



Umbrella Summary

Perceived Organizational Support

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is perceived organizational support?

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employee perceptions regarding the extent to which their employer “values their contributions and cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501). In the social exchange between employees and employers, it is the organizational equivalent of employees’ commitment to the organization, though it is based on employees’ perceptions, rather than the organization’s perspective. In short, it represents “employees’ inferences concerning the organization’s commitment to them” (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 500). Beliefs about the organization’s commitment are thought to stem from employees’ interactions with other members who are seen as representatives of the organization; attributions about those members and interactions are then extended to the entire organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The most commonly used measure is the *Survey of Perceived Organizational Support* (Eisenberger et al., 1986), of which there are many versions, of varying lengths. Example items include, “The organization cares about my opinions” and “The organization strongly considers my goals and values” (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1986). In the realm of recruitment, the concept of anticipated organizational support among job candidates has also been minimally explored, by adapting the items to be future oriented (e.g., “This organization would care about my opinions”; Casper & Buffardi, 2004).

Why is POS important?

POS is important because it is associated with many job attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, POS is strongly connected to (a) lower burnout and stress and (b) higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rockstuhl et al., 2020). POS is modestly connected to higher job performance and moderately associated with fewer citizenship behaviors, especially those that benefit the organization rather other individuals (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Finally, POS is strongly associated with lower intentions to leave and moderately associated with actual turnover (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, 2017).

What contributes to POS?

Due Meta-analytic research on POS thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with POS, not on strategies for improving it or on examining whether improving it affects outcomes like performance and turnover. These factors fall into four categories: (a) treatment by organizational members, (b) employee-organization relationship quality, (c) HR practices, and (d) job conditions. In general, organizational support theory argues that factors under the organization's control are more likely to be associated with POS, because those factors are voluntary, rather than compulsory; if the organization chooses to be supportive (or not), then it is more meaningful and reflects intent (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Treatment by Organizational Members

Considering the role of other organizational members, perceived support from supervisors is very strongly related to POS, with perceived support from coworkers or teams being moderately related (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Regarding the nature of the relationships with leaders, stronger connections to POS are found for leadership behavior that is people oriented, rather than task oriented. Leadership that involves respect and concern for employees' needs and feelings is strongly connected to POS, whereas leadership that involves work-focused emphasis on role expectations, organization, structure, and performance management is less strongly related (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Abusive supervision is moderately related to lower POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Employee-Organization Relationship Quality

POS is strongly related to several types of fairness perceptions, including those related to procedures, outcomes, and interpersonal treatment (Kurtessis et al., 2017). It is also strongly related to value congruence, which is the alignment between employees' values and beliefs and those of the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Perceptions of organizational politics and psychological contract breach are very strongly and negatively connected to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). When employees perceive organizational politics (e.g., favoritism and self-serving behavior) to be high, their POS is low. Likewise, when employees believe that their employer has not fulfilled their explicit or implicit promises or obligations to them, POS is low (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

HR Practices

In this category, POS is most strongly connected to perceptions of developmental opportunities and job security (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The availability of flexible work schedules and perceptions of family-supportive organizational practices are moderately associated with POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Job Conditions

Several job characteristics are strongly or moderately connected to POS. Specifically, when jobs involve autonomy, feedback, use of a variety of skills, participation in decision making, and the opportunity to complete whole pieces of work with visible outcomes, POS is higher (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Conversely, when employees experience role stress, POS is lower. This includes job expectations that are ambiguous, conflicting, or excessive (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ POS is associated with (a) lower burnout, stress, intentions to leave, and turnover and (b) higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and citizenship behaviors.
- ▶ There is little evidence as to what actually causes POS but the strongest potential influences for high POS are people-oriented leadership; fair procedures, outcomes, and treatment; a culture that does not include organizational politics; fulfillment of explicit or implicit promises or obligations to employees; developmental experiences; autonomy; and opportunities to participate in decision making.
- ▶ Research is needed to develop and test strategies to improve POS and to test whether improving POS improves performance and/or reduces turnover.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers who would like to assess POS should consider one of the many versions of the *Survey of Perceived Organizational Support* (e.g., Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

References

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