

Perceived Support and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the perceived social support and organizational commitment. 415 employees from sport service organization completed questionnaires measuring their perception of coworker support, supervisor support, organizational support, affective commitment, and normative commitment. The results indicated that perceived social support had a significant and positive impact on organizational commitment. This evidence provides strong rationale that organizations need to care for their employee's well-being to foster their commitment level.

Key words : Social Exchange Theory, Social Support, Sport Organization, Affective Commitment

1 . Introduction

There has been growing emphasis for organizations on increasing the flexibility of their workforce, creating more meaningful values, and cutting budget in order to gain competitive advantage in this rapidly changing environment (Atkinson & Meager, 1986). This trend requires employees to possess more wisdom, commitment, interpersonal relationship skills, and to take greater responsibility for their own career development. London and Stumpf (1986) suggests that employees should have better adaptive skill and self-managed career development skill in order to gain advantages and survive in their workplace. As such, employees are taking

more and more individual responsibility in the face of this changing situation and it is necessary for organizations to produce relatively more social support for employees in order to keep them motivated and avoid the intention to leave organizations. As a matter of fact, employees' overall work experience highly depends on the amount of support provided by the organization.

The support in the organizational settings is classified into three categories including coworker support, supervisor support, and organizational support (Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008). Coworker support is the employee's adoption of informational resources emotionally, instrumentally from coworkers (Ellis &

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Miller, 1994). Supervisor supports, similarly, refers to the degree to which supervisors provide the same kinds of support to their employees while organizational support involves employees' beliefs about how much the organization concerns their contribution and well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Previous research studies indicate that this perceived support is a significant factor influencing employee organizational commitment, defined as the strength of personal attachment toward the organization (Arnold, Cooper, & Robertson, 1998). Meyer and Allen (1991) classified the organizational commitment into three basic categories such as affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment in the organization because they want to do so." (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). In addition, Meyer and Allen (1991) refer to normative commitment as the degree to which employees feel obligated to the organization and employees with a high level of commitment "feel that they ought to remain with the organization (p. 67)". However, this study removed the continuance commitment since this variable showed unacceptable reliability (below .70).

Social exchange theory (Setton, Bennett, & Liden, 1996) explains the above relationship between perceived support at work and employee commitment. Blau (1964) indicates so-

cial exchange 'this for that' which means a person will provide support as a means of exchanging the perceived support provided by organizations. For instance, in the case of employees, if they feel supervisors support them, and then they will work for the supervisor's benefit as a means of trade-off. In addition, the extent to which employees feel their organizations concern about their benefits and well-being, they would be more likely to work for organizational success (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoads, 2001). As a matter of fact, there have been a number of studies showing the positive relationship between employees' perceived support and organizational commitment. For example, Ahmad and Baker (2003) found that coworker and supervisor support has a positive impact on affective commitment while Wang (2008) found there is a positive association between those sources of supports and normative commitment. In the similar vein, Lee and Gao's study (2005) with Korean employees, coworker support and supervisor support both were positively related to affective commitment. Furthermore, previous research studies indicate that employee's perceived social support has a potential to influence individual outcomes in organizational setting such as turnover intention, work effort, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior. However, this study will be particularly interested in work effort and intention to leave as individual outcomes since the relationship among organizational commitment,

work effort, and intention to leave has been well established by previous research studies (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2002; Shore, Sy, & Strauss, 2006; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhodes, 2001).). In this study, employees' work effort and intention to leave will be nested into the construct "employee attitude" since those two concepts are related to how employees think about and perceive of their work or organizations. Regarding organizational support, Eisenberger et al. (2001) found the reciprocity nature of employees' perceived organizational support and job performance among postal employees in that the perceived organizational support had a significant impact on withdrawal behavior negatively.

In sum, previous research studies have shown adequately that employees' perception of social support from coworkers, supervisors, and organizations had a significant impact on organizational commitment.

1. Purpose of the Study

To sum up, this study proposes the model explaining the perceived support from coworker, supervisor, and organizations has an impact on employee's organizational commitment (e.g., affective and normative commitment). Thus, the purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between perceived support and organizational commitment.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The targeted sample for this study was fitness club employees with various positions such as administrative staff, fitness instructors / trainers, sales people, and front desk employees. Collecting data from ACSM (American College of Sport Medicine) certified fitness employees who have full time and/or part time positions in fitness clubs allows this study to draw participants from a variety of positions spread across the nation. The current study was initiated with 454 participants at first but lost 39 participants during SEM analysis due to missing data, which makes the total participants 415. Most of the respondents were females (66.4%) and the largest group of the respondents was those whose age range was between 21 and 30. While the same number of respondents was employed as full time (50.0%) and part time (50.0) most respondents worked for profit organization than non-profit organizations (67.9).

In addition, the job position that was held most frequently by respondents was instructor / trainer whereas the average number of years the employees worked in the organization was 4.03 years. For the sample, the number of years the employees had worked in the organization ranged from one month to 28 years, one to three years being the most common. The average number of years the employees worked in the profession was 7.61 years.

2. Instrument

Co-worker support. Co-worker support is defined as the employee's adoption of informational resources emotionally, instrumentally from co-workers (Ellis & Miller, 1994). The construct of co-worker support was measured by four-item scale modified from Ducharme and Martin's (2000) ten-item scale. Item responses are based on a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) and 7 (very strongly agree). The reported internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) in the previous studies ranged from .76 to .83 (Ducharme & Martin, 2000).

Supervisor support. Supervisor supports refers to the degree to which supervisors provide the same kinds of support to their employees (Ellis & Miller, 1994). The researcher adopted four highest loading items from Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly's (2002) six-item scale to measure supervisor support. Item responses are based on a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) and 7 (very strongly agree). The reported internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) for Anderson et al.'s scale in the previous studies was good ranged from .89 to .92 (Ducharme & Martin, 2000).

Organizational support. Organizational support involves employees' beliefs about how much the organization concerns their contribution and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Since the original scale contained 36

items, researchers have attempted to use shorter versions of this scale due to the parsimonious issue. The Cronbach's alpha for the shorter versions of the scales ranged from .82 to .98 (Eisenberger et al., 1997). The current study reduced the items from 36 to 8, which showed the highest loading numbers. Item responses are based on a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) and 7 (very strongly agree).

Affective commitment. Affective commitment is defined as "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment in the organization because they want to do so." (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). The researcher adopted four items from Meyer et al.'s (1993) six-item affective commitment scale in order to assess this construct. However, two items were excluded in this research because those two items has shown considerably lower factor loading compared to other items (e.g., Meyer et al., 1993). Item responses are based on a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) and 7 (very strongly agree). The reported internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) in the previous studies was good ranged from .85 to .89 (Meyer et al., 1993).

Normative commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) refer to normative commitment as the degree to employees feel obligated to the organization and employees with a high level of commitment "feel that they ought to remain

with the organization (p. 67)". The researcher adopted utilized Meyer et al.'s (1993) six-item normative commitment scale in order to assess this construct. However, two items were excluded in this research because those two items has shown considerably lower factor loading compared to other items (e.g., Meyer et al., 1993). Item responses are based on a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) and 7 (very strongly agree). The reported internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) in the previous studies was good ranged from .70 to .82 (Meyer et al., 1993).

3. Data Collection

A web-based survey was utilized for all participants. In order to complete the survey, the researcher obtained email addresses of the employees from ACSM and the email message, which contains a survey link, was sent out to the participants. Reminder emails were sent out after one week of initial emailing. Selectsurvey.net software was used for the online questionnaire, which is available through the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University. The questionnaire is initiated with the informed consent, which informs confidentiality, the participation in the study is voluntary, and encourages the participants to answer the items as honestly as possible. Demographic information will include participant's age, race/ethnicity, gender, type of organization they work for, employment status,

primary job, the number of years for the organization, and years worked in the profession. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Ohio State University prior to the administration of any of the instruments.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted in a two-step process. In the first step of data analysis, the calculation of descriptive statistics for the used variables was conducted and the reliability of the subscales of each instrument was investigated. Pearson correlations were calculated for all proposed variables. Second, the current study used structural equation modeling (SEM). The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique that is available through Lisrel 8.80 was utilized to perform SEM. Lisrel 8.80 provides the following measure of fit: Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standard Root Mean Residua (SRMR), and chi-square value divided by degrees of freedom. The researcher used maximum likelihood estimation to evaluate the fit of the model. For GFI, values higher than .95 are considered to have a good fit. In addition, RMSEA and SRMR values less than .05 indicates good fit of the model and values less than .08 indicates a reasonable fit. Meanwhile, values greater than .08 indicates a poor fit and the model should not be considered (Browne & Cudeck, 1992).

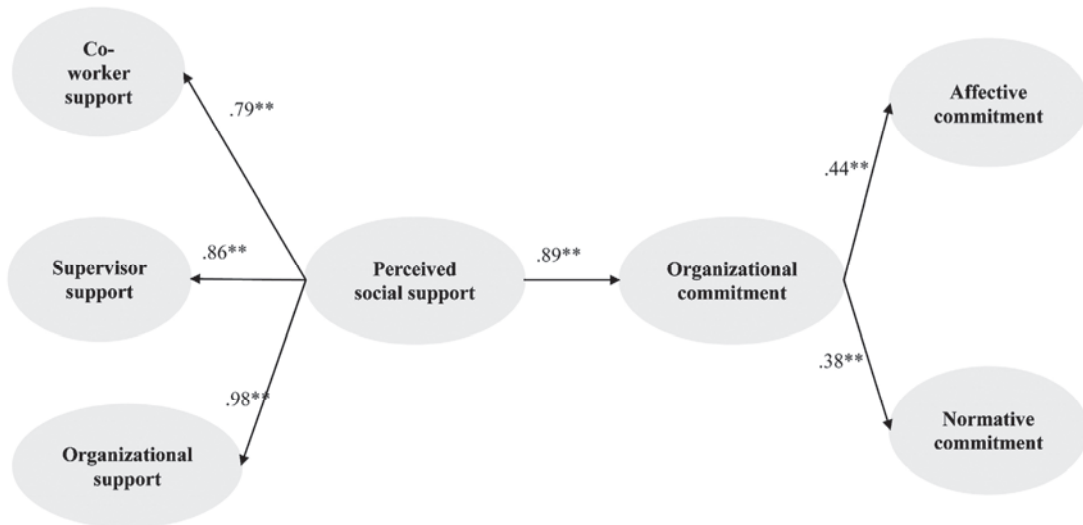


Figure 1. The final model of association between perceived support and organizational commitment

III. RESULT

1. Reliability and Validity

The present study revealed that the coefficient alphas for each subscale were acceptable based on Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) criterion of alpha being greater than .70. In addition, the present study calculated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which show the amount each item contributes to explaining the specified construct in order to assess construct reliability of the scale. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), it is assumed that AVE values greater than .50 are considered acceptable construct reliability. Finally, the researcher examined the correlations between the constructs in order to de-

termine discriminant validity of each construct. Although Kline (2005) suggested correlations above .85 between constructs are considered low discriminant validity, Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Balck (1998) argued that it is acceptable the constructs can be considered distinct from each other if previous research classified those constructs theoretically.

2. Evaluation of the Measurement and Structural Model

As the both proposed variables constitute the second-order factors, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for both variables. As shown in Figure 1, first order factors of co-worker support ($\beta = .79$; $p < .001$), supervisor support ($\beta = .86$; $p < .01$), and organizational support ($\beta = .98$; $p < .01$) defined the second-order factor of per-

ceived social support. Further, first-order factor of affective commitment ($\beta = .44$; $p < .01$) and normative commitment ($\beta = .38$; $p < .01$) defined the second-order factor organizational commitment well. Finally, structural equation modeling was conducted to test all hypotheses in our theoretical model. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicated that the structural model showed a reasonable fit, $\chi^2/df = 10.440/4 = 2.66$ ($p < .05$); RMSEA = .059, SRMR = .077, TLI = .95, CFI = .96. As shown in Figure 1, perceived social support had a significant and positive impact on organizational commitment of affective and normative commitment ($\beta = .89$; $p < .01$).

IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to propose a model explaining the relationship between perceived social support and organizational commitment. Specifically, perceived support consists of co-worker support, supervisor support, and organizational support; organizational commitment includes affective commitment and normative commitment.

The model, which consists of perceived support and organizational commitment, showed a good fit and the result suggests that the degree to employees' perception of social support in the workplace predicts good commitment. As such, the most important finding of the study is that the modified model is well applicable to the fitness industry employees regardless of the

type of organizations. First of all, this result is consistent with previous findings (Eisenerger et al., 2001; Pack, Jordan, Turner, & Haines, 2007) in the perceived support is a good predictor of affective commitment to the organization. The results indicated that fitness club employees' perception of receiving support from co-worker, supervisor, and organization is positively associated with their affective commitment. The more they feel they received support, the more they commit to the organization affectively. Therefore, the current study demonstrates the relationship between perceived support and organizational commitment established in other fields is also well applied to fitness industry. This finding is consistent with previous studies regarding perceived support in the business domain. For example, Settoon, Bennet, and Liden (1996) found there was a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment with the samples of hospital employees. In addition, it was consistent with Shore et al.'s (2006) finding that supervisor support explained 25% of the variance in affective commitment among employees.

The relationship can be explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Those fitness employees who perceive that they are receiving support at workplace reciprocate the favorable treatment through positive work attitude (i.e., increased affective commitment and normative commitment).

1. Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study

The findings derived by the current study have significant theoretical implications. First of all, the findings have a potential extending the existing literature regarding the role perceived support on organizational outcomes. While many studies have examined the relationship between distinct sources of support and work attitude (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2002; Kidd & Smewing, 2001; Simons & Jankowski, 2008), this study extended the previous findings by looking at the fitness industry. Therefore, the current study supports that the relationship between the constructs established in the domain of business are also well applicable to the fitness industry. This may be because fitness industry is also considered as business and the majority of participants in the current study were employees of for-profit fitness clubs.

The current study also has a practical implication. First of all, the findings suggest that managers need to focus on providing social support in order to positively influence employees' commitment. In other words, one of the most effective ways to increase affective and normative commitment in the fitness club setting is through providing support from several sources in the workplace. Therefore, it provides useful information to the managers on how to increase employees' level of affective and normative commitment.

2. Limitations and Future Study Direction

Based on the results of the current study, many future studies can be suggested. First of all, future studies should refine scales of the employees' attitude such as work effort and intention to leave in order to examine the further relationship of organizational commitment. It would be important to find the consequences of organizational commitment or antecedents of work effort and turnover intention. That is because increasing employees' work effort is important in service organizations in that the degree to the employees put their effort will determine employees' service quality and impact organizational performance (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Also, controlling employees' turnover rate is crucial in fitness industry because turnover rate is higher in fitness organizations compared to other domain of industry. Boshoff and Allen (2000), mentioned that employees' turnover greatly influenced organizational performance negatively because if the organization experience unexpected turnover, it would disrupt the organization's operations. Such organizations need to hire new employees and training those new employees require higher amount of cost and time.

Secondly, future studies may consider applying the proposed model to different occupations in the sport setting such as fitness employees, coaches, sport administrators, physical education teachers, and athletes as well. Finally, the model presente in this study may

be tested in other distinct culture. According to Hofstede (1980), the culture can be classified into two categories: individualism and collectivism and there may be difference in the result depending on the distinctive culture impacts.

III. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship among perceived support, organizational commitment, and employees' attitude by proposing a conceptual model. The 454 American fitness employees participated in the current study and SEM was conducted to see the model of fit. Because of the insignificant relationship between perceived support and employees' attitude, and insufficient variances from work effort to employees' attitude, the model dropped the employees' attitude latent variable. As such, this study used two latent variables (i.e., perceived support and organizational commitment) and five observed variables (i.e., coworker, supervisor, and organizational support; affective and normative commitment).

In summary, the result of the current study suggests that perceived support has a significant impact on employees' level of affective commitment and normative commitment. The finding has a potential suggesting many theoretical and managerial implications as discussed earlier and extending the sport management literatures.

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