

## **Proactivity, Job design, and Manager-Employee Interactions**

Huda Masood  
Sam Houston State University

Marie-Helene Budworth  
York University

Theme: Proactivity and job design in employment relations

**Background and Introduction.** According to a national survey, 81% of the Canadian workers have reported experiencing extreme stress adjusting to the work demands of the “new normal” (Morneau Shepell, 2020). Evidence suggests about 53% of the workplace stress can be ascribed to interpersonal relationships (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2020). While working during a pandemic is almost always stressful, it is important to identify and support those responsible for managing others at work (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2020).

**Research Objectives.** The goal of the current research is to capture the impact of COVID-19 crisis on the interplay between managerial job-demands and workplace stress as emanated from interpersonal relationships. Notably, the pandemic has changed the way we are expected to do our jobs. Accordingly, the objective of the current study is to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: How does the COVID-19 crisis impact job-demands of (a) managers; (b) employees?

RQ2: How do the COVID-19 impacted job-demands influence the interpersonal interactions between managers and employees?

RQ3: How do the manager-employee interactions impact employee stress during the pandemic?

**Methodology.** The proposed research will be studied using a multi-strand, mixed-methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, Venkatesh et al. 2016), broadly categorized into quantitative (i.e., survey instruments) and qualitative (i.e., semi-structured interviews) phases.

**Phase I:** The first research goal highlights the extent to which the job-demands have become stressful for both managers due to the COVID-19 crisis. It can be measured using semi-structured interviews with individuals in managerial positions and their direct reports. Notably, a qualitative approach can bridge the gap between the scholarly and lay persons’ comprehension of a given concept. This will attain the in- depth accounts of the perceived impact of COVID-19 on individual job-demands.

**Phase II:** The second research goal is to unmask how these COVID-19 impacted job demands influence the interpersonal interactions between managers and employees. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how an overworked manager interacts with their employees at an interpersonal level. To add triangulation to the existing research, I aim to measure the suggested relationships quantitatively, using job-demands, interactional justice, interpersonal exchanges, and stress scales. See Appendix A for risk-management.

**Phase III:** Finally, how managerial job-demands (as impacted by the COVID-19 crisis) influence employee stress, will be investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively. I will utilize the insights from the interviews conducted during an earlier stage of this research to address our final research objective. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be conducted on our qualitative data. The relationship will also be measured quantitatively through dyadic data collection. Structural Equation Modeling will be conducted for quantitative analysis on our manager-employee dyads.

***Significance and Contribution.*** The current project allows stakeholders to uncover the extent to which the managerial job demands have increased or become stressful due to COVID-19 situation. Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis and the affiliated economic uncertainties, organizations around the globe are interested in uncovering the mechanisms to manage employee stress levels in the wake of increasing job demands. On a macro level, the current project offers two broader contributions to psychological safety and wellbeing of the Canadian workforce. First, it expands our understanding of how stress is managed and perceived within manager-employee dyads. Exploring such dynamics would help us delineate pathways for stress-reduction for organizational members. Second, understanding the effect of managerial job-demands on employee health and wellbeing would allow us to overhaul the existing job designs to mitigate the negative consequences of stress on employee wellbeing, thereby promoting a healthier workforce in Canadian society. Research findings will be presented at scholarly outlets to promote awareness.

## References

- Anxiety and Depression Association of America. (2020). Workplace Stress & Anxiety Disorders Survey. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://adaa.org/workplace-stress-anxiety-disorders-survey>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–10.
- Morneau Shepell. (2020). Canadians are feeling unprecedented levels of anxiety, according to Mental Health Index. Retrieved from: <http://morneaushepell.mediaroom.com/2020-04-02-Canadians-are-feelingunprecedented-levels-of-anxiety-according-to-Mental-Health-Index>
- Tashakkori, A., Teddlie, C., and Teddlie, C. B. (1998). *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, (2020, April 23). Government of Canada. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/covid-19/covid-19-mental-health-work.html>
- Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Sullivan, Y. W. (2016). Guidelines for Conducting Mixed-Methods Research: An Extension and Illustration, *Journal of the Association for Information Systems, 17*, 435-495.