Compassion organizing: Employees’ satisfaction with corporate philanthropic disaster response and reduced job strain

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The literature on corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy generally focuses on how employers come to the aid of those outside the organization who have been affected by disasters. Less is known about an organization’s corporate philanthropic disaster response (CPDR) directed towards their employees. We argue, based on conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989, Am. Psychol., 44, 513) and compassion organizing (Dutton et al., 2006, Admin. Sci. Quart., 51, 59) literatures, that employees perceive employers who provide aid to them following a natural disaster as supportive. This aid from CPDR provides support to employees and helps to restore the loss of valued resources. Accordingly, we predict that satisfaction with CPDR reduces employee psychological and physiological strain via its positive effects on perceived organizational support. We find support for our predictions using a sample of 695 Hurricane Katrina survivors. Finally, we discussed theoretical contributions and implications of this research.

Practitioner points

- Organizations are encouraged to fulfill their social responsibilities. Our research shows that organizations should be socially responsible not only to the general public, but also to their own employees. Responding compassionately by providing aid to an organization’s own employees is an important element in carrying out their social responsibilities. In the aftermath of a severe natural disaster, employees may need to rely on their organizations to provide timely assistance. Such assistance could help them mitigate their strain, both psychologically and physiologically, aroused from the disaster they experienced.

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DOI:10.1111/joop.12088
Organizations’ compassion organizing in the form of philanthropic disaster response to their employees may be beneficial to the organization. First, it shows the organization’s intention to fulfil their social responsibility and to be a good and ethical citizen. Second, by providing assistance to their employees to deal with the challenge of restoring normal lives, organizations can help employees to continue working in a productive and effective way.

‘Life as we knew it is gone’ Katrina victim (Personal Communication, 2006)

Natural disasters, such as the Tsunami in Japan or Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy in the United States, affect a substantial number of people each year worldwide. During the last 30 years, approximately 108 natural disasters—including floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornados—have hit the United States. Damages caused by these disasters can be difficult to overcome because ‘just one disaster can wipe off the economy of a whole region or country and put hundreds of thousands of people at risk of economic and social marginalization’ (United Nations, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, [UN/ISDR], 2006, p. 2).

Victims expect disaster relief efforts from government agencies (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency; Waldman, Carmeli, & Halevi, 2011), but these efforts may not always be reliable, available, or expedient (Kapucu & Van Wart, 2008; Reid, 2013). Particularly in the case of Hurricane Katrina, many local and government agencies were ill-equipped in their preparation and management of an unprecedented disaster (Cherry & Allred, 2012). Thus, people might need to rely on aid from their employers following a disaster. Scholars have noted that employers have been increasingly involved in responding to disasters, which is referred to as corporate philanthropic disaster response (CPDR; Muller & Whiteman, 2009), such as providing help after earthquakes (Zhang, Rezaee, & Zhu, 2010), tsunamis (Patten, 2008), and hurricanes (Sanchez, Korbin, & Viscarra, 1995). CPDR activities constitute compassion organizing, the process by which ‘individuals in organizations notice, feel, and respond to human pain in a coordinated way’ (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilios, 2006, p. 59). The extreme physical and emotional devastation caused by disasters may urge employers to engage in compassion organization due to a desire to help others (Muller, Pfarrer, & Little, 2014) and to fulfil their corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1979; Jamali, 2008).

According to the stakeholder perspective, employers have the responsibility to acknowledge a duty of care towards their employees as well as other stakeholders (Jamali, 2008; Simmons, 2004). Yet much of the research on CPDR has an external focus and examines employers’ social initiatives directed towards the general public who are victims of natural disasters (Muller & Whiteman, 2009). Relatively little attention has been paid to employers’ efforts in disaster situations that are internally targeted towards their employees. CPDR extended to employees is critical for three reasons. First, from a societal perspective, such assistance may fulfil the employer’s responsibility to be a good and ethical citizen by responding compassionately to victims of a natural disaster. Further, given findings that show a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate reputation and other measures of corporate success (Hsu, 2012; Hur, Kim, & Woo, 2013; Schnietz & Epstein, 2005), CPDR may enhance the organization’s reputation. Third, from a utilitarian perspective, disaster assistance could help employees rebuild their home and lives, which then indirectly helps employees continue to contribute to their employers.
Our goal in this study is to understand the effects of internal CDPR. Specifically, we examine if and why employee satisfaction with CPDR (defined as the perception that the organization has acted appropriately and effectively in assisting employees after the disaster) relates to their psychological and physiological strain in the aftermath of a natural disaster. We propose that when satisfied with CPDR, employees should have a positive evaluation of their situation and perceive greater support from their organization. Moreover, based on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we posit that employee perceived organizational support can decrease their psychological and physiological strain following a depletion of resources induced by a natural disaster. We further propose that satisfaction with CPDR can ease the strain resulting from the disaster, through the mediating role of employees’ perceived organizational support.

Our research has the potential to make important contributions to the compassion organizing and stress literatures. First, we integrate two related streams of the literature that are often examined independently, by considering CPDR to be an aspect of compassion organizing. Organizations conduct CPDR actions not only to show their compassion to those who are suffering, but also to fulfill their corporate social responsibility towards a critical group of stakeholders, that is their employees. Following a disaster, employees, their employer, and the external environment jointly respond to the stressful situation. However, this interaction is often ignored in the literature, due to the lack of focus on how employers provide CPDR to their employees. Our research underscores the notion that employees are important stakeholders and appropriate targets of corporate social responsibility and compassion organizing.

Second, we acknowledge the serious impact of natural disasters on organizational life and how organizations can respond to this challenge. Past research indicates that organizational support can serve as a buffer against strain arising from stressful events (George, Reed, Ballard, Colin, & Fielding, 1993; Sanchez et al., 1995). We draw from the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to argue that employees who are satisfied with their organization’s demonstration of internally focused compassion are better equipped with the resources needed to alleviate their psychological and physiological strain in the aftermath of a natural disaster. In particular, we emphasize the role of perceived organizational support as a bridge between satisfaction with corporate disaster response and strain. Further, we demonstrate that employers should provide support to employees in response to events outside the workplace because such events may have a substantial impact on employees’ personal lives and their work lives (Dyrbye et al., 2006; Hochwarter, Laird, & Brouer, 2008).

We test our model on a sample of 695 Hurricane Katrina survivors. As one of the most devastating and costly natural disasters, Hurricane Katrina, coupled with the failure of the levees, devastated the Gulf Coast region and left 80% of the city of New Orleans submerged (Pardue et al., 2005). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Hurricane Katrina resulted in the loss of over 1,200 lives, $2.9 billion in wages, 95,000 jobs, and the evacuation of over tens of thousands of people (Dolfman, Wasser, & Bergman, 2007). During Hurricane Katrina, many local employers took various CPDR actions to help their employees, including financial, material, and emotional assistance. For example, the Hilton hotel allowed the family members of its employees to stay at the hotel and, following the storm, helped employees find employment at other Hilton hotels (Weber & Palmeri, 2005). PepsiAmericas established an employee relief fund to provide financial resources to the gulf employees and their families affected by the hurricane (PepsiAmericas, 2005). Hurricane Katrina provided a situation for organizations to provide CPDR aid to their employees; thus, it created a context to examine the relationships among...
employees’ satisfaction with CPDR, their perceived organizational support, and their psychological and physiological strain.

**Theory and hypotheses**

**Employee satisfaction with CPDR and perceived organizational support**

We consider CPDR to be an aspect of compassion organizing, because it involves a collective response to a disaster that entails the organization of individual compassion (Dutton et al., 2006). Compassion involves the awareness of suffering, empathic concern, and behaviours aimed to relieve suffering (Kanov et al., 2004). Compassion organizing can manifest in different forms and can be enacted by organizations, individuals (Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2011; Madden, Duchon, Madden, & Plowman, 2012), locals, and non-locals (Shepherd & Williams, forthcoming). Given the amount of devastation and loss that follows a traumatic event, employees who are victims of a disaster may be fraught with pain and suffering (Kanov et al., 2004; Waldman et al., 2011). In such a situation, employers showing compassion to their own employees by becoming involved in disaster relief could be particularly important.

As insiders, employees are able to observe their employers’ behaviours and responses after a disaster, and employees likely form their subjective perceptions regarding the extent to which the organization has acted appropriately and effectively in assisting employees after a disaster (i.e., satisfaction with CPDR). Importantly, we focus on employees’ satisfaction with their employer’s CPDR rather than the employer’s actual social initiatives because we want to examine employee attitudes regarding the corporate disaster response rather than the support organizations actually provide. Employers may provide similar types of relief (e.g., food and shelter), but it is how employees interpret and evaluate such actions that likely play a role in their effectiveness. Indeed, others have argued that research on organizational phenomena should be based on employee perceptions over objective attributes, given that individuals often ‘respond on the basis of their perceptions of reality, not necessarily reality per se’ (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002, p. 182). Moreover, because perceptions of events predict subsequent attitudes and behaviours (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hansen, Dunford, Boss, & Angermeier, 2011), we expect that employee perceptions of CPDR help shape their attitudes towards the organization.

We propose that an employer’s supportive actions following a disaster increase employees’ perceptions of organizational support or the extent to which the employer values employees’ contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Following a disaster, an organization could indicate concern by providing valuable assistance to improve (or attempt to improve) the situation for its employees. Such actions could range from instituting flexible work schedules to providing food and shelter for employees and their families. Compassion organizing likely influences how employees perceive their organization cares about their well-being. Stinglhamber, De Cremer, and Mercken (2006) noted that ‘…actions taken or messages sent by the employer or its representatives are interpreted by the employee as information about organization commitment and caring’ (p. 449). Further, Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, and Ganapathi (2007) argued that an employer’s corporate social responsibility initiatives shape employees’ general attitudes towards their organization. They suggested that social actions taken by an employer provide employees with information that they can use to judge their treatment by their employer.
Proactive actions taken by an employer both enable employees to come back to work and focus on the employer’s goals, and assure employees that they can rely on employer help during stressful situations (cf. George et al., 1993). Such actions from the employer also indicate the relational aspect of the job, and could arouse prosocial reactions from employees, such as their positive evaluation of their employer (Grant, 2007). Further, previous research indicates that experiencing compassion at work is positively related to important employee attitudes and feelings, such as affective organizational commitment and positive emotion (Lilius et al., 2008). Accordingly, we expect employees who are more satisfied with CPDR to shape a positive evaluation towards their employer in the form of higher levels of perceived organizational support. We therefore advance the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Satisfaction with CPDR is positively related to perceived organizational support.

**Perceived organizational support and employee emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints**

A stressor is a condition that may threaten or harm a person, and strain is an individual’s psychological, physiological, or behavioural response to a stressor (Jex, Beehr, & Roberts, 1992). According to the socio-cognitive model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the experience of stress depends on how a person cognitively appraises the situation, whether the event is harmful, presents a challenge, or has a positive outcome. A natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina can be characterized as a severe stressor as it creates ‘high levels of uncertainty [that]... threaten or are perceived to threaten high priority goals including security of life and property or the general individual or community well-being’ (Seeger, Sellow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 233). Although a disaster is a short-lived acute event, chronic stressors may emerge during its aftermath and victims may experience stress long after the acute event has passed (Norris & Uhl, 1993). For example, Hurricane Katrina resulted in job loss, death, temporary and permanent evacuation from the city, separation from family members, destruction of property, and a great deal of uncertainty.

According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), people aim to control and retain resources that they value. Stress can be experienced when people are threatened with resource loss, actually lose resources, or fail to gain additional resources (Hobfoll, 2011). Resources enable individuals to handle stress, enhance their current situation, and prevent future stressful situations (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Thus, the more resources that are retained, the less negative the outcomes people will experience, due to the ability of those resources to enable people to decrease stress and improve their current and future situations.

Within the context of disasters, victims can experience a loss of a variety of physiological and cognitive/emotional resources that include object resources (i.e., physical possessions such as a car or house), conditions (e.g., marriage or other relationships), personal characteristics (e.g., the way in which a person sees the world), and/or energy resources (e.g., time and money). Such a loss of resources has been found to be the primary driver of the experience of psychological distress and physiological symptoms (Freydy, Saladin, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Saunders, 1994; Freedy, Shaw, Jarrell, & Masters, 1992; Smith & Freedy, 2000). For example, Hochwarter et al. (2008) found that hurricane survivors with low levels of resources had worse outcomes (e.g., job dissatisfaction, job tension) compared to those with more resources.
The extreme casualties brought on by Hurricane Katrina made salient the vulnerabilities and the limited amount of control individuals had over their lives. People did not know if or when they were going to rebuild their homes, be reunited with their family members, and get back to ‘normal’. Moreover, survivors of Hurricane Katrina noted in various conversations with the research team during focus groups interviews that they often considered themselves to have two full-time jobs. After spending a full day at work, they would spend another eight or so hours working on rebuilding their homes and repairing their lives. Moreover, in situations where one’s colleagues in the workplace were also affected by the disaster, employees had to deal with a decrease in manpower and a more intensive workload, in addition to possible difficulties faced at home. The unstable community infrastructure was another reason for their decrement in resources.

Given that natural disasters are likely appraised as stressors that induce a considerable amount of strain, we examine both the psychological and the physiological strain caused by disasters. Specifically, we examine emotional exhaustion, a psychological manifestation of strain that is a facet of job burnout, and somatic complaints, a physiological manifestation of strain. Job burnout is a psychological stress symptom that reflects a negative response to emotional and interpersonal stressors at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; for a review, see Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004), and it consists of three dimensions: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). In this study, we focus on emotional exhaustion, which occurs when there is a depletion of emotional and physiological resources (Maslach, 1993), a situation of specific relevance in the study context. Researchers have argued that emotional exhaustion is the core component of burnout and captures its true meaning (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Emotional exhaustion is characterized by a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are depleted (Cordes & Doughtery, 1993), and could lead to higher levels of turnover and lower levels of job performance (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Witt, Andrews, & Carlson, 2004; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

We also examine somatic complaints because research has shown that stressors are detrimental not only to psychological strain, but also to physiological outcomes, such as back pain and headache (Frese, 1985; Spector & Jex, 1998). More importantly, somatic complaints are quite prevalent and are responsible for a large part of human suffering, health care costs, and loss of productivity (Eriksen & Ihlebaek, 2002). Further, emotional exhaustion and somatic strain often occur simultaneously, as shown by Verhoeven, Maes, Kraaij, and Joekes (2003) among secondary school teachers from different European countries. Therefore, it is also important to understand how physiological reactions, such as somatic complaints, are influenced within the context of a natural disaster.

We draw from the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to explain the buffering effect of perceived organizational support on emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. In times of stress, perceived organizational support is likely to instil a belief that the organization will engage in compassionate behaviours that benefit rather than hurt employees (Stinglhamber et al., 2006). According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002, p. 698), ‘perceived organizational support is expected to reduce aversive psychological and psychosomatic reactions (i.e., strains) to stressors by indicating the availability of material aid and emotional support when needed to face high demands of work.’ Thus, when employees perceive their employers provide support during a disaster, they may feel that they gain additional resources from their organizations to restore the loss of objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies. This perception of additional resources from the organization in turn helps to alleviate employees’ emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. On the other hand, employees who perceive less
support from their organization may feel that they cannot restore their resource loss and have very limited resources left to cope with stressful demands resulting from the disaster, and are likely to experience strain.

Our argument is supported by previous research that has indicated a relationship between perceived organizational support and various indicators of strain, including the experience of burnout and somatic symptoms (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Jawahar, Stone, & Kisamore, 2007; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). For example, perceived organizational support relates negatively to general psychological strain, depression, headaches, anger, and burnout (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Richardson, Yang, Vandenbeng, DeJoy, & Wilson, 2008). Individuals who perceive support from their employer believe that in stressful situations, aid is available from the employer when needed (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, their ability to cope successfully and effectively with stress increases (George et al., 1993; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Accordingly, we expect that employees who perceive that their employer will provide the resources needed to manage potential job strain will experience lower levels of psychological (i.e., emotional exhaustion) and physiological (i.e., somatic symptoms) strain. Thus, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 2:** Perceived organizational support is negatively related to (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) somatic complaints.

The mediating role of perceived organizational support
Taking our arguments together, we propose that perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between satisfaction with CPDR and emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. The psychological and physiological strain experienced at work because of a loss of resources may be accounted for by employees’ perceptions about whether they will be able to recover from their losses or have any additional losses. As noted, after a disaster, surviving employees usually face increased job demands due to the decreased workforce. They also face increased personal demands on rebuilding their homes and community, which may drain them from effectively functioning on their jobs. In such a stressful situation, employers’ assistance could help shape employee perceptions and attitudes towards the organization (Lilly, Kavanaugh, Zelbst, & Duffy, 2008). When the employer provides CPDR assistance to their employees following a disaster, it suggests that the employer is interested in its employees and has offered resources to mitigate the employees’ job and/or personal demands, ultimately leading to reduced strain.

In addition, if employees are satisfied with the manner in which their employer treats them and others after a disaster, they are likely to use this information when evaluating the employer’s general concern for employees. This is particularly critical following a natural disaster, as employees are prone to high levels of stress and often perceive that they are unable to control and predict events in their lives (Leon, Hyre, Ompad, DeSalvo, & Muntner, 2007). In short, we argue that perceived organizational support is the psychological mechanism through which satisfaction with CPDR reduces employee strain (i.e., emotional exhaustion and somatic symptoms). We offer the following hypothesis:
Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between satisfaction with CPDR and (a) emotional exhaustion, and (b) somatic complaints.

Methods

Data and sample
The research was part of a large project examining employee attitudes and withdrawal resulting from Hurricane Katrina. Employees (N = 2,870) from four firms contracting with a large government agency located in the Southern U.S. were recruited for participation in this project. These employees worked at facilities directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina (Fall 2005). Data were collected from employee respondents 1 year following Hurricane Katrina (Fall 2006). Employees held jobs in areas such as engineering, administration, production, analysis, and project management. We took measures to mitigate common method bias concerns when we collected the data. Following the recommendations of Podsakoff and Organ (1986), we collected data in two phases with a 2-month time lag in between, to temporally separate the independent and dependent variables. Further, we assigned participants random ID numbers to assure complete anonymity, so as to increase the likelihood that they would be open and honest in their responses.

Participants were asked to fill out either an online survey or a paper survey. Employees who did not have easy access to the Internet could fill out a paper survey, and we provided them a prepaid envelope in which they could return their responses directly to the researchers. For employees with Internet access, we emailed them a direct link to the web survey. A total of 1,191 employees completed phase 1 (a response rate of 41.5%) and 916 completed phase 2 (a response rate of 31.9%). During phase 1, we collected data on employees’ satisfaction with CPDR, perceived organizational support, demographic variables, and control variables. After approximately 2 months, we administered the phase 2 survey, which included measures of emotional exhaustion, somatic complaints, satisfaction with the local government, and other variables unrelated to the current study. We received 695 matched surveys from employees who participated in both phases 1 and 2 (24.2% of the total study population). The majority of respondents participated in the online survey (93.7%). The final sample was primarily male (70%), married (72%), and parent of at least one child (74%). Most respondents were Caucasian (79%). The majority of employees (88%) reported completing at least some college education. Seventy percent of employees were between 25 and 54 years of age. In addition, 82% of respondents reported that their houses had been damaged to at least some extent in the hurricane.

We ran an ANOVA to compare our sample with respondents who only completed one of the surveys to determine whether the final sample was representative. Results showed that respondents who answered both surveys and those who responded to only one of the surveys differed in means on satisfaction with CPDR, perceived organizational support, somatic complaints, age, gender, race, and income after Hurricane Katrina, but not on emotional exhaustion, satisfaction with government, job demands after Hurricane Katrina, satisfaction with the local government, and other variables unrelated to the current study. We received 695 matched surveys from employees who participated in both phases 1 and 2 (24.2% of the total study population). The majority of respondents participated in the online survey (93.7%). The final sample was primarily male (70%), married (72%), and parent of at least one child (74%). Most respondents were Caucasian (79%). The majority of employees (88%) reported completing at least some college education. Seventy percent of employees were between 25 and 54 years of age. In addition, 82% of respondents reported that their houses had been damaged to at least some extent in the hurricane.

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1 ANOVA analyses showed that compared with online participants, those who answered paper surveys were older, more likely to be male, and sustained more damage to their homes during the disaster, but had less income and fewer job demands after Hurricane Katrina. They were also less satisfied with CPDR and perceived less organizational support, but they suffered similar emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints, and were similarly satisfied with the local government. As a robustness check, we analysed the data without the 44 paper surveys and results were similar (i.e., the relationship we proposed in Figure 1 still holds, though the standardized coefficients slightly differed).
and degree of damage. It should be noted that at the time of this survey, contract renewals with the government agency were in process. People who were not going to renew their contract may have been less likely to respond, which might be the reason for the differences on our study variables. Nonetheless, we also checked variances for the variables and found that participants who responded to both surveys reported equal or smaller variances than those who only responded to one survey on most of the key constructs (i.e., satisfaction with CPDR: $SD = 1.47$ vs. $SD = 1.66$, $F = 12.39$, $p < .01$; perceived organizational support: $SD = 1.34$ vs. $SD = 1.50$, $F = 10.53$, $p < .01$; and somatic complaints: $SD = 1.30$ vs. $SD = 1.27$, $F = 0.08$, n.s.), except for emotional exhaustion ($SD = 1.74$ vs. $SD = 1.58$, $F = 5.15$, $p < .05$). With smaller variances, it is a more conservative test. If we can still find results with conservative test, our results will be more robust.

**Measures**

**Satisfaction with CPDR**
This construct refers to the perception that the organization has acted appropriately and effectively in assisting employees after a disaster. As this construct has not been previously measured in the literature, we composed three items based on its definition. In addition, we interviewed several victims of Hurricane Katrina and asked them what they thought about their employers’ disaster relief actions to further validate that the items reflected employee reactions. We went through several versions of the items with content experts before they were finalized. These items were the following: ‘I am satisfied with the way that my employer responded to Hurricane Katrina’; ‘My employer did everything that it could have in response to Hurricane Katrina’; and ‘My employer took care of its employees’ needs resulting from Hurricane Katrina’ (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .92$).

**Perceived organizational support**
We used the 8-item scale from Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001) to measure perceived organizational support. An example item is ‘My organization really cares about my well-being’ (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .93$).
Emotional exhaustion
We used the 3-item measure from Boswell, Olson-Buchanan, and LePine (2004), which was based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), to assess employees' emotional exhaustion. These items included 'I feel emotionally drained from my work'; 'I feel burned out from my work'; and 'I feel exhausted when I think about having to face another day on the job' (1 = never to 7 = very often; \( \alpha = .92 \)).

Somatic complaints
We used six items adapted from Cooke and Rousseau (1984) and Spector, Dwyer, and Jex (1988) to measure employees' somatic complaints. Employees were asked how they generally felt in the following way, such as 'Find it difficult to get up in the morning,' and 'feel spells of dizziness' (1 = not at all to 7 = very much so; \( \alpha = .85 \)). The Appendix lists full scales for the above four constructs.

Control variables
Because the data were collected from four different employers, we created three dummy variables (i.e., Organization 1, Organization 2, and Organization 3) to control for firms. We also controlled for demographic variables in the analyses, including employees' gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (1 = 24 and under, 2 = 25–34, 3 = 35–44, 4 = 45–54, 5 = 55–64, and 6 = 65 and over), race (1 = Caucasian; 0 = Non-Caucasian), and family income after Hurricane Katrina (1 = $1,199/month or below, 2 = $1,200–2,399/month, 3 = $2,400–3,999/month, 4 = $4,000–6,399/month, and 5 = $6,400/month or above). These variables could influence personal experiences and employees' ability to cope with stressful situations following a natural disaster and have been controlled for in previous studies due to their potential effect on reactions towards the workplace (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

Job demand is a critical determinant of employee strain (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Thus, we also controlled for employees' reported job demands after Hurricane Katrina with a 5-item scale drawn from Quinn et al. (1971). A sample item is 'How often does your job require you to work very fast?' (1 = never, 7 = always; \( \alpha = .88 \)). In addition, given the potential of resources provided by external agencies to influence an individual’s strain, we controlled for employees' satisfaction with the local government, measured by a 6-item scale from Van Ryzin (2004). A sample items is 'Local government here does a good job of meeting my needs and the needs of my family' (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; \( \alpha = .91 \)). Lastly, we controlled the degree of damage to a respondent's home (1 = no damage to 7 = complete destruction) because employees' feelings of strain are likely a function of the amount of damage they experienced and have to deal with before, during, and after work. Among our participants, 92.7% experienced at least minor damage to their homes, and 55.8% experienced significant, major, or complete damage to their homes. Although including these critical factors as control variables arguably provides a quite conservative test of our hypotheses, by doing so, we are able to isolate the specific role of an employer’s response and employees’ perceived support in influencing their experience of strain.
Results

Before testing our hypotheses, we investigated the convergent and discriminant validity of our focal constructs (satisfaction with corporate disaster response, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and somatic complaints). We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). Results in Table 1 showed that standardized loading estimates were higher than 0.50 for all items of the four constructs, except for one item of somatic complaints, which was 0.47. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE), a measure of the variance captured by each construct (Fornell & Larker, 1981), for satisfaction with CPDR, perceived organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and somatic complaints was .79, .62, .81, and .50, respectively, equal to or larger than the recommended cut-off value of .50 to establish convergent validity (Fornell & Larker, 1981). Composite construct reliabilities were adequate, ranging from .66 to .83. The composite reliability for somatic complaints was .66, a bit lower than .70, but still acceptable. Taken together, these results suggest that the four focal constructs in our study had good convergent validity.

To test discriminant validity, CFA results in Table 2 showed that our hypothesized 4-factor model provided a better fit to the data ($\chi^2$/df = 3.24, CFI = .96; NFI = .94; IFI = .96; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .06) than the other alternative models, and the fit indices were acceptable, based on recommended cut-off values (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In addition, the change from the 3-factor model to the 4-factor model was significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 964.02$, Table 1. CFA factor loadings (FL), squared multiple correlation (SMC), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values of study variables

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<td>Item 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
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<td>Somatic complaints</td>
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<td>Item 1</td>
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<td>Item 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 6</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>.44</td>
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</table>
ADF = 3, p < .01). AVE for each construct was well above the square of corresponding interconstruct correlation estimates or the shared variance between constructs (ranging from .01 to .37). In other words, the measurement items had more in common with the construct they were associated with than they did with the other constructs. Overall, the four focal constructs in our study achieved both convergent and discriminant validity.

Testing hypotheses

Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables. We tested our hypotheses with structural equation modeling (SEM) with latent constructs in AMOS 17.0. We first analysed the hypothesized model in Figure 1, which proposes that satisfaction with CPDR is positively related to perceived organizational support, and the latter is in turn negatively related to employees’ emotional exhaustion at work and their somatic complaints. Because of the high correlation between the dummy control variables, Organization 1 and Organization 2 (Table 1, \( r = .56, p < .01 \)), and Organization 1 and Organization 3 (Table 1, \( r = .59, p < .01 \)), these two correlations were added to the hypothesized model, as the modification indices suggested. In addition, as we tested the indirect effects with bootstrapping procedures, missing values were replaced through multiple imputation (Rubin, 1987). To simplify the figure, we omitted the control variables from Figure 1.

Fit indices for the model were adequate (\( \chi^2/df = 2.77, p < .01; \) CFI = .92; NFI = .88; IFI = .92; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .05). Figure 1 depicts path coefficients. Satisfaction with CPDR was positively related to perceived organizational support (\( \beta = .61, p < .01 \)), supporting Hypothesis 1. Perceived organizational support in turn was negatively related to emotional exhaustion at work (\( \beta = -.31, p < .01 \)) and somatic complaints (\( \beta = -.13, p < .01 \)), thus supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Finally, we found an indirect effect of satisfaction with CPDR on emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints, mediated by perceived organizational support. Based on the bootstrapping procedure (Preacher &

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Table 2. Confirmatory factor analyses on study constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( \chi^2/df )</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Factor model</td>
<td>4583.06</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>26.96</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Factor model</td>
<td>2364.21</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>13.99</td>
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<td>.75</td>
<td>.76</td>
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<td>.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-Factor model</td>
<td>1496.08</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Factor model</td>
<td>532.06</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Notes. The 4-factor model is the basic hypothesized measurement model. In the 3-factor model, satisfaction with CPDR and perceived organizational support were combined because of their high correlation (\( r = .51, p < .01 \)). In the 2-factor model, satisfaction with CPDR and perceived organizational support were combined into one factor, and emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints were combined into the second factor because of their high correlation (\( r = .50, p < .01 \)). Finally, in the 1-factor model, all the four variables were combined into one factor.

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2 To further validate our measure of satisfaction with CPDR, we also conducted a CFA on satisfaction with CPDR, satisfaction with local government, and affective commitment to the employer (collected in the large dataset and measured by Meyer, Allen, and Smith’s (1993) 6-item scale, \( a = .89 \)). Results show that the 3-factor model yielded a better fit (\( \chi^2/df = 3.66, CFI = .99; NFI = .99; IFI = .99; TLI = .99; RMSEA = .06 \)) than the 2-factor and 1-factor models. This provides additional evidence of discriminant validity for the construct of satisfaction with CPDR.
Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Organization 1</td>
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<td>3. Organization 3</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>0.12**</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
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<td>5. Age</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
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<td>6. Race</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Income</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
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<td>8. Job demands</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
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<td>0.26**</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Damage</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07†</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.07†</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<td>12. POS</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
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<td>13. Emotional exhaustion</td>
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<td>1.73</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07†</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07†</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
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<td>14. Somatic complaints</td>
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<td>1.34</td>
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<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
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<td>0.09**</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. N = 695; **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .10; Gender was coded 1 = male, 0 = female; Race was coded 1 = white, 0 = non-white; Income: Family income after Hurricane Katrina; Job demands: Job demands after Hurricane Katrina; Sat. with Gov.: Satisfaction with local government; Sat. with CPDR: Satisfaction with CPDR; POS: Perceived organizational support.
Hayes, 2008; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010), the indirect effect for emotional exhaustion
was \( -0.22 \), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) of \(-0.30, -0.16\).
The indirect effect for somatic complaints was \( -0.07 \), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap
CI of \(-0.13, -0.02\). It should be noted that there were no direct effects between
satisfaction with CPDR and emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. These results
suggest a full mediation process. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were both supported.
Finally, squared multiple correlation (SMC) or the variance explained for perceived
organizational support, emotional exhaustion, and somatic complaints were 0.37, 0.25, and
0.13 respectively. As a robustness check, we also tested our hypotheses in PROCESS
(Hayes, 2013). Results were quite similar. Thus, we only reported results from SEM
analysis.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to examine the influence that employers can have on
their employees in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Results revealed that employees’
satisfaction with CPDR was positively related to perceived organizational support, which
in turn was negatively related to their emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. In
addition, perceived organizational support fully mediated the relationships between
satisfaction with CPDR and employee emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints.

**Theoretical contribution**

Compassionate acts aimed to ease the hardship of others can take many forms (Lilius
et al., 2008), and we conceptualize CPDR as a particular kind of compassionate response
to human suffering. Research on CPDR generally focuses on employers’ corporate social
responsibility in aiding distant victims in a disaster. Here, we attempt to add to this
growing literature by examining how attitudes regarding employers’ compassion
organizing influence employees within the organization after the experience of a natural
disaster. We found that employees’ satisfaction with CPDR predicted perceived
organizational support and, subsequently, reduced their emotional exhaustion and
somatic complaints. Satisfaction with employers’ CPDR is important as it helps their
employees restore resources. When employees are satisfied with CPDR, they can be more
certain that when a similar stressful situation arises, their employer will have the resource
and ability to conduct compassion organizing to aid them.

We also contribute to positive organizational scholarship. We offer new insights to the
compassion organizing literature by showing how the appraisal of an employer’s actions
relates to employee perceptions and strain. In particular, we draw attention to the fact that
employee assessments of the compassionate actions taken by the employer influence
important employee perceptions and health outcomes. Given the unpredictability of
some government agencies, employees may increasingly expect compassionate acts by
their employers. Our findings suggest that employers that provide a satisfactory response
after the devastation of a natural disaster can help lessen employee strain via strengthened
employee perceptions of organizational supportiveness.

We support the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and extend it to the
context of employer support provided in response to a natural disaster. Within the
context of a natural disaster, this study replicates and extends prior research that has
demonstrated a negative relationship between perceived organizational support and
emotional exhaustion (Jawahar et al., 2007). Specifically, employers that aid their employees to cope with a natural disaster are more likely to be perceived by their employees through a positive lens as providing proper support and helping restore resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989).

**Practical implications**

Our findings offer important practical insights for managers and employers. In times of uncertainty such as those following a natural disaster, organizational responsiveness could play a critical role in helping to mitigate both employees’ psychological and physiological strain. Our findings echo calls for more research on the effects of corporate social responsibility actions on employees’ work attitudes (Mueller, Hattrup, Spiess, & Lin-Hi, 2012; Turker, 2009). Employers’ responses to a disaster and their provision of support to their employees are consistent with the numerous efforts to promote corporate social responsibility, or an organization’s responsibility to set policies, make decisions, and take actions that benefit those within society (Bower, 1953). Although employers may have donated a substantial amount of resources to victims of disasters in different parts of the world (Muller & Whiteman, 2009), our study underscores that employers are not only responsible for their shareholders, customers, and large community, but also their own employees. Each of the various stakeholders is critical for the sustainable success of the organization (Waddock, Bodwell, & Graves, 2002). Furthermore, compassion organizing may have long-term benefits. Organizations that respond compassionately to a single event will build the capacity to respond to future uncertainty (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011; Madden et al., 2012).

Disasters may lead to diminished resources for employers (e.g., less revenue, fewer jobs, reduced profit), as well as employees. For example, extreme budget cuts led Tulane University to lay off 230 professors, more than 2,000 instructors and staff, and cut several programs (MSNBC, 2005). Situations like this severely influence employees’ psychological and physiological strain. As such, in the midst of budget cuts and job insecurity, employers could provide compassionate and philanthropic actions to increase remaining employees’ perceptions of organizational support. Such response could be costly monetarily, but, as our results show, the employer can get valuable returns by enhancing employee perceptions of organizational support and reducing feelings of psychological and physiological distress.

Our results indicate that employers can play a potentially important role to both the psychological and physiological strain of employees, even beyond that of their own work (e.g., job demands) and personal experiences (e.g., home damage) and the role of government. This is especially important to employers given the relationship between strain, job performance, and various work withdrawal behaviours (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Witt et al., 2004; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). There are many ways that organizations can help their own employees endure severe natural disasters, such as allowing affected employees to use organizational amenities and helping relocate employees to safe areas. Employers are actually in an important position to provide their affected employees with necessary resources. For example, Shepherd and Williams (forthcoming) examined people in the community (i.e., locals) who have suffered themselves but work together to aid the suffering of other victims of a natural disaster. They suggested that locals who are experiencing the dire effects of a particular disaster may have more specialized knowledge about what exactly the victims of a disaster need than non-locals and thus may be better able to provide customized resources.
Limitations and future research

As with all research, the current study has several limitations. Although we collected our data in two phases (2 months apart) to reduce the problems associated with common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) and give greater confidence in the direction of the effects, some study variables were collected at the same time. In particular, satisfaction with CPDR and perceived organizational support were both collected during phase 1. This weakens the causal argument that satisfaction with CPDR drives perceived organizational support. Although our conceptual arguments and findings supported the causal link, a multi-phase longitudinal study is needed in the future to strengthen interpretation of these causal relationships. Further, it is possible that those with emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints experienced lower levels of perceived organizational support and satisfaction with CPDR rather than vice versa, leaving open the possibility for reverse causality. We conducted additional analyses to test a reverse causal model (i.e., emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints lead to satisfaction with CPDR, mediated by perceived organizational support). Results show that emotional exhaustion had an indirect effect on satisfaction with CPDR through perceived organizational support (the indirect effect was \(-0.20\), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI of \(-0.27, -0.14\)). However, the fact that emotional exhaustion was collected in phase 2 makes the above finding less meaningful.

In addition, previous studies showed that perceived organizational support could decrease employee emotional exhaustion (Jawahar et al., 2007). A few studies that examined the negative consequences of emotional exhaustion found that emotional exhaustion decreased organizational commitment, job performance, and helping behaviours, and increased turnover intentions (Cropanzano et al., 2003). To our knowledge there have not been studies showing emotional exhaustion leading to a decrease in perceived organizational support. Yet according to the attribution theory (Kelley, 1967), it is possible that when people are suffering from emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints, they may blame others, such as their employers. To fully explore the causality of this research, we encourage researchers to conduct a well-designed longitudinal study.

We used a short measure to operationalize the construct of satisfaction with CPDR. In future studies, we should follow a more strict scale development procedure to ensure that the full domain of the construct is covered. Similarly, we focused on employee perceptions regarding the employer’s response to the disaster, but it would be valuable to examine what drives employee variance in reported satisfaction. What in particular can employers do to satisfy the needs of their employees? Are there certain organizational actions (e.g., monetary vs. counselling vs. time off) that are most likely to facilitate positive reactions from employees? For example, previous research indicates that public evaluations of an employer’s charitable giving after a disaster depend on the perceived motivation underlying the disaster response (Fernando, 2007, 2010; Patten, 2008). Similarly, employees may consider how the employer has treated them in the past when assessing their level of satisfaction with CPDR. Actions taken by employers to help employees may be considered to be disingenuous if the behaviour is inconsistent with how they have been previously treated. Further, it would be interesting to investigate the effect of perceived insincerity in an employer’s disaster response, such as helping employees to boost the firm’s reputation. Perceiving the disaster response in such a way may even hurt, instead of enhance, employees’ work attitudes and/or feelings of well-being, compared with no disaster response from the employer. We recommend that future research seeks to better understand the motivational process in which employer
Corporate philanthropic disaster response and job strain

Disaster response efforts affect employees’ perceptions and subsequent attitudes and behaviours.

Although we focused specifically on the role of employers in helping to reduce employee emotional exhaustion and somatic symptoms in the aftermath of a natural disaster, the support of employees’ family and friends is also important. Research has shown that social support can reduce employee emotional exhaustion (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987). Future studies may explore the interplay between support from inside and outside the workplace to gain a more complete picture of factors that reduce employee strain. Further, we encourage future research to investigate the underlying mechanisms linking satisfaction with CPDR to perceived organizational support and ultimately to reduced strain. Our data suggest that perceived organizational support explains the relationship between satisfaction with CPDR and strain; yet more work is needed to understand the different types of work and non-work stressors that employees may experience after a natural disaster and the specific role that perceived organizational support may play in mitigating strain.

Another issue we should note is the limitation of our sample. The comparison between our final sample (i.e., participants who answered both surveys) and those who only answered the phase 1 or phase 2 survey showed that there were some differences between the two groups on key study constructs. Further analysis showed that compared with those who only answered one survey, the final sample had smaller variances on key constructs. Though the findings still support our hypotheses with this conservative test, future studies that could replicate our findings are needed to validate and generalize our findings.

Conclusion

Our research examined the links between employees’ satisfaction with CPDR, perceived organizational support, and employee emotional exhaustion and somatic complaints. Findings from this study expand our understanding of how an employer’s response to events residing outside the organization’s walls can influence employee perceptions of the employer. Extending the line of research about employers’ conduct after natural disasters (Muller & Whiteman, 2009) and compassion organizing (Dutton et al., 2006), we demonstrated that employers can play an important role in shaping perceptions and emotional experiences and ultimately help reduce the negative consequences experienced by employees facing external stressors such as a natural disaster.

References


Received 22 November 2013; revised version received 28 August 2014

**Appendix: Measurement items for key study variables**

**Satisfaction with CDPR:**

1. I am satisfied with the way that my employer responded to Hurricane Katrina.
2. My employer did everything that it could have in response to Hurricane Katrina.
3. My employer took care of its employees’ needs resulting from Hurricane Katrina.

**Perceived organizational support (Rhoades *et al.*, 2001):**

1. [My employer] really cares about my well-being.
2. [My employer] strongly considers my goals and values.
3. [My employer] is willing to help me if I need a special favor.
4. [My employer] shows little concern for me (reverse coded).
5. Help is available from [My employer] when I have a problem.
6. [My employer] would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
7. If given the opportunity, [My employer] would take advantage of me (reverse coded).
8. [My employer] cares about my opinions.

Emotional exhaustion (Boswell et al., 2004):
1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. I feel burned out from my work.
3. I feel exhausted when I think about having to face another day on the job.

Somatic complaints (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Spector et al., 1988):
1. Find it difficult to get up in the morning.
2. Become very tired in a short time (i.e., fatigue).
3. Feel nervous or fidgety and tense.
4. Feel spells of dizziness.
5. Have trouble sleeping at night.
6. Have an upset stomach or stomach ache.