

Supervisor support, career satisfaction, and career adaptability of healthcare sector employees

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of career adaptability (CA) in the relationship between supervisor support (SS) and career satisfaction (CS).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 193 full-time employees working in private health-care institutions in Ankara, Turkey. The participants were asked to respond to a self-reported survey. Structural equation modeling was used to examine the hypothesized relationships between the research variables.

Findings – The results indicated that SS has a significant and positive effect on CS. It further reveals that CA mediates the effect of SS on CS.

Research limitations/implications – As this study had a cross-sectional research design, causality could not be established between study variables.

Practical implications – CA ought to be considered by the managers and it ought to be advanced as it provides the employees fundamental instruments to deal with their career advancement efficiently.

Originality/value – The present study adds to the existing literature by providing additional evidence for the relationship among SS, CA and CS by examining a sample of health-care professionals.

Keywords Supervisor support, Career satisfaction, Career adaptability, Health-care sector employees

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound influence on health-care employees' mental, emotional and psychological well-being (Labrague and De los Santos, 2020). This period of crisis also



caused a decrease in career satisfaction (CS) of health-care professionals (Fauteux, 2021) and, thus, detrimental effects on their occupational satisfaction (Savitsky *et al.*, 2021). Career adaptability (CA) has been also more important in recent years as it comprises qualities that enable health-care professionals to deal with any changes that may occur in their careers. Owing to these reasons, they have become more dependent on their supervisors' support to adjust their work life (Greenberg *et al.*, 2020). This era of crisis has demonstrated the need of supervisor support (SS) for health-care employees' career adaption and satisfaction.

A highly adaptable workforce is becoming increasingly necessary for companies to fulfill shifting demands in a dynamic global context (Haibo *et al.*, 2018). For this reason, career researchers have shown great interest in CA in recent years (Haibo *et al.*, 2018; Yu *et al.*, 2019). CA refers to an individual's capacity to adjust to changes easily and preserve the balance of their career roles, and it is critical for career advancement (Guan *et al.*, 2015). CA has four dimensions, which are "concern, control, curiosity and confidence," and they are used to manage several problems and challenges in career advancement (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Nevertheless, it is quite tough for employees to have a successful career without the support of their supervisors (Yarnall, 1998). Having SS creates a feeling of importance in the environment where the employees work (Karatepe, 2013). If the employees feel that they have the support of their supervisors, they develop a better career for themselves and achieve CS by having CA (Ito and Brotheridge, 2005; Guan *et al.*, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships among SS, CA and CS of health-care employees working in private hospitals in Ankara, Turkey, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives of the study are to better understand:

- how SS influences health-care employees' CS; and
- whether or not CA mediates the relationship between SS and CS.

The contributions of this study will be significant to the current literature. First of all, the effects of CA on individual success remain unclear (Haibo *et al.*, 2018). The literature review shows that the studies mostly focus on the CA of nursing students (Fang *et al.*, 2018; Kim and Shin, 2020; Tian and Fan, 2014). Despite providing significant career outcomes (Al-Ghazali, 2020), more empirical studies on CA are needed to shed light on career outcomes of health-care professionals (Pajic *et al.*, 2018). In addition, there are few empirical studies examining CA and career outcomes on health-care professionals in Turkey (İspir *et al.*, 2019; Sahin and Eryilmaz, 2017). As a result, investigating the results of CA of health-care employees is necessary.

The second reason is that various kinds of resources, which are in different industries, might change adaptability (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Career construction theory claims that CA is estimated by the interpersonal connections between the employees (Savickas, 2005). Employees who have the support of their supervisors do not have the feeling of being left alone and can make decisions on their career advancement and adaptability. Nevertheless, there are not sufficient empirical studies about CA estimated by SS implements (Tian and Fan, 2014). Therefore, SS is treated as a resource to activate CA.

The third reason is that although there are several empirical studies about the connection between SS and CS (Karatepe, 2013; Karatepe and Olugbade, 2017; Kang *et al.*, 2015), there are not sufficient studies about the relationship between CA and CS (Haibo *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, there is not enough focus on the mediating mechanism of CA in relation to SS and CS.

Hypotheses development

Supervisor support and career satisfaction

CS represents how people feel about their career-related roles, advancements and professional growth (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990). CS is an important predictor of career success

and is evaluated objectively as well as subjectively (Ballout, 2009). In recent research, the subjective evaluation of career success has become important as individuals may not feel subjectively successful despite having objective career success indications (Ekmekcioglu *et al.*, 2020). In this context, CS is a concept that relates to the positive psychological consequences of an employee as a result of his/her work experience (Judge *et al.*, 1995), which has been assessed in numerous studies as a subjective measure of career success (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Pathardikar *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, CS, which is the most common operationalization of subjective career success, demonstrates the extent to which employees believe their career advancement is consistent with their own goals, aspirations and values (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001).

Supervisors are considered as representatives or an extension of the organization, who directly assist and give feedback to their subordinates (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Subordinates typically depend on their supervisors for professional growth and promotion prospects (Loi *et al.*, 2014). Thus, support from supervisors is a considerable factor for the development of career outcomes such as employee praise, recognition and promotion by the organization (Yang *et al.*, 2018). Supervisors, who also contribute to their career development by providing information and opportunities to employees, can reduce employee turnover and increase performance (Kang *et al.*, 2015; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In addition, SS creates greater career support, which brings more satisfaction for employees with their career (Wayne *et al.*, 1999).

When employees face less amount of SS, they tend to face more barriers to achieving their objectives (Talukder *et al.*, 2018). This process is a loss of resources, which causes receiving a negative response from the subordinates which is a low amount of CS (Ng and Feldman, 2014). Employees who receive the assistance of their supervisors work better, give positive feedback and feel encouraged (Talukder *et al.*, 2018).

CS reflects an individual's evaluation of their career-related roles and success (Park, 2018). Employees may feel more satisfied with their careers when they observe that their supervisors are paying individual attention to their problems and providing adequate support for their development. There is also empirical evidence for a positive association between SS and employees' CS in the extant literature (Kang *et al.*, 2015; Karatepe and Olugbade, 2017; Yang *et al.*, 2018). For instance, Matsuo (2021), in his study which is conducted in a Japanese hospital, found that when supervisors encourage nurses to use their strengths at work, they can be satisfied with their progress toward their career goals. According to Chen *et al.* (2012), the more supervisor social support male nurses perceive, the more effective their nursing career growth is. Vera and Hucke (2009) provided a conclusion that managerial support provided by a pronounced managerial orientation had a positive effect on the career success of physicians in hospitals. As a result, it is hypothesized that:

H1. SS is positively related to CS.

The mediation role of CA

Career structuring theory (Savickas, 2005) addresses how individuals construct their careers. A career is a process in which individuals attach personal meanings to their professional choices, career transitions and future goals, according to career structuring theory (Savickas, 2013). This theory focuses on people's subjective construction of their professional experiences. According to career structuring theory, CA resources (e.g. concern, control, curiosity and confidence) allow for the creation of strategies that individuals use to guide their adaptive behavior (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). CA, which is one of the important

concepts for career development, refers to an individual's resources for coping with present and expected duties, changes and traumas in their vocational positions (Savickas, 1997).

Yarnall (1998) states that SS is a crucial part of job resources, which helps employees to handle their careers successfully. SS is considered a resource motivating employees' CA, and those employees who have enough SS are likely to be excellent in CA (Ito and Brotheridge, 2005). For instance, Gong and Li (2019) argued that nurses with support in terms of feedback environment established by the mentor were more likely to experience high CA.

Individuals with high CA can successfully integrate their self-concept into their job role, cope with vocational difficulties, and are, therefore, likely to be highly satisfied with their careers (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Employees who can analyze unexpected issues have a competitive advantage over other job candidates, and career adaptation in the form of competencies and knowledge gained through training and experience are highly valued in the labor market and lead to positive career outcomes such as CS (Haibo *et al.*, 2018). A number of recent studies have shown that CA in the workplace is positively related to CS (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2017; Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Al-Ghazali (2020) found positive association between CA of female nurses and CS. Pajic *et al.* (2018) clarified that the CA of Hungarian nursing professionals has a key role on their career processes. In this study, it is summarized that employees who had SS will use their adaptability resources to have CS. As a result, it is hypothesized that:

H2. CA mediates the relationship between SS and CS.

Method

Sample and procedures

We collected the data from health-care sector employees in Ankara, Turkey, between November 2020 and January 2021. This study adopted a descriptive research methodology to investigate the relations of three study variables, SS, CA and CS, among health-care sector employees. The research was addressed by private health-care institutions in Ankara that provide various degrees and types of treatment. The study's target demographic included all nurses, doctors, paramedical and health-care support workers employed by health-care units. Participants for the research were chosen using simple random sampling. To increase response rates among health-care personnel, a mixed approach (online and pen-paper survey) was considered feasible. Permission to conduct the questionnaire was obtained through prior meetings with the organizations via phone calls. Participants were informed about the objective of the study, as well as the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their replies.

Three-hundred self-report questionnaires were sent out, and 193 valid questionnaires were returned, providing a 64.3% effective response rate; 63.7% ($n = 123$) of the respondents were female, and 36.3% ($n = 70$) of the respondents were male. The mean age was 32.45 years, and ages ranged from 20 to 60 years. The majority ($n = 128$) had at least a bachelor's degree (66.3%). Most of the participants ($n = 91$) had a working period of 1–5 years (47.2%).

Measures

Supervisor support: SS was adopted with the five-item scale developed by Karasek *et al.* (1982). One-sample item was "My supervisor shows employees how to improve their performance." A five-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree") was applied to rate SS. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.95, suggesting high reliability.

Career adaptability: We assessed CA with the 24-item career adapt-abilities inventory-international version-2 developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2012), which was composed of four dimensions: concern (e.g. “Realizing that today’s choices shape my future”), control (e.g. “Making decisions by myself”), curiosity (e.g. “Investigating options before making a choice”) and confidence (e.g. “Taking care to do things well”). Responses to CA items were given on five-point Likert scale (1 = “not strong” and 5 = “strongest”). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.88, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Career satisfaction: CS was measured with the five-item scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990). One-sample item was “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.” Responses to CS items were given on five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale in the current study was 0.91, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Control variables: We controlled for employees’ gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age (in years), education (1 = associate’s degree; 2 = bachelor’s degree; 3 = master’s degree and higher) and tenure (1 = 1–5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 11 years and above). As shown in Table 1, none of the control variables were associated to the study variables and were thus excluded from the analysis as such impotent control variables might lead to biased parameter estimations (Becker, 2005).

Results

Common method variance

To investigate common method variance, we used Harman’s one-factor test, as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). As a result, unrotated exploratory factor analysis was performed on all variables. The one-factor solution explained just 29% of the overall variance, which is less than the 50% limit, indicating that no dominant component was found in the research. Harman’s one-factor test results indicated that common method variance was not an issue.

Measurement model

Prior to testing the structural model, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were performed to evaluate the discriminability of study variables. The findings of the CFA revealed a good fit between the hypothesized three-factor model and the data ($\chi^2/df = 962.46/518 = 1.85, p < 0.001$, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.96; tucker-lewis index (TLI) = 0.96, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.04). The proposed three-factor model fit is better than other models including the two-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 1864.52/521 = 3.57$, IFI = 0.88; = 0.87, CFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.28, $\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 902.06, p < 0.001$),

Variable	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	32.45	8.83	–	–	–	–						
2. Gender	1.63	0.42	–	–	–	–0.04	–					
3. Education	2.08	0.57	–	–	–	0.14	–0.11	–				
4. Tenure	1.86	0.88	–	–	–	0.74**	–0.07	0.13	–			
5. Supervisor support	3.72	1.50	0.96	0.78	0.95	0.05	–0.01	–0.09	0.12	(0.88)		
6. Career adaptability	2.98	1.31	0.88	0.66	0.88	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.54**	(0.81)	
7. Career satisfaction	3.45	1.47	0.91	0.67	0.91	–0.01	–0.05	–0.05	0.02	0.37**	0.39**	(0.82)

Table 1.

Correlation analysis

Notes: n = 193. Values in parentheses on the diagonal are the square of AVE of each scale. **p < 0.01

and the one-factor model ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 3069.58/522 = 5.88$, IFI = 0.78, TLI = 0.77, CFI = 0.78, RMSEA = 0.16, SRMR = 0.29, $\Delta\chi^2_{(4)} = 2107.12$, $p < 0.001$), which loaded all variables on a single component. These results provided support for the construct's distinctiveness.

Table 1 shows that the composite reliability (CR) for all variables is more than 0.70, and the extracted average variance (AVE) for all three constructs is greater than 0.50, indicating that each construct has adequate psychometric properties (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, discriminant validity was confirmed by the fact that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with the other constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2006). These results indicated that construct validity and internal consistency were satisfactory.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables in the research. The results showed that SS was significantly and positively related with CA ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$) and CS ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$). Further, the findings also indicated that CA was positively associated with CS ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypotheses testing

After validating the measurement model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the hypothesized relationships between the research variables. The SEM results revealed that the research model provided a satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 962.46/518 = 1.85$, $p < 0.001$, IFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04). Table 2 also includes the findings of the structural model that was evaluated.

H1 proposes that SS is positively related to CS. The results showed that SS had a significant and positive direct impact on CS ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1 was supported. The findings also indicated that SS had a significant positive direct impact on CA ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). Further, the impact of CA was found to have a significant positive direct impact on CS ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$).

H2 proposes that CA mediates the relationship between SS and CS. The bootstrapping procedure was conducted to test H2. To predict the significance of the indirect impact, we used 2,000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI). If the 95% bias-corrected CI do not contain a zero, the induced effect is considered significant (Mallinckrodt *et al.*, 2006). As depicted in Table 2, results showed that there were significant indirect effects from SS to CS ($\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.28], $p < 0.01$), providing support for H2. Further, the total effect (direct + indirect effects) of SS on CS is 0.38 (0.22 + 0.16). The findings also reported that R^2 of CA and CS

Model pathways	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Supervisor support → Career adaptability	0.56**	0.56**	–
Career adaptability → Career satisfaction	0.29**	0.29**	–
Supervisor support → Career adaptability → Career satisfaction	0.38**	0.22**	0.16**
(LLCI = 0.06; ULCI = 0.28)			

Notes: $n = 193$. ** $p < 0.01$; bias-corrected bootstrapping analysis was made with a bootstrapped 2,000 sample at 95% confidence interval. LLCI = lower levels for confidence interval; ULCI = upper levels for confidence interval

Table 2.
Standardized direct,
indirect and total
effects

was 0.31 and 0.20, respectively. In short, SS enhances CA, which in turn results in employee's CS at elevated levels.

Discussion and conclusion

The current study aimed to study the mediating role of CA in the relationship between SS and CS during the pandemic among health-care professionals in Ankara, Turkey. The results of the study support the positive relationship between SS and CS through CA. Because Turkey is characterized as a collectivist culture, SS can be considered as a critical variable in increasing the CS of health-care professionals. Health-care employees most affected by the unpredictable COVID-19 crisis, in particular, need SS more than ever in this period. Because CS is based not only on employees' perception of career but also on the belief that others view them as valuable (Harvey *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, employees can evaluate their career potential based on the feedback from their supervisors.

Health-care employees can avail themselves of CA resources to find solutions to problems associated with occupational transitions or current and expected work-related tasks. During the pandemic, health-care professionals can draw on CA resources (concern, control, curiosity and confidence) to find solutions to work-related challenges. In addition, employees can also use SS as a resource to get information and help about career development. That is, it can be inferred that health-care professionals can increase CS by increasing CA with SS during the pandemic period.

Implications

CA should be considered by the managers and it should be promoted as it provides the employees essential instruments to manage their career advancement efficiently (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2017). It is important for the managers to note the point that job resources are needed by the employees to manage challenges and hardships in their career advancement (Guan *et al.*, 2015). Hence, management needs to arrange some special training programs for the health-care supervisors.

The employees ought to be surveyed by the management yearly to find how the health-care employees find the organizational policies on career management. In this way, they can also find out whether health-care employees are satisfied with their careers. In conclusion, managers are perhaps enabled by the results of this study to focus on the strengths of career management and avoid weaknesses in career management by promoting employee participation.

Limitations and future researches

Performing self-reported measurements for all variables might raise the risk of common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The common method variance was investigated in the existing study using Harman's one-factor test as a statistical remedy, and it was found that common method variance had no effect. In future studies, it is recommended to choose different statistical remedies (e.g. CFA marker technique) and collect data at different time points to reduce the possibility of common method variance. Because this research is cross-sectional, causal inferences cannot be drawn. Thus, longitudinal studies are needed to obtain causal inferences.

Further studies on CA are warranted. In this study, we investigated one predictor, SS, and how this links to CS through CA. Future study relating personality traits to CS through CA might add to the body of knowledge available on the subject.

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