A Social Identity Perspective on the Relationship Between Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Commitment

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Researchers have consistently found perceived organizational support (POS) to be positively related to organizational commitment (e.g., Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). POS is defined as people’s “global beliefs about the extent to which the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501). The relationship between POS and organizational commitment is based on social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). That is, because commitment can be an exchange commodity, people are likely to become committed to an organization when they feel that the organization is committed to them. Because no research had explored other theoretical explanations for the relationship between POS and organizational commitment, the present study was designed to examine that relationship from a perspective of social identity theory.

Social identity theory suggests that people “remain loyal when they feel that their organizations ... value and appreciate them” (Tyler, 1999, p. 235). However, social identity theory maintains that when people feel that their organization values and appreciates them, it is a sign of organizational respect for them or of

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their high status within the organization (Tyler). High status is likely to increase people's organizational commitment because it enhances their social identity (Tyler). Therefore, because social identity is reflected in people's self-esteem (Chattopadhyay, 1999), the relationship between people's POS and organizational commitment is likely to be mediated to some degree by their organization-based self-esteem (OBSE). OBSE is "an employee's evaluation of his or her personal adequacy and worthiness as an organizational member" (Gardner & Pierce, 1998, p. 50).

Participants were 104 employees of a chain of convenience stores in the southern United States. They voluntarily completed a survey distributed during work hours. Of the sample, 29 (approximately 28%) were male, and 75 (approximately 72%) were female, with over half reporting some level of college education: 46% had graduated from high school, 44% had some college experience, and 11% had a college degree. We measured POS with Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) scale (17 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$). We measured OBSE with Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham's (1989) scale (10 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). We measured organizational commitment with Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979) scale (9 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

POS correlated with the participants' OBSE ($r = .61; p < .01$) and organizational commitment ($r = .71; p < .01$). OBSE also correlated with the participants' organizational commitment ($r = .57; p < .01$). We used structural equation modeling (LISREL 8.3) to test a fully mediated model, $\chi^2(592, N = 104) = 787.74, p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .057; and comparative fit index (CFI) = .87; and a partially-mediated model, $\chi^2(591, N = 104) = 778.67, p < .001$; RMSEA = .056; and CFI = .88. Although all of the structural pathways in both models were statistically significant, the partially-mediated model offers a better fit to the data than the fully mediated model, $\Delta \chi^2 (1, N = 104) = 9.07, p < .01$.

The results provide some support for integration of two previously separate streams of antecedent research on organizational commitment (i.e., POS and OBSE). In short, the results suggest (a) that for U.S. convenience store employees, POS might be related to organizational commitment partly because of its impact on OBSE and (b) that organizational support theory might benefit from expansion of its theoretical foundation to include a social identity perspective.

REFERENCES

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