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# Crossover of resources within formal ties: How job seekers acquire psychological capital from employment counselors

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Email: [corinna-vera.schmidt@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:corinna-vera.schmidt@tu-dortmund.de)**Summary**

Unemployed job seekers experience stress which impedes their job search. Research suggests that psychological capital is a key resource which enables job seekers to cope with their stress. Yet it is still unclear how they acquire this key resource. During job search, job seekers engage in task-oriented, infrequent interactions with counselors in employment agencies and establish formal ties. We explore these largely neglected formal ties and draw on conservation of resources theory and the crossover model to show that psychological capital crosses over from counselors to job seekers. We examine 209 dyads collected from two sources—counselors and job seekers—in an employment agency in Germany. Our hierarchical linear modeling results support the crossover of psychological capital within formal ties: Our results indicate that counselors' psychological capital impacts job seekers' psychological capital, which in turn lowers their stress. This relationship is mediated by job seekers' perception of counselors' social support. This study advances research on job loss and the crossover model as it explains the transfer of key resources within an institutional context characterized by formal ties, and it reveals social support as underlying mechanism. The practical implication is that counselors serve as enablers transferring key resources to job seekers.

**KEYWORDS**

crossover model, dyadic multilevel research, formal ties, job seeker, psychological capital

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that unemployed job seekers experience a high level of stress (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009), which impedes job search intensity and reemployment success (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2012). Moreover, job seekers' stress indirectly harms society because job seekers do not contribute to the nations' productivity while unemployed (Boswell et al., 2012). Thus, for individual job seekers and society alike, it is crucial to investigate factors reducing stress.

According to conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), high levels of stress occur because job seekers have lost resources: the resource of employment itself and the resources provided by it, such as a steady income and supportive work relationships. Given these substantial losses, the best option for individuals to reduce stress is to acquire key resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Key resources are described as being personal, developmental, and synergistic; they enable individuals to cope with loss by mobilizing other resources (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Hobfoll, 2002; Thoits, 1994). Psychological capital is known to be an important key

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resource for job seekers as it meets the characteristics of key resources (Chen & Lim, 2012; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). It is defined as “an individual's positive psychological state of development” comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007, p. 3). Research reveals that psychological capital enables job seekers to cope with unemployment: It supports their active job search behavior (Chen & Lim, 2012) and successful reemployment (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005), and it also reduces fatigue (Lim et al., 2016). Psychological capital as a key resource thus seems to play a significant role in lowering job seekers' stress. However, it still remains unclear how job seekers acquire psychological capital (Chen & Lim, 2012; Lim et al., 2016). Scholars do investigate antecedents of psychological capital for employees within the workplace, such as leadership style and job characteristics (Avey, 2014), but their findings cannot be transferred to job seekers without steady work. Cole et al. (2009) note that job seekers own significantly lower psychological capital than employed individuals. Consequently, Chen and Lim (2012, p. 835) call for investigations of success factors related to the job search that “may lead to gains in psychological capital.” Addressing this gap, we pose the first research question: *How do job seekers acquire the key resource of psychological capital to reduce their stress?*

According to COR theory, individuals—after a severe resource loss—can regain resources through informal and formal ties (Hobfoll, 2001). Wanberg, Ali, and Csillag (2020, p. 317) state that “both informal and formal sources are important for job seekers.” Other scholars suggest that formal ties play an important but overlooked role in key resource acquisition. Formal ties refer to task-oriented and infrequent interactions with counselors or employees in institutions (Lipman & Longino, 1982). They are shown to provide more novel information than informal ties such as family or friends (Granovetter, 1973). From a societal perspective, formal ties are advantageous, as the supporting sources are institutions (Lipman & Longino, 1982). The state or municipality can enact laws or regulations to guide the institutions, such that the beneficial impact on job seekers is higher. We focus on counselors in employment agencies as an important type of formal ties as they support unemployed job seekers to find reemployment (Gist-Mackey, 2018). Van Hooft (2014, p. 2) notes that “the process of getting reemployed, [...] is difficult and complex. Therefore, many unemployed job seekers are assisted by employment counselors.” Counselors, and thus formal ties, might act as enablers transferring resources to job seekers. Yet despite the seemingly well recognized significance of formal ties, most job loss research to date neglects the role they play in job seekers' gaining the key resource of psychological capital. By focusing on formal ties in the context of job loss, our study hence aims to help bridge this crucial gap in the literature.

Previous research shows that the psychological capital of employees in the service industry—like counselors—has a particularly strong impact on their service work, such as supporting individuals during social interactions (Avey et al., 2011). Accordingly, and in line with the crossover model (Westman, 2001), we propose that psychological capital crosses over during social interactions from

counselors to job seekers through the perceived social support counselors provide. Earlier research verifies such crossovers in informal ties (Carlson et al., 2019) but has so far neglected formal ties (Zagenczyk et al., 2020). Booth-LeDoux et al. (2020, p. 743) support the perception that formal ties have so far been overlooked in research and they underline that “scholars could examine other [...] ‘partners’” relevant for the crossover of key resources. We argue that crossovers occur in formal ties as well—for example, between counselors and job seekers. To address this gap, we pose our second research question: *How does the key resource of psychological capital cross over in formal ties, for example, from counselors to job seeker?*

To answer our research questions, we conduct a multilevel analysis with dyadic data collected from 209 dyads of counselors and job seekers in an employment agency in Germany serving all kinds of unemployed job seekers. We contribute to the literature in two ways. First, we advance the job loss literature by elucidating that job seekers gain the key resource of psychological capital when interacting with an employment agency counselor. Thus, we empirically investigate the so far overlooked role of counselors in providing job seekers with support and resources (Wanberg, Ali, & Csillag, 2020). Moreover, while prior research assumes that social support reduces stress (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), we show that counselors' social support increases job seekers' psychological capital, which in turn lessens stress. Second, we advance and generalize the crossover model, as we are among the first to explain and empirically verify the crossover of resources within formal ties, often characterized as weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). With this, we address prevalent gaps in the literature and explore “other workplace and non-workplace ties that may lead to [...]” crossovers (Zagenczyk et al., 2020, p. 1603). By explaining job seekers' perception of counselors' support as underlying mechanism, we also extend the limited research on positive resource crossovers (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Our findings reveal practical implications for job seekers and society. Counselors working on a formal, institutional level can serve as important enablers, passing on their own psychological capital to numerous job seekers who lack valuable key resources needed to reduce their stress level. Interacting with and perceiving social support from counselors thus represents a straightforward lever that may help job seekers find their way towards reemployment.

## 2 | THEORY DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 | COR theory

COR theory explains that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources and that individuals experience stress when resources are lost (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). According to the theory, resources are defined as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that individuals value in their own right or that serve to attain or protect additional resources (Hobfoll, 2001). In the context of our study, job seekers suffered a severe loss of resources provided by

employment, such as income or social ties at work (Westman et al., 2004); as a result, they experience a high level of stress (Paul & Moser, 2009). COR theory assumes that regaining key resources becomes crucial when substantial resources are lost (Hobfoll, 2002). Key resources refer to particularly important resources that enable individuals to select, alter, and implement other resources, thereby reaching beneficial outcomes (Hobfoll, 2002; Thoits, 1994). Key resources are characterized as being personal, developmental, and synergetic (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Hobfoll, 2002). Within the literature, psychological capital classifies as a key resource: It is defined as a personal resource (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) and shown to be developmental, as it can evolve through various leadership styles or trainings (Avey, 2014). Also, psychological capital is synergetic, as it comprises the four dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007). Jiang (2021, p. 3) concludes that “key resource[s] [...], and thus psychological capital, can help individuals successfully cope with, alleviate, or eliminate the negative effects of stress.” For job seekers, scholars indeed reveal the important role of psychological capital, as it is positively related to job search behavior (Chen & Lim, 2012), reemployment (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005), and reduced fatigue (Lim et al., 2016). Thus, we propose that job seekers experiencing severe stress as a result of their loss of employment strive to gain psychological capital to alleviate their stress. However, to date, it is not yet clear how job seekers acquire psychological capital and whether this key resource reduces their stress (Chen & Lim, 2012; Lim et al., 2016). According to COR theory, individuals suffering a severe resource loss “call on resources available to them from their environment” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 517). Hobfoll et al. (2018) extend COR theory based on the crossover model and state that key resources emerge from interactions with social ties possessing them.

## 2.2 | The crossover model

Crossover is defined as a dyadic, interindividual transmission of psychological states and resources (Westman, 2001). The crossover model extends COR theory in that it expands the focus from individuals to dyads, explaining that individuals gain resources that are transferred to them from the dyad (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Such a crossover is likely to occur indirectly through social support (Chen et al., 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Westman, 2001). According to COR theory and the crossover model, social support is defined as a process whereby one individual provides resources to another in some form of social interaction (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002; Westman, 2001). Extant research, however, reveals conflicting results for the indirect crossover: Few studies report a significant role of social support within crossover effects (e.g., Westman et al., 2004); other works do not find support for such a relationship (e.g., Brummelhuis et al., 2014). Halbesleben (2006) and Zagenczyk et al. (2020) suggest that the relevance of social support as a crossover mechanism might depend on the type of social tie that offers support. Social ties are interpersonal relationships and can be distinguished into informal and formal ties

(Lipman & Longino, 1982). Informal ties refer to family, friends, and acquaintances with whom individuals have emotional, proximal, and frequent interactions (Wanberg, Hooft, et al., 2020). Formal ties refer to counselors or employees in institutions and agencies with whom individuals have task-oriented, distant, and infrequent interactions (Granovetter, 2017).

## 2.3 | The role of formal ties for job seekers

Literature on job loss has to date largely neglected the relevance of formal ties for job seekers (Wanberg, Ali, & Csillag, 2020). However, investigating the role formal ties play in building job seekers' resources is highly promising: In contrast to informal ties, which often encompass individual sources of support, formal ties represent institutional sources of support which mitigate the impact of unemployment on the individual and the society (Lipman & Longino, 1982): Formal ties may provide resources to individual job seekers which reduces the job seekers' stress, thereby enabling job seekers to engage in efficient job search and regain employment, which, in turn, is beneficial for the productivity of the nation and thus for society. Analyzing such underresearched formal ties thus not only contributes to academia, but also offers unique practical insights into potential leverage effects. We hence focus on the role formal ties play in providing support—and ultimately in building job seekers' resources.

Formal ties provide instrumental assistance: They offer heterogeneous, novel information, and emotional support, and they help individuals cope with stressful situations (Granovetter, 1973; Wanberg et al., 2000). Institutional in nature, formal ties offer stable support as “the organizational structure maintains a greater continuity over time” (Lipman & Longino, 1982, p. 142). Moreover, formal ties are intentionally designed for the purpose of interacting with a specific group and thus display a high level of specialization (Srivastava, 2015). We thus argue that formal ties are advantageous for job seekers. Specifically, counselors in employment agencies constitute a relevant type of formal tie for job seekers (Granovetter, 2017) and “an interesting site of analysis,” as they support job seekers during job search (Gist-Mackey, 2018, p. 1253). Counselors help enhance job search skills (e.g., résumé writing and interviewing) and coping strategies (e.g., by providing personal counseling). In doing so, counselors directly interact with the job seekers during one-on-one meetings and provide support depending on the job seekers' needs (Gist-Mackey, 2018; Wanberg, Ali, & Csillag, 2020). We assume that counselors who interact with job seekers as part of their everyday work and who possess a high level of the key resource of psychological capital act as *enablers* transferring this key resource to a multitude of job seekers. However, while the literature assumes that counselors—and hence formal ties—can aid job seekers in building the key resource of psychological capital (Chen & Lim, 2012; Lim et al., 2016), it is not yet known how this process unfolds. Three gaps remain that limit our understanding: specifically, these are the domain, the valence, and the mechanism of crossover.

First, the majority of studies explores crossovers within a particular domain, such as the family (e.g., Carlson et al., 2019), the workplace (e.g., Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009), or the workplace-to-family sphere (e.g., Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020). So far, “scholars have applied the crossover model primarily to explain [...] intimate relationships (Westman, 2001)” (Zagenczyk et al., 2020, p. 1591) and focus largely on informal ties' crossover effect, not on the effect of formal ties. Only few studies confirm that the key resource of psychological capital crosses over from leaders to employees (Story et al., 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2010). However, the interaction between leaders and employees is proximal and frequent, and hence differs significantly from the distant and infrequent interaction between counselors and job seekers. Westman (2001) finds that crossover occurs between two individuals in any kind of social tie. Hobfoll et al. (2018, p. 108) state that “resources are transferred within social [...] contexts.” Hence, the crossover model is not limited to informal ties and frequent interactions, but equally applicable to formal ties and infrequent interactions. Consequently, scholars argue to broaden our understanding of crossover effects within formal ties and in other domains (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Li et al., 2016; Neff et al., 2013) to “design environments for sharing and fostering resources” (Hobfoll et al., 2018, p. 111).

Second, regarding the valence, to date, research mainly focuses on negative crossover, such as strain (e.g., Li et al., 2016). This is surprising, especially as Westman (2001, p. 743) notes that “investigating positive crossover can enhance theoretical thinking and make practical contributions to the crossover literature.” Exceptions in the literature provide evidence of the positive crossover of engagement (e.g., Westman et al., 2009), enrichment (e.g., Carlson et al., 2019), and self-efficacy (Neff et al., 2013). However, the positive crossover of resources has only emerged as a new topic in the literature (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and scholars call for academia to deepen our understanding of it in other domains (Bakker et al., 2009; Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Westman, 2013; Zagenczyk et al., 2020).

Third, the mechanisms facilitating crossovers are often assumed, but rarely empirically tested, which constitutes “a critical missing link” in research (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020, p. 735). Westman (2001, p. 745) suggests that “social interactions as mediators are important factors of the crossover process”—especially for distant ties—and hence implies that the crossover occurs indirectly. However, within crossover research, such an “indirect mechanism is largely overlooked” (Li et al., 2016, p. 143). Studies examining the crossover of psychological capital do not explain any mechanisms either—except for Story et al. (2013), who analyze leader–member exchange; this, however, is neither applicable to the context of job loss nor to formal ties which are distant and infrequent. Thus, scholars encourage studying the mechanisms of positive crossover (Bakker et al., 2009; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Westman et al., 2009).

We aim to address these gaps within the literature on the crossover model and explain the crossover of resources within formal ties following the prerequisites for crossover.

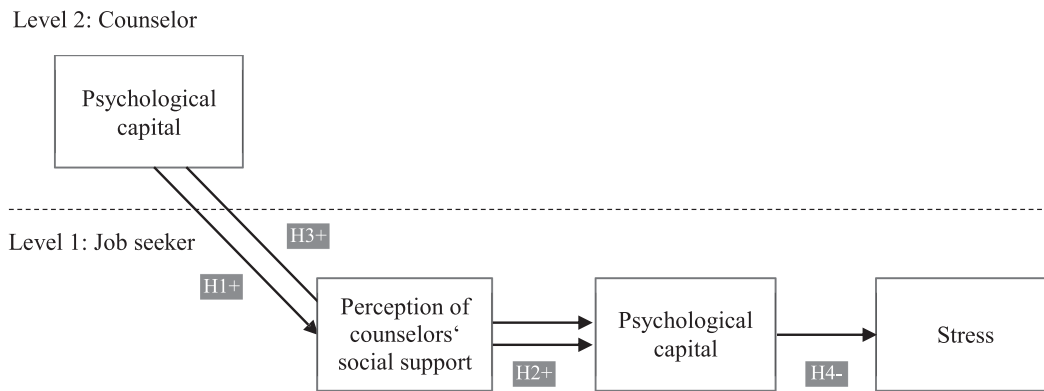
## 2.4 | Prerequisites for resource crossover within formal ties

According to the crossover model, the prerequisite for a transfer to occur is susceptibility (Bakker et al., 2009), which means that the individual to whom resources cross over needs to be open to the support offered by the individual who possesses these resources. With regard to formal ties and in the context of our study, it can be assumed that a job seeker who engages in a task-oriented interaction with a counselor of an employment agency is highly susceptible to the support provided. The reason is that crossover is more likely to occur in hierarchically organized dyads in which one individual (i.e., the counselor) has many resources and provides the other individual (i.e., the job seeker) who possesses fewer resources with support (Carlson et al., 2019). In such situations, the individual with fewer resources pays close attention to the formal tie (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). Hence, “resources can flow interpersonally and in a top-down fashion within a hierarchy, causing crossover effects (Hobfoll et al., 2018)” (Liu et al., 2021, p. 5). Research has indeed shown that perceived social support from formal ties becomes a valuable asset for the individuals who own fewer resources, and they view favorably those who possess and pass on resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Moreover, “there is some evidence that crossover does not occur in low-stress situations” (Westman, 2001, p. 741) but is triggered by more stressful situations. Thus, in the context of job seekers, the prerequisites of crossover exist: Job seekers have lost the resource of employment and experience a stressful situation (Paul & Moser, 2009) in which crossover is more likely to occur. Job seekers strive to regain key resource to reduce their stress. As such, they tend to be susceptible to the perceived social support from the counselor in an employment agency.

Overall, we draw on COR theory and the crossover model to show how psychological capital indirectly, through social support, passes on in formal ties. Specifically, we argue in our research model that counselors' psychological capital is indirectly associated with job seekers' psychological capital and that job seekers' perception of counselors' social support mediates this relationship. Moreover, we argue that job seekers' psychological capital is related to job seekers' stress. Figure 1 illustrates our research model.

## 3 | DERIVATION OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In line with COR theory, we argue that counselors who have a high level of psychological capital are both capable and motivated to provide job seekers with social support. First, counselors with a high level of psychological capital possess an important key resource enabling them to mobilize other resources and successfully engage in social interactions (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Westman (2013, p. 263) finds that “when one person's resources at work increase [...], he or she has a positive interaction with the [dyad] and provides support.” Such a



Note. Solid lines indicate paths proposed to be significant; H = hypothesis  
 Controls = Level 2: COVID-19; Level 1: Appreciation for the counselor; length of unemployment; COVID-19

FIGURE 1 Research model

crossover effect is likely to occur in hierarchically organized dyads (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and hence is especially relevant in the context of our study: Counselors have a higher status than job seekers (Gist-Mackey, 2018; Paul & Batinic, 2010). Thus, counselors with a high level of psychological capital have the means and expertise to engage in fruitful interactions and provide social support to job seekers. Second, counselors with high psychological capital are motivated to support job seekers and aim to invest their key resource to reach a beneficial outcome (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Thoits, 1994). For counselors, this outcome is to meet their performance goal of enabling job seekers to regain employment (van Hooft, 2014; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). As job seekers' "emotional reactions [...] may be barriers to finding suitable employment despite the best efforts of the counselor" (Guindon & Smith, 2002, p. 73), counselors are required to provide job seekers with emotional support to enable effective job search. Counselors high in psychological capital are able to select and implement their other resources delicately and can therefore be responsive to the emotional needs of the job seeker, which results in social support. Our rationale corresponds to research showing that for service employees, such as counselors, a high level of psychological capital leads to improved social interactions and work outcomes (Avey et al., 2011; Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). Moreover, psychological capital increases individuals' citizenship behavior and commitment (Newman et al., 2014) as well as their ability to relate empathically (Paterson et al., 2014), all of which helps counselors provide job seekers with social support.

In line with the crossover model, we conclude that job seekers perceive the level of social support provided by counselors: They are in a highly susceptible state as they have experienced a severe loss of resources bound to employment (Hobfoll, 2001; Westman et al., 2004). Job seekers therefore feel emotionally distressed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and report considerably lower status and less access to social contacts than do employed individuals (Paul & Batinic, 2010). Given their own losses, job seekers are highly susceptible to the crossover of counselors' resources as they need to regain

key resources such as psychological capital. According to COR theory, job seekers strategically engage in interactions with social ties that offer the highest resource gain (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2011). In doing so, they pay careful attention to those who possess and pass on resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Gist-Mackey (2018, p. 1251) concludes that "the longer people grapple with unemployment the more likely they are to seek help from unemployment support organizations" and hence from counselors. Thus, job seekers are likely to perceive counselors who have a high level of psychological capital, as a source of support. The support is provided by the counselor crosses over to, and is perceived by, the job seeker. Thus, we propose:

**Hypothesis 1.** Counselors' psychological capital is positively related to job seekers' perceptions of counselors' social support.

The crossover model states that resource gains can be initiated based on a crossover effect within dyads (Westman, 2001). Job seekers typically lack resources and hence can invest little, which, in turn, inhibits them in their effort to acquire new key resources. Receiving social support from the counselor becomes a valuable asset: It is an important means for them to regain key resources such as psychological capital. This argument is grounded in COR theory: Hobfoll et al. (2018, pp. 105-106) state that "the infusion of resources for those with few resources can have powerful impact in engaging gain momentum and strength." For job seekers, this infusion of resources emerges with the social support they perceive from the counselor. According to Hobfoll (2002, p. 319), such "perception of support is more important than actual receipt of support." Research confirms that perceived social support increases individuals' resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2020) and is thus positively related to psychological capital. In line with Westman's (2001) crossover model, counselors' social support passes on to job seekers as it increases their perception of available resources: "social support is effective because it helps to reinforce the positive aspects of the self"



(Halbesleben, 2006, p. 1135). As a result, job seekers become confident that they can employ these resources to offset their loss and regain further resources. The perceived support hence expands job seekers' available resources (Hobfoll, 2001), thereby promoting their psychological capital. We conclude that job seekers' perception of counselors' social support results in the development of key resources such as psychological capital and posit:

**Hypothesis 2.** Job seekers' perception of counselors' social support is positively related to job seekers' psychological capital.

We hypothesized that counselors' psychological capital promotes job seekers' perception of social support, which, in turn, translates into job seekers' psychological capital. Thus, we describe a model in which job seekers' perception of counselors' social support mediates the relationship between counselors' psychological capital and job seekers' psychological capital.

This mediated relationship follows research on COR theory and the crossover model which suggests an indirect positive transfer of resources through social support (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Westman, 2001). Story et al. (2013) were among the first to show that psychological capital indirectly crosses over through leader-member exchange, a form of frequent and proximal intraorganizational interaction. We argue that in the context of our study, psychological capital indirectly crosses over through social support, a form of interaction that can also occur in task-oriented, distant, and infrequent interactions and therefore in formal ties between counselors and job seekers. In line with COR theory, and as noted above, counselors with high psychological capital invest their key resource in supportive behavior towards job seekers because they aim to meet their own performance goals (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Thoits, 1994). Such an outcome would be the successful reemployment of the job seeker, which typically requires supporting the job seeker in finding a new job (Guindon & Smith, 2002). In line with the crossover model, job seekers perceive this social support as a mechanism through which key resources cross over to them, resulting in the build-up of psychological capital (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Job seekers who have lost their employment and as a result experience stress are highly susceptible to the support provided by the counselor. Job seekers perceive this support as a means to regain key resources needed to reduce their stress. Thus, counselors with a high level of psychological capital provide a high level of social support, which job seekers perceive, and which, in turn, increases their level of psychological capital. Thus, an indirect crossover effect of psychological capital via social support occurs, and we posit:

**Hypothesis 3.** Job seekers' perception of counselors' social support mediates the relationship between counselors' psychological capital and job seekers' psychological capital.

COR theory states that individuals experience stress after a loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), and scholars find that job seekers report high stress levels after losing employment (Paul & Batinic, 2010). In loss situations, it becomes more salient to regain key resources such as psychological capital as they support individuals in "selecting, altering, and implementing their other resources to meet stressful demands" (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 308). Thus, key resources enable job seekers to counteract resource loss (Hobfoll et al., 2018), thereby reducing stress. Huang and Luthans (2015) reveal that psychological capital leads to high creativity: Individuals with higher levels of psychological capital are likely to be more resourceful and innovative in investing their existing resources and hence in offsetting resource losses, which indicates that psychological capital might reduce the stress job seekers perceive. Corroborating this, Baron et al. (2016) reveal that psychological capital reduces stress among entrepreneurs. For job seekers, the level of stress is particularly pronounced, with the loss of employment depleting other essential job-related resources. Thus, job seekers benefit from a high level of psychological capital as it helps alleviate stress. Lim et al. (2016, p. 68) provide support by stating that "psychological capital serves as a personal resource that reduces job seekers' fatigue." In summary, job seekers who possess psychological capital perceive the acquisition of this key resource as a valuable gain, which enables them to mobilize other resources, thereby lessening their stress. Hence, we propose:

**Hypothesis 4.** Job seekers' psychological capital is negatively related to their stress.

## 4 | METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 | Research context

To test our hypotheses, we collected dyadic survey data from counselors and job seekers in a branch office of an employment agency in Germany. The agency offers programs to acquire job search skills (e.g., résumé writing and interviewing) and coping strategies (e.g., personal counseling) as well as job placement assistance (e.g., identifying open positions). It supports job seekers who have involuntarily lost their jobs and have not yet found reemployment. This support is free of charge for job seekers and paid by federal money (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). Following recommendations on dyadic research by Tse and Ashkanasy (2015), we focus on the interaction between counselors and job seekers during their individual one-on-one meetings. We collected the dyadic data on-site at the agency for 3 weeks in September 2020. As the data collection took place during the COVID-19 crisis, the procedures of the agency had been adapted to comply with the German government's pandemic containment measures. Job seekers were allowed to enter the agency only after prior registration for a meeting with a counselor.

## 4.2 | Data collection and sample

We followed three steps to collect our data. First, we distributed a paper-based survey to all 71 counselors who had scheduled in-person meetings with job seekers and agreed to participate in our study. We marked each survey with a unique, anonymous 4-digit ID number. To reduce the likelihood of biased responses (Podsakoff et al., 2012), we informed the counselors that the ID number does not allow identifying individual counselors. We received 45 responses from the counselors, a 63.4% return rate. After completion of this survey, we provided the 45 counselors with the paper-based job seekers' surveys, which we had marked with their ID number, and asked them to hand these out to job seekers directly after their meeting. Second, upon entering the agency and after giving their consent, job seekers filled out a one-item survey, asking how much they appreciated their previous encounter with the counselor. After their meeting, job seekers received the full survey from the counselors, which they voluntarily and anonymously filled out. During the 3 weeks that the survey was distributed, 391 job seekers visited the agency. We received 240 responses, of which we eliminated those with missing data, resulting in 209 job seeker responses for our analysis. Our 53.5% return rate exceeds those of other studies investigating job seekers (e.g., Chen & Lim, 2012; Nakai et al., 2011). Given that dyadic datasets are rare in organizational behavior research (Tse & Ashkanasy, 2015) and are difficult to obtain from job seekers who are said to be less active than employed people (Paul & Batinic, 2010), we view our sample as sufficient. Third, we used the ID numbers to match the 209 job seeker surveys to the 45 counselor surveys, which equals an average of 4.6 job seekers per counselor. Following Scherbaum and Ferrer (2009), we a priori estimated the required sample size and conclude that we can be confident that our sample size of 209 dyads is adequate to detect effects in our model. We provide the Supporting Information as an online appendix. In our sample, the number of job seekers per counselor ranges from 1 to 13: Some counselors work part-time, whereas others work full-time, so the number of prescheduled job seeker meetings differs for each counselor.<sup>1</sup> Following calls by Tse and Ashkanasy (2015) to investigate one-to-one

dyads, we examined 209 dyads of counselor and job seeker and accounted for the multilevel structure in our analytical procedure, as explained below. Our sample comprises a reasonable representation of job seekers across employment agencies and the German population (OECD, 2020; Paul & Batinic, 2010). Table 1 shows the sample composition.

## 4.3 | Measurement

We based our surveys on validated constructs, which we measured using 7-point Likert scales. We translated and back-translated all measures into German. We confirm the reliability of our measures as the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variances extracted (AVE) exceeded commonly accepted thresholds (Hair et al., 2006).

### 4.3.1 | Counselors' psychological capital

We assessed counselors' psychological capital using the 24-item psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ), which Luthans, Avolio, et al. (2007) set up for employed individuals. We removed two items due to cross-loadings and prove construct reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ; CR = 0.94; AVE = 0.53). Sample items include "Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work" (hope); "I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues" (efficacy); "I usually manage difficulties one way or another at work" (resilience); and "When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best" (optimism).

### 4.3.2 | Job seekers' psychological capital

We measured job seekers' psychological capital using the scale by Chen and Lim (2012). The authors adapted the PCQ to the context of unemployed individuals and empirically validated their scale in the

	Counselor	Job seeker		Counselor	Job seeker
Age			Gender		
<20	.0%	3.3%	Female	51.7%	40.7%
20–24	.5%	3.8%	Male	48.3%	59.3%
25–29	2.4%	16.3%			
30–34	14.4%	15.8%			
35–39	15.8%	14.8%	Length of unemployment		
40–44	25.8%	10.5%	<12 months	— <sup>a</sup>	50.7%
45–49	4.3%	11.0%	>12 months	— <sup>a</sup>	49.3%
50–54	12.9%	11.0%			
55–59	10.5%	9.6%			
>60	13.4%	3.8%			

TABLE 1 Sample

<sup>a</sup>No data available.



context of job seekers. We eliminated five items due to cross-loadings and prove construct reliability ( $\alpha = .95$ ; CR = 0.96; AVE = 0.62). Sample items include “There are lots of ways around my problems in my job search” (hope); “In my future job, I am confident in representing my area of work in meetings with management” (efficacy); “I feel I can handle many things at a time in my job search” (resilience); and “I always look at the bright side of things regarding my job search” (optimism).

#### 4.3.3 | Job seekers' perception of counselors' social support

We assessed job seekers' perception of counselors' social support using the 9-item scale by van Dolen et al. (2002), capturing the emotional aspects of counselors' support. This measure is reliable ( $\alpha = .84$ ; CR = 0.90; AVE = 0.58). A sample item includes “The counselor paid special attention to me.” Following Jolly et al. (2020), we classify social support as the job seekers' perception (form) of the emotional support (type) received from the counselor (source).

#### 4.3.4 | Job seekers' stress

We assessed job seekers' stress by using four items of the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979). This measure is well suited for our context, as Paul and Batinic (2010) validated these four items measuring stress among unemployed individuals in Germany. The measure is reliable ( $\alpha = .93$ ; CR = 0.90; AVE = 0.85).

#### 4.3.5 | Controls

We controlled for job seekers' appreciation for the counselors using one item (“On an overall basis, I appreciated the performance of the

counselor during my previous encounter”) by Frey et al. (2013), measured on a 7-point Likert scale. We asked job seekers to answer this item upon entering the agency to control for a potential feedback loop (Westman, 2001). We assessed all other controls as part of the full survey after the meeting. We assessed job seekers' length of unemployment (number of months), as McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) suggest a negative impact on job seekers' attitude. We asked job seekers and counselors, “To what extent are you affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?” measured on a 7-point Likert scale, as scholars suggest a negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on available resources (Mao et al., 2020; Wanberg, Csillag, et al., 2020).

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of job seeker-level and counselor-level variables. It also shows the discriminant validity, as the square root of the AVEs is in all cases larger than the bivariate correlation (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

## 4.4 | Analytical procedure

Our data are dyadic and multilevel, raising the possibility of dependencies in the data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), as we hypothesize that measures on the job seeker level (Level 1)—that is, job seekers' perception of counselors' social support and job seekers' psychological capital—are related to measures on the counselor level (Level 2)—that is, counselors' psychological capital. To acknowledge these two levels, we analyzed Hypotheses 1–3 using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992), which explicitly accounts for the fact that measurements at Level 1 (within-group analysis) are not independent of Level 2 (between-group analysis). This analytical procedure is consistent with our theoretical model and with previous studies (Walumbwa et al., 2010). We used the Kenward and Roger (1997) method with restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimation in Stata 16, as it produces accurate variance estimates for small sample sizes with unbalanced data structure (Peugh, 2010), which is the case for our data. We estimate Hypothesis 4 using ordinary least square

**TABLE 2** Correlations and discriminant validity

Construct	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Job seeker (Level 1)										
(1) Perception of counselors' social support	5.53	0.98	.76							
(2) Psychological capital	4.79	1.33	.25***	.79						
(3) Stress	3.70	2.07	-.03	-.33***	.92					
(4) Appreciation for the counselor	4.19	0.97	.20**	.11	-.09	— <sup>a</sup>				
(5) Length of unemployment	22.72	31.60	.06	-.24***	.05	-.02	— <sup>a</sup>			
(6) COVID-19	2.74	0.88	-.06	-.16*	.00	-.07	.11	— <sup>a</sup>		
Counselor (Level 2)										
(7) Psychological capital	5.48	0.75	.11	.01	.12	.00	-.12	.11	.73	
(8) COVID-19	3.68	1.50	.11	-.04	.03	-.03	.05	-.08	-.35***	— <sup>a</sup>

Note: The square root of the average variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) is shown in the diagonal.

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.

<sup>a</sup>Not applicable.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

(OLS) regression, as we posit a single-level relationship between job seekers' psychological capital and their stress.

## 5 | RESULTS

### 5.1 | Preliminary analyses

#### 5.1.1 | Preconditions for multilevel analysis

Before estimating our Hypotheses 1–3, we determined whether a multilevel analysis was appropriate for our data (Peugh, 2010). We ran a null model (intercept-only model with no predictor variables) for our dependent variables (Hofmann, 1997) to ensure that there was systematic between-individual variance to explain variance in job seekers' perception of counselors' social support and job seekers' psychological capital across counselors (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Based on the null model, we examined the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), the random variance, and the design effect statistics (Peugh, 2010). First, the ICC revealed that job seekers' perception of counselors' social support ( $ICC = 0.11$ ) and job seekers' psychological capital ( $ICC = 0.04$ ) varied significantly across job seekers as well as across counselors (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Second, the estimated variances for these variable means were significant ( $p < .05$ ) at the counselor level, indicating significant variation of job seekers' observations among counselors (Hofmann, 1997). Third, the design effect quantifies the effect of independence violations on the standard error (Peugh, 2010). The design effects for our dependent variables were above 1.0 (job seekers' perception of counselors' social support: 1.38; job seekers' psychological capital: 1.15), indicating that HLM analysis was preferable to OLS regression for Hypotheses 1–3 (McCoach & Adelson, 2010). In line with our proposition of a single-level relationship for Hypothesis 4, the dependent variable of job seekers' stress did not meet the required thresholds for HLM ( $ICC = 0.00$ ; design effect = 1.0). Overall, the preliminary analyses suggested that using HLM for Hypotheses 1–3 and OLS regression for Hypothesis 4 was justified. In addition, we analyzed Hypotheses 1–3 using OLS regression. The results were consistent with the HLM results reported below.

#### 5.1.2 | Centering

As recommended for multilevel mediation models, we group mean centered all Level 1 predictor variables, as this procedure provides the most accurate estimates of the slope variance (Enders & Tofghi, 2007), and controlled for the Level 1 group means in the Level 2 models (Zhang et al., 2009). Results remained consistent when we grand mean centered all Level 1 predictor variables (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007), so we report results with group mean centering of lower-level variables. Following the literature, we grand mean centered all Level 2 predictor variables (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

## 5.2 | Assessing potential biases

We collected data for our independent and dependent variables from two sources: counselors and job seekers. Hence, we are confident that the relationships between cross-level variables are not inflated by common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, we measured the mediator and the dependent variable from a single source, and hence, common method bias might affect Level 1 relations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate this potential concern, we employed several procedural remedies before our data collection. We proximally separated our variables through various unrelated items. We reassured respondents of anonymity, confidentiality, and the fact that there was no right or wrong answer. Lastly, based on interviews and pilot testing with five job seekers of the agency, we improved the scale items to eliminate ambiguity in item wording (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012). In our survey, we changed the word “employee” into “counselor”, as this term was more familiar to job seekers of the agency. We clarified words with multiple meanings, such as “success” (Item 10 of the job seekers' psychological capital scale) by defining it as “receiving an invitation to a job interview.”

We performed statistical assessments of potential common method bias following Lindell and Whitney (2001). We ex ante included a three-item marker variable, interest in football ( $\alpha = .96$ ), within the survey for the job seekers. The marker is theoretically unrelated to any of the constructs (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). When comparing correlations and partial correlations without the marker, all coefficients and statistical significances remain consistent, as shown in Table 3. The results suggest that our findings are not inflated by common method bias.

We conclude that multicollinearity is not a threat to the integrity of our results, as we examined the three criteria for a Type 1 error and found no such error (Kalnins, 2018). Following Bascle (2008) and using counselors' empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996) as an instrumental variable, we find that endogeneity is unlikely to affect our results (Wu-Hausmann: 1.00,  $p = .32$ ).

Lastly, we estimated the possibility of non-response bias (Berg, 2005). We compared scores for the one-item survey, appreciation for the counselor, which job seekers filled out upon entering the agency, for three groups: (1) participated in the full survey ( $N = 209$ ;  $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ); (2) participated in the full survey, but observations were eliminated due to missing data ( $N = 31$ ;  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ); and (3) did not participate in the full survey, but filled in the one-item survey ( $N = 61$ ;  $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). We conducted independent sample *t* tests and found no significant difference in the scores for Groups (1) and (2) ( $t[208] = 1.80$ ,  $p = .07$ ) and Groups (1) and (3) ( $t[208] = 1.41$ ,  $p = .16$ ), indicating that job seekers' appreciation was not a reason for non-response of the full survey. Further, we interviewed randomly selected non-respondents (Hulland et al., 2018). Job seekers and counselors revealed that a lack of time was the main reason for non-response. These results indicate that the samples are sufficiently representative.

**TABLE 3** Marker variable test based on Lindell and Whitney (2001)

Construct	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Job seeker (Level 1)									
(1) Perception of counselors' social support									
(2) Psychological capital	.25***								
	.25***								
(3) Stress	-.03	-.33***							
	-.03	-.33***							
(4) Appreciation for the counselor	.20**	.11	-.09						
	.20**	.10	-.09						
(5) Length of unemployment	.06	-.24***	.05	-.02					
	.07	-.23***	.05	-.01					
(6) COVID-19	-.06	-.16*	.00	-.07	.11				
	-.06	-.15*	.00	-.06	.10				
Counselor (Level 2)									
(7) Psychological capital	.11	.01	.12	.00	-.12	.11			
	.11	.03	.11	.00	-.13	.10			
(8) COVID-19	.11	-.04	.03	-.03	.05	-.08	-.35***		
	.11	-.06	.03	-.04	.06	-.07	-.34***		
(9) Marker variable	.04	.14	-.03	.07	-.08	-.12	-.11	.09	

Note: Correlations in italics represent partial correlations, excluding the marker variable.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 5.3 | Hypotheses testing

To examine Hypotheses 1–3, we followed the steps recommended by Peugh (2010) and ran several multilevel regressions for our Level 1 variables. We present the results in Table 4.

As suggested for multilevel analyses, we report the effect sizes of our models by estimating the proportional reduction in variance and the deviance statistics (Peugh, 2010; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The proportional reduction in variance quantifies how much variation of the outcome variable is explained by the predictors; Singer and Willett (2003) refer to it as a local pseudo- $R^2$  statistic. We calculate pseudo- $R^2$  using Snijders and Bosker's (2011) formula. As this pseudo- $R^2$  can also yield negative results, it needs to be interpreted with caution (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). The deviance statistics are defined as the  $-2\log$  likelihood of the model and show how well the variance estimates fit the data, with smaller values indicating a better fit of the model (Singer & Willett, 2003). As a likelihood ratio test yields incorrect results for REML estimation, we only report the change in deviance and no results of likelihood ratio tests (Peugh, 2010).

As Model 2 of Table 4 indicates, counselors' psychological capital has a significant, positive impact on job seekers' perception of counselors' social support ( $\gamma = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ), thus lending support to Hypothesis 1. This model is significantly different from Model 1, which contained only controls ( $\Delta - 2\log$  likelihood = 2.2;  $R^2 = 3.0\%$ ).

As Model 4 of Table 4 depicts, job seekers' perception of counselors' social support had a significant, positive impact on job seekers'

psychological capital ( $\gamma = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus lending support to Hypothesis 2. This model is significantly different from Model 3, which contains only controls ( $\Delta - 2\log$  likelihood = 14.60;  $R^2 = 7.1\%$ ).

We assess Hypothesis 3 using a procedure by Zhao et al. (2010) that has been validated in multilevel research (e.g., Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Following Zhao et al. (2010), we estimated the indirect effect using the bootstrapping method by Preacher and Hayes (2008) with a bias-corrected and accelerated confidence estimate. The unstandardized indirect effect ( $a \times b$ ) and bootstrapped confidence intervals reveal that the indirect effect is positive ( $a \times b = .088$ ) and significant with a 95% confidence interval of 0.009–0.223. The prerequisite for mediation is supported. To determine the type of mediation, we ran a model including the impact of predictor and mediator on the outcome variable. As Model 6 of Table 4 shows, the impact of job seekers' perception of counselors' social support on job seekers' psychological capital remains significant and positive ( $\gamma = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the impact of counselors' psychological capital on job seekers' psychological capital remains insignificant ( $\gamma = -.05$ ,  $p > .1$ ). This model is significantly different from Model 3, which contains only controls ( $\Delta - 2\log$  likelihood = 11.8;  $R^2 = 6.3\%$ ). These results suggest an indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Following our preliminary analysis, we examine Hypothesis 4 using OLS regression. As Model 4 of Table 5 shows, job seekers' psychological capital had a significant, negative impact on job seekers' stress ( $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ), lending support to Hypothesis 4. This

**TABLE 4** Results of hierarchical linear modeling

	Job seekers' perception of counselors' social support				Job seekers' psychological capital							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE
Intercept	3.91***	1.08	4.24***	1.02	5.85***	1.33	5.81**	1.34	5.82***	1.37	5.21**	1.64
Control (Level 1)												
Appreciation for the counselor	.17*	0.07	.17*	0.07	.20*	0.10	.13	0.10	.20*	0.10	.13	0.10
Length of unemployment	.09	0.14	.09	0.15	-.63***	0.20	-.66***	0.19	-.63***	0.20	-.66***	0.19
COVID-19	-.07	0.08	-.07	0.08	-.24*	0.11	-.21	0.11	-.24*	0.11	-.21	0.11
Control (Level 2)												
COVID-19	.07	0.06	.11	0.06	-.02	0.07	-.01	0.07	-.02	0.07	-.03	0.08
Group means of all Level 1 variables	Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		Included	
Job seeker (Level 1)												
Perception of counselors' social support							.44***	0.10			.44***	0.10
Counselor (Level 2)												
Psychological capital			.26*	0.12					-.01	0.16	-.05	0.17
Model information												
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	2.8%		3.0%		6.2%		7.1%		-.7%		6.3%	
Deviance	583.8		581.6		705.2		690.6		707		693.4	
Δ Deviance	-3.4		2.2		8.6		14.60		-1.80		11.80	

Note:  $N = 209$ .

Abbreviations: Coeff., coefficient; SE, standard error.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 5** Results of hierarchical linear regression

	Job seekers' stress									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4			
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE		
Control variables										
Appreciation for the counselor			-.20	0.15	-.20	0.14	-.18	0.15	-.15	0.14
Length of unemployment			.21	0.29	.28	0.29	.29	0.29	-.06	0.28
COVID-19 (job seeker)			-.03	0.17	-.06	0.17	-.07	0.17	-.17	0.17
COVID-19 (counselor)			.03	0.10	.10	0.11	.11	0.11	.07	0.10
Main effects										
Counselors' psychological capital					.42* <sup>†</sup>	0.21	.44* <sup>†</sup>	0.21	.38***	0.20
Job seekers' perception of counselors' social support							-.09***	0.16	.11***	0.15
Job seekers' psychological capital									-.53***	0.11
F ratio			.72		1.44		1.32		5.31***	
R <sup>2</sup>			.012		.032		.034		.135**	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>			-.007		.008		.005		.105	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>					.020*		.002		.107***	

Note:  $N = 209$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown.

Abbreviation: SE, standard error.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

model is significantly different from Model 1 of Table 5, which contains only controls ( $R^2 = 10.7\%$ ;  $p < .001$ ). These findings are robust when analyzing the data using HLM.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

This study offers unique contributions to the literature on job loss and the crossover model. We answer our two research questions and reveal that job seekers acquire the key resource of psychological capital by interacting with formal ties, which in our context refer to counselors working in employment agencies. We show furthermore that the crossover of psychological capital within formal ties occurs indirectly through social support.

First, we contribute to the job loss literature by explaining the relevance of formal ties for job seekers. We find that job seekers gain psychological capital through the perceived social support from counselors. While scholars assumed such a relationship (Chen & Lim, 2012; Lim et al., 2016), we are among the first to provide empirical support. We thus address a call by Wanberg, Ali, and Csillag (2020) for research to go beyond previous studies that focus predominantly on the role of informal ties for job seekers. Moreover, our study takes a societal perspective within the job loss literature, as we explain that institutions such as employment agencies increase job seekers' key resources, thereby reducing job seekers' stress. We identify formal ties as a so far largely overlooked lever that can be employed on a municipal or state level to influence job seekers positively, with counselors acting as valuable enablers. This finding is important, as Wanberg, Ali, and Csillag (2020, p. 329) call for research "to close the gap between those who can and those who cannot benefit from social network use." Previous studies suggest that informal ties might erode with persisting unemployment (e.g., Paul & Batinic, 2010), and our findings close this gap by showing that job seekers regain resources from formal ties. We contribute further to job loss research by addressing how job seekers can reduce the high levels of stress associated with job loss (Paul & Moser, 2009). Most job loss literature neglects job seekers' stress and focuses on improving job search skills (e.g., Wanberg, Hooft, et al., 2020). Our results extend these studies: We reveal that job seekers' psychological capital reduces their stress, which is a prerequisite for engaging in a successful job search (Wanberg et al., 2012). With this, we answer a call by Chen and Lim (2012, p. 834) for studies to establish a better understanding of "the process in which psychological capital affects reemployment." Scholars often refer to COR theory to suggest that social support as such alleviates stress (Hobfoll, 2002; Westman et al., 2004); our results, in contrast, show that social support increases job seekers' psychological capital and that it is this key resource that, in turn, reduces stress. Hence, we uncover an underlying mechanism that has been implied conceptually, but not yet examined empirically.

Second, we significantly advance our understanding of the domain, valence, and mechanism of crossover. We extend existing research on the domain, as we are among the first to explain the crossover effect in the institutional sphere and thus within formal ties.

Such formal ties are typically associated with weak ties and characterized by distant and infrequent interactions (Lipman & Longino, 1982). While previous studies find that crossover occurs within dyads that share frequent interactions (e.g., Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Zagenczyk et al., 2020), our results show that frequency is not necessarily a crossover precondition. Rather, we find empirical support that indirect crossover in formal ties is likely dependent on high-stress situations in which one individual is highly susceptible to the social support provided by the other individual. Such preconditions for indirect crossover have been assumed, but not empirically validated before (Bakker et al., 2009; Westman, 2001). Our study follows Makadok et al.'s (2018) guide for making theory contributions, as we add a new mode of theorizing to the crossover model, thereby generalizing the crossover effect also for formal ties within the institutional domain. We extend existing research on the valence of crossover by investigating the positive crossover of psychological capital. While most works focus on the negative crossover of emotional states (e.g., Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020), we answer calls by Chen et al. (2015) and Hobfoll et al. (2018) for research to explain the positive crossover of resources. Lastly, we advance research on the mechanisms of crossover by uncovering social support as an indirect mechanism, which has been called for (e.g., Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Westman, 2001). Linking personal resources (i.e., psychological capital) and interpersonal processes (i.e., social support) in an integrated research model is an important step (Hobfoll, 2002; Jolly et al., 2020), especially because results have been mixed so far: While some studies found significant evidence for the indirect crossover through social support (e.g., Westman et al., 2004), others did not (e.g., Brummelhuis et al., 2014). However, these studies investigated informal ties. In our institutional context of formal ties, the counselors' social support is affirmed as an indirect mechanism. Our findings thus add to the mixed results of previous studies and respond to Halbesleben (2006), who proposes considering the relevance of different sources of support in different domains when investigating crossover effects.

Overall, the theoretical relevance of our study lies in the conclusion that a crossover of psychological capital occurs within formal ties in high-stress situations. Our findings thus likewise contribute to research in other contexts of formal ties in which one individual is tasked to provide support while the other individual faces a resource loss—loss of health (i.e., hospitals) or loss of money (i.e., financial institutions)—and experiences stress (Wanberg, Csillag, et al., 2020).

### 6.1 | Limitations and opportunities for future research

As with all research, our study has potential limitations that future research could address.

In line with COR theory, the crossover model, and previous studies investigating hierarchical dyads (e.g., Carlson et al., 2019), we presumed a causal sequence of psychological capital crossing over from counselors to job seekers. While it was beyond the scope of our study

to investigate the effects on the counselor, this relationship might also be reciprocal, such that the psychological capital of the counselor crosses over to the job seeker and vice versa. We call on scholars to conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the potential reciprocal process of crossover effects.

We follow Hobfoll et al. (2018), who suggested a direct measurement of the key resource of psychological capital among job seekers. Future research could account for the influence of other resources, such as money or health, and the value that job seekers place on them. Moreover, we acknowledge that the scale of job seekers' psychological capital contains only two items for the subdimension of self-efficacy. While this might raise concerns of measurement invariance, our approach is in line with research conducted by Chen and Lim (2012) and Lim et al. (2016), and our measure of psychological capital proves to be reliable, supporting the reliability of our results.

Our research is among the first to establish the important role of counselors and thus of formal ties in providing job seekers with support. Future studies could investigate if the role of formal ties is more pronounced in different phases of unemployment, or if the internet as a job search tool complements or hinders the counselors in their support (e.g., Boswell et al., 2012).

Lastly, we draw our sample from an employment agency in Germany. COR theory suggests that the value of resources as well as the perception of stress differ across cultures (Hobfoll, 2002). Compared to similar studies conducted in Asia, we find no large difference in means or standard deviations of job seekers' psychological capital (Chen & Lim, 2012; Lim et al., 2016). However, we call on scholars to study other cultural contexts to generalize our results.

## 6.2 | Practical implications

This study has several practical implications for job seekers and counselors, formal institutions such as employment agencies, and lastly the government and society as a whole.

Job seekers benefit from our results, as we explain that the social support they perceive is positively related to the key resource of psychological capital, which, in turn, reduces their stress. Thus, job seekers learn that they can gain psychological capital by interacting with counselors. More broadly, job seekers benefit from paying greater attention to interactions with formal ties to build key resources and lessen their stress. Counselors benefit from our results, as they can see even greater value in their work and feel inspired to cultivate psychological capital in job seekers.

Formal institutions and agencies providing services to individuals who experienced a loss of resources likewise benefit from our results. Apart from employment agencies, our results are relevant for hospitals whose patients have lost the resource of health or for investment firms whose customers have lost the resource of money. Our findings suggest that formal institutions can reduce the stress experienced by these individuals (i.e., job seekers, patients, and customers) by actively investing in their employees' key resources (see Mao et al., 2020), which cross over to the stressed individuals. As research shows that

psychological capital can be developed (Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007), formal institutions are well advised not only to hire employees high in psychological capital but also to conduct trainings to enhance the psychological capital of existing employees.

Governments benefit from our results, as they see the impact of investing money in programs that develop psychological capital in employees involved in formal ties, such as counselors. Our study finds that these counselors function as multipliers, transferring their psychological capital to job seekers. In the long run, society as a whole might benefit from our results which highlight the importance of such counselors' role in building psychological capital and reducing the stress job seekers experience job seeker.

## 6.3 | Conclusion

This study explains the crossover of resources in formal ties. We examine a multilevel dyadic model, investigating the crossover of psychological capital from counselors to job seekers through job seekers' perception of counselors' social support. Job seekers' psychological capital reduces their stress. Our study sets the stage for further research on job loss and resource crossover.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> We conducted an additional analysis in which we excluded observations of counselors matched to only one or two job seeker observations. This overall sample size was 191 job seekers matched to 31 counselors. We find all results remain robust compared to the results based on the full dataset of 209 job seekers matched to 45 counselors.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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