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Giving and taking social support at work: An experience sampling study among coworker dyads

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that both receiving support and providing support enhance employee well-being and work engagement. In the current study, we integrate social exchange theory (SET) and conservation of resources (COR) theory to investigate under which conditions receiving and providing daily support are most likely to occur. Specifically, we test the hypotheses that receiving requested support and reciprocating received support are more likely when the support is requested or received from a co-worker who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high (vs. low), and less likely when the support is requested or received from a co-worker high (vs. low) on workaholism. To test these hypotheses, we collected data among 45 employees and their co-workers during two moments per day for five consecutive working days (N = 90 participants; N = 614 work episodes). Multi-level analyses supported all hypotheses, except for the moderating effect of partner's workaholism on the link between receiving and providing support. These findings imply that receiving and providing support do not

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occur automatically but are dependent on characteristics of the exchange relationship and the exchange partner. We discuss the implications for SET and COR theories, as well as practical implications.

KEYWORDS

conservation of resources, quality of the exchange relationship, social support, workaholism

INTRODUCTION

Social support is crucial for employee well-being and job performance. It not only protects employees from job strain (Viswesvaran et al., 1999) and boosts engagement and performance when received (Bakker, 2014; Kaiser et al., 2018), but it also motivates and engages when provided (Zeijen, Petrou, & Bakker, 2020; Zeijen, Petrou, Bakker, & Van Gelderen, 2020). In fact, where employees collaborate, there is interdependence. This means that in order to accomplish team performance, individuals need to actively support and assist each other. While it is widely assumed that all people tend to repay the good deeds of others (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Emerson, 1976), some people are more inclined to do so than others (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001). Therefore, when employees and employers want to stimulate social exchange at work and improve team performance and well-being, it is important to uncover under what conditions social exchange is most likely in a dyadic context. Previous research on social support mainly used one-way perspectives and designs to investigate social support (Jolly et al., 2021; Uy et al., 2017) and largely overlooked the dependence on contextual factors, such as to whom the support is given (Haslam et al., 2012). In the present study, we treat social support as a two-way process — and examine the role of the co-worker in this process.

Specifically, we investigate under what conditions it is most likely that asking for support results in received support and under what conditions received support fosters providing support — in other words, is reciprocated. We thus address the possibility that asking for and receiving support do not automatically lead to received and reciprocated support, respectively, as often assumed by longstanding theories (e.g., reciprocity norm by Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Instead, we propose that characteristics of the source from whom support is requested or received act as boundary conditions and influence the strength of the exchange processes.

To uncover relevant conditions under which employees are more (or less) likely to exchange support at work, we conduct our research within the conceptual paradigm of social exchange theory (SET; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET offers a broad conceptual paradigm, which can be understood as a family of related theoretical models (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Its core idea is that interpersonal relations are formed on the basis of a subjective cost-benefit analysis. While social exchanges are often mutually beneficial (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010; Zeijen, Petrou, & Bakker, 2020), it is essential to recognize that employees may also incur costs as part of the exchange process. Engaging in social exchanges within the workplace can cost time and effort, which may affect perceived work progress (Koopman et al., 2016). Perceived costs, as well as benefits, vary among individuals based on their personal values (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001), motivations (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), traits (Koopman

et al., 2016), and the organizational context (Yang et al., 2018), but may also depend on characteristics of the person whom the support is requested or received from.

Continuing our line of reasoning and in order to better understand the social support process, we integrate insights from SET (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018). While SET focuses on resource exchange, COR theory broadens this perspective by emphasizing personal resource management and the role of the resource provider. Our study specifically uses COR theory to examine the co-worker's perspective and how their personal resource considerations influence the social support process, complementing the SET framework. In addition, because of the finite nature of resources (Beal et al., 2005; Van Veldhoven et al., 2020), individuals must strategically invest in profitable resource allocations. In response to the call for research emphasizing the role of the other (i.e., the partner) in support exchanges (Haslam et al., 2012), we investigate two situations representing the co-worker's perspective—one involving an interaction partner likely to enhance the provider's own resource gain (profitable), and another involving an interaction partner less likely to enhance the provider's resource gain (less profitable).

According to SET, employees will be more likely to engage in social exchange if their provided support has been reciprocated in the past. A concept that captures this idea is the general quality of the exchange relationship (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018), which we address as our first boundary condition of social exchange as perceived by the partner. Exchange quality represents the extent to which employees are focused on creating joint outcomes (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). When employees perceive a high-quality exchange relationship, there is reciprocity between co-workers' ideas, feedback and assistance, as well as mutual acceptance of information, help and recognition (Seers et al., 1995). Because the other within this relationship has proven to be worthy of investment, resource investment in a high-quality exchange is likely to enhance one's own resources. Additionally, to contrast this situation, we aimed to investigate the opposite of a profitable exchange situation, namely, exchanges with a co-worker who is more concerned with their own goals and less with the goals of others. Therefore, as a second boundary condition, we address the co-worker's workaholism, which indicates a strong focus on achieving individual outcomes. Workaholism refers to an inner drive to work excessively hard and an obsession with one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2008), reflects an extreme attention on one's own goals, needs and wishes (Robinson & Post, 1997) and represents a neglect of attention for others (Killinger, 2006; Porter, 2001). Workaholics do not necessarily value social exchange, and are unlikely to perceive social exchange as a viable way to enhance their resources.

By examining how two different person-level variables of a co-worker influence how employees request, receive, and provide social support, we contribute to the literature in several ways. First of all, we contribute to SET (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and COR (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) theories by examining to what extent their basic premises about resource investment depend on characteristics and perceptions of others. In other words, assuming that people invest resources when they perceive the investment as a worthwhile social exchange (i.e., COR) or because they have been rewarded in the past (i.e., SET), we empirically test whether social support exchange, in fact, relies not only on one's own behavior but also on the behavior of the exchange partner. Secondly, whereas the majority of social support research focuses on either outcomes for the support provider (e.g., Lanaj et al., 2016) or outcomes for the support receiver (e.g., Vera et al., 2016), we offer a dyadic perspective on the process of daily exchange. This is particularly important because social support is a dyadic phenomenon by nature in which both provider and receiver influence each other (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Thirdly, whereas proactivity scholars (e.g., job crafting; Rudolph

et al., 2017) largely assume that asking for support always leads to received support, we refine this literature by examining whether certain boundary conditions make the relationship between asking for support and receiving support more likely. Finally, by testing two widely accepted human tendencies (i.e., helping tendency, Hornstein, 1982 and reciprocity norm, Gouldner, 1960) and applying them to a daily organizational setting, we expand social exchange literature (Cropanzano et al., 2017) and offer practical insight for employees and employers on how and when to stimulate social exchange in the best possible way. Notably, we test how two person-level variables of a co-worker (another colleague) influences whether employees are more or less likely to receive requested support or reciprocate received support. To do so, we capture the person-level variables that influence how a situation will be perceived from the “other” co-worker and label this variable with “partner”. In addition, we capture the support behaviors (i.e., requested, received, and provided support) from the focal employees, which we therefore label with “actor” (see Figure 1). To be clear about what variable is reported by whom, we use the labels actor and partner consistently in all hypotheses and results.

GIVING AND TAKING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support is a central component in virtually all social relationships, well-known for its positive influence on health and well-being (Heller & Rook, 1997). Helping behavior is so innately connected to our nature as humans that it can already be detected in one-year-olds (Liszkowski et al., 2006; Vaish et al., 2009). Not only when there is nothing to lose for them, but even at their personal costs children have been found to help others and share their resources (Dunfield et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the act of both providing and receiving support has not consistently led to positive or even significant results. According to previous research, this largely depends on several contextual factors, such as to whom and when the support is given (Haslam et al., 2012).

Moreover, why social support plays such an inherent part in our existence can be explained in different ways. According to the indirect reciprocity reasoning (Alexander, 1987), our ancestors were more likely to survive when they helped each other. Through helping and cooperation they increased the willingness of others to reciprocate these resources later on (called reciprocity norm; Gouldner, 1960). This is in line with our SET perspective, in which individuals who are more inclined to help others generally also receive more help from others (Cropanzano

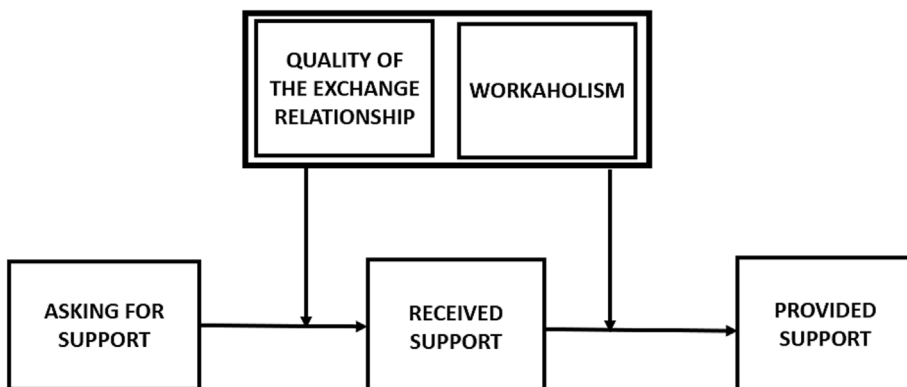


FIGURE 1 Theoretical research model.

et al., 2017). However, other research shows that people are not only motivated by self-serving motivations but also want to help others because they have a genuine concern for their wellbeing (Hepach et al., 2012). According to Warneken and Tomasello (2008), tangible rewards even suppress the internal helping drive that children naturally possess.

In the present study, we draw on humans' inherent tendency to help others in need (Hornstein, 1982; Piliavin et al., 1981), as well as the human tendency to repay the good deeds of others (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Gouldner, 1960) and investigate these tendencies within an organizational setting. According to a review by Schaufeli (2006), conducted among more than 11,000 employees, employees reveal the highest well-being when they provide just a little bit more than they receive in general. Moreover, research shows that the more employees perceive support from the organization, the more employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and supervisors (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006) are inclined to help their colleagues and subordinates, which, in turn, improves job performance. Hence, it seems important for employees to be able to help others, as well as to reciprocate previously received support to some extent. Various empirical studies underline this reasoning, and show that, over time, the more employees request for support, the more social resources they accrue (Tims et al., 2013), and the more social support individuals receive, the more likely they are to provide social support (Bowling et al., 2005; Schaufeli, 2006). The majority of social support studies, however, have focused on how much support is generally exchanged, and have focused on the requested, received or provided support in terms of months or years (e.g., Bowling et al., 2005; Buunk et al., 1993; Buunk & Schaufeli, 1999; Schaufeli, 2006). Since social support plays a crucial role in employees' day-to-day well-being (for an overview, see Bakker, 2014), we consider it important to examine the daily dynamics of supportive exchange and investigate whether these human helping tendencies (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Gouldner, 1960; Hornstein, 1982; Piliavin et al., 1981) can also be detected at the daily level. In the present study, we therefore base our support model (Figure 1) on the ample studies and theories that show that humans are inclined to help others and reciprocate previously received help and examine whether asking for support increases the amount of received support, and, in turn, whether received support increases the amount of reciprocated support within work episodes. Specifically, we do so by zooming in on work episodes consisting of four working hours that allow enough time for employees to request, receive, and provide support.

Hypothesis 1a. Actor asking for social support during a work episode relates positively to actor receiving social support during the same work episode.

Hypothesis 1b. Actor receiving social support during a work episode relates positively to actor providing social support during the same work episode.

Hypothesis 2. Actor asking for support predicts actor providing support, through actor receiving support.

Conserving or acquiring new resources through social support

Although the human tendencies to help and reciprocate social support are universal, people may differ in the effort with which they provide support — depending on whom they ask for

support or from whom the support is received (see Figure 1). In other words, depending on contextual factors, employees may be stimulated or discouraged to put effort into helping others. Part of this reasoning comes from the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which proposes that individuals only invest resources when they perceive an investment to (a) protect current resources (i.e., conservation) or (b) acquire new resources (i.e., acquisition). As such, COR does not only address when and why people invest resources but also when and why they do not. COR defines resources as objects, states, conditions, and other things that people value (Hobfoll, 1989). However, what people value largely varies among individuals and is tied to personal experiences, situations, and orientations. For example, investing time and energy in colleagues can be viewed as a valuable resource that enhances work pleasure and performance, but can also be perceived as a threat, costing unnecessary time and energy (see Koopman et al., 2016, for both positive and negative effects depending on personal traits).

In addition, we draw on SET theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET and COR theories offer complementary insights into human behavior in the context of social interactions and resource management. SET theory focuses on the costs and benefits individuals assess in social exchange relationships, while COR theory emphasizes personal resource management. By integrating insights from SET and COR, our study predicts that employees are motivated to invest personal resources in the social exchange relationship when they perceive it as safeguarding or augmenting their own resources. In the context of requesting support from co-workers, we anticipate that employees are more likely to receive support when their co-worker views the quality of the exchange relationship as high. From the perspective of the co-worker providing the support, it is expected that requests that come within a high-quality relationship motivate to view the support request as an opportunity to protect the ongoing flow of resource exchange and therefore providers will be more inclined to provide support (Hobfoll et al., 2018). To capture this dynamic, we measure the quality of the exchange relationship from the perspective of the co-worker who serves as the provider in the requested–received support relationship. This approach allows us to investigate the extent to which the dynamics of receiving requested support depend on the source from whom support is requested.

Furthermore, in accordance with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), we anticipate that employees who receive support within a high-quality exchange relationship will be more inclined to reciprocate support. By reciprocating support in such relationships, employees aim to reinforce and maintain a revitalized high-quality exchange relationship (i.e., building resource reservoirs; Hobfoll, 1989). So, when it comes to reciprocating previously received support, we anticipate that employees who have received support are more inclined to provide support when the co-worker highly values the quality of the relationship. By exploring the impact of the source of support on the dynamics of reciprocation, we gain insight in the extent to which reciprocating previously received support depend on the source of the received support. Empirical studies support our theorizing, and show that when the quality of social exchange is high, employees indeed frequently exchange work-related feedback, ideas, and expertise with each other (Liden et al., 2000), receive more information from their peers (Seers, 1989), and are more inclined to actually help their colleagues (Farmer et al., 2015; Kamdar & van Dyne, 2007). Taken together, we propose (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 3a. Partner's perception of the quality of the exchange relationship moderates the positive link between actor asking for support and actor receiving support during a work episode. This link is stronger when the partner perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high (vs. low).

Hypothesis 3b. Partner's perception of the quality of the exchange relationship moderates the positive link between actor received support from the co-worker and actor providing support to the co-worker during a work episode. This link is stronger when the partner perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high (vs. low).

In contrast to the drive to enhance joint outcomes and stimulate equality (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001), workaholic employees tend to focus more strongly on maximizing outcomes for the self and express less desire to restore equality in outcomes (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001). Therefore, as a second boundary construct, we selected employees' level of workaholism, which reflects the extent to which employees are focused on achieving their own work goals at the cost of social investments towards others (pro-self-orientation). Workaholism is an individual characteristic referring to self-imposed demands, compulsive overworking, an inability to regulate work habits, and an excessive preoccupation with work to the detriment of most other activities in life (Robinson & Post, 1997). Workaholism has been discussed as an addiction (Ng et al., 2007; Porter, 2006), as a behavior pattern (Scott et al., 1997), and even as a syndrome (Clark et al., 2016).

According to previous research, workaholic employees exhibit a proactive tendency to increase the challenges (Hakanen et al., 2018) rather than to decrease the hindrances of their work (Lee et al., 2022). However, there is no reason to believe that such behavior is of prosocial nature. In fact, these studies also show that there is no significant correlation between workaholism and the proactive pursuit of social resources, such as seeking for support or feedback from peers and supervisors. These findings suggest that workaholic employees prioritize their own task-related responsibilities over engaging in social activities at the workplace. This is in line with previous studies showing that the social relationships of workaholics are limited (Ng et al., 2007), which may be explained by workaholics' loss of emotional attachment (Robinson et al., 2001). Workaholics are inclined to set excessive and rigorous standards of success that stimulate their tendency to not cooperate or communicate with co-workers (Porter, 2001). According to Porter (2001, based on Robinson, 1998), workaholics' perfectionism represents an important part of their work addiction and emphasizes an inclination to evaluate one's own performance against superhuman standards that ensure failure. As a result, workaholics feel that they can justify a response of anger, less communication and less cooperation (Porter, 2001), which, in turn, explains why workaholics pay little attention to others (i.e., Locomotion, Falvo et al., 2013).

However, attention for others, and specifically the intentions with which employees attend to others, matters greatly as to how support is provided (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Support that is provided based on extrinsic motivations (e.g., provided because one feels they should do so) is namely less effective for the receiver and results in less perceived effort according to receivers (i.e., also objectively in less quantity of support; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Given that workaholics tend to exhibit high levels of extrinsic work motivation (Van Beek et al., 2012) and limited interest in their colleagues (Porter, 2001), we anticipate that individuals high in workaholism are less inclined to go to great lengths to assist others, even when requested to do so. To capture the dynamic of receiving requested support, we measure workaholism as reported by the co-worker who serves as the provider in the requested-received support relationship.

Finally, based on COR (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), we predict that re-investing support in a collegial relationship with workaholic colleagues is less likely to stimulate large

resource investments because acquiring new resources from a workaholic, now or in the future, is less probable. Based on COR theory, we expect that when employees receive support from workaholic co-workers (perceived as such by the co-worker who is the target of the support provision), employees will be less inclined to reciprocate the support compared with when they receive support from colleagues with low levels of workaholism (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 4a. Partner workaholism moderates the positive relationship between actor asking for support and actor receiving support during a work episode, such that the relationship is weaker when the partner scores high (vs. low) on workaholism.

Hypothesis 4b. Partner workaholism moderates the positive relationship between actor received support from the partner and providing support to the partner during a work episode, such that the relationship is weaker when the partner scores high (vs. low) on workaholism.

METHOD

Procedure and sample

In order to capture the daily support exchange as part of organizational life, we use a fixed interval experience-sampling methodology (ESM; Ohly et al., 2010). We advertised the study among participants working in a wide range of different sectors and organizations using social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook in the Netherlands. Every participant who voluntarily signed up for the study was asked to contact the co-worker they had most contact with and request them if they wanted to participate together in the study. If the co-worker was willing to participate and was available for the study during the next days (i.e., was not ill, on holiday, or had meetings outside the organization), we selected the two co-workers as a participating dyad. Data were collected online via the survey platform Qualtrics (2019). During the period when this study commenced (2017–2018), non-invasive questionnaire surveys—focused on everyday work encounters rather than traumatic or private matters—received automatic ethical approval. The current questionnaires, which investigate the exchange of social support and job-related personal aspects, also align with these non-invasive regulations. To ensure confidentiality, the dyads' responses were linked via an anonymous code provided by the researchers, which participants were required to complete at the beginning of each questionnaire. Finally, we emailed all participants a generic questionnaire to measure the person-level variables and demographics. We used all data points, even if only one of the participants of a dyad completed the ESM survey.

In total, 90 participants signed up, resulting in 45 dyads. From each participant we sampled 10 experiences over five working days in one week. Each day comprised two measurement moments (i.e., one during noon and one just before the end of the day). This resulted in $N = 614$ data points (see Table 1 for the specific datapoints per variable). We introduced the study as a voluntary and anonymous research project in which employees and their co-workers could participate. In addition, we invited participants to fill in a general survey with which we measured the demographics, workaholism, and quality of the exchange relationship. From all participants, 16 participants (18%) did not fill in the general questionnaire. Hence, the sample

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations between the study variables.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
General questionnaire							
1. Partner general Workaholism	2.34	.47	-	-	-	-	-
2. Partner general relationship exchange quality	5.12	.73	.22	-	-	-	-
Daily experience samplings							
3. Actor asking for social support	2.16	1.25	.10	.15	.29	.57**	.53**
4. Actor receiving social support	2.44	1.19	-.03	-.02	.67**	.22	.60**
5. Actor providing social support	2.69	1.03	-.03	.06	.59**	.68**	.39

Note: Correlations above the diagonal are within-person correlation ($N = 614$). Correlations below the diagonal are respondent-level correlations aggregated over all days and moments ($N = 74-89$). The $N = 74$ represents the available person-level data (16 people did not fill in the general questionnaire), and $N = 89$ represents the available day-level data (the total number of participants minus one person who did not complete daily questionnaires). Means and standard deviations are person-level means.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

statistics that we report are from the remaining 74 participants (84%). Dyads consisted of both opposite-sex (i.e., men and women 46.7%) and same-sex couples of co-workers (i.e., two men 20% or two women 33.3%). Participants were 45 women (50%) and 29 men (32%). The mean age of the sample was 34.49 years ($SD = 11.55$). On average, participants worked 7.10 years within their current job ($SD = 8.78$), and 8.43 years within their organization ($SD = 9.45$). Participants worked 32.42 hours per week ($SD = 9.96$). Of them, 13.5% finished high school, 20.3% completed a vocational training, and the other 66.2% finished higher education (university or applied sciences). Finally, 27% were employed in the health care sector, 14.9% in the research and educational sector, 13.5% worked for governmental agencies, 2.7% worked for energy and/or water companies, 4.1% worked at a financial organization, 13.5% worked in the retail sector and the remaining 24.3% was employed in various other sectors.

Episodic measures

While conducting ESM studies, Ohly et al. (2010) suggest the utilization of concise scales or even single-item measures. Given that ESM entails participants completing the same questionnaire twice a day over five days, it is essential to keep the questionnaires as succinct as possible. As a result, we extracted items from the original scales based on factor loadings and adapted the formulation to an episodic experience.

Asking for support

To assess to what extent employees asked for support, we used one item, namely, “This morning/this afternoon, I actively asked my colleague for help, emotional support, information or advice”. Answers could be given on a scale ranging from 1 = “not at all”, 2 = “yes, to a small extent”, 3 = “yes, to some extent”, 4 = “yes, to a large extent” to 5 = “yes, to a very large extent”.

Social support

The assessment of received support and provided support was based on the social support questionnaire developed by Peeters et al. (1995). From each of the three main types of support (instrumental, informative and emotional support; House & Kahn, 1985), we selected one item for the received support questionnaire and one item for the provided support questionnaire. We formulated three items measuring the amount of support that was received during the morning and afternoon (e.g., “This morning/this afternoon, my coworker gave me advice about how to approach an issue”). Furthermore, we also formulated three items measuring the amount of support that was provided during the morning and afternoon (e.g., “This morning/this afternoon, I helped my coworker with a certain task”). The same answer categories as for “asking for support” were used. Across moments, the reliability for received support was $\alpha = .76$ and for provided support $\alpha = .78$.

Person level

Workaholism was measured with the Dutch Work Addiction Scale (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009). This instrument assesses two subdimensions that are indicated by five items each: working excessively (e.g., “I find myself continuing working, after my colleagues have called it quits”) and working compulsively (e.g., “I feel that there’s something inside me that drives me to work hard”). Participants could respond to each item using a four-point scale (1 = never, 4 = always). We followed recommendations from Schaufeli, Bakker, et al. (2009) and combined all items into one overall score. The reliability of the scale was good — Cronbach’s alpha was .81.

Quality of the exchange relationship

We assessed quality of the exchange relationship between co-workers with seven items selected from the team member exchange quality scale (Farmer et al., 2015; Seers, 1989). The scale reflects the quality of reciprocal exchange among team-members (in our case dyads of co-workers). This is defined as a colleagues’ perception of the quality of “the reciprocity between a member and his or her team with respect to the member’s contribution of ideas, feedback, and assistance to other members and, in turn, the member’s receipt of information, help, and recognition from other team members” (Seers et al., 1995, p. 21). The selected seven items for our study represent a large set of different resources that can be exchanged, such as flexibility, attention, recognition, understanding and ideas. Two example items are “My colleague recognizes my potential” and “I often suggest better work methods to my coworkers”. We slightly adjusted the items to match the dyadic co-worker setting (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). Cronbach’s α was .73.

Statistical analyses

Our study examines the exchange of social support between two co-workers within the same team. To analyze this non-independent data (Hox, 2010), we utilized the Actor-Partner

Interdependence Model (APIM; Cook & Kenny, 2005) in Mplus 8.8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). The data have three levels: The dyadic level (level 3, between-dyad, $N = 45$), the individual level (level 2, between-person, $N = 90$), and the episodic level (level 1, within-person, $N = 614$). Since our focus was on daily and person-level variables, we considered these two levels only, following previous practice (Peeters et al., 2016). Importantly, in the APIM framework, the direction of reporting (partner to actor or actor to partner) is interchangeable, as all employees in our sample acted as both actors and partners (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). In other words, with the APIM method it does not matter which direction (partner to actor or actor to partner) is reported we test the effects simultaneously. The predictor variable at the within-person level (i.e., asking for support) was centered to the individual mean, and predictors at the between-person level (Level 2 asking for support, partner's workaholism and partner's perceived quality of the exchange relationship) were centered to the grand mean. Finally, collecting both dyadic between-person and dyadic within-person data concerns a complex data collection and almost inevitably results in missing values. To optimally make use of the available data, we decided to retain missing values and analyze the data in Mplus. Mplus deals with missing values using the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) method (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). This method calculates all the model parameters using the available data and calculates all the equations at the same time. Moreover, the FIML method is suggested for social scientists (Raykov, 2005).

To test the hypotheses, we estimated three different models. Model 1 is the intercept-only model including the intercept of actor received support and actor provided support. Model 2 is the direct relationship model, in which we added all three effects of actor asking for support, partner perception of the quality of the exchange relationship, and partner workaholism on received support. Also, in Model 2, we added actor received support, partner perception of the quality of the exchange relationship and partner workaholism on the provided support. Finally, in Model 3, we added the cross-level interaction term of (a) partner perception of the quality of the exchange relationship \times actor asking for support, (b) partner workaholism \times actor asking for support (c) partner perception of exchange quality \times actor received support, and (d) partner workaholism \times actor received support. Furthermore in Model 3, we created randomized slopes between asking for support and receiving support, and between receiving and providing support. Each model was compared with an unrestricted model or null model that only contained the intercepts because our final model (Model 3) included random slopes. The analyses involved numerical integration in the computations, as outlined by Muthén and Muthén (1998-2017). Consequently, fit statistics such as chi-square, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR were not available for our analyses. Instead, we employed the chi-square difference test utilizing log-likelihood values and scaling correction factors (Satorra & Bentler, 2001) to compare the models.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides an overview of the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the study variables. As can be seen, there is a relatively strong positive correlation between asking for support and receiving support and between receiving support and providing support within episodes (i.e., $r = 0.57$, $r = 0.60$, $p < .01$). However, there is enough unexplained variance left for the theorized moderators to explain as can be seen in Table 2, Model 2.

TABLE 2 Multilevel estimates for the models (model 2 & model 3).

Level and variable	Model 2		Model 3	
	Received support <i>b</i> (SE)	Provided support <i>b</i> (SE)	Received support <i>b</i> (SE)	Provided support <i>b</i> (SE)
Level 1				
Actor asking for support	.44*** (.05)	-	-	-
Actor received support	-	.65*** (.08)	-	-
Indirect effect				
Actor asking → receiving → Providing support		.28*** (.05)		
Level 2				
Partner's Workaholism	-.02 (.14)	-.18 (.16)	-.00 (.14)	.30 (.25)
Partner's PEQ	-.01 (.06)	.11 (.09)	-.00 (.06)	-.43 ^M (.24)
Actor asking for support	.66*** (.08)	-	.66*** (.08)	-
Actor received support	-	.93*** (.13)	-	-.34 (.28)
Cross-level interaction				
Actor Asking for support × Partner's Workaholism	-	-	-.20* (.09)	-
Actor asking for support × Partner's PEQ	-	-	.11* (.05)	-
Actor received support × Partner's Workaholism	-	-	-	-.16 (.10)
Actor received support × Partner's PEQ	-	-	-	.20* (.10)
Residual variance components				
Intercept variance (τ_{00})	.29*** (.07)	.21*** (.05)	.21*** (.05)	.41 (.28)
Within-person variance (σ^2)	.43*** (.05)	.47*** (.04)	.40*** (.06)	.41*** (.05)
Slope variance (τ_{11})			.02 (.03)	.05* (.02)
Additional information				
-2 log likelihood	-893.906		-872.868	
Scaling correction factor	1.1732		1.10899	
Δ -2 log likelihood	650.192***		21.038***	
Number of free parameters	14		24	

Note: PEQ = Perceived Exchange Quality. The slopes between asking for support and receiving support and between receiving support and providing support are randomized in Model 3; the cross-level interaction model. Only unstandardized coefficients (*b*) are reported because Mplus does not provide standardized coefficients for randomized models and kept this consistent in all models. Model 2 is compared with an only intercept Model (Model 1; -2 log likelihood = 1544.098, Scaling Correction Factor = 1.6969, Number of Free Parameters = 6).

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

*** $p \leq .001$.

Measurement model

To examine the validity of our constructs we conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analysis with Mplus 8.8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). We compared the proposed model with the two within-person variables that consisted of more than one indicator (i.e., support received and support provided) and the two between-person variables (i.e., partner's workaholism and partner's perceived quality of the exchange relationship) to models that included fewer factors. Results showed a better fit to the data for a model comprising the four distinct factors ($\chi^2 [243] = 1359.764$, Loglikelihood $H_0 = -6363.187$) as compared with the three-factor model in which workaholism and perceived quality of the exchange relationship loaded on one factor ($\chi^2 (244) = 1465.668$, Loglikelihood $H_0 = -6401.884$; $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 105.904$, $p < .001$). The hypothesized four-factor model however fitted the data significantly worse than the three-factor model in which we combined the received and provided support to load on one factor ($\chi^2 (244) = 1347.834$, Loglikelihood $H_0 = -6363.848$; $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 11.93$, $p < .001$). To enhance the construct validity of received and provided support we removed two items that revealed high correlations between the measures (i.e., for received support this concerned instrumental support for provided support this concerned emotional support). Analyses with these adjustments showed a better fit with the data for a model that included the four individual factors, $\chi^2 (193) = 519.886$, Loglikelihood $H_0 = -4841.380$) as compared with the three-factor model in which we combined the received and provided support to load on one factor ($\chi^2 (194) = 527.303$, Loglikelihood $H_0 = -4845.668$; $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 7.417$, $p = .006$). Based on these findings we report the analyses with the adjusted constructs for received and provided support.¹

Null model

The null model (Model 1) provides the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for the dependent variables in this study, asking for support ($\rho = .29$), received support ($\rho = .22$) and provided support ($\rho = .39$). The ICCs show whether there are sufficient levels of variance at the within person level. From these ICCs we can conclude that a substantial part of the variance is situated on the higher as well as on the lower level and a multi-level analysis is appropriate.

Hypothesis testing

First of all, we hypothesized that asking for support during a work episode positively relates to actor receiving support during the same work episode (Hypothesis 1a). In Table 2 (Model 2), it can be seen that there is indeed a positive relationship between asking for support and receiving support ($b = .44$, S.E. = 0.05, $t = 9.533$, $p < .001$). This means that during work episodes employees who request for more support from a colleague also receive more support (cf. Hypothesis 1a). In addition, we predicted a positive relationship between actor receiving support and actor providing support (Hypothesis 1b). Results in Table 2 (Model 2) are consistent with this hypothesis, and show that the relationship between actor receiving support and actor providing support within work episodes is positive and significant ($b = .65$, S.E. = 0.08, $t = 8.048$, $p < .001$). In addition, Hypothesis 2 stated that actor asking for support predicts actor providing support, through actor receiving support. From Table 2 it can be seen that there is an indirect relationship (i.e., the product of the aforementioned regression coefficients) between asking for

support and provided support via received support ($b = .28$, $S.E. = 0.05$, $t = 5.327$, $p < .001$). Taken together, these findings show that employees who ask for more support from co-workers during working days also seem to reciprocate more support through receiving more support.

Further, it was hypothesized that the link between asking for support and receiving support would be stronger when employees ask support from partners who perceive the quality of the exchange relationship as high (vs. low; Hypothesis 3a) and weaker when the support is requested from a partner who scores high on workaholism (vs. low; Hypothesis 4a). According to the results in Model 3 (i.e., Table 2), the interaction term between actor asking for support \times partner's perception of the quality of the exchange relationship was positively related to actor received support ($b = .11$, $S.E. = 0.05$, $t = 2.123$, $p < .001$), and the interaction term of actor asking for support \times partner workaholism was negatively related to actor received support ($b = -.20$, $S.E. = 0.09$, $t = -2.288$, $p = .022$). Simple slope tests revealed that the positive link between actor asking for support and receiving support was stronger when the support was asked from a partner who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as 1 SD higher than the mean (estimate = 0.52, $S.E. = 0.06$, $z = 8.711$, $p < .001$) as compared with 1 SD lower than the mean (estimate = 0.36, $S.E. = 0.06$, $z = 6.1104$, $p < .001$; see Figure 2). In contrast, the positive link between actor asking for support and receiving support was weaker when support was requested from a partner scoring 1 SD higher than the mean on workaholism (estimate = 0.35, $S.E. = 0.06$, $z = 5.628$, $p < .001$), compared with when the support was requested from a partner scoring 1 SD lower than the mean (estimate = 0.53, $S.E. = 0.06$, $z = 8.6001$, $p < .001$; see Figure 3). These findings indicate that seeking support from a colleague who perceives a high-quality exchange relationship, as well as seeking support from a colleague with low workaholic tendencies, are associated with elevated levels of received support. These results align with Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 4a.

Moreover, it was hypothesized that the partner's perceived quality of the exchange relationship would positively affect the link between receiving and providing support (Hypothesis 3b) and that the partner's workaholism would negatively affect this link (Hypothesis 4b). According to the results presented in Table 2 (Model 3), the interaction term between actor received support \times partner's perception of the quality of the exchange relationship was positively related to actor provided support ($b = .20$, $S.E. = 0.10$, $t = 2.040$, $p = .041$), whereas the interaction term of received support \times partner workaholism was not a significant predictor of actor provided support ($b = -0.16$, $S.E. = 0.10$, $t = -1.199$, $p = .230$). Providing support in response to receiving appears to be unaffected by the partner's workaholism in this study, leading us to reject Hypothesis 4b. Additionally, a simple slopes test revealed a positive link between actor receiving support and actor providing support when the support was received from a partner who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as 1 SD higher than the mean (estimate = 0.20, $S.E. = 0.08$, $z = 2.6132$, $p = .009$), whereas the relationship was not significant for 1 SD lower than the mean (estimate = -0.10 , $S.E. = .08$, $z = -1.2947$, $p = .196$; see Figure 4). Based on these findings we conclude that receiving support from a co-worker regarding the exchange relationship as having a high (vs. low) quality increases the chance that the support receiver will reciprocate the support and the results support Hypothesis 3b.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the psychology of giving and taking social support at work. Consistent with theory, the findings suggest that when employees proactively ask for and receive

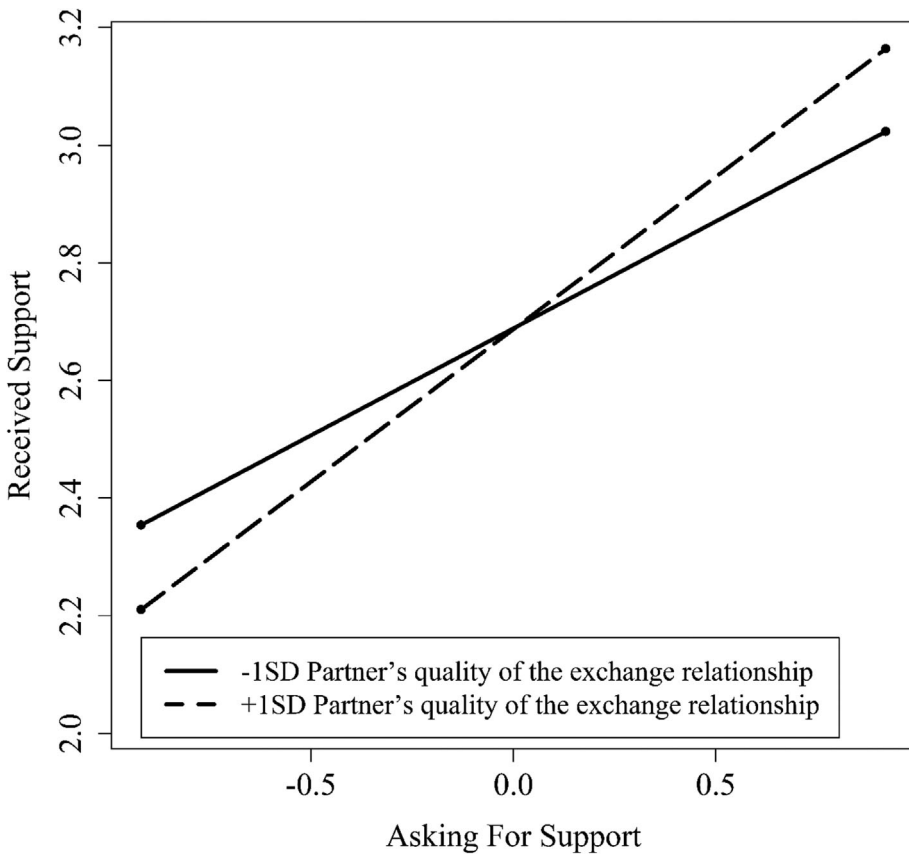


FIGURE 2 The relationship between actor asking for support and actor receiving support, moderated by partner's perceived quality of the exchange relationship. Note. The depicted scales do not represent the full range of the scales as measured. We have adjusted the scale for ease of interpretation.

(i.e., “take”) support, they are more likely to also give support. Moreover, as predicted, we found that the links between asking for support, receiving support and providing support were stronger when support was asked from a co-worker who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high. In contrast, the link between asking for support and receiving support was weaker when support was asked from a co-worker high in workaholism.

Theoretical implications

First and foremost, we make contributions to COR and SET theories. According to the findings in this study, the perceived quality of exchange relationships and workaholism are important mechanisms explaining perceived supportive investments at work. The present findings exemplify how scholars can apply concepts that grasp how rewarding others (i.e., colleagues) have been in the past (i.e., SET; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) to explain social exchange within organizational settings. Current findings reveal that social support exchange is not only driven by one party's behavior and motivation but is also influenced by the perceived social behaviors of others.

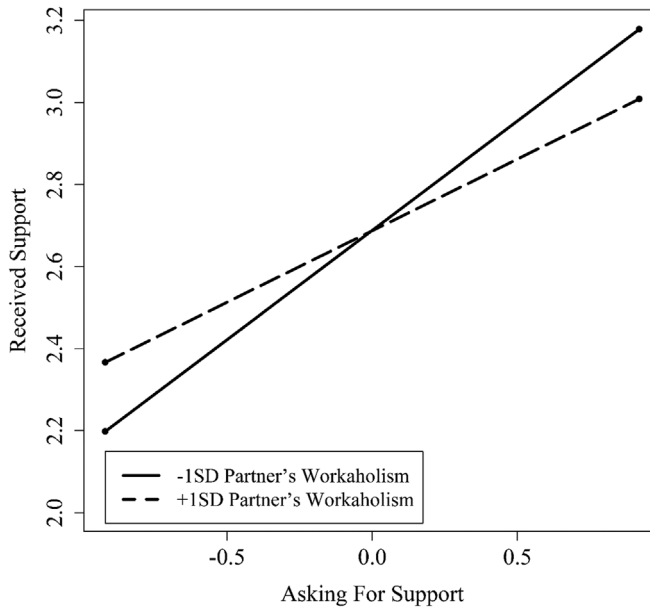


FIGURE 3 The relationship between actor asking for support and actor receiving support, moderated by partner workaholism. Note. The depicted scales do not represent the full range of the scales as measured. We have adjusted the scale for ease of interpretation.

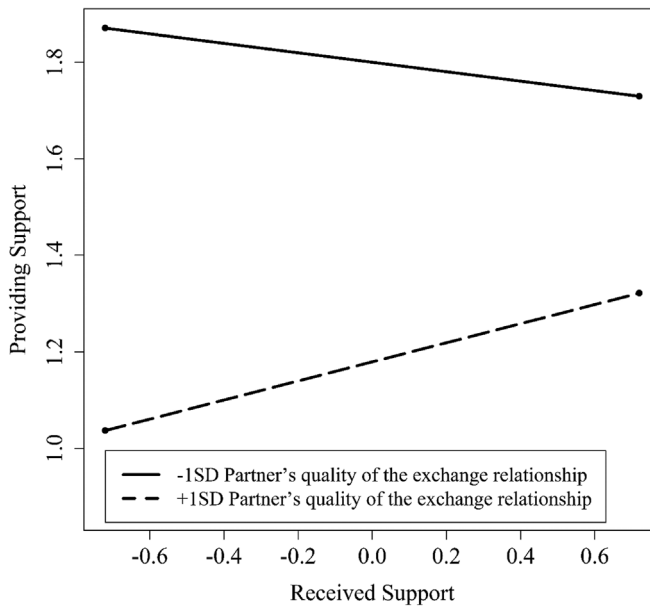


FIGURE 4 The relationship between actor received support and actor provided support, moderated by partner's perceived quality of the exchange relationship. Note. The depicted scales do not represent the full range of the scales as measured. We have adjusted the scale for ease of interpretation.

Specifically, regarding the mechanism of perceived quality of the exchange relationship by the co-worker, findings indicate that employees are more likely to (re)invest personal resources in co-worker relationships that they perceive to be of high-quality. In terms of COR, investing in relationships with co-workers that are perceived as high-quality relationships is a way to conserve/protect one's own resource pool (Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to COR (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), investing time and energy in colleagues can be viewed as a valuable resource that enhances work pleasure and performance, but can also be perceived as costing unnecessary time and energy (Koopman et al., 2016). Current findings add to this that the perceived quality of the exchange relationship can be seen as a mechanism that stimulates colleagues to put more effort into helping each other, and protects the perceived amount of available resources as well as stimulates acquiring new resources.

Regarding the mechanism of workaholism, our research findings indicate that employees who report to be obsessed with their work and invest excessive amounts of time and energy into their work, negatively impact the perceived social exchange as perceived by their co-workers. Asking for support is less effective when the support is asked from a co-worker who has an inner drive to work excessively hard and experiences work as an addiction. These findings contribute to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) by showing that employees who perceive social investments as unsafe investments are more likely to refrain from day-to-day support provision. Furthermore, according to previous literature, workaholism goes hand in hand with less attention and care for surrounding others and obtaining social resources because workaholics are more focused on achieving instrumental goals and with competing against others (Hakanen et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2007; Porter, 2001; Robinson et al., 2001). Therefore, even though not much is known yet about the specific support behaviors of workaholics, the present findings fit well with the general picture that previous literature painted about workaholics social behavior (Clark et al., 2016; Hakanen et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2007). This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that workaholism is associated with reduced motivation to provide requested support.

While individuals exhibiting high levels of workaholism provided less support in comparison with those with lower levels of workaholism, they still exhibited responsiveness to requests for support and offered a moderate degree of support. A possible explanation for this may be that employees scoring high on workaholism, albeit to a lesser extent, are still motivated to provide support because they want to maintain a positive image among their co-workers (i.e., behavior that is regarded as impression management; Bolino & Turnley, 1999). This explanation is in line with previous findings suggesting that workaholics strive to gain approval of others (Spence & Robbins, 1992) and are afraid to lose approval of others (Taris et al., 2010). To test this hypothesis, future studies may include the underlying motives of workaholics to provide support. According to previous research, individuals vary in the extent to which they intrinsically enjoy providing support (i.e., autonomous motivation) and extrinsically feel that they have to provide support (i.e., controlled motivation; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Future research could examine whether employees who score high on workaholism are also more inclined to provide extrinsically motivated support as compared with employees scoring low on workaholism.

Another perspective that can explain the reciprocation behavior of workaholics relates to their excessive motivation to take on extra tasks and obligations (Hakanen et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022). Workaholic employees are known to surpass organizational expectations by self-imposing job demands (Porter, 2001). Previous research, (e.g., Hakanen et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022), demonstrated that workaholic employees are inclined to volunteer for additional

work tasks. Therefore, while workaholic employees may not actively seek social support or go to great lengths to provide or seek feedback, they are highly rigid perfectionists who are very willing to contribute to work tasks. From this perspective, it is possible that workaholics are equally likely to reciprocate compared with non-workaholics when it concerns instrumental support, since helping others is an integral part of work performance and getting things done. To test this hypothesis, future studies can compare workaholics' investments in reciprocating different types of social support, with a particular emphasis on comparing instrumental versus emotional support.

Together, the two interaction effects suggest that the tit-for-tat strategy, in which people help each other because they want to sustain a helping relationship (Axelrod, 1981), applies in various occupational settings on a daily basis. Asking for help from a co-worker who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high may be beneficial for both the provider and the receiver. By providing requested support, the provider maintains the quality of the exchange relationship and thereby also improves their own chances to receive support when needed in the future (i.e., resource pool; Hobfoll, 1989).

Whilst the majority of social support studies have been conducted with samples comprising single employees (Lanaj et al., 2016; Vera et al., 2016), the present study contributes to the social support literature (Jolly et al., 2021; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984) by offering insight in how receivers and providers are influenced by each other on specific work days. In particular, we encourage future support researchers to account for the dyadic nature of social support and include both the receivers and providers in their studies. There are still many aspects of the receiver (i.e., motivation for asking for support, how is the support requested and what type of support is requested?) as well as the provider (i.e., is the provider in a positive mood, is the provider capable of lending the requested support, how is the request perceived?) left to uncover. Since very little is known about how support providers and receivers influence each other, whereas social support is considered as one of the most valuable resources among employees to stay well and vital at work (Bakker, 2014), we hope more researchers will provide new insights through dyadic support research.

With the present study we combine two longstanding helping norms and apply and contextualize these norms in our daily support model. Specifically, we included the general human tendency to help (Aknin & Whillans, 2021; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; Hornstein, 1982; Piliavin et al., 1981) and the tendency to reciprocate good deeds of others (Gouldner, 1960). Whereas in previous literature it is often assumed that requested support will be received (Rudolph et al., 2017) and received support will be reciprocated (Cropanzano et al., 2017), we show that certain boundary conditions (i.e., workaholism and the perceived quality of an exchange relationship) alter the strength of these relationships and it matters from whom support is asked and received.

Limitations and future research

The present study is not without limitations. First, we measured the requested support using one single item: "This morning/this afternoon, I actively asked my colleague for help, emotional support, information or advice". Although we captured the three most relevant forms of requested support in this item (i.e., instrumental, informative, and emotional support; House & Kahn, 1985), we were not able to distinguish between the three types of support and possible differential effects. Furthermore, a limitation of this study is that the social support constructs

received and provided support revealed overlap (as originally measured). To increase the construct validity of received and provided support we had to remove one item from each construct (i.e., instrumental support from received support and emotional support from provided support). Another limitation concerns our procedure regarding inclusion. We collected information from dyads by asking participants to select a colleague with whom they most frequently interacted at work on a day-to-day basis. This may raise the question whether employees are inclined to select only those colleagues with whom they experience the closest relationship. However, in previous research that used the same inclusion procedure, participants were as much inclined to select colleagues whom they liked as colleagues whom they did not necessarily like (Zeijen, Petrou, & Bakker, 2020). For future research it may, however, be informative to include likeability or closeness as a predictor variable (e.g., are employees more inclined to provide requested support to colleagues they like?) or as a moderator of the effects of support provision on outcomes. Moreover, the measurement of general relationship quality in our study is based on individual reports. Although, we test the effects simultaneously, from actor to partner and vice versa (see also Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Peeters et al., 2016), we do not capture 'shared perceptions' by method. To assess more intersubjective measurement of relationship quality, it can be valuable to measure shared perceptions by means of agreement. For instance, by asking the dyad how they would rate the relationship quality. Finally, all three support behaviors that form our mediation model were all measured with self-report data, and therefore may have led to common method bias. Common method bias can inflate (but also deflate; Siemsen et al., 2009) bivariate linear relationships. To overcome this limitation, future studies could incorporate multiple sources for the perceived support behaviors and combine or compare the perspectives of both the receiver and provider of support. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the dynamics involved in support provision. However, the present study compensates for the self-report limitations by employing other-ratings for the moderators, that were also on a different measurement level (i.e., the between level) and which were reported by another source (i.e., a coworker). Our study uniquely integrates the role of the partner in the daily support process at work, emphasizing the importance of considering the perspectives of both support receiver and provider.

Practical implications

The findings of this study also have implications for organizations in which employees are required to help and work with each other. Firstly, this study highlights that daily workplace social support is not an automatic given, but relies on relationship quality and co-worker work-aholicism. Building on prior research that highlights the benefits of support provision and receipt for employees' energy and job performance (Kaiser et al., 2018; Zeijen, Petrou, & Bakker, 2020; Zeijen, Petrou, Bakker, & Van Gelderen, 2020), a practical suggestion can be to prioritize the quality of support exchange. One effective approach could involve enhancing the psychological safety climate (PSC; Dollard & Bakker, 2010), which encompasses shared employee perceptions of organizational practices safeguarding health and safety. A high PSC is likely to facilitate supportive resource exchange because it stimulates decision latitude and instrumental support, which in addition moderates the impact of work demands, and ultimately enables better job performance (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Another approach could entail sharing positive workplace events, such as offering support to colleagues (interpersonal capitalization; Ilies et al., 2015). These interactions can occur informally or semi-formally within the workplace,

with leaders taking a central role in initiating discussions where they share their own acts of prosocial behavior. This not only sets an inspiring example but also guides and encourages employees in similar endeavors. Secondly, supervisors can actively encourage employees to ask for support when they need it. In order to stimulate employees' support-seeking behavior which increases their experienced amount of support, employers may offer proactivity trainings, in which employees receive instructions and tools that encourage them to actively seek for needed support (e.g., Tims et al., 2013). Thirdly, an advice for organizations and employers is to coach/train workaholic employees to participate in meaningful and effective support exchange with their co-workers. This could, for instance, be done by increasing the awareness of the value and worth that support provision has for both the support receiver and provider (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), particularly as the present study shows that provided support can be seen as an investment in an exchange relationship, which later on will benefit the support provider as well. Finally, organizations may want to encourage social support exchange by implementing a buddy-system for newcomers. When newcomers have clear access to the social support of an experienced colleague, they will be more likely to ask for support and start to exchange support. Practically, this could even be implemented using low-key online tools such as mobile apps, which can be used to stimulate social support among newcomers as well as among all employees (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

The present study showed that employees who actively request social support from their colleagues are more likely to perceive more received support, which motivates employees to reciprocate the help. In particular, when support is requested from a colleague who perceives the relationship as a high-quality exchange relationship, chances of receiving support are higher. However, when support is requested from a colleague high in workaholicism, supportive requests are less likely fulfilled as perceived by the employee who requested for the support. Whilst all employees are inclined to reciprocate previously received support (i.e., giving back), findings do show that this is particularly the case when the received support came from a co-worker who perceives the quality of the exchange relationship as high. Taken together, this study shows that asking for support at work can be effective and received support is mostly reciprocated, but it matters who is giving and taking social support at work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

ETHICS STATEMENT

We affirm our adherence to the APA ethical principles concerning research involving human participants throughout the execution of the current study.

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ENDNOTE

ⁱ We also examined whether the results remained the same without the adjustments in the measurement for received support (i.e., without instrumental support) and provided support (i.e., emotional support). Both the direction and significance of all hypothesized relationships remained the same.

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