social support, we assume that:

*Hypothesis 1. Instrumental social support is positively related to job performance for people with disabilities.*

**The Relationship Between Self-efficacy and Job Performance**

Bandura defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce certain effects by their actions (Bandura, 1997). "An efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura, 1977: 193). Self-efficacy is considered to be among the best dispositional predictors of job performance (Bandura and Jourden, 1991, Judge and Bono, 2001). It is related to thought patterns, actions, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1982) and impacts choices and aspirations (Bandura and Jourden, 1991, Bandura, 1977). For instance, self-efficacy positively influences directing resources towards a goal (Vancouver et al., 2008), work effectiveness, and the ability to cope (Staples et al., 1999). Self-efficacy beliefs not only determine which behaviors will be initiated, but also whether the effort to carry them out will be increased or decreased and how long the person persists in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1977). In turn, these behaviors determine the outcomes of which performance accomplishment is a central one (Bandura, 1982). To sum up, high self-efficacious individuals believe in their abilities and tend to be motivated to utilize them to achieve good work-related results. They tend to be persistent in achieving their work-related goals, which should be positively related to their performance outcomes.

The link between self-efficacy and performance is a well-established one for people without disabilities. In an extensive amount of studies, Bandura (e.g., Bandura and Jourden, 1991) and other researchers (e.g., Judge and Bono, 2001) provide evidence for a positive relationship between the two constructs. Results of a meta-analysis performed by Judge and Bono (2001) identified a true score correlation of .23 between generalized self-efficacy and performance. A further meta-analysis revealed a weighted average correlation between self-efficacy and work-related performance of .38 (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

However, more recent studies stress the importance of taking a closer look at motivational processes accompanying self-efficacy as well as differentiating under which conditions it is related to performance. They found a negative within-person relationship (e.g., Vancouver et al., 2002, Yeo and Neal, 2006) and a positive between-person relationship (Yeo and Neal, 2006) between self-efficacy and performance. Moreover, in a further meta-analysis, Judge and colleagues (2007) suggested that “individual differences are at least as important as self-efficacy” (Judge et al., 2007: 115). The authors examined the relative incremental contribution of self-efficacy to work-related performance when controlling for the Big 5 personality traits, mental ability, and experience. They found that the unique contribution of self-efficacy is rather small and stress the importance of the context, such as task complexity. Whereas self-efficacy was predictive for performance in jobs or tasks of low complexity, this did not hold for working contexts of medium or high complexity. Other studies also suggest that boundary conditions play a significant role for the relationship between self-efficacy and performance. Schmidt and DeShon (2010), for instance, focused on the important role of ambiguity in terms of effort mobilization. They found that under conditions of high ambiguity in terms of one’s level of performance, the relationship between self-efficacy and exerted effort is negative, indicating overconfidence of individuals with high efficacy beliefs. In contrast, under conditions of low ambiguity, the relationship between self-efficacy and effort was positive, leading to an increase in performance.

In contrast to samples of people without disabilities, less is known about self-efficacy in samples of people with disabilities (O’Sullivan, 2012). To the knowledge of the authors, there is no study investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and job-related performance in a sample of people with disabilities. However, there are studies focusing on people with disabilities that provide evidence for the usefulness of the self-efficacy construct in determining other related outcomes, such as health (da C. Menezes Costa et al., 2011, Arnstein, 2000), disease management (Clark and Dodge, 1999, Dolce, 1987), and functional capacity evaluation (Kaivanto et al., 1995, Asante et al., 2007). Self-efficacy believes play an important role in terms of independent-living skills and confidence in their abilities to set and achieve goals (Block et al., 2010), as well as in keeping their perceived autonomy (Warner et al., 2011). In a similar vein, Brouwer and colleagues (2010) provided evidence for the negative relationship between self-efficacy and time to return to work. Further, self-efficacy has been demonstrated to relate to employment (Richard et al., 2011, Brouwer et al., 2010), and learning outcomes (Tam, 1996, Tam, 2000).

Researchers have differentiated specific versus general self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2001). Whereas specific self-efficacy is perceived as a motivational state, general self-efficacy is viewed as a motivational trait (e.g., Eden, 1988, Judge et al., 1997). Since specific self-efficacy predicts specific outcomes best (Bandura, 1997), we chose to operationalize self-efficacy as specific work-related self-efficacy.

To sum up, theoretical reasons mainly support a positive relationship between self-efficacy and work-related outcomes, which is widely supported by empirical results in cross-sectional studies using samples of people without disabilities. In addition, our sample is from a call center, representing a less complex and rather unambiguous working context. Finally, studies using samples of people with disabilities demonstrate a positive effect of self-efficacy on performance-related outcomes. Thus, we postulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2. Work-related self-efficacy is positively related to job performance for people with disabilities.*

Since the main purpose of this study is to shed light on factors which foster the performance of employees with disabilities, we investigate the interaction of interpersonal and intrapersonal resources. Hereby, we focus on the interplay between social support as one of the most central intrapersonal resources and self-efficacy as one of the most central intrapersonal resources for people with disabilities.

**The Moderating Role of Self-efficacy on the Relationship Between Social Support and Performance**

Is social support more beneficial for some people than for others? This question follows the call by Warner and colleagues (2011) to take intrapersonal resources into account when trying to understand the influence of interpersonal resources. We investigate the relationship between social support as an interpersonal resource and performance by taking the influence of self-efficacy as a central intrapersonal resource into account. In line with the *compensation hypothesis* (Schröder, 1997), we assume that social support is differently associated with performance depending on the level of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy was chosen because of its prominence in research and its importance for people with disabilities. It has been identified as one of four core self-evaluation traits (Judge et al., 1997, Judge and Bono, 2001) that regulates behavior. We argue that self-efficacy beliefs interact with social support to predict performance of people with disabilities. More specifically, we assume that employees with disabilities high in work-related self-efficacy dispose enough internal resources to fulfill job-related tasks at a high level. Since they expect that they can successfully perform the tasks they need to do at work (Bandura, 1977, Schyns and von Collani, 2002), they will use all their effort necessary to do a good job. When facing challenges or difficult situations at work, they will rather expand their efforts and persist until the task is finished. Because they rely on their capabilities, they are able to mobilize constructive coping strategies (Bandura, 1977). Thus, they do not need as much encouraging feedback or instrumental support from others.

Their low self-efficacious colleagues, in contrast, are less convinced that they possess the necessary skills to do a good job. As a consequence, less coping behavior is initiated, especially in the face of obstacles. When work-related barriers, such as an inadequate accommodation or stereotyping, emerge, they rather tend to give in than try to remove it. Further, low self-efficacious individuals usually avoid work-related activities they feel would exceed their capabilities (Bandura, 1982). For low self-efficacious employees, it is therefore especially helpful to have others that provide them with feedback, encouragement, and concrete advice. This form of instrumental social support can assume a guideline function, facilitating the proactive solution of perceived difficulties instead of becoming desperate or resigned about them. This enables employees to be more productive and effective in what they do and prevent them from avoiding challenging but performance-relevant situations at work. Thus, we argue that individuals with disabilities, who are low in work-related self-efficacy, benefit to a larger extent from social support with regard to their on-the-job performance. In sum, social support is assumed to compensate deficiencies in self-efficacy.

Empirical evidence for the compensation hypothesis is scarce. In a longitudinal study, Warner et al. (2011) investigated the effects of social support and self-efficacy on perceived autonomy in older individuals. They found support for the compensation hypothesis by showing that social support buffered lower levels of self-efficacy. Following the outlined theoretical arguments and the empirical evidence, we postulate that:

*Hypothesis 3. Self-efficacy moderates the positive relationship between social support and performance in such a way that social support and performance are more strongly, positively related for low self-efficacious individuals than for high self-efficacious individuals with disabilities.*

The model we propose, summarizing all hypotheses, is presented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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**Methods**

**Sample**

The data were collected in an Israeli call center which provides outsourcing services in fall 2010. Most employees have some form of disabilities. The call center is specifically adapted to their needs by providing accommodations like technological solutions and flexible working hours as well as professional support stuff. The investigated call center is not only a social but also a business venture, competing successfully on the open market.

Data for this study were collected from three different sources. First, 131 employees were surveyed. All questionnaire items were translated into Hebrew by professional translators following a double-blind back-translation procedure to ensure semantic equivalence with the original English wording (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003). The survey was administered online. During their working time, the call center employees were given the possibility to participate by filling out the survey on two specific computers, which were positioned in a separate room. The code for the questionnaire was provided by the HR manager of the call center. Respondents were assured full anonymity. 89 employees out of 131 participated in the survey, resulting in a response rate of 68 percent. Second, we collected demographic information about the sample, which was provided by the HR manager. Third, we asked the direct supervisors to rate the respondents' performance. With the help of a unique identifier for every employee, the three different data sources were matched. Out of the 131 potential participants, 65 cases with full information from all three sources were obtained, which equals 50 percent. Of these 65 full-information cases, 14 did not have any impairment, therefore, were not qualified to be part of the sample since the study aimed at investigating people with disabilities only. Thus, the effective final sample consists of 51 employees having impairment. 55 % of the respondents were male and 45 % were female. The respondents were between 22 and 64 years old. The mean age was 38.67 (*SD* = 13.17). Their tenure was between 1 and 27 months with an average tenure of 13.37 months (*SD* = 8.81).

**Measures**

*Instrumental social support.* The perceived degree of instrumental social support was assessed by the 4-item Hebrew version of the "Berliner Social-Support Skalen (BSSS)", developed by Schwarzer and Schulz (2000). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. A sample item is “When everything becomes too much for me to handle, others are there to help me”. The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was .91. In addition, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Based on recommendations by Hu and Bentler (1999), we chose a combination of different types of fit indices to assess the appropriateness of our CFAs. More precisely, we chose the comparative fit index (CFI) as an incremental fit index, and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) as an absolute fit index. According to the suggestions by Hu and Bentler (1999), a CFI value above .95 indicates a good and a value above .90 a satisfactory fit. Further, the authors recommend values below .08 for the SRMR. Our results were: *χ2* = 9.5, *df* = 2; CFI = .942; SRMR = .049, which indicated a satisfactory fit.

*Self-efficacy.* The self-efficacy construct was captured by the occupational self-efficacy scale (OCCSEFF) developed by Schyns and von Collani (2002). The short version (OCCSEFF-8) was used, consisting of 8 items. The response scale ranged from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. An exemplary item is “No matter what comes my way in my job, I’m usually able to handle it”. The applied occupational self-efficacy scale has been demonstrated to reliably capture a one-dimensional construct (Schyns and von Collani, 2002). Its relations to personality constructs and organizational variables were shown to possess acceptable construct and criterion validity (Schyns and von Collani, 2002). The coefficient alpha value of this scale was .84, indicating sufficient reliability. To confirm the appropriateness of our measurement, we ran a CFA. Results indicated a satisfactory fit: *χ2* = 34.6, *df* = 20; CFI = .909; SRMR = .073, and thus, measurement of the self-efficacy construct.

*Job performance.* Research provides evidence for the usefulness of subjective performance measures (Powell, 1992, Rowe and Morrow Jr, 1999, Wall et al., 2004). Therefore, the direct supervisors of the employees participating in the survey were asked to rate their employees’ job performance. A measure of in-role behavior developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was used, consisting of 7 items. The employee performance was rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7. “strongly agree” A sample item is “This employee adequately completes assigned duties”. Cronbach’s Alpha was .85. The results of the CFA confirmed a good fit (*χ2* = 10.1, *df* = 9; CFI = .992; SRMR = .043).

*Disability.* The construct of disability was assessed by a third data source, which is a form filled in by the HR manager. Disability was assessed in detail by providing the information on the diagnosis as well as on accommodations, etc. For the purpose of this study, all employees with a disability were included in the analysis.

*Control variables* were assessed to rule out alternative explanations. The following variables were taken into account: age, tenure, hours employed per month, and gender. Time-related variables such as a person’s age or tenure serve as proxies for knowledge and skills (Sturman, 2003).

*Age* was used because research indicates a relationship between age and performance in a negative, neutral, or positive direction (Ng and Feldman, 2008). Concerning core task performance, studies indicate that older employees have certain disadvantages when it comes to learning, cognitive speed, fluid intelligence, and short-term working memory. However, deductive reasoning and professional expertise is likely to increase with age. Thus, depending on the task, older employees perform the same or even better than younger ones.

*Tenure* was included because it is related to organization-specific experience and thus, may also be related to performance (Sturman, 2003).

The number of *hours employed per month* was included for similar reasons, since the number of hours employed may have an impact on the performance level.

In a recent meta-analysis investigating *sex* differences in job performance from field studies, Roth, Purvis, and Bobko (2012) found that the performance ratings of women were slightly higher than those of men.

**Data Analysis**

We used a hierarchical regression analysis, as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), to test our hypotheses. Since mean centering does not fully avoid the problem of non-independence between the interaction term and its constituent first-order variables, we applied the alternative approach of residual centering as proposed by Little Bovaird, and Widaman (2006). This technique ensures full orthogonality between the interaction term and its constituent first-order variables. Following this approach, we regressed the interaction term on its respective first-order effects and saved the standardized residuals. The residuals, in turn, represent the interaction effect.

**Results**

**Descriptives**

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study variables. The mean job performance was 5.44, with a standard deviation of 1.00. Mean social support was 4.10, with a standard deviation of .81. Mean self-efficacy was 4.07 with a standard deviation of .62. Job performance was neither significantly positively correlated with social support nor with self-efficacy. Social support and self-efficacy were positively correlated (.34, p < .05).

Since none of our assessed control variables correlates significantly with our study variables, we did not include them in our subsequent analyses. Studies show that the inclusion of irrelevant controls diminishes the power of the analyses and may lead to biased parameter estimates (Bedeian, 2007, Becker, 2005).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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**Tests of Hypotheses**

Results of the regression analysis are displayed in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 states a significant positive association between social support and performance. As demonstrated in the first step of the hierarchical regression (model 1), this relationship was conditionally supported by the data (*B* = .27; *p* = .06). Hypothesis 2, proposing a positive effect of self-efficacy on job performance, was not supported (*B* = -.15; *p* > .05).

Hypothesis 3 states a moderation of self-efficacy on the relationship between social support and job performance. The interaction term of social support and self-efficacy was significantly related to job performance (*B* = -.41; *p* < .01). For high levels of self-efficacy, we expected a weaker relationship between social support and job performance. For low levels of self-efficacy, in contrast, the relationship should be stronger. To further examine the nature of this relationship, we plotted the interaction model. Figure 2 displays the results for employees with high, medium, and low levels of self-efficacy. In support of hypothesis 3, there was a stronger link between social support and job performance for low self-efficacious individuals than for high self-efficacious individuals. To further test under which conditions of the moderator (i.e., self-efficacy) the relationship between social support and job performance is significant, we conducted a simple slopes analysis (Aiken and West, 1991). We tested the significance of the slope for the two groups of low (one standard deviation below the mean) and high (one standard deviation above the mean) self-efficacious employees. The analysis revealed that the relationship between social support and job performance was significant for low self-efficacious individuals only (*B* = .60, *t* = 3.00; *p* < .05). For the group of high self-efficacious individuals, the slope was not significant (*B* = -.21; *t* = -.81; *p =* .42).

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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In total, the model including all study variables accounted for approximately 23% of variance in job performance.

To test the robustness of the overall regression model, we ran three additional models, one with all control variables, one with supervisor dummies, and one with controls and supervisor dummies. Results mainly stayed the same and the regression weights differed only slightly in magnitude.

**Discussion**

First, our study investigated the relationship between social support and job performance of employees with disabilities. In line with prior research (e.g., Burns et al., 2007), the results of our data analyses showed that social support and job performance were positively related at the 10% significance level with a p-value of .06. We decided to relax the significance level due to our relatively small sample size and the resulting low power (Cohen, 1988). Thus, hypothesis 1 gained conditional support.

Second, hypothesis 2, stating a positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance, was not supported. Though extensive prior research provided evidence for a positive relationship in samples consisting of people without disabilities, this was not reflected by our data.

Third, we argued for taking potential boundary conditions into account when analyzing the relationship between social support and job performance of people with disabilities. Even if prior research has shown the general importance of social support for the job performance of people with disabilities, we hypothesized that intrapersonal resources, i.e. self-efficacy, may play a central role for shaping the social support-performance relationship. Our results supported this assumption. Employees with disabilities low in self-efficacy benefited more from social support than those with high self-efficacy beliefs. These findings add to prior research by supporting the compensation hypothesis (Warner et al., 2011). Social support seems to buffer performance differences between individuals high and low in self-efficacy. Moreover, under conditions of high social support, employees with low levels of self-efficacy even seem to outperform their colleagues with high levels of self-efficacy. This rather unexpected finding underlines the positive effect of social support as an adequate organizational intervention for individuals with low levels of confidence in their abilities. A further unexpected result is that for those individuals high in self-efficacy, the relationship between social support and job performance was even slightly negative, although not significant. It seems social support was actually harmful for those individuals with high self-efficacy. Thus, our results point into the direction that there may be a “dark side” of social support under conditions of well-developed personal resources. This is in line with Warner and her colleagues (2011), who state that interpersonal resources can interfere with intrapersonal ones.

The conditional acceptance of the first main effect hypothesis, stating a positive relationship between social support and performance, as well as the rejection of the second main effect hypothesis, stating a positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance, clearly underlines the important interdependence between the two constructs for the prediction of job performance of people with disabilities. If we had solely looked at the influence of one predictor variable at a time and not investigated both variables simultaneously, we would have overlooked the interaction effect between the two.

In sum, the way social support relates to the outcome variable job performance depends on the level of self-efficacy. Thus, our study provides evidence for the importance to account for the interplay of inter- and intrapersonal resources when investigating the job performance of people with disabilities.

**Practical implications**

There are a number of practical implications resulting from our findings. First, organizations and especially supervisors can benefit from having information about the level of self-efficacy of their employees with disabilities. Therefore, they should assess, observe, and monitor the level of self-efficacy of their employees with disabilities. Job interviews, regular interactions, as well as annual talks might provide opportunities to get a better feeling for the self-efficacy level of a particular individual, and might consequently determine the right level of support which should be provided towards this person. Second, colleagues and supervisors should pay attention to whom they offer support. When a colleague with disabilities has high self-efficacy beliefs, help seems less indicated compared to a colleague does not have enough confidence in his or her skills. In the latter case, help might even have a negative effect on job performance. Depending on personal characteristics, interventions should individually differ, which makes a “one-size-fits-all” approach rather inadvisable. In terms of trainings, Colella (1994) underlines the necessity of providing education not only at higher level management or personnel department employees but especially to the direct colleagues working with a person with disability. Furthermore, Colella suggests that educational efforts should be designed “to teach employees and managers more about how persons with disabilities *want* to be treated”, making them aware of the fact that (most) people with disabilities do not ask for being patronized (Colella, 1994: 100).

Supervisors should try to motivate all employees to pay attention to the need of social support for people with disabilities and thereby, create a supportive environment. Ways to do so could include role modeling (Bandura and Walters, 1963, Weiss, 1977), or including social aspects in performance appraisals for all employees. When companies, supervisors, and coworkers pay attention to the needs of people with disabilities, they can help them to unleash their working potential, making them effective members of the workforce instead of becoming unemployed and thereby, reduce the loss of human resources and ease the burden on social security systems.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As every empirical study, this study has strengths and weaknesses. First, there are some threats to the validity of our findings, such as a small sample size, and the focus on one single company from Israel with the resulting restrictions for the generalizability. Thus, future studies should aim at providing a broader data base. We decided to relax the level of significance to 10%, however, future studies should provide further evidence for the social support-job satisfaction relationship. Moreover, we did not find the proposed positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance. It seems as if further research needs to take a closer look at the effects of self-efficacy in samples of people with disabilities. In a study of Renemann and colleagues (Reneman et al., 2008), for example, the correlations between self-efficacy and functional capacity evaluation of persons with chronic back pain were also not significant (with one exception).

Second, the effect sizes in this study are moderate. To further test the proposed model, we checked the robustness of the moderation effect. Results did not change significantly when control variables and supervisor dummies were added to the model which confirms a certain robustness of our findings. Moreover, it is generally difficult to detect a moderation effect in field studies (McClelland and Judd, 1993). Despite this relative rareness to find a moderation effect as well as a small sample size resulting in a rather low power to detect it, our moderation hypothesis gained support. Nevertheless, future research should try to add further evidence to the proposed model by testing it in other samples than the one used here.

Third, we applied a cross-sectional survey design using three different data sources (employee survey, HR management survey, supervisor ratings). While these independent data sources avoid the occurrence of common method bias (Campbell and Fiske, 1959, Podsakoff et al., 2003), the data does not allow causal interpretation . Whereas it is impossible that our focal variables influenced the disability status of a person, it could be possible that performance influences the degree of social support provided to and/or self-efficacy of a person. Therefore, even though we provided theoretical arguments for the described directions of relationships, future research should aim at applying experimental or longitudinal research designs to the presented model. In her longitudinal study, however, Fisher (Fisher, 1985) provided evidence that performance is rather an outcome than an antecedent of social support.

In this study, we provided evidence for the importance of boundary conditions when studying the relationship of social support for people with disabilities and their job performance. We investigated the role of self-efficacy, an intrapersonal resource, as a moderator of social support and performance. Future research should investigate further moderators since we believe that other groups of variables may influence the effects of interpersonal resources on job performance as well. Future research should try to investigate further variables such as organizational culture, organizational climate, or organizational structure. Whether the organizational culture is perceived as open and inclusive, or as formalistic and bureaucratic could strongly affect the relationship between providing social support for people with disabilities and their job performance. For example, in a highly competitive environment and the resulting pressure for success, receiving social support could be viewed as being “weak”, indicating that a person is not able to contribute to goal achievement, thus putting a negative label on this person. In contrast, we would not expect this negative connotation in an inclusive and appreciative organizational environment.

However, also three way interaction processes could occur. One example is the study of Stetz, Stetz, and Bliese (2006) in which they tested whether the moderating effect of social support on the stressor-strain relationship depends on the individual's self-efficacy. In sum, it seems as if the relationship between interpersonal resources and job performance is way more complicated than sometimes assumed. However, we hope that this study and future research will guide companies, supervisors, and coworkers on how to provide assistance to people with disabilities and thereby, help them to unleash their full potential and make them an integral part of the workforce.

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**Table 1**

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Variable** | **Mean** | **s.d.** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
| 1. | Age | 38.67 | 13.17 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Tenure | 13.37 | 8.81 | .21 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. | Hours employed | 107.57 | 31.23 | .01 | -.24 |  |  |  |  |
| 4. | Gender | .55 | .50 | .17 | .04 | -.07 |  |  |  |
| 5. | Social Support | 4.10 | .81 | -.12 | -.09 | -.06 | -.15 |  |  |
| 6. | Self-efficacy | 4.07 | .62 | .06 | -.01 | .09 | .19 | .34\* |  |
| 7. | Job performance | 5.44 | 1.00 | -.18 | -.16 | .09 | -.18 | .20 | -.02 |

*Note.* All correlations were two-tailed tested.

\* *p* < .05

**Table 2**

Results of hierarchical moderated regression analysis of self-efficacy and social support

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Job Performance** | |
|  | **Model 1** | **Model 2** |
| **Main effects** |  |  |
| Social Support | .27 (1.55)† | .27 (1.70)\* |
| Self-efficacy | -.15 (-.64) | -.15 (-.70) |
| **Interaction** |  |  |
| Social Support X Self-efficacy |  | -.41\*\* (-3.27) |
| Percent of total variance explained | .050 | .232 |
| ΔR2 | .050 | .182 |
| ΔF | 1.202 | 10.686\*\* |

*Note.* Unstandardized *B*-coefficients are reported. One-tailed testing. Figures in parentheses are *t* values.

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

† *p* < .10

**Figure 1**

Our Proposed Model: The Relationship between Social Support and Job Performance, Moderated by Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy

Job Performance

Social Support

**Figure 2**

Job Performance by Social Support for Different Levels of Self-efficacy

