An Investigation of Liking of Computers, Help Received, and Job Outcomes for Computer Workers

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ABSTRACT

The number of workers having to use computers in their jobs continues to increase. However, not all employees enjoy computer work at the same levels, and for those who do not enjoy computer work, negative outcomes are likely to result. Further, it is important to examine how work-related support from either supervisors or coworkers will minimize/buffer the relationships between not liking computer work and the consequences of job satisfaction and technology overload. We examine these hypotheses in a sample of 225 workers, from a wide range of jobs, all of whom work more than 20 hours per week on their computers. Our results show that liking computer work is positively related to job satisfaction, and supervisor computer help moderates the relationships between liking computer work and the outcomes of job satisfaction and technology work overload. Practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research are offered. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

Keywords: Computer Help; Liking Computer Work; Job Outcome; Job Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Computers seem to be omnipresent in today’s society, and the number of employees completing some or all of their jobs on a computer continues to increase. However, not all individuals enjoy computer work as much as others. When employees who dislike computer work have to complete their jobs on a computer, they are likely to experience negative consequences (Compeau, Higgins, & Huff, 1999; Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997; Yi & Hwang, 2003). Two of these outcomes that we investigate in this study are job satisfaction, defined as a positive emotional state that results from how employees appraise their jobs and/or job experiences (Locke, 1976), and perceived technology work overload, defined as the extent to which perceptions of the
technology-related job performance required is excessive and feeling that computers have compounded the overall workload (Iverson, Deery, & Erwin, 1995). Not only are these outcomes important in and of themselves, but they have also been shown to be important predictors of other workplace consequences including turnover intentions, actual turnover, job performance, and health-related outcomes (e.g., Edmunds & Morris, 2000; Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Thatcher, Stepina, & Boyle, 2002) in a number of different samples including IT workers (e.g., Thatcher et al., 2002).

Although negative outcomes are likely to be associated with the dislike of computer work, there are factors in the workplace that may minimize or buffer these linkages (Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986; Salanova, Peiro, & Schaufeli, 2002). In particular, we want to examine how work-related support received from either the supervisor or an employee’s coworkers will impact job satisfaction and perceived technology work overload. Both of these relationships are of considerable importance to computer workers, thus making the investigation of help received from these sources all the more necessary (e.g., Ferratt, Short, & Agarwal, 1993). Further, based on the social support framework (e.g., House, 1981; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999) and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we expect that the dislike of computer work is related to job satisfaction and perceived technology work overload, and that receiving computer help from either the supervisor or coworkers will minimize these negative outcomes. Additionally, we hope to determine whose (supervisor’s or coworkers’) support has a greater buffering impact.

Thus, this study has three purposes that relate to the various hypothesized relationships shown in our theoretical model in Figure 1. The first purpose is to examine the relations between the dislike of computer work and the outcomes of job satisfaction and perceived technology work overload. Second, we examine the associations between supervisor and coworker computer help on these same outcomes. The third purpose of the study is to investigate the potential for computer help from either source to moderate the dislike of computer work-consequence relationships. We examine these hypotheses in a sample of 225 workers from a wide range of jobs, thus providing a more stringent test of these relationships across different workplaces and helping to establish the generalizability of our results. Practical implications and directions for future research are offered.

LIKE/DISLIKE OF COMPUTER WORK

Previous research has suggested and empirically shown that liking various aspects of one’s work will be related to positive outcomes (e.g., Compeau et al., 1999; Shore, Newton, & Thornton, 2006; Spector, 1997). As shown in Figure 1, we anticipate this to be especially true for computer workers and their like/dislike of computer work. We define “liking of computer work” as one’s general affect toward computer work rather than toward just one system (Sabherwal, Jayaraj, & Chow, 2006). People who like computer work tend to be self-directed learners, seeking out new opportunities to innovate with technology, whereas people who dislike computer work tend not to engage in self-learning, and utilize less complex applications (Shaw, Lee-Partridge, & Ang, 2003). Although the like/dislike of computer work does not seem to directly influence the usage of a specific information system (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003), if a computer worker enjoys his or her computer work, he or she is likely to be happy with the job and feel that the work he or she is performing is less overwhelming (e.g., Spector, 1997; Yi & Hwang, 2003). On the other hand, if a computer worker dislikes computer work, feelings of decreased job satisfaction and perceptions of computer-related work overload are likely to result (Hobfoll, 1989). We acknowledge that this notion has been tested in a number of different aspects of the work world, but this first set of hypotheses
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