

## 論文の内容の要旨

The social construction of jobs and its association with job stress: A qualitative study of workers at a construction management firm

(仕事の社会的構築と職業性ストレスとの関係：総合建設企業の従業員を対象とした質的研究)

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### **Background**

Studies investigating job stress have traditionally focused on ‘distress’ or the negative aspects of work experiences. Accumulating evidence has identified the adverse effects of job stress on the well-being of workers in terms of their physical responses, psychological responses, and behavioral responses.

These past studies were often based on theoretical models of job stress that were developed to theorize job stress as well as related constructs. Although these theoretical models of job stress and subsequent empirical studies have contributed to identifying various stressors, strains, and their relationships, there are still some research gaps that remain unaddressed. Importantly, these models assumed static and generalized stimuli–response relationships between stressors and strains, while limited attention has been paid to the dynamic process of how workers experience job stress under diverse psychosocial contexts over the duration of workers’ careers.

Additionally, many of the existing job stress models also regard a job as a fixed concept that is provided by managerial and supervisory personnel in a top-down manner. In contrast to this traditional perspective, several theoretical studies have recently proposed that jobs are rather socially constructed at the workplace. However, limited studies have empirically explored the psychosocial process of job construction, which involves interactions between workers and their work environments over the course of their career, or the effects of that process on workers’ job-stress-related experiences.

Thus, the purpose of the present study was to develop a theoretical model to explore the process of how jobs are socially constructed at the workplace and its association with the negative and positive experiences of workers. The specific research questions were “how are jobs socially constructed at the workplace?” and “how is this process associated with the negative and positive experiences of workers?”

### **Methods**

The present study used a qualitative research design because the phenomenon of how the social construction of jobs is associated with the negative and positive experiences of workers has not been fully explored to date. Specifically, grounded theory methodology was employed for data collection and data analysis because the ultimate goal of this study was the development of a theoretical model.

The interviewees were construction engineers working at a Japanese construction management firm.

This focus was chosen because construction work is often characterized by long work hours and client-imposed schedules, and hence, it is physically and psychologically demanding for construction personnel generally. Therefore, construction engineers were considered appropriate for a study investigating job-stress-related experiences at the workplace especially due to their long work hours and client-imposed schedules.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen construction engineers based on an interview guide (from April 2017 to October 2018). Purposive sampling was used at the beginning to recruit interviewees who worked at the participating company. The selection of interviewees was followed by theoretical sampling based on the concepts derived from the analysis. The interview data were analyzed using coding procedures with an emphasis on constant comparison. Additionally, this study has taken various procedures, such as peer debriefing, member checking, and follow-up interviews, to ensure its credibility.

The study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo (No. 11507).

## Results

The analysis of the interview data resulted in six major themes (i.e., *job*, *self*, *enhancing environments*, *attitudes toward work*, *negative and positive experiences*, and *moderators*) and constitutive categories, which together explain the psychosocial process of job development and its association with negative and positive experiences at the workplace.

In particular, the construction engineers' perceptions, understandings, and interpretations of their jobs (*job*) developed along with their work-related identity (*self*) over the course of their careers, and this process was enabled by development-enhancing work environments (*enhancing environments*). Additionally, the relationships between *job* and *self* comprised the construction engineers' attitudes toward performing their work (*attitudes toward work*). These themes of *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work* became the contexts for what was experienced as stressful and motivational (*negative and positive experiences*), and mitigating stressful encounters (*moderators*).

To elaborate on these themes in more detail, first, *job* refers to the construction engineers' perceptions, understandings, and interpretations of their jobs, including construction site management, design work, and technical assistance. The major patterns in which *job* was manifested during the developmental process were *regarding the job as fragmented tasks*, *drawing an overall picture of the job*, and *constituting one's own interpretation of the job*.

Second, *self* denotes the work-related identity possessed by the construction engineers; it develops together with job over the course of their careers. The major patterns in which *self* was manifested during the developmental process were *lacking a clear sense of work identity*, *being aware of the expected roles*, and *recognizing one's distinctive value*.

Third, *enhancing environments* describe the characteristics of work environments that enable and

foster the development of *job* and *self* over the course of construction engineers' careers. *Enhancing environments* are composed of categories, such as *stable positions for skill development*, *learning-fostering interactions*, *diverse yet consistent work experiences*, and *opportunities for new challenges*.

Fourth, *attitudes toward work* illustrate the construction engineers' attitudes toward performing their work in the sense of what they primarily focus on. *Attitudes toward work* stem from the relationships between *job* and *self* and exhibit the following patterns: *carrying out assigned tasks*, *fulfilling roles and responsibilities*, and *making contributions in one's unique way*. In addition, the construction engineers' *attitudes toward work* do not simply transfer from one state to the other but rather become multifaceted alongside the development of *job* and *self*.

Fifth, *negative and positive experiences* represent stressful and motivational encounters at the workplace experienced by the construction engineers as significant. Notably, *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work* provided the contexts explaining what was experienced by the construction engineers as stressful (i.e., *working without making sense*, *unable to keep up with work demands*, *losing curiosity in routinized work*, *deceiving oneself to comply with roles*, and *discrepancy between the ideal and reality*) and motivational (i.e., *inspired by new experiences*, *feeling togetherness with co-workers*, and *resolving a challenging situation*).

Finally, *moderators* refer to experiences of the construction engineers that mitigate their stressful encounters at the workplace. *Moderators* include categories, such as *technical support from co-workers* and *adhering to accountable procedures*. Similar to negative and positive experiences, *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work* became the contexts for what was perceived by the construction engineers as mitigating their stressful encounters.

## **Discussion**

To interpret the results, first, the developmental process of *job* and *self* delineated in this study partially overlaps with some theoretical propositions in previous studies, such as job crafting and Mead's social identity theory. However, in contrast to previous theories that considered job construction and identity creation at the workplace separately, the results of this study indicated that *job* and *self* developed together in an intertwining relationship along with work environmental characteristics that enabled and enhanced the development, which is original to the current study.

Second, the results suggest that *job* and *self* constitute the construction engineers' *attitudes toward work*, which is supported by some past models of professional development at workplaces, such as the five-stage model of skill acquisition proposed by Dreyfus. However, in contrast to the Dreyfus model that focuses exclusively on skill acquisition, the results of this study indicate that it is not merely skill acquisition but *job* and *self* as a whole that determine the construction engineers' *attitudes toward work*.

Third, part of the categories comprising *negative and positive experiences* and *moderators* explored in this study are comparable to the concepts proposed in previous studies. However, other categories, such as *inspired by new experiences*, *losing curiosity in routinized work*, *discrepancy between the ideal*

*and reality*, and *resolving a challenging situation*, appeared to be original to this study. These categories warrant further refinement as well as operationalization in order to enable quantitative examination of the theoretical model.

Fourth, the theoretical model suggests that the development of *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work* could change some workers' stressful encounters into less significant ones. Thus, many stressful encounters experienced by the construction engineers were mitigated and overcome in conjunction with the development of *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work*.

Fifth, the underlying premise of the current theoretical model was that the company attempted to provide environments and opportunities to the construction engineers to develop within their company, and the construction engineers were expecting the same thing. Therefore, the themes, categories and their relationships explored in this study may be transferrable to workers in similar settings. In contrast, the theoretical model may only have limited transferability to workers in different settings, such as those in favor of a boundaryless career rather than a traditional employment system.

The implications of the present study are two-fold. First, the reduction and removal of stressors can be considered in conjunction with the psychosocial process of job development because what was experienced by the workers as stressful varied across the developmental stages of *job* and *self*, which are represented by their *attitudes toward work*. Second, providing development-enhancing work environments may also mitigate the detrimental effects of stressful encounters.

A major limitation of the present study is that the interviewees were limited to those who were able to continue working at the company. Thus, future research could incorporate workers who had experienced turnover due to job stress into the analysis to consider the variations in the themes and categories. Furthermore, this study is prone to bias, such as discrepancy between the actual interactions taking place at the workplace and the interviewees' descriptions of the interactions, which is also called recall bias. This weakness of qualitative interviews could possibly be compensated through triangulation in terms of data collection methods and data sources.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study developed a theoretical model that explains the process of how jobs are socially constructed at the workplace and its association with the negative and positive experiences of workers. The results suggested that the social construction of jobs involved the development of *job*, *self*, and *attitudes toward work* over the course of workers' careers, which became the contexts for what was experienced by workers as stressful and motivational. In particular, what was experienced by the workers as significantly negative or positive varied across the developmental stages of *job* and *self*, which are represented by their *attitudes toward work*. It could be inferred from the model that prospective job stress interventions may remove and reduce specific stressors by considering these developmental stages of the workers. Additionally, providing development-enhancing work environments may also mitigate the detrimental effects of stressful encounters.