(namely, organisational and supervisor support). Trade union social support may be more appropriate as trade unions often have a better understanding of worker's needs (Shostak, 1980), and workers are more committed to the company than to the company, as they see the union been able to offer them their needs (Allen & Keaveny, 1983). In addition, some of the scales used were developed and validated outside of South Africa, and they may not be appropriate to the situation in this country at the present. Therefore more research is needed to clarify these viewpoints and it is necessary to compare the buffering effects of job-related strains not only for blacks, but other racial groups as well, and use scales that have been developed in South Africa or have been validated in this country.

Limitations of the study

Methodological limitations of any study greatly influence the findings (Anastasi, 1982). It is suggested that the present study contains limitations that can be presented in three areas, namely, the sample, measurement and statistics.

The Sample

A factor limiting the generalisability of the present study is that the sample only dealt with one trade union, namely the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union. Access could not be gained to other unions for various reasons, indicating the sensitive nature of trade unions in South Africa. However, despite the exclusion of certain groups of people involved, the sample did cover diverse areas throughout South Africa (e.g., Cape Town, Johannesburg, Kimberley, and Port Elizabeth).

The sample also consisted of blue-collar workers who often experienced a literacy problem concerning some of the questionnaires, in particular the hardiness scale. This literacy problem meant that prompting and offering an explanation to certain questions had to be undertaken which might have influenced the responses.
Measurement

The present study can be criticised because all the questionnaires were in English. Most of the subjects used English as a second or even third language. This practice increased the chances of subjects misunderstanding questionnaires. However, English had been chosen because it is the official language of the union, and was thus requested by the union.

The Trade Union Commitment scale (Fullagar, 1986) also posed a problem due to its length, negatively worded questions and the actual language used. On speaking to some of the subjects, they found the scale tedious and tiring because they had to concentrate on the language use. The negatively worded questions were often left out or the subjects interpreted it as a positively worded item.

That the hardiness scale was not used in any regression analyses has implications for this research. This meant that only one model of trade union social support was tested, and personality dispositions were not included. With relation to the measurements used, the hardiness scale (Kobasa, 1989) was not used in the MMR because of its unsatisfactory reliability. For many blue-collar workers this scale posed problems as the questions were too abstract and complicated.

The last scale that caused some problems was the IRES (Bluen, 1986). The subjects had to rate each event they experienced on a seven-point scale ranging from 'extremely unfavourable' (-3) through to 'extremely favourable' (+3). This choice was too large. The majority of subjects responded to the extremes. Thorough explanation of instructions had to be given in order for subjects to first complete the occurrence scale and then to rate the positive or negative scales.

Problems with Overall Research

In the present study only one source of data was used, namely, paper-and-pencil, self-report responses. All instruments included in the questionnaire were
psychometrically acceptable, but certain problems with this strategy still prevailed. Anastasi (1982) cautions that not all subjects will answer the questions accurately. This is due to response biases (e.g., social desirability and acquiescence). Thus all paper-and-pencil inventories are vulnerable to these inaccuracies (Anastasi, 1982).

Second, this study can be criticised for using self-reports as the only source of data. Future research on stress-strain relationship should avoid relying solely on self-reports and should include objective data, physiological measures of stress and strain (e.g., heart rate and blood pressure) (Gore, 1978), in-depth interviews, and peer/supervisor ratings. Qualitative analysis instead of only using quantitative analysis, as in this research should also be undertaken.

Statistical Issues
Although certain findings in Study 2 were found to be statistically significant, only a small amount of variance in the dependent variables was explained. In the present study covariates were included as an attempt to eliminate spuriousness (House et al., 1978). If the covariates had been omitted, the main and moderator variables would have had more variance associated with them but the statistical analyses would not have been as sound (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973).

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study

The results of the present research provide some evidence that trade union social support moderates the industrial relations stress-strain relationship. Theoretically it has been shown that the trade union is well placed to offer social support to its members. Trade union social support, offered by shop stewards and trade union officials, may be more important than the traditional sources of social support (e.g., supervisors). In addition, it appears that union
instrumentality plays a role in members supporting a union and in members' belief that the union is in fact offering the members social support.

It is important that trade unions become aware of the buffering effects of trade union social support and try to practice strategies which would involve the offering of social support, thereby buffering the work strain experienced by their members. One approach is to negotiate with management to help reduce the incidence of stressful organizational and IR events by ensuring a well-functioning IR system and a healthy IR climate (Bluen & Fullagar, 1986). For example, Van Collier (1979) suggests that if an organization's grievance procedure is working effectively and there is a high level of worker-management trust, it is possible that worker discontent will be handled satisfactorily, thereby eliminating a potential source of stress. However, in South Africa, political factors precipitate industrial action, regardless of the company-union relationship (Rigby, Radford & Bennett, 1986). The worker-management relationship is based on the premise of conflict of interest between the two parties (Bluen, 1986). Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect conflict to be entirely eliminated (Bluen, 1986). What is required is the appropriate management of conflict in which trade unions could offer social support which helps deal with the conflict that workers experience (House, 1981). Here the Trade Union Social Support scale could be used to discover which social support types are the most influential in alleviating industrial relations stressors.

House (1981) also suggests that professionals are not the only eligible sources to offer social support, but informal sources of support at work (e.g., shop stewards, and peers) are often more effective than professionals in providing support, and that this source can also be important moderators. The trade union seems well placed to offer this support at work where shop stewards have earned trust from their fellow workers (Shostak, 1980). In addition, union officials and shop stewards are involved in established channels of organizational
communication and authority, they are then accessible to influence through those channels (House, 1981). McLean (1979) found that workers will often turn to friends at work, who are also trade union members, thereby obtaining support. Knowledge of the importance of social support and of the skills necessary to provide support could and should be part of the basis of selecting and/or procedures for training people to be union officials and shop stewards (House, 1981).

**Future Research Strategy**

This study has found that trade union social support acts as a main effect and moderator effect on the IR stress-strain relationship, and that trade union social support interacts with other variables to moderate the stress-strain relationship.

Future research should replace cross-sectional studies and be based on longitudinal analyses designed to meet the prerequisites of causal models, specifically, that trade union social support is causally related to strain (Cooper & Marshall, 1976). Second, the variables to be measured must be conceptually defined and unambiguous, and should be measured using psychometrically reliable and valid scales (Beehr & Newman, 1978). The scales used for measurement need to be carefully chosen so as to allow the subjects to complete the scales without prompting or help from the administrator. For example, the hardiness scale (Kobasa, 1979), and the trade union commitment scale (Fullagar, 1986) should have easier language usage and could be shorter. Second, instead of relying solely on paper-and-pencil self reports, objective data should be obtained (Beehr & Newman, 1978). Third, future research needs to compare the traditional forms of social support (i.e., peer and supervisor support) to assess which form of support is the most beneficial. In addition, various physiological measures (e.g., heart rate and blood pressure) needs to be taken to strengthen
validity of results (Gore, 1978), and in-depth interviews are another source of data. Fourth, qualitative research in addition to quantitative analysis should be carried out hence results would yield characteristics or attributes from the data collected (Rickmers & Todd, 1967).

By adopting these guidelines in future research it will be possible to explain whether union support does act as a main effect or a moderating effect for different variables. Future research also needs to consider which type of trade union social support (namely, emotional, appraisal, instrumental, or informational) is the most beneficial in alleviating industrial relations stressors. In addition, future research would also have to investigate the role of other types of trade unions in offering social support (e.g., conservative and militant unions). This alone has implications for the trade union because if support has largely main effects everyone will benefit from enhanced levels of social support (House, 1981). However, if social support has primarily buffering effects, it will be of significant value to people experiencing moderate to high levels of stress, but of lesser, or even no value to people experiencing little or no levels of stress (House, 1981).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present dissertation set out to investigate social support offered by trade unions as a main and/or moderator effect of the stress-strain relationship. A review of the literature revealed that social support can be a main or buffering effect on organizational stress and its associated consequences (i.e., strains). However, no attempt had been made to investigate empirically whether the trade union is a source of social support, although it had been cited in the literature as a source (House, 1981). Thus the present research was conducted to address this area of neglect.
To measure social support offered by trade unions, it was necessary to develop an appropriate and psychometrically valid scale, the Trade Union Social Support scale. A second study was then conducted to assess the main and moderating effects of trade union social support on three measures of industrial relations stress (i.e., negative IR-events, role ambiguity and role conflict), and four measures of strain (i.e., general health, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and propensity to leave the organisation).

Results indicated that the trade union social support scale does in fact act as both a main and moderating effect on the stress-strain relationship for certain variables of stress and strain. The findings were then discussed with relation to previous theory and empirical research. Finally, implications and future research directions were outlined.

From the results obtained the trade union as a source of social support can represent a viable area of research. Past research has examined related aspects of social support, such as general health (Beehr & Newman, 1978), psychological well being (Turner, 1981), life stress (Ganellen & Blaney, 1984) and role ambiguity (Beehr, 1976), while other research has focused on the co-worker or supervisor as being the main source of social support (e.g., La Rocco & Jones, 1978). However, the present research examined the role of the trade union, possibly for the first time.

Future research would have to test which sources (e.g., fellow trade union members or shop stewards) and which types (e.g., informational, appraisal, emotional or instrumental) of social support were the most effective. In addition, it is necessary to investigate whether the trade union is more effective than traditional forms of social support (e.g., the organisation). By adopting this approach to social support, a more comprehensive understanding of social support associated with organisational stress can be obtained. Although this research
can only be seen as the beginning of our understanding of trade union social support. It is however a breakthrough into something that was before only speculated upon.
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