# Theorizingantecedents of Perceived Organizational Support: A Literature Review Approach

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**Abstract:** This study is an attempt to highlight the dimensions of Perceived Organizational Support. From an extensive literature survey an attempt has been made to see the dimension. From literature it has been noticed that there are three forms of supports i.e. managerial, supervisory and coworkers' support that effects perception of organizational support. Managerial support includes support from organization in form of rewards, policies, procedures etc., supervisory and coworkers' support includes all forms of supports from leader or supervisor and coworkers' support.

**Key words:** Perceived organizational support · Managerial support · Supervisory support · Coworkers' support

## INTRODUCTION

**Conceptual Background of Perceived Organizational Support:** Since the inception of "perceived organizational" support there are numerous researchers who have paid attention on the various determinants of perception of organizational support. These factors range from fairness in organization, supervisory support, working conditions [1]; participation in decision making, access to information [2]; job characteristics and stress at job [3].

Previous section illustrates few of the examples given by various authors about outcomes of organizational support; yet there are tens of factors or antecedents of "perceived organizational support", but studying all the facets independently will not be an easy task. So these facets can be divided in some justifiable and appropriate categories. One of the categories or division is given Woo [4]. In the words of Woo [4], perceived organizational support is studied from three perspectives i.e. support from management, support from supervisor and coworkers support. Management supports their employees by

showing commitment towards them. Ahmed, Ismail, Amin and Ramzan [5] also recommended that organizational support can be attributed to these three types of supports. Organizations offer better rewards, better working conditions, promotion opportunities to employee, learning opportunities, better working environment and support of many other types that positively influences employees at work place. Same conclusion was made by Chou and Robert [6] while discussing facets of organizational support.

Organization is combination of people working to achieve some common goals. Human interaction at workplace makes all objectives achieve. Organizations give some vested authorities or rights to some employees over other employees on the basis of their knowledge, experience, or skill. These appointed authorities are considered to be agent of organization and any action performed by them is believed to be action of organization. So good are bad done by any employee would be conceived as good or bad from the organization. In the words of Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa [7], employees perceive organization like a human

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being and acts are considered to be the acts of human being. Similarly, agents performing tasks for the organization are itself organization and their actions will be actions of organization, as Levinson [8], mentioned that wishes and feelings of agents are the feelings and wishes of organization. Care from the employees or management will be considered as the care from the organization. This agency position is not only given to boss or supervisor, rather employees or coworkers/peers are also agents of organization, as they are also representative of organization. So it can be inferred that organization is having agency relation with all of its employees. From an employee perspective it can be inferred that there are two types of agents or representative of any organization i.e. supervisor/ boss/ leader and the other one is coworker or peer. So, while studying concept of "organizational support" the word organization should not be restricted only to organization but it should cover agents as well. Summing up, organizational support will include support from management, support from supervisor and support from coworkers or peers.

This study is focused on aforesaid three basic components of perceived organizational support i.e. management support, supervisor's support and coworkers' support. Following section covers literature on three forms of support.

**Managerial Support Factors:** Organizational support means support from organization. The most widely used and accepted definition of organizational support was given by Eisenberger *et al.*, [7]. They define "organizational support" as "employees' perception about the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being". Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk and Hochwarter [9] concluded that organizational support factors are very important to study. They inferred that when organization fails to meet their obligations towards employees, organizations face reduced level of perceived organizational support in the minds of employees. So in order to get positive image in the minds of employees, organizations should make attractive offers. Same notion was discussed by Ahmed *et al.*, [5] and Coyle-Shapiro and Conway [10] when they found that incentive inducements offered by organization create positive feelings about organizational support. So there is significant association between inducements and employees' perception of organizational support. As this definition is agreed upon and widely adopted, this study will consider perceived

Table 1: Managerial Support factors and its literary support

|  | Managerial Support Factors |
| --- | --- |
| Support Factors | Sources |
| Organizational justice | [11-15] |
| Reward and Recognition | [16-22] |
| Participation in Decision Making | [23-25] |
| Growth Opportunities | [16-18, 24] |
| Autonomy | [26-30] |
| Task variety | [3, 7, 31, 32] |
| Work overload | [3, 6, 33, 34] |
| Role Ambiguity | [3, 34-36] |
| Role Conflict | [3, 37, 38] |
| Job security | [1, 17, 37] |

organizational support in the same sense in which it is presented in this definition. The following section covers the main antecedent of perceived organizational support (organizational support factors) that is available in literature. The main antecedents being agreed upon in literature are organizational justice, participation in decision making, job itself, organizational reward system and availability of growth opportunities. The following sections address all these antecedents one by one.

Conclusively it can be derived that employee perception of organizational support is outcome of employee and organization relationship as noted by Eisenberger *et al.*, in [7]. This relationship is created and is based on the tradeoff between organization and employees. Employees offer their commitment, loyalty, motivation and other outcomes in return of the support that is offered by the organization. With reference to the antecedents of perceived organizational support the basic construct is exchange relation. This exchange may include both economic and social exchange.

In the words of Blau [39] exchange relation whether it is social or economic exchange is based on future expectations, but time frame and nature is different. Economic exchange is based on specific time frame and having contractual nature. On the other hand social exchange is open ended, informal and long term relation which is based on verbal obligation to "reciprocate" [39, 40]. All the up mentioned organizational factors are very important antecedents of perceived organizational support have a great bearing on the construct of perceived organizational support. This study covers all the organizational level antecedents of perceived organizational support. In the words of Ahmed *et al.*, [5]; Woo [4] and Chou and Robert[6], perceived organizational support has three constructs i.e. organizational/managerial support, supervisor support

and coworker's support. This section has addressed all organizational support factors. The forthcoming sections cover other factors i.e. supervisor's support and coworker's support.

**Supervisory Support:** Organization is combination of people who strive to achieve some common purpose. When an employee works in an organization, he has to interact with people around him/her. He has direct interaction with management, supervisor, coworkers and subordinates. Supervisors are more influential to have an impact on employees. They bridge the relation between management and employees. So they have to work on policies implementation as well as to look at how effectively they are working. The actions performed by supervisors are considered as the actions performed by the organization (supervisors' are considered as agents of the organization). In the words of Eisenberger *et al*. [7], employees perceive organization like a human being and acts are considered to be the acts of human being. Similarly, agents performing tasks for the organization are itself organization and their actions will be actions of organization, as Levinson [8], mentioned that wishes and feelings of agents are the feelings and wishes of organization. Jokisaari and Nurmi [41] comment that supervisor is an important element in the socialization process in an organization. This role is due to the functions that are being performed by the supervisor. Supervisor bridges the gap of management and organization, supervisor makes subordinates identify their goals, makes them achieve those goals and makes suggestions for rewards for their achievements.

Tekleab and Chiaburu [42]; Pack [43] and Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe [44] are of the view that provision of support from supervisor is an important source of employee's perception of support from the organization. They are of the view that both the constructs are independent but rise together. It is generally believed that supervisors work on the targets given by top level management and has to report at that level about the performance of each and every employee against each and every target, so this communication creates a link between feelings about the supervisor and feelings about the organization (perceived organizational support) [43]. In the word of Kottke and Sharafinski [45] it is evident from literature that along with appraisal from their organization, employees also received appraisal from their supervisor or leader or senior. This notion is called "supervisor's support" in literature. The term of

"supervisor support" is quite consistent with the notion given by Levinson [8], where he argues that employees view their supervisor in negative or positive sense and they consider it as a sign of organizational support? If a supervisor is supportive then employee will be having positive perception about organizational support. But if the belief about supervisor is opposite the corporate image of support will also be negative. This notion is validated by numerous researchers e.g. Eisenberger *et al*., [32]; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli [46].

Supervisor can also be called as a leader, because as a leader should be readily available to its followers, a supervisor should be there to help and make employees perform their tasks. This notion is also supported by Brown and Duguid [47], who discussed that leadership, is use of internal capabilities, skills, personality, experience and honesty under the banner of authority vested in and widely accepted by coworkers and followers. Similar comments are made by Hervey, Royal and Stout [48], when they discussed that leadership is all about achieving some objectives. Wayne, Shore and Liden [49] argue that the concept of Leader-member exchange can be attributed to supervisor's support and thus both the constructs can be used interchangeably. They further concluded that supervisor support is having great bearing on the employee's perception of organizational support as well. So, this study considers supervisors as leaders and literature on leaders-member exchange is considered as part of supervisor support.

Sluss, Klimchak and Holmes [50] concluded that higher the level of exchange between employee and his/her leader higher and positive will be employees' level of perception of organizational support. So it can be predicted that supervisor support (LMX) will predict overall organizational support. These findings are validated by numerous researchers; table 2 shows few of those:

In summing up it can be inferred that employees are in exchange relationship with their supervisor. If they perform well they will be rewarded from their supervisor, they reciprocate it with positive job attitudes and behaviors as they believe that care and reward is from organization (supervisor is agent of organization). This study considers this notion and takes organizational support and supervisor support being constructs of concept of perceived organizational support. Yet another construct that requires attention is coworkers/peer support, it is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Table 2: Supervisor's support as antecedent of Perceived Organizational Support

| | Supervisory Support as antecedent of POS |
|---|---|
| Relation | Researchers |
| Perception of organizational support as outcome of supervisory support | [1, 5, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 32, 41, 51-56] |

Table 3: Coworkers' support as determinant of POS

| | Coworkers' support as antecedent of POS |
|---|---|
| Relation | Researchers |
| Perception of organizational support as outcome of coworkers' support | [5, 56-59] |

**Coworkers' Support:** In the words of Eisenberger *et al.* [7], employees perceive organization like a human being and acts are considered to be the acts of human being. Similarly, agents performing tasks for the organization are itself organization and their actions will be actions of organization, as Levinson [8], mentioned that wishes and feelings of agents are the feelings and wishes of organization. Care from the employees or management will be considered as the care from the organization. This agency position is not only given to boss or supervisor, rather employees or coworkers, also termed as peers, are also agents of organization, as they are also representative of organization. So it can be inferred that organization is having agency relation with all of its employees. From an employee perspective it can be inferred that there are two types of agents or representative of any organization i.e. supervisor/boss/leader and the other one is coworker or peer. So, while studying concept of "organizational support" the word organization should not be restricted only to organization but it should cover agents as well. Summing up, organizational support will include support from organization, support from supervisor and support from coworkers or peers. Table 3 covers literature which has discussed coworkers' support as an important antecedent of organizational support.

The aforesaid literature is evident that support from peers can influence employees positively and it can also be noticed that support from coworkers can positively influence employees' perception of support from organization.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Previous sections are evident of the fact that perceived organizational support has been observed to be an area of great importance. Its significance has been accepted since its emergence and is increasing with each passing day. While identifying the causes or antecedents of organizational support at work, this study opens a new horizon by adding value to existing body of knowledge, as the existing studies consider unidimensional nature of perceived organizational support; but this study enlightens this concept and explains that how employees perception of organizational support can be segregated into various concepts like managerial support, supervisor support and coworker support. Conclusively, it is drawn from the study that managerial support, supervisor support and coworker support are the three basic constructs of organizational support which effect employees' perception of organizational support.

This research also confines that concept of perceived organizational support can't only be explained by organizational support theory, but leader member exchange theory and social exchange theory are also equally important in order to grasp the true perspectives of perceived organizational support.

Thus this study opens new avenues for discussion and welcomes researchers to debate on the issue in more comprehensive way.

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