The Professional Challenges for Administrative Staff: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract. Administrative staff play a critical role in organizational performance; however, their professional challenges remain insufficiently examined within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) literature. This study synthesizes recent evidence on the professional challenges experienced by administrative staff, examines the effects of job demands on employee well-being, and explores the role of organizational support within the JD-R framework. A structured literature review was conducted using 46 peer-reviewed English-language journal articles published between 2020 and 2026. Eligible studies were identified through established academic databases using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Bibliometric mapping and qualitative thematic analysis were employed to identify publication trends, dominant research themes, and relationships among job demands, organizational resources, and employee well-being. The review indicates that excessive workload, role ambiguity, organizational change, technological demands, and limited professional recognition are consistently associated with burnout and diminished psychological well-being. Conversely, perceived organizational support, supportive leadership, and coworker support mitigate these adverse effects and promote resilience, work engagement, and job satisfaction. This study expands the application of the JD-R framework to administrative staff, an understudied occupational group, and highlights the importance of strengthening organizational support systems to enhance employee well-being and sustainable organizational performance.

Keywords: Administrative staff; Job Demands–Resources theory; organizational support; burnout; workplace well-being; structured literature review.

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1 Introduction

Administrative staff play an indispensable role in ensuring organizational continuity, operational efficiency, and service quality across diverse sectors, including higher education, healthcare, government institutions, and private organizations. Their responsibilities have expanded considerably in response to organizational restructuring, digital transformation, regulatory changes, and increasing stakeholder expectations. Rather than performing routine administrative tasks, contemporary administrative staff are expected to coordinate complex organizational processes, facilitate communication among multiple stakeholders, manage information systems, and support strategic decision-making. Despite these expanding responsibilities, their contributions remain less visible than those of core professional groups, and discussions surrounding administrative work continue to be dominated by concerns over operational costs and administrative inefficiency rather than employee well-being [1].

In higher education, this transformation has created a "third space" where support staff experience a hybrid work environment of both academic support and traditional administrative roles [2], [3]. At the same time, administrative workers in the healthcare field are dealing with a far more arduous systemic situation, compounded by the growing digital transformation, international workforce deficits and the impact of post-pandemic crisis management, which has a long tail effect [4], [5]. These changing work environments expose administrative employees to multiple occupational demands that may adversely affect their psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and long-term career sustainability[6].

Although administrative employees play an important role, the existing literature on administrative staff still has some limitations to understand a more comprehensive picture of the administrative reality. One of the main challenges is the ambiguity in the terminology; research results are distributed across different disciplines, and are frequently contained in jargon like "professional staff", "non-academic personnel", or "third space professionals", making it a hard task to synthesize scientific results on a different context [7], [8].

In addition, the academic lens has been more focused on the lived experiences and ambiguities of roles and career vulnerabilities of core professions physicians, nurses, faculty and largely ignored the lived experiences of administrative personne [9], [10], [11]. While these staff members are in the focus of study, the literature often leaves conflicting results, as, for instance, digital transformation tools, which are generally sold to improve efficiency, are frequently not a suitable match with high-quality support and will cause technostress and harm to staff well-being if not well designed [12], [13]. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive synthesis that integrates evidence across sectors and identifies common patterns of professional challenges experienced by administrative staff.

For this reason, the conceptual framework of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is used as the conceptual foundation of this study. According to the JD-R model, the well-being and performance of employees are a result of the constant interaction between stressors and resources in the workplace [14]. The recent versions

(Extended JD-R theory and JD-R 3.0) highlight the importance of a dynamic management of personal, family and organizational resources in today's work emergencies, to prevent burnout, and to promote real work engagement [14], [15], [16].

Although the JD-R framework has been widely applied across occupational groups, its application to administrative staff remains relatively limited, particularly in studies synthesizing evidence from multiple organizational contexts. Moreover, previous studies have reported organizational support as either a mediating mechanism that explains how workplace conditions influence employee well-being or a moderating mechanism that weakens the negative impact of job demands. Because these represent conceptually distinct mechanisms, the present study does not assume that organizational support performs both functions simultaneously. Instead, this review critically examines evidence from previous studies to identify how organizational support has been conceptualized and empirically examined within the administrative staff literature. This clarification addresses an important conceptual ambiguity identified in previous research and strengthens the theoretical consistency of the review.

This conceptual analysis aims to answer three important questions, based on the identified gaps: (a) How have the trends and architecture of job demands-resources research evolved within the literature? (b) Do job demands exert a direct negative impact on the well-being of administrative staff? (c) To what extent do organizational support and resources mediate or moderate the negative effects of job demands on staff well-being?

Both theoretical and practical advances are found in this research. First of all, it focuses specifically on administrative personnel; and second, it gives a nuanced view of a group of professionals that is at best under-researched in the academic literature. The study expands its application to an understudied occupational group by integrating contemporary evidence regarding job demands, organizational resources, and employee well-being [9]. Lastly, the integration of JD-R theory with a multidisciplinary empirical review provides a solid basis for designing managerial interventions, such as leadership interventions and social support interventions, that promote organizational resilience and that foster the general well-being of employees in a more complex modern world [17], [18].

2 Literature Review

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is a broad theory that predicts employee well-being, behavior, and performance by exploring the dynamic relationship between pressures or job demands and job resources that can be used to respond to those demands [14]. It has also become clear as the theory has developed, that through the Extended JD-R framework and into the JD-R 3.0 that specific job demands (such as excessive workload, time pressure and physical strain) will drain energy from the individual and inevitably result in exhaustion or burnout [14], [15]. On the other hand, there are resources that are available at the individual, family and organizational levels that can have two functions, such as social support and supportive leadership. They act as a buffer and help to reduce the negative impact of occupational stress, and are

also intrinsically motivating employees to engage more with their work, as they are enthusiastic about it and dedicated to it [14], [16].

In this study entitled, "The Professional Challenges for Administrative Staff: A Conceptual Analysis," the JD-R theory is extremely relevant for the purposes of this study and serves as a strong foundation for exploring the dynamics of the workplace for this professional group. The current workloads of administrative staff are often reported as administrative bloat [1], [7], and the ambiguity of their role between two or more worlds of institutional functioning in the so called "third space" [2], [11], as well as the emotional fatigue linked to a fast pace of digital transformation and [19], [13] are sizeable demands of their jobs. The current study, using the perspective of the JD-R theoretical framework, provides a systematic analysis of how organizational support and leadership-driven interventions act as important mediating variables in reducing the negative consequences of these occupational stressors [9]. This structure enables the identification of potential strategic paths to avoid burn-out and actively support administrative employees' psychological well-being and resilience when facing the challenges of their work duties [17].

3 Methodology

This study used a hybrid review approach by combining a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and selection of relevant studies. All articles were collected from the **Scopus** database because it provides broad coverage of peer reviewed international journals and is widely used in bibliometric research. The search was carried out using keywords related to administrative staff and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework. Only English-language journal articles that met the inclusion criteria were included in the analysis. During the initial search, AnswerThis.io was used only to help identify and refine relevant keywords. However, it was not used as a source of research data, and all articles analyzed in this study were retrieved directly from the Scopus database. The selected articles were analyzed using VOSviewer to examine publication trends, citation patterns, collaboration networks, and keyword co-occurrence. The findings from the bibliometric analysis were then combined with the systematic review to identify the main research themes, theoretical developments, research gaps, and directions for future studies on administrative staff within the JD-R framework.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 How Have Trends and Structures in Job Demands-Resources Research Evolved? (Q1)

The analysis of the publication volume during 2021-2026 shows that the research priority has a clear trajectory with a gradual increase and a decrease in the last year. This trend started with one publication in 2021 and more than quintupled to 5 in 2022, but continued to rise to 8 publications in 2023. This increased even more, with a rise to 12 studies in 2024 and finally reaching 16 publications in 2025. The boom reflects a burgeoning interest in such dynamics in academic circles, before slowing down to 4 publications during the first half of 2026.

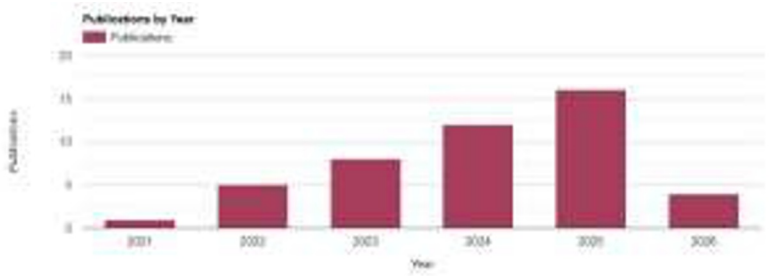


Figure 1. Publication by Year

Noticeable fluctuations in average citation count per publication are observed over the time range. In 2022, these studies garnered an impressive average of 106 citations per paper, a significant impact that fell to eight citations per paper in 2023. The number of citations for the field in 2024 was at an average of 26.6, but then fell to 3.1 in 2025 and ended at zero in the 2026 data. In comparison, the first year of the study period (2021) had on average 15 citations per publication.

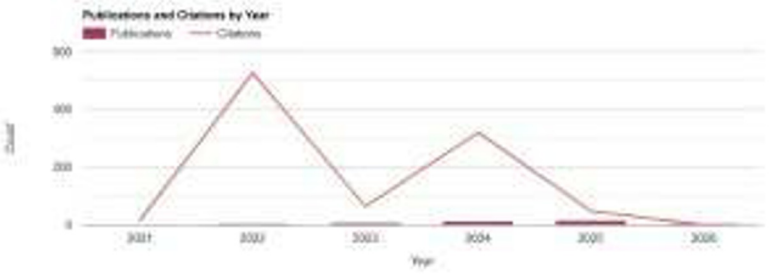


Figure 2. Citations per Publication by Year

Bibliometric analysis via a word cloud reveals that the literature is centered primarily on workplace dynamics and employee well-being. Terms such as "study", "staff", "health", "stress", "workplace", "performance", and "demands" appear with the greatest prominence, signaling that current research is heavily preoccupied with the professional challenges, mental health outcomes, and job pressures confronting today's workforce. Furthermore, supporting terms like "healthcare", "administrative", "support", "resources", "burnout", and "professional" sharpen the context, highlighting a specific focus on evaluating the working conditions of administrative and professional staff within the healthcare sector and broader organizational settings. Taken together, the word cloud reflects a cohesive integration between abstract theoretical frameworks evidenced by the presence of the word "theory" and the pragmatic realities of ensuring employee well-being in the modern workplace.



Figure 3. Word Cloud by Title

The 'Job Demands-Resources Theory' is currently the most common theory that anchors the thematic focus of the research with 18.5%. This is followed by a group of very significant terms, notably "Burnout" (14.2%), "Work Engagement" (12.8%), "Organizational Support" (11.5%) and "Administrative Burden" (10.3%) indicating a strong research focus on occupational stress and employee health. But the underlying visual data lists a far greater number of variables, which includes the group of "Social Support", "Job Stress", "Organizational Change" and ends with "Turnover Intention" at 3.8%. Thematic themes are covered in individual studies frequently so that the total coverage is 130%. Fundamentally, this distribution illustrates the complex interdependencies of what influences administrative workers' daily work, connecting to abstract theoretical accounts and organizational climates with their personal psychological effects.

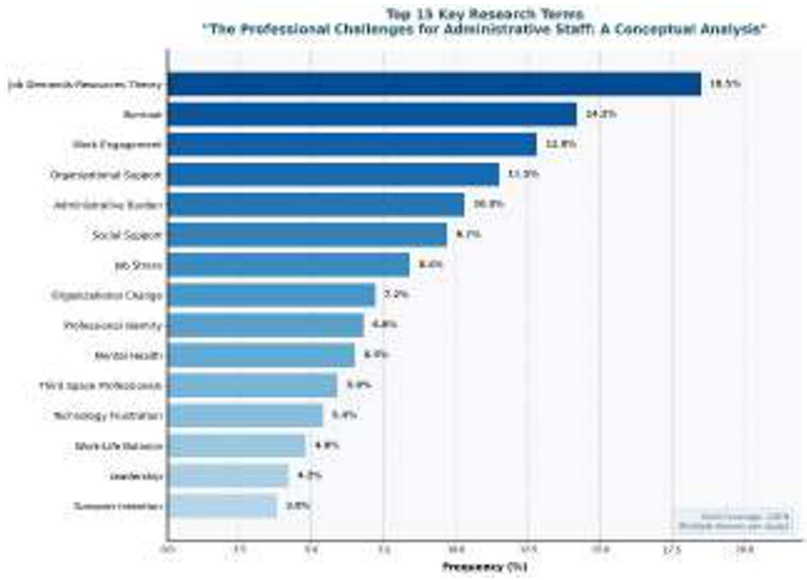


Figure 4. Key Research Themes in Professional Challenges for Administrative Staff

4.2 Do Job Demands Exert a Direct Negative Impact on the Well-being of Administrative Staff?

Within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, workplace pressures function through what is known as the "health-impairment process." In this cycle, chronic exposure to intensive workloads drains energy reserves, compromises physical health, and diminishes the intrinsic motivation of administrative staff [14]. Excessive demands such as unrealistic targets, constant pressure to maintain high output, and significant role ambiguity are primary drivers of severe burnout and emotional exhaustion [20], [21], [22]. This presents a significant paradox in HRM: After having a positive intention of improving the organizational output, high performing HR practices can actually be seen as an additional stressor that leads to anxiety and depression [12]. Work hours of more than 40 hours and lack of recovery time are also separate risk factors for "severe burnout" [23]. More specifically, the accumulation of physical and psychological workplace demands acts as a primary predictor of burnout, affecting both the personal and work-related dimensions of the individual [9]. [13]. In the end, this high workload significantly impacts mental health, especially when organizations lack sufficient protective resources to buffer against these stressors [24]. [25]. [1], [26], [27]

In addition to the operational and technical pressures, job demands from the macro-organizational structures and micro-interpersonal dynamics cause a tremendous psychological impact. An ongoing process of organizational change, like restructuring or downsizing, is more than just an ordinary administrative task, it is rather a trigger that becomes a significant risk for psychosocial factors and is negatively associated with the mental health of employees [25]. The increased administrative workload from HEIs to healthcare environments has resulted in less collaborative work environments and staff are increasingly susceptible to burnout, with their authority and autonomy being continuously undermined [1], [26], [27]. In addition, professional identity and relational marginalization are major stress factors for administrative well-being. These people often experience conflict with dominant professional groups, such as academics or clinical medical staff, and they are rarely formally recognized, especially in the language and attitude of such groups; they are often treated condescendingly by such groups [7], [10]. This lack of professional validation has a direct impact on 'wellness' and leads to an exhaustive state from a professional point of view [28]. These multiple high demands and relational toxicities contribute to a negative 'spillover' effect: work creeps into the private sphere, and adversely affects the work-life-balance [29], [30], [31]. If administrators work without social support from supervisors and colleagues [21], [32], [33] then this path of declining well-being is even more escalatory and severe.

Theoretically, this analysis complements the current literature on the JD-R model by providing a broad understanding of what is actually meant by the job demands of the contemporary administrative workforce, which now involve not only the quantity of tasks or workload but also "technological demands" (e.g., frustration with technology) and "identity demands" (e.g., marginalization in a hierarchy). Both groups show a strong 'direct impairment effect' on psychological welfare. On a practical level, these results call for a new approach to organizational policy from the organization's operational efficiency. The psychosocial occupational health and safety (OHS) should be the main focus of leadership, especially in times of organizational

restructuring[25]. Additionally, companies are forced to change the culture of the workplace, which may be hierarchical and separate administrative functions. This involves the use of inclusive recognition programs, planned increase in autonomy at work and the reinforcement of social support systems as the first "buffer" against systemic burnout [9].

4.3 Do Organizational Resources and Support Mediate or Moderate the Negative Effects of Job Demands on Administrative Staff? (Q3)

In the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) approach, organizational resources and support systems act as key mediators and moderators in the process of how workplace demands affect administrative employees. Empirically, "Perceived Organizational Support (POS)" appears as one of the most critical mediators between high job demands and psychological outcomes, and when perceived organizational support is strong, it can help to reinterpret professional stress into more sustainable and positive outcomes [34].]. Like that, job satisfaction is a significant mediator in dealing with role conflict, indicating high levels of well-being can be achieved when organizations actively respond to role demands with satisfaction as a strategy [35]. These organizational factors are complemented by individual emotional regulation strategies as key personal resources that enable them to buffer the negative effect of emotional demands on burnout [36].

Organizational resources also are important in moderating or "buffering" the stressor effect of job demands on staff exhaustion. There is consistent evidence that the effect of these demands is diminished by supervisor and co-worker support; and high levels of supervisor support have a significant positive effect on both job satisfaction and lessening of emotional exhaustion, even in high stress jobs [37]. This social support is a protective factor for mental well-being and resilience from the stress of overwork, but its effect may vary depending on the context of the workplace [38], [39]. Furthermore, supportive practices such as union involvement can offset negative consequences of "High-Performance Work Systems" (HPWS) in environments where they are not deliberately introduced [40]. Therefore, organizational actions with a focus on reinforcing supervisor support, peer collaboration and overall POS are critical actions to reduce burnout and ensure long-term staff wellbeing [41].

Theoretically, this discussion enriches the JD-R literature by demonstrating that organizational support is not a monolithic entity; rather, it performs a dual, intersecting function: acting as a mediator that interprets demands and as a moderator that diminishes pressure. This contribution underscores that the JD-R model for administrative staff necessitates a sophisticated integration of structural resources (POS) and relational resources (supervisor support). From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that management should pivot away from conventional, load-centric approaches toward an "ecosystem of support." Organizations are encouraged to cultivate ethical leadership as a foundation for transparent communication and to

facilitate ongoing *self-care* programs to preemptively address the accumulation of psychosocial risks. By embedding social support directly into job design, organizations can proactively mitigate burnout and foster a work environment that is not only efficient but also fundamentally supportive of the long-term psychological health of their administrative professionals.

5 Conclusion

This study provides an overview of how the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework has been applied to understand the work experiences of administrative staff across different organizational settings. The findings indicate that administrative staff encounter various job demands, including excessive workload, role ambiguity, organizational change, and increasing technological expectations. These demands are consistently associated with burnout, lower work engagement, and reduced job satisfaction. At the same time, organizational resources, particularly perceived organizational support, supportive leadership, and positive workplace relationships, emerge as important factors that help employees cope with workplace demands and maintain their well-being.

From a theoretical perspective, this review expands the application of the JD-R framework to administrative staff, a group that has received relatively limited attention in previous studies. The review also shows that organizational support has been examined from different perspectives in the literature, functioning either as a mediating mechanism or as a moderating factor depending on the research context and model. These findings suggest that future studies should provide clearer conceptual justification when positioning organizational support within the JD-R framework and should continue to examine its role across different organizational and cultural settings.

The practical implications of this review highlight the importance of balancing job demands with adequate organizational resources. Organizations should pay greater attention to supportive leadership, professional recognition, workload management, opportunities for employee development, and effective communication during organizational change. Rather than focusing only on reducing work pressure, organizations need to create a work environment that strengthens employees' capacity to respond to changing job demands while supporting their well-being and long-term performance.

This review is limited to studies indexed in the Scopus database and therefore may not capture relevant evidence published in other databases or grey literature. In addition, the reviewed studies vary considerably in terms of research design, organizational context, and measurement approaches. Future research could broaden the evidence base by incorporating multiple databases, conducting longitudinal or cross-cultural studies, and examining emerging issues such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, hybrid work arrangements, and organizational resilience. These efforts will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how job demands and organizational resources influence the experiences of administrative staff in contemporary workplaces.

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