Fostering Organizational Commitment of Employees via Organizational Support Practices

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ABSTRACT

Having loyal and committed employees these days is a major challenge for any organization especially for service organizations where the effectiveness of organization mainly depends on the behaviour and performance of the people. The way employees behave and perform mainly depends on how they view their organization in terms of: providing them necessary support whenever in need; working for their betterment; and appreciating their work efforts. When employees perceive that the organization values them as a member of organization, cares about their well-being and provides them necessary work support, they try to reciprocate by being loyal and committed, improving their performances, and indulging in such behaviours that are beneficial for the organization. Such perception of employees also called as perceived organizational support (POS) can be influenced by many factors which the organizations need to manage and monitor. This paper is an attempt to provide an idea of perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and the relationship thereof. Further, the paper provides for the role of various organizational support practices from the existing literature (such as participation in decision making, growth opportunities, fairness of rewards, leader-member exchange and work-family support), in improving the support perceptions of employees positively and eventually in enhancing commitment of employees towards the organization.

Keywords: Organizational Support Practices, Organizational Commitment, Performance, Perceived Organizational Support.

INTRODUCTION

Today, organizations face stiff competition due to the fast changing business practices and thus there arises the challenge of creating more value in an environment of growing requirements and limitations. To face these challenges and reach their goals, organizations require best use of available resources. Human resources are the key sources that can facilitate an organization to accomplish best out of other existing resources. According to Robbins (1996), improving the performance of the employees and ultimately the organizations is among the major goals of

every active and alive organization. Hence studying the factors effective on the performance of the organizations is the main source in directing the managers towards achieving this goal. Employee performance is basically dependent on several organizational elements that shape their environment. The way an employee views his organization in terms of; providing them necessary help whenever needed; making efforts for their satisfaction at work; working for their betterment as well as appreciating their efforts will largely determine their performance as well as their loyalty and commitment towards it. This means that employees expect best possible rewards from their organization for the dedication they show in achieving their tasks and organizational goals. All these challenge the organizations for developing best human resource strategies in order to provide for the efficient management of human resources which in turn is imperative for overall development of human society.

On one side organizations want their employees to be loyal and committed to them and on the other side employees want their organization to pay back for their work efforts by being committed to their needs. So, it can be inferred that there is an exchange relationship between organization and employees. This notion of reciprocation is assessed by the concept of perceived organizational support. Research on perceived organizational support began with the observation that if managers are concerned with their employees' commitment to the organization, employees are focused on the organization's commitment to them (Eisenberger et al., 2004). The concept of perceived organizational support has its roots in organizational support theory. Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995) holds that in order to meet socio-emotional needs and to assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form general perceptions concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

The research literature indicates that employees' perception of organizational support is positively related to a number of outcomes favorable to both the organization and the individual namely conscientiousness in carrying out conventional job responsibilities, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009). Therefore the level of support as perceived by the employees needs to be constantly reviewed to ensure favorable outcomes to the organization which ultimately leads to profitability (Krishhan & Mary, 2012). This also puts a challenge before the management to indulge in such organizational support practices that can improve the support perceptions of employees, which can ultimately increase the commitment of employees towards the organization. This study provides an idea of the influence that perceived organizational support has on commitment of employees on the basis of available literature. Further, it provides for the various support practices that when incorporated by the management can influence the perceived organization support of employees positively.

PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) has been defined in numerous ways by various authors and attempts have been made to simplify the concept. According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), perceived organizational support is a general belief that employees develop concerning the extent

to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Erdogen and Enders (2007) have said, "Perceived organizational support refers to the degree to which an individual believes that the organization cares about him/her, values his/her input and provides him/her with help and support". In other words POS captures employees' belief concerning the extent to which the organization is committed to them. The concept of perceived organizational support has its roots in organizational support theory (OST). According to organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995), employees attribute human like characteristics to organization and this encourages the development of perceived organizational support. Levinson (1965) suggested that the actions taken by agents of the organization are seen as the indication of the organization's intent. Such personification of the organization gives legal, moral and financial responsibility for the actions of organization's agents. Based on organization's personification, the favourable or unfavourable treatment received by the employees are viewed an indication that the organization favours or disfavours them. Further the organizational support theory holds that, the treatment received by employees contribute more to POS if they believe that it results from the organization's discretionary actions, and not because of external constraint such as union negotiations or governmental health and safety regulations (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Shore & Shore, 1995). According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), three major categories of beneficial treatment received by employees (i.e., fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards and favourable job conditions) are associated with POS, which in turn, is related to a number of outcomes which are favourable to both the employees (e.g., job satisfaction, positive mood) and to the organization (e.g., affective commitment, performance, and withdrawal behaviours).

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organizational commitment has been defined in a variety of ways by different researchers in the past. Newstrom and Davies (2002) described organizational commitment as the degree to which an employee identifies with the organization and wants to continue active participation in it. They further stated that organizational commitment is a measure of willingness to remain with the firm in the future. It often reflects the employee's belief in the mission and goals of the firm, willingness to expend effort in their accomplishment and intentions to continue working in the organization. According to Mullins (1999) there are three processes or stages of commitment: Compliance, where a person accepts the influence of others mainly to obtain something from others, such as pay; this is followed by: Identification, in which the individual accepts influence in order to maintain a satisfying relationship and to feel pride in belonging to the organization; which leads to; Internalization, in which the individual finds the values of the organization to be intrinsically rewarding and compatible with the personal values.

Allen and Meyer (1990) have identified commitment in three forms: affective commitment, which essentially concerns an employee's emotional attachment to his organization; continuance commitment, which concerns an employee's perception of the costs and risks associated with

leaving his current organization and; normative commitment which is a morale dimension concerning employee's felt obligation and responsibility to his employing organization.

Meyer et al. (1993) stated that organizational commitment of employees can be influenced by personal characteristics of employees (e.g. age, gender, experience), work experiences (e.g., support from organization, treatment received), and organizational characteristics (structure, culture, organizational level policies).

A highly committed person will probably see himself or herself as a true member of the firm, overlook minor sources of dissatisfaction, and see him or herself remaining a member of the organization. In contrast, a less committed person is more likely to see himself or herself as an outsider (Reichheld, 1993). Organizational commitment can lead to increase in in-role and extra-role performance, reduced withdrawal behaviours and less turnover intentions and such other behaviours that are beneficial for the organization.

PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The way employees interpret their organizational environment has a major impact on their attitude, motivation, performance, and well-being (Brown and Leigh, 1996). Eisenberger et al. (1990) suggested that a worker's perception of how an organization values him/her may be essential for determining his/her attitudes benefiting the organization.

The relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment is generally explained by norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Social exchange and reciprocity theories suggest that employees feel an obligation to help those who helped them. From the social exchange perspective, Eisenberger et al. (1986) argued that employees' beliefs concerning their organizations' commitment to them in turn contribute to the employees' commitment to their organizations. High perceived organizational support creates such an obligation from employees that they not only ought to be committed to their organizations, but also feel an obligation to return the organizations' commitment by showing behaviours that support organizational goals. It is therefore reasonable to expect that in organizational setting, POS will prompt a desire to repay benefits offered by the organization by; greater identification with the organization (affective commitment), a feeling of obligation towards the organization (normative commitment) and ; relative increase in the costs of leaving the organization (thereby increasing continuance commitment).

According to Tourangeau and Cranley (2006), perceived organizational support is an important factor that indirectly affects the intention to remain employed. Tumwesigye (2010) highlighted significant positive relationships between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. They also found organizational commitment and support as negatively associated with turnover intentions. Similarly, Islam et al. (2013) found perceived organizational support positively influencing affective and normative commitment while influencing negatively on turnover intentions. The results also showed that affective and normative commitment performs the role of a mediator between perceived organizational support and turnover intentions.

Currie and Dollery (2006) found that perceived organizational support was significant in predicting affective and normative commitment. However perceived organizational support did not significantly predict continuance Commitment. Similarly, another study based on a cross-sectional research design conducted in an organizational setting by Aube et al. (2007), found perceived organizational support significantly correlated with affective and normative commitment. Ucar and Otken (2013) indicated a significant relationship of perceived organizational support with affective commitment and normative commitment, but a negative relationship between perceived organizational support and continuance commitment.

Fuller et al. (2003) studied perceived organizational support and organizational commitment through Organizational Based Self Esteem (OBSE) from a social identity perspective. Social identity theory states that "people remain loyal when they feel that their organizations value and appreciate them" (Tyler, 1999). According to social identity theory, when people think that their organization appreciates and values them, this is an indication of organizational respect for them (Tyler, 1999). This can be interpreted as a form of organizational support.

Overall, it appears that employees with higher levels of POS are likely to be more committed and possibly more willing to engage in extra role or "organizational citizenship" behaviors than are employees who feel that the organization does not value them as highly.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT PRACTICES

By organizational support practices, we mean such practices that when incorporated by the organizations can influence the support perceptions of employees positively. Research has shown that several types of antecedents are important for development of POS, including: perceptions of organizational justice and politics (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Moorman et al., 1998); Job conditions (Eisenberger et al., 1999); Supervisor support (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997); Personality (Aquino and Griffeth, 1999) and; Human Resource (HR) practices (Wayne et al., 1997). Based on Wayne et al. (1997), HR practices that imply the organization values and cares about employees were taken into consideration. A supportive HR practice in this context is one that indicates investment in the employee or recognition of employee contributions, and is discretionary in the sense that the organization is not obligated to offer the practice to everyone (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore and Shore, 1995).

Allen et al. (2003) found that perceptions of supportive human resource practices (participation in decision making, fairness of rewards, and growth opportunities) contribute to the development of POS, which in turn, mediates their relationship with organizational commitment. Accordingly, several HR practices are very important in showing support for employees and when the same are practiced in the organization can improve the support perceptions of employees and ultimately enhance their commitment towards the organization.

Growth Opportunities

Wayne et al. (1997) argued that growth opportunities indicate that the organization recognizes and values the employee's contributions and imply future support from the organization; they found a significant positive relationship between both promotions and developmental

experiences and perceived organizational support. Likewise, various other studies revealed that perception of career development opportunities have a significant positive impact on POS (e.g. Allen et al., 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000). This suggests that organizations that provide employees with opportunities to extend their potential and build up their capabilities, which help meet employees' needs for personal growth, are likely to be viewed as supportive and caring about employees' well-being.

Participation in Decision Making

Employee participation in decision making should also signal that the employee's contributions are valued. Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that having influence over policy should be examined as a possible sign of perceived organizational support. Allen et al. (2003) found employee participation in decision making positively contributing to perceived organizational support.

Fairness of Rewards

Fasolo (1995) argued that being recognized and rewarded fairly would seem to signal that an organization cares about the well-being of the employee and is willing to invest in them. Rhoades et al. (2001) found that perceptions of organizational rewards and procedural justice predicted perceived organizational support. Likewise, Allen et al. (2003) found fairness in rewards significantly contributing to the support perceptions of employees.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Eisenberger et al. (1986) maintained that leaders or supervisors often act as agents of the organization and have the responsibility of directing and evaluating their subordinates' performance. Therefore, employees view their supervisor's favourable or unfavourable treatment towards them as an indicative of the organization's support. Wayne et al. (1997) found POS and leader-member exchange had a mutual influence on each other. They concluded that, the quality of leader-member exchange appears to have a stronger effect on perceived organizational support, indicating that leader-member exchange plays a key role in affecting employees' perceptions of organizational support. Likewise, Sluss et al. (2008) 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.

Work-Family Support

Armeli et al. (1998) suggested that POS can be related to such organizational actions that strengthen employee beliefs that the organization would provide sympathetic understanding and material help to deal with stressful situations at work or home. By providing such understanding and help, organizations would fulfill the employee's need for emotional support and interpersonal relationships, thus enhancing employee POS. It is very likely that if the organization provides a high level of work-family support, the employees will consider the organization as more focused of their well-being and being more supportive. Kossek and Nichol (1992) found work-family support positively contributing to support perceptions of employees.

Likewise, Guzzo et al. (1994) found POS positively related to perceived sufficiency of family-oriented actions among a group of expatriate managers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Figure 1 provides the conceptual framework of the relationship between organizational support practices, perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. From the review of literature, it is clear that practicing supportive HR practices (growth opportunities, participation in decision making, fairness of rewards, leader-member exchange and work-family support), can increase the support perceptions of employees positively and that can ultimately increase the commitment of employees towards the organization.

Organizational Support Practices
- Growth Opportunities
- Participation in Decision Making
- Fairness of Rewards
- Leader-Member Exchange
- Work-Family Support

→ **Perceived Organizational Support** → **Organizational Commitment**
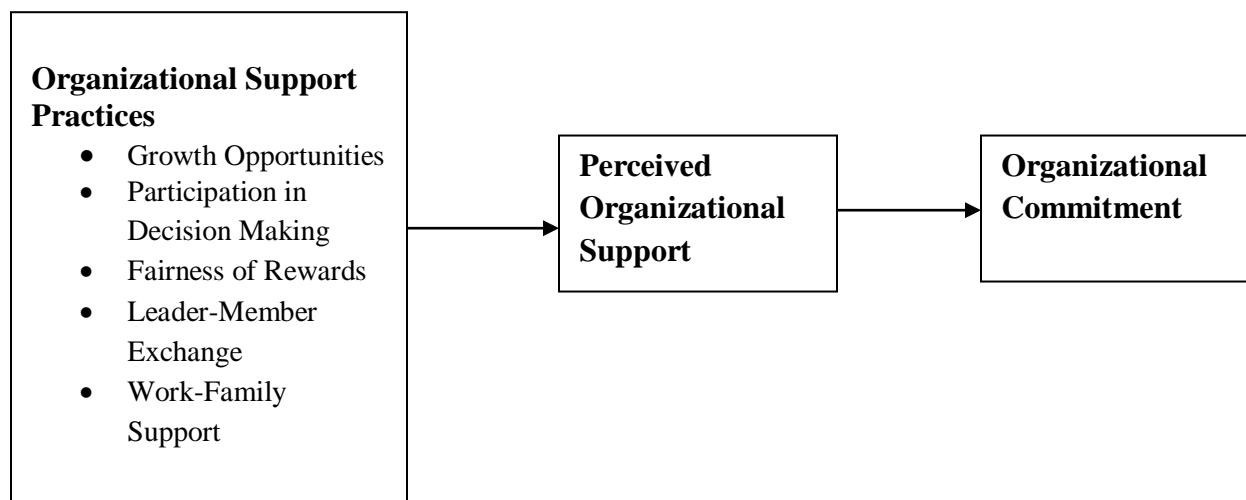
Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between organizational support practices, perceived organizational support and organizational commitment.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Organizations need to make efforts to understand and analyze the aspects which affect the performance of employees. The literature review indicates that perceived organizational support and organizational commitment are very crucial for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. It also highlights the role of positive support perceptions in increasing the commitment of employees towards their employer. It can be inferred from the literature that when employees feel supported, their contribution towards organization is always positive which eventually helps organization to achieve its goals. Moreover, the existing literature emphasizes the role of various organizational support practices in increasing the support perceptions of employees. Organizational support practices in this context are those practices which indicate investment in the employee or recognition of employee contributions, and are discretionary. Human Resource practices like participation in decision making, growth opportunities, fairness in rewards, work-family support and leader-member exchange, are all crucial for development of positive support perceptions as these indicate investment in the employees, and also imply that the organization values and care about them.

Managers should take time to discover such organizational resources that are valued by employees and take measures to provide such resources where possible. On the basis of above discussion, it is suggested that the management of a firm must employ such discretionary or voluntary practices that are required to attain commitment from its employees. They should provide employees with opportunities: to extend their potential and build up their capabilities (growth opportunities); to have influence over organizational policies (participation in decision making). Management should also provide fair recognition and rewards to employees (fairness of rewards); promote a supportive and positive exchange between supervisors and their subordinates (leader-member exchange); and offer sympathetic understanding and material help to deal with stressful situations at work or home whenever needed (work-family support). These are some of the discretionary support practices which when incorporated in organizations can help management to increase support perceptions of employees positively and eventually increase their commitment towards the organization.

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