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Influence of Job Demands, Job Control and Social Support on Malaysian Independent Musicians' Job Stress and Career Change Intentions

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Abstract: The Job Demand-Control (JDC) and its extended version, the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, provide a theoretical lens to study how distinct job features impact overall well-being and career longevity. This study investigates the experiences of 385 Malaysian independent musicians' job stress and career change intentions by concentrating on job demands along with job control and social support's direct and moderating influences. Adopting a quantitative methodology grounded in a cross-sectional design and non-probability sampling, this study used Smart PLS for the structural model evaluation. Findings indicate that stress-inducing job elements significantly affect musicians' job stress. The data analysis conducted allowed for the exploration of the impact and interrelationships among the studied variables. The study unveiled significant positive associations between job demand and job stress. However, social support and job control exhibited insignificant relationships with job stress. Only social support, and not job control, was found to moderate the relationship between job demand and job stress. This outcome underscores the buffering role of social support in mitigating the effect of job demand on job stress. This study offers a basis for future theoretical advancements and research on the occupational sustainability of Malaysian independent musicians by empirically validating the extended JDCS model with career change intentions. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how psychosocial factors affect the career sustainability of independent musicians in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Job Demand, Job Stress, Job Control, Social Support, Career Change Intentions, Independent Musicians, Malaysia.*

1. Introduction and Background

Numerous studies have investigated both internal and external determinants that substantially affect mental and physical health. Since the 1950s, scholarly interest in the psychosocial dimensions of work has progressively developed, gaining significant traction during the 1960s with the emergence of occupational psychology and research on the psychosocial work environment (Johnson et al., 1996). The 1960s represented a pivotal phase, characterized by an intensified emphasis on understanding how various aspects of the work environment impact employee well-being (Cox et al., 2000). Despite the well-documented associations between psychosocial work factors and health outcomes within the general workforce, research focusing specifically on the psychosocial work environment of musicians remains scarce (Detari et al., 2020).

Research indicates that exposure to psychosocial factors and stress is interconnected (Leka & Jain, 2010). Previous studies examining the stress experienced by musicians have investigated psychosocial factors (e.g., Holst et al., 2012; Kenny et al., 2012). Empirical evidence has shown that musicians experience significant mental health challenges, including high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the demanding nature of their profession (Cardoso et al., 2025). That said, independent musicians have emerged as prominent figures in the future of the music industry. The independent music industry is currently valued at US$104.61 billion (2024) and forecasted to reach $149.91 billion by 2029 (Thompson, 2025). In 2023, non-major labels and self-releasing artists accounted for an impressive 46.7% of the global recorded music market on an ownership basis, equating to revenues of $14.3 billion (Witt, 2024). In Malaysia, the local music industry achieved a significant milestone, generating RM339 million in 2024, making it the highest revenue in the history of the local music industry (Nst Entertainment, 2025). According to Statista Market Insights, revenue is projected to continue growing at approximately 5.7 percent CAGR from 2024 to 2027 (Statista, 2024). The Malaysian Communications Ministry's new initiatives highlight the government's recognition of the music industry as a potential revenue source (The Star, 2025).

Despite the substantial global revenue generated by independent musicians, only 12% are engaged as full-time professionals (Pilkington, 2024). Furthermore, one in five musicians has contemplated changing careers

(Cihak, 2021) and 64% are considering exiting the music industry altogether (Burns, 2020). These statistics underscore the volatility and instability of the music profession, with many musicians struggling to sustain their careers. This situation emphasizes the urgent need for a more comprehensive support framework to enable independent musicians to thrive. While Pilkington (2024) identified financial limitations as a primary factor driving career transitions, Musgrave (2023) highlighted the presence of numerous other stressors that hinder career advancement. Addressing these diverse sources of stress could contribute to the development of more sustainable careers, particularly in fields where organizational support structures are lacking.

Resolving this issue necessitates a theory or model that includes variables beyond financial considerations. One of the major models that has been widely accepted is the Job Demand-Control Model. Based on Karasek's Job Demand-Control Model (1979), demanding tasks that offer low control negatively affect worker well-being, while job control can moderate the impact of job demands on strain. Johnson and Hall (1988) extended the model (Job Demand-Control-Support Model) with the supposition that social support from co-workers and supervisors also buffers the effects of job demands on job strain. This addition emphasizes the crucial role of a supportive work environment in alleviating stress levels. In the context of an independent career, it will be interesting to assess the model. Thus, this study examines how job demands contribute to job stress among Malaysian independent musicians, and how job control and social support may mitigate these effects, along with the consequent effect that job stress has on their career change intentions.

2. Literature Review

Job Demands of Independent Musicians

Based on a review of past literature, this study employed the interpretation of job demands as a multidimensional measurement that consists of five stressors. Creativity demands have been incorporated as an additional key dimension for independent musicians.

- Physical Demands. Physical demands are associated with the health of performing artists. Long et al. (2012) indicate that musculoskeletal problems arise from physically demanding work and strenuous conditions, such as heavy lifting, awkward postures, and repeated motions.
- Cognitive Demands. Musicians exhibit cognitive demands through performance, creation, and response, which are associated with working memory processes (Pozenatto, 2020).
- Quantitative demands refer to components of the work environment related to workload and work pace, necessitating physical and/or psychological exertion (Van Veldhoven, 2013).
- Emotional Demands. Emotional demands pertain to the process of regulating emotions and expressions in response to assessment, criticism, and performance anxiety (Holst et al., 2012; Kenny, 2012).
- Creativity Demands. Creativity demands can be viewed as the ability to generate novel and effective ideas, artifices, or solutions (Runco, 2014).

Job Control

Job control is defined as comprising decision authority and skill discretion (Cattell et al., 2016). First, decision authority is how and what to do at work (Mauss et al., 2018). For example, in Holst et al. (2012), job control addressed the 'how' as being how much work is to be assigned, and the 'what' as what task an employee can choose to work on. Second, skill discretion includes the requirement of initiative, the possibility of learning new things through work, and the opportunity to develop skills, possibilities for development, and a variety of work (Holst et al., 2012; Mauss et al., 2018). For this study, the decision authority will be the focus.

Social Support

Social support refers to the perceived or actual receipt of social resources (Uchino, 1996). It is measured as a multidimensional concept that consists of support from peers, family, and fans (Pejtersen et al., 2010; Vaag et al., 2014).

Career Change Intentions

Career change intentions are defined as a move into a position of greater managerial responsibility and organizational status, a transfer to a similar job in a new company or industry, or a lateral move into a different

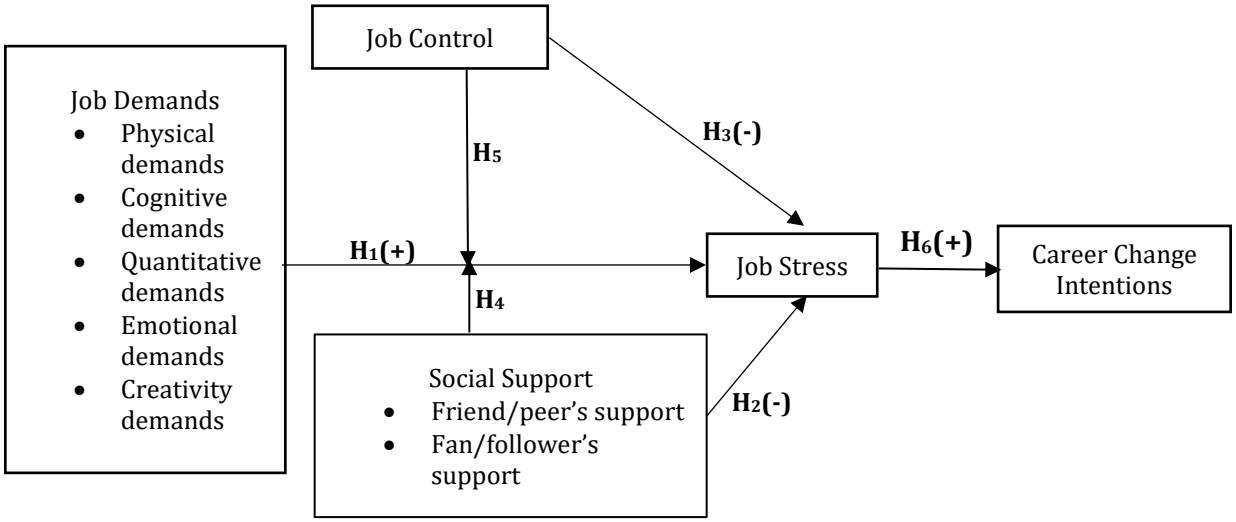
work function within a familiar field (Ibarra, 2002).

Hypothesis Development

This study employed the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model (Karasek, 1979; Johnson & Hall, 1988) to develop several hypotheses, extending it with career change intentions as the outcome variable to job stress. The Job Demand-Control model (JDC) explained that high job demands combined with low job control increase job strain. The model was later expanded to the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, which explains the relationship between job demand, job control, and job support on job stress (Karasek & Thorell, 1990). Various researchers have utilized the JDCS model to understand the impact of job demands on well-being (e.g., Del Pozo-Antunez et al., 2018; Ariza-Montes et al., 2018). Past studies have shown that job stress predicts job turnover intention positively and significantly (Aqeel et al., 2021; Abarghouei et al., 2016), demonstrating the substantial effect job stress has on intention to leave (Tabur et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2019). Consequent to the JDCS model and preceding discourse, the subsequent hypotheses have been formulated (Figure 1).

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model and hypotheses for this investigation. It includes the direct effects of four factors and two moderator effects.

Figure 1: Model Hypotheses



H1: Job demands are positively related to job stress of Malaysian independent musicians.
H2: Social support is negatively related to the job stress of Malaysian independent musicians.
H3: Job control is negatively related to the job stress of Malaysian independent musicians.
H4: Social support moderates the relationship between job demands and job stress of Malaysian independent musicians.
H5: Job control moderates the relationship between job demands and job stress of Malaysian independent musicians.
H6: Job stress is positively related to career change intentions of Malaysian independent musicians.

3. Research Methodology

The unit of analysis and population of interest for this study comprised independent musician respondents in Malaysia, who produce and distribute music without the support or control of a record label (CENDANA & Kreativekat Resources, 2019). Participants were independent musicians grouped by age from 18 to 50. Power calculations with a standard margin of error of 5% determined the sample size. The sample size of 385 independent musicians aligns with previous research (e.g., Kenny et al., 2012; Holst et al., 2012). Musicians were defined based on the Three Component Model of Musician's Definition, which consists of multi-faceted perceptions (Zhang et al., 2018). They were sourced from ReverbNation.com, Malaysian Music Community, Rhythm of the Third World (ROTTW)'s Official Group, and live gigs. This study used non-probability sampling,

deliberately selecting participants based on specific qualities (Etikan et al., 2016). Non-probability online sampling is commonly used for population estimates (Baker et al., 2013). Homogeneous sampling, a purposive technique, aims to obtain a sample with similar characteristics or traits.

Job demands comprise five dimensions derived from prior research. The measurement includes seven items for physical demands (Bazazan et al. 2023); four items for cognitive demands (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) four items for quantitative demands (Pejtersen et al., 2010), three items for emotional demands (Pejtersen et al., 2010), and four items for creativity demands (Baltzer, 1988). This study utilized a job control measurement developed by Pejtersen et al. (2010) and Dobson (2010b) consisting of five items. Pejtersen et al. (2010) outlined three dimensions for social support, resulting in a total of eight items for family, friends, and fans (Pejtersen et al., 2010; Janosy et al., 2023). The job stress assessment that was developed by Pejtersen et al. (2010) has four items. Whereas the career change intentions were measured with four items (Chen et al., 2022; Karadag & Sahin, 2022). A structural equation modelling approach using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted to determine the significance of the path coefficients.

4. Results

A sample of 385 questionnaires was used after outliers were eliminated. Among the respondents (Table 1), 58.4% are male, while the remaining 41.6% are female. The majority of respondents are in their 30s, representing approximately 82.1% of the sample. Additionally, 19.6% are under 30 years old, and 14.7% are in their forties. Most respondents are members of an ensemble, band, or orchestra, accounting for 61% of the total sample, with 39% being solo artists or front figures. The sample includes representation from all sixteen listed genres, with rock (19.5%), pop/singer-songwriter (16.4%), and metal (12.1%) comprising the top three genres, collectively representing almost half of the total sample (48%). The distribution of independent musicians across genres is not even among age groups. Instead, there is a strong overlap, where specific genres (hip hop, punk, emo, metal, and electronic) are significantly more popular among younger musicians (<30 and 30-35). Genres like classical, jazz, blues, and Latin show a higher propensity for older musicians. In terms of primary musical instruments, approximately 30% play guitar, 29.2% are vocalists, and 12% play piano/keyboards. More than half of the musicians in the sample are multi-instrumentalists, with about 20.1% being vocalists, 10.4% being drummers, and 9.9% playing bass guitar. As for social media presence, 43% of participants have fewer than 1,000 fans/followers, while more than half have between 1,000 to 10,000 fans/followers. Only 0.3% have more than 10,000 fans/followers. The majority earn less than RM1,000 as independent musicians, with only 9.2% earning between RM1,001 and RM5,000. More than half of the musicians earn between RM1,000-RM5,000 from other sources of income, with 27.7% earning between RM5,000-RM10,000, and the remaining 2.7% earning more than RM10,000. The demographic statistic of this study is presented below.

Profile of Respondents: Table 1 displays a summary of the characteristics of the total sample of Malaysian independent musicians who participated in the study.

Table 1: Summary of statistics of respondents' demographics

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE(%)
GENDER		
Male	215	58.4
Female	153	41.6
AGE		
<30	72	19.6
30-35	120	32.6
36-40	110	29.9
41-45	54	14.7
46-50	12	3.3
ROLE AS INDEPENDENT MUSICIAN		
Solo/front figure	174	39.0
Member of ensemble/band/orchestra	272	61.0
GENRE		

Classical	46	5.9
Hip Hop	34	4.3
Folk/Acoustic	71	9.0
Rock	153	19.5
Pop/Singer-songwriter	129	16.4
Metal	95	12.1
R&B/Soul	77	9.8
World	43	5.5
Punk/Emo	34	4.3
Blues	34	4.3
Country	2	0.3
Jazz	31	3.9
Electronic	17	2.2
Latin	8	1.0
Reggae	4	0.5
Religious/Worship	7	0.9
PRIMARY MUSICAL INSTRUMENT		
Vocals	153	29.2
Drums	45	8.6
Bass guitar	58	11.1
Guitar	157	30.0
Piano/Keyboard	63	12.0
Electronic	15	2.9
Harmonica	1	0.2
Other string instruments	22	4.2
Other wind instruments	3	0.6
Other percussive instruments	7	1.3
SECONDARY MUSICAL INSTRUMENT		
None	154	40.1
Vocals	77	20.1
Drums	40	10.4
Bass guitar	38	9.9
Guitar	31	8.1
Piano/Keyboard	18	4.7
Electronic	6	1.6
Harmonica	6	1.6
Other string instruments	4	1.0
Other wind instruments	10	2.6
Other percussive instruments	0	0
NO. OF FOLLOWERS/FANS		
Less than 1,000	159	43.2
1,000-10,000	208	56.5
10,001-100,000	1	0.3
100,001-1,000,000	0	0
More than 1,000,000	0	0
INCOME (FROM BEING AN INDEPENDENT MUSICIAN)		
Below RM1,000	334	90.8
RM1,001-RM5,000	34	9.2
RM5,001-10,000	0	0
Above RM10,000	0	0
INCOME (FROM OTHER SOURCES)		
Below RM1,000	6	1.6
RM1,000-RM5,000	250	67.9
RM5,001-10,000	102	27.7

Above RM10,000	10	2.7
Total	**368**	**100**

Table 2: Results of reliability analysis and descriptive data

Variable	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	VIF
Physical demands	3.27	0.43	0.76	0.52	1.07
Cognitive demands	3.27	0.91	0.94	0.79	2.25
Quantitative demands	3.16	0.56	0.77	0.53	1.21
Emotional demands	3.31	0.71	0.84	0.64	1.05
Creativity demands	3.58	0.76	0.92	0.66	2.09
Job control	3.46	0.68	0.86	0.56	1.11
Social support (Friends/peers)	3.35	0.67	0.82	0.70	1.03
Social support (Fans/Followers)	3.14	0.81	0.77	0.79	1.11
Job stress	3.39	0.47	0.89	0.53	1.07
Career change intentions	3.11	0.52	0.86	0.74	2.25

The results from the bootstrapping performed in this study presented mixed findings. Job demands (β=0.67, p=0.001) have a significant positive effect on job stress. Thus, H1 is supported. However, the direct effect of social support on job stress is insignificant (β = -0.08, p = 0.06). Therefore, H2 is not supported. Similarly, the results found an insignificant direct effect of job control on job stress (β = -0.008, p = 0.42). H3 is not validated. For the moderators, social support (β=-0.11, p=0.01) plays a significant role as a moderator between job demand and job stress. H4 is supported. However, job control was found not to moderate the relationship between job demand and job stress (β=-0.03, p=0.23). H5 is not supported. In terms of the outcome variable, job stress demonstrated a significant positive correlation with career change intention (β=0.297, p=0.001). H6 is validated.

Discussion

The JDCS model is widely tested among employees or professionals with organizational support; however, among freelancers or those without employers, the model has yet to be tested. This study fills the theoretical gaps by examining the model for independent careers and the extent of career change intentions. Firstly, job demands and job stress were positively related. The results are in line with Burin & Osorio (2017) and Kenny et al. (2012). The higher the job demands, the higher the job stress. Secondly, social support and job control were found not to be negatively related to job stress. The findings are not in line with the JDCS model. However, the findings are not surprising due to the nature of independent careers. Independent musicians are self-employed; therefore, they control their tasks and responsibilities. Indeed, the entrepreneurial nature of independent musicianship involves simultaneous multiple roles (Hracs & Leslie, 2014; Pizzolitto, 2021) that require increased decision-making; therefore, control could become burdensome rather than beneficial. Social support may not directly influence reducing job stress, but it does play a role as a moderator. Similarly, Aalberg et al. (2019) and Holst et al. (2012) found no significant correlation between social support and musicians' stress reduction. Finally, job stress and career change intentions were confirmed to have a significant positive correlation, which is in line with past studies (e.g., Aqeel et al., 2021; Tabur et al., 2022).

5. Practical Implications

Several practical implications for government bodies and associations can be drawn from this study. Since job stress is significantly related to career change intentions, reducing job stress is significant. Firstly, care should be given to designing beneficial workshops to improve independent musicians' know-how in managing stressors for sustainable careers. Special attention ought to be given to acknowledging that independent musicians have to equip themselves with the skills to manage job demands according to their effects on job stress. This finding supports prior literature suggesting that certain demands, such as emotional and creative ones, may be positively framed as challenge demands rather than hindrance and distressing demands (Fiori et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2021; Duarte et al., 2020). Second, although social support does not directly influence job stress, it is found to moderate the relationship between job demand and stress. Therefore, social support can buffer the effect of job demand on job stress. From a cultural perspective, Malaysia's collectivist orientation necessitates interventions that are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate. Given the prevailing emphasis on interdependence and social harmony, independent musicians in this context may be less inclined

to assert personal autonomy or actively seek overt forms of support. Consequently, stress-mitigation strategies should incorporate culturally aligned practices such as collective reflection, peer acknowledgement, and the pursuit of shared, community-based objectives. Additionally, accessibility to performances, exposure, and visibility, along with platforms that could further improve the fan/follower base, would go a long way.

Conclusion

The Job Demand-Control-Support (Career Change Intentions) model adopted in this study is an appropriate theoretical framework to analyze the relationship between job demands, job strain, and career change intentions in the context of Malaysian independent musicians. There is a scarcity of studies that have explored the main and multiplicative effects within this model in relation to the job stress and career change intentions of Malaysian independent musicians. Independent musicians would be able to manage their stress levels better by addressing these factors according to their correlation with job stress. Stressors such as overwhelming workload, heavy cognitive attention tasks, and highly physically demanding activities could be brought forward and discussed with managers, ensemble leaders, or friends/colleagues to achieve a better understanding. Treating emotional and creativity demands according to their association with job stress is also warranted. Additionally, there is also the need to recognize the importance of fans and framing job control within the entrepreneurial and cultural context in reducing job stress and mitigating strain. As a conclusion, it can be said that this study confirms the basic postulations of the JDCS model, with job demand predominantly increasing job stress, social support as one of the basic mechanisms for moderating the pressures of being independent musicians, and job stress increasing career change intentions. Thus, contributing towards advancing the understanding of perceived job stress and career longevity of Malaysian independent musicians.

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