Supervisors’ provision of physical environment resources to administrative support staff in a public university: Application of Job Demands-Resources theory

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article was to apply the job demands-resources (JD–R) theory in a public university as a lens to ascertain the extent of measures undertaken by academic supervisors to provide physical environment resources that support administrative employees and enhance their performance of the demanding duties they constantly perform. Supervisors’ understanding of their role in catering to the physical environment needs of administrative employees has been ignored in previous studies conducted in the university sector. The research design was qualitative since data collection relied on semi-structured interviews with six academic heads of departments who supervised office administrative employees in a public university context. The participants’ responses indicated a high understanding of the importance of providing resources such as updated equipment and eliminating any physical environmental factors that could enhance office employees’ performance in their demanding administrative duties. The challenges expressed were mainly with the budget that proved to constrain them. This finding on supervisors is significant as it addresses a research gap in which the focus on physical environment factors has mainly been on employees’ perceptions and experiences in the business sector with less interest in the public sector and developing countries. The success of an organization requires a caring leadership that strives to provide enabling workplace physical environment resources that meet the work demands of employees.

INTRODUCTION

Empirical studies on the importance of supportive physical environment resources for the improved performance and attitudes of employees facing demanding duties and high workload exist in high numbers (Nuutinen et al., 2022; Udakasana et al., 2022). However, this focus has mainly been in the business sector with a focus on employees’ perceptions and experiences with their physical workplace environment (AL-Hashimi & Al-Barri, 2018; Xia, et al., 2020; Ryu, 2016). Other studies have focussed on human resources management practices as responsible for the employees’ satisfaction and performance (Gastearena-Balda et al., 2021; Ngirande, 2021). This approach has ignored the role of supervisors in supporting the human resources management on the provision of needs of employees they supervise. Supervisors are a subject of interest because they make underperforming employees account and are also accountable to their superiors for their subordinates’ failures (Bloxham et al., 2015; Cardus 2013; Maake et al., 2021). It has also been found that the underperformance of employees with demanding jobs, who were in this instance emergency room nurses, is attributable to unsupportive conditions of the physical work environment for the improvement of services (Udakasana et al., 2022).

This indicates a lacuna on research conducted in the public university sector targeting employees at supervisory level as the ones who must ensure the provision of a comfortable physical environment for their subordinates. Such one-sided research has ignored
the “new public management movement” which has witnessed the introduction of “business-like” approaches into the public sector that are aimed at improving its efficiency (Xia et al., 2020, citing Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Yet, Xia, et al., (2020) are quick to caution that research tools from the business sector and research conducted in developed countries need to be adapted to the public sector and its context. This is more so because the public and private sector differ in their “employee characteristics and work context” (Wright, 2001, cited by Gastearena-Balda et al., 2021). These differences have led to less research being conducted in the public sector because it is assumed that all public sector employees neither have demanding jobs nor exert more effort and as such, they do not require large-scale resources (Gastearena-Balda et al., 2021). Their goals equally differ in that private organizations aim for profits while public organisations serve their societies (Gastearena-Balda et al., 2021).

Supervisors are further made critical because they are the line managers at a level where productivity is pertinent. In the academic sector, the core business of universities is to teach and conduct research over and above engaging in community development. Research is particularly important because it is weighed higher (40%) when it comes to the ranking of academic institutions’ performance in the global arena (Dixit, & Upadhyay, 2021). These activities are mainly performed by academics who have been found to experience occupational stress and ill-health due to teaching and research overload (Rothmann et al., 2008; Ngirande, 2021). These job demands on academics have led to them receiving more attention than administrative staff. This overlooks the fact that academics require extensive administrative support from office employees to be able to deal with their demanding workload. This is evident in that academics tend to pass on their workload to administrative employees who end up performing several administrative duties for many people (Rothmann & Essenko, 2007). The nature of administrative employees’ duties can clearly be very demanding and this can be a source of physical health and psychological strain on them (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Bakker and de Vries (2021) note that research suggests that these negative experiences may be an indication of workplaces that lack balance between high job demands and job resources to buffer work stress. Interventions at supervisory level, also referred to as leader-level workplace resources as opposed to organisational-level resources, would in such circumstances be better placed for specific type of employees’ well-being and their quality performance (Nielsen et al., 2017).

It is therefore critical to investigate through interviews if supervisors understand their expected supportive role for administrative staff in providing them with essential physical environmental resources. In other words, organisational performance in terms of supervisors providing job resources is a variable to assess employee support. Hence, this article extends knowledge by applying the Jobs Demand-Resources (JD-R) theory in a public academic institution of a developing country by examining the provision of resources by supervisors to the administrative employees in their departments. The selection of supervisors is intended to provide a new insight to the understanding of JD-R theory because of the intersection position they hold between the organization and the employees which makes their values to be critical (Teferaa et al., 2020). Further motivation for the study comes from Ncemane et al., (2021) who aver on the need for research that focusses on the role of job resources provision to assist employees cope with job demands.

The question that the article seeks to answer is: What is the extent of supervisors’ understanding of their supportive role in providing physical environment resources for administrative staff? The adopted approach in this investigation is qualitative since the study seeks this understanding by engaging five supervisors during interviews. The data analysis is also qualitative, and the results are presented in response to the seven questions posed to the supervisors.

Against this background information, the next section of the article outlines the JD-R theory as a framework of the study together with empirical studies to indicate the connection between theory and practice. This is followed by a discussion on research and methodology, findings of the study, discussion of results and their implications. Lastly, the conclusion, recommendations and proposed future research are tabled.

**Literature Review**

The reviewed literature is in this section first guided by a discussion on the Job Demands-Resources theory. This is followed by a focus on previous theories and research on the JD-R theory that assist in the development of hypotheses for the current study.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

In conducting this investigation, the researchers sought guidance from a theoretical framework that clearly identifies the relationship between the management’s demands for productivity and the need to meet employees’ various physical environment resources that can facilitate their performance. In this regard, Roskams and Haynes (2020) suggest the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory because of its popularity and influence in the organizational literature. Moreover, the JD-R theory is preferred because it is context neutral in that it has been used in the private and public sector without any difficulties (Dixit, & Upadhyay, 2021). This is partly because its reference to resources is broad as it neither confines itself to a particular set of resources (Demerouti et al., 2001) nor demands in a specific sector (Jackson, 2018). However, the JD-R theory has not been extensively used to investigate the provision of physical environmental resources by supervisors for the benefit of administrative employees in the academic sector.

The JD-R theory is apt for the current study because Bakker and Demerouti (2017), Demerouti et al., (2001) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), the scholars credited for developing this theory, aver that if the job demands on the employee are rather too high there should equally be adequate supportive resources to enable them to cope and be motivated to perform their duties. In this instance,
the authors describe job demands as duties, such as high workload and dealing with demanding stakeholders, that compel employees to apply a lot of their physical and psychological effort. Such job demands can take a toll on employees physical and mental health resulting in employees not being able to perform the required quality and quantity of work within the set or expected period (Ricciadelli & Carleton, 2022). It is for this reason that job resources provision from supportive supervisors is equally important as a coping mechanism for employees if they are to achieve work goals (Koedsmeyer et al., 2022). Roskams and Hayes (2020), citing Schaufeli and Taris (2014), clarify the ambiguity between demands and resources by associating demands with negative work characteristics and resources with positive aspects. In essence, the provision of job resources should correlate with the job demands situation (Nuuinen et al., 2022). In this case, resources would serve as a reward system to prompt employees to be committed to their job and the organization because they would realize that the organization cares (Abun et al., 2022). Hence, the focus of this article is on the assessment of supervisors to determine if they have the welfare of employees at heart through their provision of job resources.

The interest in job resources is inspired by the understanding that resources provide the necessary supportive role to employees, particularly those at a lower rank of the organizational hierarchy. In return, Qi et al., (2020) argue that the provision of resources likely creates the psychological desire to reciprocate on the part of the employees. Workers provided with sufficient job resources become motivated to engage in their duties (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Previous studies attest to this reciprocity since the supervisor support has been found to enhance employees’ satisfaction and engagement with their jobs despite any demands they might experience (Pattnaik, & Panda, 2020). Equally so, employees’ job satisfaction is important and beneficial to managers (Jackson, 2018; Ngirande, 2021). Yet, Rattrie et al., (2022) found supervisory support not to be significant in relation to work-related outcomes among international travelers. The contradictory results on this issue suggest the need to further investigate the role of supervisory support through resource provision.

Bakker and Demerouti (2018) further refine their theory and come up with six propositions. However, the propositions of interest here are the first, second and third. Proposition 1 makes a distinction between job demands and job resources. On the one hand, job demands arise because of the workload and complexity of tasks to be performed by employees. On the other hand, but related, job resources are the factors that support employees in performing their job demands as required by their line managers. These factors can include the working environment that meets the physical and psychological needs of employees. Proposition 2 goes further by theorizing that if the basic needs are met, employees will be in good physical and mental condition which will motivate them to perform the challenging workload. Lastly, Proposition 3 emphasizes the importance of maintaining the relationship between job resources and job demands due to the supportive role of resources to demands. Thomas et al (2020) note that there has been a number of research investigations on this theoretical framework that attest that it is in the employer’s best interest to strike a balance between job demands and job resources so that work engagement is positively affected. In the context of this article, the supervisors are the ones that are responsible for ensuring that this close relationship between job demands and job resources is always observed. It is therefore important to investigate the supervisors’ observation of this relationship in the academic context as it pertains to administrative staff.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Administrative office employees spend a lot of their time staring at their computers because of the high amount of careful reading and writing they must perform (Chua et al., 2016). Amid that, they must respond to telephone calls and emails which could mean they have to unexpectedly halt what they were doing on their computers and rush to another office or building as demanded by their supervisors. This could mean having to arrive at the office earlier than scheduled to be able to work with less interruptions and staying until late. For this reason, the workplace physical environment resources should be conducive and comfortable for office employees to feel motivated to perform their demanding tasks to the best of their abilities (Hadinata, 2020).

The responsibility to provide this type of an environment is the management of an organization at different levels. Supervisors should initiate and support the provision of supportive physical environment resources (Pattnaik, & Panda, 2020). However, there is limited research on JD-R theory as a lens to view physical environmental factors as potential job resources (Roskams & Haynes, 2020) among administrative office employees in a university context. Roskams and Haynes (2020) conceptualize physical workplace environment as indoor environmental quality (air quality and temperature), spatial factors (furnisher and its arrangement, interior design and colours), and socio-spatial factors (office space, privacy). Mogale et al., (2021) also identify the provision of new Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) office technological gadgets as useful in enhancing administrative employee efficacy which translates to overall organizational performance.

The association between physical work environment in an office and employee performance has been found to be critical (Chua et al., 2016). More so, such studies are scarce in public organizations (Gastearena-Balda et al., 2021). Hence, the additional contribution of this article is that it is in a public organization that is academic in nature in a developing country. A related study by Gastearena-Balda et al., (2021) administered a survey to compare satisfaction levels about job demands and job resources between Spanish private and public organizations’ employees across different job types. The authors found that job satisfaction levels were different in these two sectors due to that employees from the public sector had more resources but less job demands as compared to those from the private sector. Gastearena-Balda et al., (2021: 248) use their findings to encourage managers in the public sector to work on

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providing more supportive conditions such as facilities that would keep their employees satisfied and encourage them to work harder towards accomplishing organizational objectives.

Studies that have explored JD-R theory in academic institutions are not only limited but the few available have focused on academic staff and neglected the administrative office employees when they are pivotal on academics’ performance. One located study was in India (Dixit, & Upadhyay, 2021) while the other one was in China (Xia et al., 2020) and in both cases the academic staff members were surveyed using questionnaires. Another related study was among teachers in Peru private schools (Corso-de-Zúñiga et al., 2020). This indicates a gap in studies conducted in public organizations found in an African context using a qualitative approach.

Xia et al., (2020) surveyed academics on their satisfaction with reforms that served as resources but came with job demands made by the human resources management of their institutions. The examined job demands for academics were that they found themselves under pressure to make time to work on their research and publish quality journal articles over and above their teaching workload. This job demand was matched with resources that were in the form of performance-based pay and career development opportunities which created a win-win scenario (Xia et al., 2020). However, Hamidi et al., (2020) state that managers of today have a challenge of ensuring that, beyond salaries, employees work in an environment that promotes their retention and motivation to be productive. Particularly the physical environment in which supervisors’ support is evident in their provision of job resources for the performance of duties is critical (Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021; Wood et al., 2020). Several studies cited by Thomas, Du Plessis and Thomas (2020) identify the abundance of job resources as the strongest predictor of work engagement when there are high job demands. Supervisors are therefore expected to take care of physical environmental resources in the form of good lighting, temperature and office layout (Hamidi et al., 2020). In this case, JD-R theory serves to address job resources and personal resources that are critical in the performance of ones’ duties (Borst et al., 2019; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Hence, this study hypothesizes that the academic supervisors give priority to the provision of environmental physical resources for their administrative staff.

Teo et al., (2021) use the results of their study in the food service industry to suggest the importance of supervisors and line managers to equally implement human resource management practices that show support for employees in dealing with challenges posed by their jobs. A study that examines human resource management practices and commitment to employee satisfaction was conducted among Australian employees in the food service industry (Teo et al., 2021). The authors explain that their interest in this type of employees was due to their demanding job environment where they must constantly follow rigid job guidelines and be extra polite to prevent conflict and to deal with ever demanding customers. The management was examined in the extent to which they buffer this stressful work environment by providing competitive salaries, treating employees fairly, emphasizing job security and supporting them with regular training. Similarly, Dixit and Upadhyay (2021) recommend that managers of academic institutions that strive to be counted among the best should provide resources for their employees as a way of supporting their maximum performance.

Roskams and Hayes (2020) have examined JD-R as a theory to understand the relationship between work physical environment and employee satisfaction by conducting a conceptual multidisciplinary literature analysis. The authors describe enabling and supportive workplace as physical environmental resources. They make examples of interior design, integration of nature with the office environment, privacy, pleasant fragrances and lighting as resources that can independently support and motivate employees to increase their performance. Roskams and Hayes (2020) emphasize the importance for employers and managers to maximize resource for the benefit of obtaining better performance. Yet, the authors acknowledge the challenge faced by many organizations as they have to reduce costs due to stringent budgets. This concern makes it hard for organizations to provide a resource-abundant work environment (Roskams & Hayes 2020). It is therefore important to examine how the selected public university supervisors and employers try to balance the two scenarios.

Hence, the present study examines the provision of resources in the physical environment of employees where they have to perform demanding jobs. The JD-R theory is employed as a lens to assess its applicability on job resources.

Research and Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design as the plan to collect and analyze data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The supervisors’ views are investigated to find and describe what is their understanding of their role about the provision of physical environment resources.

Its approach is qualitative because semi-structured interviews are conducted with a sample of six heads of departments of a particular South African public university that is used as a case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kumar, 2019). The study is a qualitative research approach that seeks to obtain the perspectives of the supervisors about physical environment resources’ provision and importance considering the job demands of the administrative employees (Creswell et al., 2003).

The selection of heads of departments relies on purposeful non-probability sampling technique because of their supervisory roles as line managers of administrative employees who support them, their academic staff and students in a public university sector (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). However, the sample size was based on convenience sampling since the respondents’ participation was purely on availability and willingness to be part of the study in a context where the population of supervisors was in the excess of more than twenty across the university. Interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants after securing appointments
through either their secretaries or by email. The interviews were recorded and coded to avoid revealing the names of the participants. The time spent with each participant did not exceed thirty minutes.

Seven questions that sought to gauge the supervisors’ understanding of the importance of providing resources to assist employees cope with job demands were prepared. The questions were used during individual semi-structured interviews with supervisors in academic departments. The analysis of data was also qualitative.

Findings and Discussions

Findings

The first question sought to establish the views of the participants on the possible positive influence of physical environment comfort on productivity. The participants responses indicated their positive view on the influence of physical environment comfort on productivity. Their responses were as follows:

i. without proper physical comfort one cannot perform well.
ii. the environment of office motivates one to work.
iii. office must be comfortable in order for one to perform better.
iv. without proper office performance would be bad.
v. without comfort no production. It is very important for the staff to have proper furniture.
vi. The administrative staff are the lifeblood of any organization.

The provided explanations indicated a clear understanding of the correlation between a comfortable office environment and productivity. There is also confirmation that administrative staff are critical in the university and any type of organization. The subsequent questions were a follow-up on these positive responses to gauge the extent to which the supervisors strive to make the environment comfortable by providing the required resources.

Hence, the second question inquired on the availability of certain critical resources to support administrative academic staff perform their duties efficiently. Some of the mentioned resources were IP telephones, laptops, printing machine, desks and filing cabinets. The responses were as follows:

i. The department does have such resources.
ii. The department has most of the equipment mentioned but it’s hard for any department to have them all.
iii. Laptops were bought this year although it is not what we wanted for the administrative staff. But generally, the department has some of the items.
iv. We are trying to provide as many resources as we can, except when there is a lack of budget.
v. They might not have it all but they do provide and it is assisting office employees to perform well.

The indication from the above responses is that resources are provided. Yet, there is a sense that the supervisors do not always acquire the quantity and the quality they would prefer due to budgetary constraints. The provision of resources at departmental level is taken seriously by line managers. They would try their level best to obtain as much as possible of the necessary resources. Those that are supposed to provide departments with these resources appear to be making satisfactory effort because there is no sense of complaints from the supervisors. Overall, supervisors do ensure the provision of resources in this public university.

Still taking interest on the provision of resources, the third question probed on the frequency with which the departmental supervisors tried to keep up with global developments by changing the equipment as often as it is necessary. Such regular changes would enable the administrative staff to have updated resources to assist them in lessening the burden that comes with having to perform demanding jobs. The responses of the supervisors were as follows:

i. It takes some time, but the department is doing their best.
ii. I can’t remember how often, but it has been sometime without any change.
iii. It takes long time to be changed, maybe more than ten years, due to budget constraints.
iv. It takes time, but I cannot remember when the last change was.
v. Not sure but they do change some of the items such as laptops.

The responses indicated a sense of dissatisfaction with the frequency in which resources are replaced to meet the ever-changing developments in technology and general equipment. The respondents could neither specify nor remember the frequency of resources’ replacement. Some acknowledged that it takes long. This points to failure on both the part of the supervisors in initiating such changes and that of the organization. On the one hand, the supervisors apportion blame to the organization. On the other hand, they expressed some understanding of the situation under which public organizations operate with limited funding to keep up with private organizations. On the positive note, critical resources such as laptops were indicated as regularly replaced. This is despite some concerns on computers not meeting the required specifications. This may suggest that some of the resources do not assist administrative employees in carrying out their demanding duties as efficiently and effectively as they would prefer.
Hence, the fourth question followed up on this issue to obtain clarification. The question specifically asked the respondents if they considered the physical office environment to be conducive to allow employees to perform their duties effectively. The received responses were affirmative and went as follows:

i. Yes, we do because of space.
ii. Yes, all staff are able to use the office which means the office is big enough.
iii. Yes, because there is enough space and enough equipment.
iv. Yes, it does and that is why their performance is good.

The responses indicated that the supervisors took the responsibility of providing sufficient space and equipment to enable administrative employees to perform their duties efficiently. This shows an understanding that the workload of administrative staff requires that they be provided with a supportive physical work environment.

On the same subject of physical environment, it was important to understand the supervisors’ thoughts that the environment is not only about space, but other things that go with it need to be taken care of. The fifth question was specifically on efforts to reduce and control noise levels in the office space. The question wanted to know if they thought that noise levels had a negative impact on administrative employees’ performance. The responses that came through were as follows:

i. It does because the level of noise makes one not to perform well.
ii. When there is too much noise it makes the staff not to concentrate.
iii. Because admin is the main person that has to record everything so it’s important to be in a peaceful place.
iv. Yes, most especially when their staff are busy, we need to keep controlling the level of noise.
v. Yes, it does but at least we have private offices to be protected against any disturbances.

The supervisors’ responses indicated their clear understanding of the negative impact of noise on performance. They confirmed that noise is destructive to a person with a demanding job that requires a high level of concentration. The respondents acknowledged that administrative staff are kept very busy throughout the day and their job needs them to be focused. For this reason, resources need to be provided to keep control of the noise and to ensure that their work stations are peaceful. The supervisors have shown this understanding by providing administrative staff with private offices.

The sixth question quizzed supervisors if they understood the relationship between comfortable office environment and good health of administrative employees. When this question was posed, the supervisors responded by stating that:

i. Yes, if chairs are not conducive for the office environment they can cause certain diseases.
ii. Yes, because if there is no enough comfort it can cause stress and body discomfort.
iii. Yes, if the comfort in the office is poor it can be hard for any administrator to perform.
iv. Yes, It can lead to serious problems like back pain. This is a very important aspect.
v. Yes, It can cause stress and lead to absenteeism.

The supervisors agreed on the negative effects of uncomfortable work physical environment on administrative employees. They acknowledge that if the physical environment is not taken care of it can contribute to ill-health, physical pain that may lead to absenteeism. All these negative factors would make it difficult for administrative staff to keep up with their demanding workload. This would in turn mean that the supervisors, academics and students would not receive the support they require. The supervisors therefore think that it is important that the resources’ comfort meets the job demands of administrative employees.

The last and seventh question inquired on the supervisors’ understanding of the importance of consulting administrative employees on their resources’ needs. The consultations would require that the supervisors inquire from administrative employees on their needs that they would then take up with relevant departments, such as procurement, that either approve or procure the required physical environment resources. These would be resources that would assist administrative staff perform their demanding duties with ease and comfort free of psychological and physical strain. The supervisors stated as follows:

i. Staff need to be part of the process in terms of selecting equipment which is conducive to them, including paintings and colors of the equipment.
ii. That can be improved by asking staff to draft what they need and as a department help them.
iii. By allowing admin staff to choose what is good for them.
iv. This depends on the motivation from higher authority, it’s not on us.
v. By listening to the people working as administrators.
vi. The improvement depends on budget, so as much as we might need improvements but budget plays a major role.

The responses indicated a good understanding of the need to consult administrative employees on their resource needs. This is the right procedure to follow as it enables the administrative staff to indicate their needs. Yet, there was an acknowledgement that it all depends on the “higher authority” and the availability of budget as it “plays the major role”. This ties up with the earlier concern raised about getting laptops that did not meet the specifications the administrative staff had preferred.
Discussion

The objective of the study was to ascertain the extent of measures undertaken by academic supervisors to provide physical environment resources that support administrative employees enhance their performance of their demanding duties. This was done by applying the job demands–resources (JD–R) theory as a lens to inquire on the supervisors understanding of their role in maintaining a balance between expecting administrative staff perform demanding jobs and providing them with resources to enhance their engagement, satisfaction and buffer the potential burnout that could result from having a high workload (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008 & 2018; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Pattnaik, & Panda, 2020).

The focus on supervisors was informed by Bakker and de Vries (2021) who aver that employees should not be treated as a group in a large organization where they perform different duties and experience various job demands. Hence, leader-level interventions were viewed as an interesting area of research to determine the extent to which supervisors understand their role to provide workplace resources to administrative employees that would cater for their well-being and quality performance of their demanding jobs (Breevaart et al., 2015; Haynes, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2017). This in turn benefits managers because employees’ job satisfaction results in good job performance (Jackson, 2018; Ngirande, 2021).

The results of the study showed a close relationship between job demands and resources provision. The supervisors of administrative employees expressed an understanding of the importance of providing resources that enhance employee comfort, their performance of their duties and protecting them from physical environment disturbances such as noise. In providing a supportive physical work environment for the cognitive, emotional and physical well-being of administrative employees the supervisors understood that this would assist improve the employees’ performance (Udaksana et al., 2022). At the same time, the supervisors acknowledged that public universities experience budgetary constraints to be able to provide as many resources as they can and frequently change them to keep up with technological and equipment global developments.

The results are in line with Roskams and Hayes (2020) multidisciplinary literature analysis of JD–R theory that found that an enabling physical environment has been described as resources in many previous studies. In the same breath, the reviewed studies found a correlation between managers’ provision of resources and maximized performance of demanding jobs. There was also an indication that stringent budgets limited the provision of an abundance of resources across public and private sectors (Roskams & Hayes, 2020). A study by Teo et al. (2021) is also supported by the current results which indicate that the interviewed supervisors implement human resource management practices that show support for employees in dealing with challenges posed by their jobs. In addition, Thomas, Du Plessis and Thomas’s (2020) review of previous published work on JD–R theory concurs with the results of the present article as they also found that a common thread among them was the importance of managers and employers to strike a balance between job demands and job resources. It is therefore important for organizations and supervisors to provide employees with resources that promote a conducive work environment that assists to reduce job stress and promote job satisfaction if they are to reduce employee turnover (Taduvana, Msosa & Chikukwa, 2022).

Conclusion

The reported study was successful in its application of the JD–R theory in a public university sector where it sought to determine the understanding of supervisors on their responsibility to provide supportive physical environment resources to administrative employees. Public universities are encouraged to improve their budget so they can equally support supervisors and employees by providing the required physical environment resources that are of good quality and in keeping with ever changing global and technological developments. The study has made an important contribution to the understanding of literature on JD–R theory in the public sector. Future studies could quantitatively explore the views of employees on leader-led support to verify this qualitative report that was informed by the supervisors’ views.

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