

Perceived Supervisor Support: Contributions to Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Retention

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Three studies investigated the relationships among employees' perception of supervisor support (PSS), perceived organizational support (POS), and employee turnover. Study 1 found, with 314 employees drawn from a variety of organizations, that PSS was positively related to temporal change in POS, suggesting that PSS leads to POS. Study 2 established, with 300 retail sales employees, that the PSS–POS relationship increased with perceived supervisor status in the organization. Study 3 found, with 493 retail sales employees, evidence consistent with the view that POS completely mediated a negative relationship between PSS and employee turnover. These studies suggest that supervisors, to the extent that they are identified with the organization, contribute to POS and, ultimately, to job retention.

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, in press; Shore & Shore, 1995) supposes that to meet socioemotional needs and to determine the organization's readiness to reward increased work effort, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived organizational support, or POS). Accordingly, employees showed a consistent pattern of agreement with various statements concerning the extent to which the organization appreciated their contributions and would treat them favorably or unfavorably in differing circumstances (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Employees evidently believe that the organization has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that encompasses both recognition of their contributions and concern for their welfare.

Just as employees form global perceptions concerning their valuation by the organization, they develop general views concerning the degree to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being (perceived supervisor support, or PSS; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Because supervisors act as agents of the organization, who have responsibility for directing and evaluating subordinates' performance, employees would view their su-

perervisor's favorable or unfavorable orientation toward them as indicative of the organization's support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Levinson, 1965). Additionally, employees understand that supervisors' evaluations of subordinates are often conveyed to upper management and influence upper management's views, further contributing to employees' association of supervisor support with POS. Although over a dozen studies have reported positive relationships of POS with PSS (e.g., Hutchison, 1977a, 1997b; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Malatesta, 1995; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Yoon, Han, & Seo, 1996; Yoon & Lim, 1999; Yoon & Thye, 2000) and related measures (e.g., Allen, 1995; Hutchison, Valentino, & Kirkner, 1998), little attention has been given to assessing the direction of causality between POS and PSS, the mechanisms responsible for this association, or the behavioral consequences of the POS–PSS relationship.

Temporal Relationships Between PSS and POS

On the basis of organizational support theory, findings of a positive relationship between PSS and POS have usually been interpreted to indicate that PSS leads to POS (e.g., Hutchison, 1997a; Malatesta, 1995; Rhoades et al., 2001; Yoon et al., 1996; Yoon & Lim, 1999). Yoon and Thye (2000) suggested that causality might also occur in the reverse direction, with POS increasing PSS: employees' perception that the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being might lead them to believe that supervisors, as agents of the organization, are favorably inclined toward them. A relationship between the initial value of one variable and changes in a second variable over time provides stronger causal evidence than is afforded by the simultaneous measurement of the two variables (Finkel, 1995). We therefore used a panel design to examine the relationship of PSS to temporal change in POS and the relationship of POS to temporal change in PSS.

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Hypothesis 1: PSS is positively related to temporal change in POS.

Supervisor's Perceived Organizational Status as a Moderator of the Relationship Between PSS and POS

Because supervisors act as organizational agents in their treatment of subordinates, PSS should contribute to POS (Levinson, 1965). The strength of this relationship would depend on the degree to which employees identify the supervisor with the organization. Supervisors who appear to be highly valued and well treated by the organization would be highly identified with the organization's basic character and would therefore strongly influence POS. Of course, an employee may attribute a supervisor's high perceived status to the organization's misperception of the supervisor's character. But, on average, supervisors who appear to be highly regarded by the organization would be assumed by workers to strongly embody the organization's character.

Employees' perception of the status accorded their supervisor by the organization, and therefore the employees' belief that supervisor support also represents organizational support, would increase with employees' perceptions concerning (a) the organization's positive valuation of the supervisor's contributions and its concern about the supervisor's well-being, (b) the supervisor's influence in important organizational decisions, and (c) the autonomy and authority accorded the supervisor in his or her job responsibilities. The supervisor's informal organizational status, as conveyed by these features of the organization's favorable treatment of supervisors, should moderate the relationship between PSS and POS.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between PSS and POS is positively related to the supervisor's perceived status within the organization.

POS as a Mediator of the Relationship Between PSS and Employee Turnover

Insufficient consideration has been given as to why PSS and POS have both been found to be related to employee withdrawal behaviors. According to organizational support theory, PSS should decrease voluntary employee turnover by increasing POS. The POS resulting from PSS would strengthen employees' felt obligation to help the organization reach its goals and increase affective organizational commitment, with a resultant reduction in turnover and other withdrawal behaviors (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001; Shore & Shore, 1995).

Malatesta (1995) maintained that based on the reciprocity norm, PSS should increase obligations to the supervisor and to the organization. Malatesta found evidence for both relationships: PSS increased extra-role performance beneficial to supervisors, and PSS increased POS, which, in turn, led to greater extra-role performance beneficial to the organization. Concerning voluntary employee turnover, Malatesta (p. 23) suggested that when PSS was low, employees would believe that they could deal with the unpleasant situation by switching to a new supervisor or, we would add, minimizing contact with the supervisor while continuing to carry out usual job responsibilities. However, by reducing POS, low PSS would have general unfavorable implications for the employees' future. Thus, in Malatesta's view, POS would entirely

mediate a negative PSS–turnover relationship. However, Malatesta did not test the mediating effect of POS on the possible association between PSS and turnover.

Hypothesis 3: POS mediates a negative relationship between PSS and voluntary employee turnover.

Study 1: Temporal Relationship Between PSS and POS

Organizational support theory assumes that PSS leads to POS. Because prior studies assessed PSS and POS simultaneously, evidence is unavailable concerning causal direction. We therefore measured PSS and POS at two points in time 3 months apart. We used structural equation modeling to assess Hypothesis 1, holding that initial PSS would be related to a temporal change in POS. We also examined the relationship between POS and temporal change in PSS.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The final sample consisted of 314 alumni of a Belgium university who graduated between 1997 and 1998. To obtain a diverse sample of job types and organizations, names and addresses of a random sample of 578 alumni were obtained from university records. We sent prospective participants a questionnaire packet containing a cover letter, the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. The cover letter explained to the alumni that the purpose of the study was to examine the opinions of the University's graduates about their work environment, informed them that they would receive the questionnaire a second time 3 months later, stressed the importance of responding to both questionnaires, and provided assurances of confidentiality. Two weeks later, we mailed follow-up letters to non-compliant individuals stressing the value of the survey and the importance of their participation. Three months after we received a completed questionnaire from any participant, we sent that participant the second version of the questionnaire. If the follow-up questionnaire was not returned within 2 weeks, we sent a letter encouraging participants to complete and return the questionnaire.

Fifty-four percent of the initial sample returned questionnaires at Time 1 and then again at Time 2. This final sample of employees had an average age of 30.8 years ($SD = 4.1$) and had been employed by their organization an average of 4.1 years ($SD = 3.4$) before receipt of the first questionnaire. Seventy-one percent of participants were male. Overall, 20% of the respondents were working in heavy and chemical industry, 13% in public administration, 11% in computer science, 11% in banking and insurance, 9% in consulting, 8% in research, 7% in law, 7% in transportation and communication, 5% in construction, 3% in media and advertising, 2% in public health, 2% in environmental agencies, and 2% in commerce. A total of 35% of the respondents worked in large organizations (more than 1,000 employees), 35% in midsize organizations (100–1,000 employees), and 30% in small organizations (less than 100 employees).

Measures

Because participants had graduated from a French-speaking university, all survey measures were first translated from English into French and then independently back-translated into English by a second translator, following the procedure recommended by Brislin (1980). The few discrepancies between the original English version and the back-translated version resulted in adjustment in the French translation based on direct discussion between the translators.

Control variable. Because we used employees drawn from a variety of organizations, we controlled statistically for organizational size. We also

controlled for employee tenure. This information was obtained from the first questionnaire.

Perceived organizational support. Studies surveying many occupations and organizations provided evidence for the high internal consistency and unidimensionality of the survey generally used to assess POS (Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, or SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). The scale has been found to be related to, but distinguishable from, measures of similar beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Aquino & Griffeth, 1999; Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999; Rhoades et al., 2001; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Vandenberghe & Peiro, 1999; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). To assess employees' perception that the organization valued their contribution and cared about their well-being, we selected three high-loading items from the SPOS (Items 1, 4, and 9; Eisenberger et al., 1986) with factor loadings, respectively, of .71, .74, and .83. For this and the PSS measure, respondents rated their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

Perceived supervisor support. To assess employees' perception that their supervisor valued their contribution and cared about their well-being, we adapted the SPOS in the same manner as Kottke and Sharafinski (1988), Hutchison (1997a, 1997b), Rhoades et al. (2001), and others, replacing the word *organization* with the term *supervisor*. We adapted three items from the SPOS (Items 10, 27, and 35; Eisenberger et al., 1986) on the basis of their high loadings (respectively, .72, .76, and .80).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities, and intercorrelations among variables at Times 1 and 2 are displayed in Table 1. As predicted, PSS at Time 1 was positively related to POS at Time 2.

Temporal Relationships Between PSS and POS

To assess the temporal relationships between PSS and POS, we estimated a two-wave panel model with PSS and POS measured at both Time 1 and Time 2 (see Figure 1). We used the latent variable structural equation modeling approach of LISREL 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Paths connected the antecedent variables (Time 1 PSS, Time 1 POS, tenure, and organizational size) with Time 2 PSS and Time 2 POS. As recommended by Finkel (1995, p. 29), Time 2 latent variable variances were allowed to covary. Additionally, we allowed for autocorrelated error variances by freeing

the error covariances of identical terms administered at both Time 1 and Time 2 (Finkel, 1995, p. 61).

Evidence consistent with an effect of PSS on POS would be provided by a statistically significant path between Time 1 PSS and Time 2 POS. Because this path controlled for Time 1 POS, such an effect would be interpretable as a relationship between PSS and temporal change in POS (Finkel, 1995, p. 27). We also examined the relationship between Time 1 POS and Time 2 PSS, which, controlling for Time 1 PSS, would provide evidence concerning the influence of POS on PSS.

Figure 1 gives the estimated path model with standardized regression coefficients. For ease of presentation, we show the structural model rather than the full measurement model, and we describe the effects of the two control variables (tenure and organizational size) in the text rather than the figure. Tenure was not significantly related either to Time 2 PSS ($\beta = .05$) or Time 2 POS ($\beta = .01$). Similarly, organizational size was not significantly related to Time 2 PSS ($\beta = .01$) or Time 2 POS ($\beta = -.04$). As predicted, controlling for employees' tenure and organizational size, PSS was positively related to the temporal change in POS. In contrast, POS was not associated with the temporal change in PSS. The overall model showed adequate fit to the data: root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04; comparative fit index (CFI) = .98; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .96; adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = .93; $\chi^2(63) = 91.8, p < .01$. In sum, consistent with Hypothesis 1 that PSS leads to POS, PSS was found to be positively related to the temporal change in POS. In contrast, the relationship between initial POS and the temporal change in PSS was not statistically significant.

Study 2: Moderating Effect of Perceived Supervisor Status on the PSS-POS Relationship

Those supervisors believed to be most favored by the organization would be perceived by employees as most strongly embodying the organization's basic character. Thus, support received from supervisors who appear highly favored by the organization should have the greatest impact on POS. Study 2 examined the moderating effect of the supervisor's perceived status in the organization on the PSS-POS relationship. The supervisor's informal organizational status, as perceived by employees, was assessed by employees' judgments of (a) the organization's positive valuation of the supervisor and care about the supervisor's welfare, (b) the supervisor's influence over important organizational decisions,

Table 1
Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|----------|-----------|---|-----|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Tenure | 4.08 | 3.34 | — | .05 | -.13* | -.10 | -.12* | -.10 |
| 2. Organizational size | — | — | | — | .10 | .09 | -.11 | -.10 |
| 3. Perceived supervisor support at Time 1 | 3.37 | .87 | | | (.81) | .74*** | .47*** | .47*** |
| 4. Perceived supervisor support at Time 2 | 3.34 | .92 | | | | (.82) | .37*** | .55*** |
| 5. Perceived organizational support at Time 1 | 2.85 | .77 | | | | | (.74) | .65*** |
| 6. Perceived organizational support at Time 2 | 2.85 | .74 | | | | | | (.75) |

Note. *N* = 314. Internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses on the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

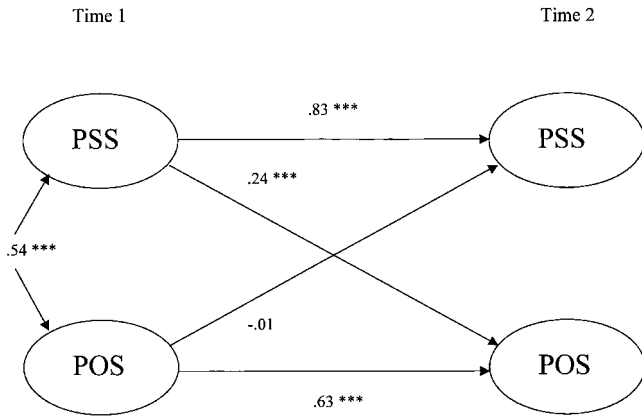


Figure 1. Structural equation model of the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and perceived organizational support (POS) over time. (Study 1). *** $p < .001$.

and (c) the authority and autonomy allotted supervisors to carry out their job responsibilities.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The final sample consisted of 300 employees who worked for a chain of large discount electronics and appliance stores located in the northeastern United States. These employees comprised 98% of the 313 employees who received questionnaires and returned them completed during their regularly scheduled working hours in the organization’s cafeterias. To encourage candidness, we gave employees verbal and written assurances that their individual responses would be kept confidential and that only group data would be reported to the organization. Surveys were distributed and collected by the researchers in sealed envelopes. We attribute the extraordinarily high return rate in this and the following study to the survey’s administration during paid working hours and to the favorable long-term professional relationship between the investigators and the employees. Employees trusted that their individual identities would be kept confidential, that their views would be accurately represented, and that they would have access to the same information given to management.

Of the final sample, 27% were hourly paid sales-support employees, 45% were hourly paid salespeople, 21% were salaried sales-support employees, and 7% were salaried salespeople. These employees had an average age of 34.3 years ($SD = 11.9$) and had been employed by their organization an average of 4.6 years ($SD = 4.2$) before receipt of the questionnaire. Twenty-seven percent of respondents were women.

Measures

Tenure. We controlled statistically for employee tenure in the organization. The number of months that each employee had worked for the organization before the questionnaire administration was obtained from company records.

Perceived organizational support. We selected eight high-loading items (Items 4, 8, 9, 13, 20, 22, 23, and 25; loadings from .66 to .84) from the SPOS to assess POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). For this and the following measures, respondents indicated their agreement with each item using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Perceived supervisor support. We measured PSS with the same 8 items used to assess POS, as modified by replacing the word *organization* with *supervisor*.

Supervisor’s organizational status. We developed a 12-item scale, given in Table 2, to assess employees’ perceptions of their supervisor’s organizational status. Four items examined the organization’s valuation of the supervisor and care about his or her well-being. Four items examined the supervisor’s contributions to important organizational decisions. And the final four items considered the supervisor’s authority and autonomy in carrying out job responsibilities.

Results and Discussion

Dimensionality of the Supervisor’s Perceived Organizational Status

We carried out a principal-components analysis to determine whether the 12 supervisor’s organizational status items comprised a unitary dimension or multiple dimensions. The results suggested a single factor, as indicated by a strong loading on the first factor, accounting for 47.4% of the total variance, a related break in the scree plot, and eigenvalues far less than 1.0 for the remaining presumptive factors. The resultant single-factor scale had an acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha of .89). As shown

Table 2
Study 2: Factor Analysis of Supervisor’s Perceived Organizational Status Items

| Item no. | Statement | Factor loading | Item category ^a |
|----------|---|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | The organization holds my supervisor in high regard. | .81 | VAL |
| 2. | The organization gives my supervisor the chance to make important decisions. | .80 | INF |
| 3. | The organization values my supervisor’s contributions. | .79 | VAL |
| 4. | The organization gives my supervisor the authority to try new things. | .78 | AUT |
| 5. | The organization supports decisions made by my supervisor. | .76 | AUT |
| 6. | My supervisor participates in decisions that affect the entire organization. | .72 | INF |
| 7. | My supervisor influences decisions made by upper management. | .69 | INF |
| 8. | The organization allows my supervisor to run things the way he wants. | .64 | AUT |
| 9. | The organization consults my supervisor when deciding on new policies and procedures. | .61 | INF |
| 10. | The organization gives my supervisor the freedom to determine how to treat me. | .57 | AUT |
| 11. | If my supervisor decided to quit, the organization would try to persuade him to stay. | .54 | VAL |
| 12. | Even if my supervisor did well, the organization would fail to notice. | .45 | VAL |

^a VAL designates the organization’s high valuation and positive regard for supervisor. INF designates supervisor’s influence in important organizational decisions. AUT designates supervisor’s authority and autonomy in carrying out job responsibilities.

in Table 2, principal-components loadings for the items ranged from .45 to .86, with a mean loading of .68. The factor loadings of the three types of items (organization’s positive valuation of supervisor; supervisor’s influence over important organizational decisions; and authority and autonomy afforded supervisors) overlapped in magnitude. Because each item loaded highly on the single factor, all items were used to compute the total perceived organizational status score.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities, and intercorrelations among variables are displayed in Table 3. Of greatest interest, PSS was positively related to POS.

Moderating Effect of Supervisor’s Perceived Organizational Status

We used standard hierarchical regression analysis to assess the moderating effect of the supervisor’s perceived organizational status on the PSS–POS relationship (see Table 4). To reduce the potential collinearity between the interaction term and its component variables, we followed Aiken and West’s (1991) recommendation to center the independent variables (PSS and supervisor’s perceived organizational status) involved in the presumptive interaction. Tenure was entered in the first step as a predictor of POS; PSS and supervisor’s organizational status were added in the second step; and the product term (i.e., PSS × Supervisor’s Organizational Status) was entered in the third step to assess the interaction between these two variables. As shown in Table 4, controlling for tenure, PSS and supervisor’s perceived organizational status were reliably related to POS. Of more direct interest, the interaction between PSS and supervisor’s organizational status was statistically significant.

To examine this interaction in more detail, regression lines representing the relationship between PSS and POS were plotted, as shown in Figure 2, at high and low levels of supervisor’s perceived organizational status (i.e., 1 *SD* above and below the mean; cf. Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Simple effects tests (Aiken & West, 1991) indicated reliable positive relationships between PSS and POS at both one standard deviation above, $t(295) = 7.56, p < .001$, and one standard deviation below, $t(295) = 6.66, p < .001$, the mean supervisor’s organizational status score. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the slope of the relationship between PSS and POS was greater when supervisors had high perceived organizational status than when they had low status, $t(295) = 2.76, p < .01$.

The strength of the relationship between PSS and POS depended on employees’ perception concerning their supervisors’ organizational status. PSS was positively related to POS at both high and low organizational status, but the effect was stronger when the supervisor was highly favored by the organization. These findings suggest that supervisors with high perceived organizational status are taken by subordinates to more completely embody the organization’s basic character, leading to a stronger relationship between PSS and POS.

Study 3: POS as a Mediator of the PSS–Employee Turnover Relationship

Both PSS and POS have been found to be related to employee withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover. According to organizational support theory, POS should mediate a negative relationship between PSS and employee turnover (Hypothesis 3). Therefore, using sales employees, we examined the relationships among PSS, POS, and turnover.

Method

The final sample consisted of 493 employees who worked for the same organization investigated in Study 2. A total of 532 employees were administered the questionnaire under the same conditions as in the second study; 306 of these employees were those surveyed in Study 2 plus an additional 226 employees who received the same PSS and POS scales given the employees in Study 2 but who did not receive the scale items used in Study 2 to assess the supervisor’s organizational status. Five hundred twenty-one employees (98%) returned completed questionnaires. We used the entire available sample to maximize statistical power for assessing the relationships among PSS, POS, and turnover. Because we were interested in voluntary employee turnover, we excluded from the analysis 28 of the respondents who were laid off during the 6 months after the survey.

Twenty-nine percent of the final sample were hourly paid sales–support employees, 44% were hourly paid salespeople, 20% were salaried sales–support employees, and 7% were salaried salespeople. The average tenure of these employees was 60 months (*SD* = 49 months). Seventy-two percent were men. We obtained voluntary employee turnover data from organizational records 6 months after the survey administration.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities, and intercorrelations among variables are displayed in Table 5. Thirteen percent of the employees voluntarily left the organization during the 6

Table 3
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|----------|-----------|---|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. Tenure | 55.50 | 50.09 | — | .04 | .18** | .21*** |
| 2. Perceived supervisor support | 4.41 | 1.21 | | (.88) | .47*** | .60*** |
| 3. Supervisor’s perceived organizational status | 3.90 | 1.15 | | | (.89) | .69*** |
| 4. Perceived organizational support | 3.54 | 1.33 | | | | (.88) |

Note. *N* = 300. Internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses on the diagonal. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4
Study 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Perceived Organizational Support

| Regression steps | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β | ΔR^2 |
|---|----------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Step 1 | | | | .04** |
| Tenure | .01 | .00 | .21*** | |
| Step 2 | | | | .54*** |
| Tenure | .00 | .00 | .10** | |
| Perceived supervisor support | .39 | .05 | .36*** | |
| Supervisor's organizational status | .58 | .05 | .50*** | |
| Step 3 | | | | .01** |
| Tenure | .00 | .00 | .09* | |
| Perceived supervisor support (PSS) | .44 | .05 | .40*** | |
| Supervisor's organizational status | .57 | .05 | .49*** | |
| PSS \times Supervisor's Organizational Status | .09 | .03 | .11** | |

Note. Final model: $F(4, 295) = 106.55, p < .001$; total $R^2 = .59$.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

months after the questionnaire administration. As predicted, PSS was positively related to POS and negatively related to turnover. This pattern of correlations satisfies Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger's (1998, p. 260) first two conditions required to provide evidence consistent with mediation, stating that the exogenous variable (PSS) should be related to both the mediator (POS) and the outcome variable (turnover).

Mediating Role of POS

Because turnover was a binary variable, we used hierarchical logistic regression to provide evidence consistent with a mediating role of POS in the PSS–turnover relationship. As shown in Table 6, we entered tenure in the first step as a control variable, PSS in the second step, and, finally, POS in the third step. Because we used logistic regression, statistical significance was assessed with the Wald statistic, which approximates a Z^2 distribution. The third mediation requirement of Kenny et al. (1998), that POS should be associated with turnover while controlling for PSS, was met (see Step 3 in Table 6). Fulfilment of the fourth and final mediation requirement, that the relationship between PSS and turnover be reduced when POS is entered into the model, is suggested by the nonsignificant relationship between PSS and turnover in the final regression step. More precisely, using the Kenny et al. formula (p. 260), we found that the drop in the relationship of PSS with POS from Step 2 to Step 3 was statistically significant, $b = .32, SE = .08, Z = 3.94, p < .001$. The presumptive mediation effect was complete, with only a negligible relationship between PSS and turnover remaining after controlling for POS.

The findings were consistent with POS's mediation of a negative relationship between PSS and voluntary employee turnover. This result follows from organizational support theory, holding that PSS leads to POS, which in turn, reduces turnover by strengthening felt obligation toward the organization and affective organizational commitment.

General Discussion

The present findings provide a greater understanding of the relationship between PSS and POS, including evidence concerning the causal direction, the mechanism underlying employees' generalization of PSS to POS, and POS's role in the association

between PSS and employee turnover. Employees appear to infer POS from PSS based on their perception of their supervisors' status in the organization, leading to reduced turnover. With due regard to the limitations of correlational research for assessing causality, the findings are consistent with PSS's role in POS's development, as maintained by organizational support theory.

Consistent with the view that PSS leads to POS, we found that PSS was positively related to the temporal change in POS. The results supplement prior findings involving the simultaneous assessment of PSS and POS that left the association's direction indeterminate. Such a finding of a positive cross-lagged relationship would occur if the interval between the assessments of PSS at Time 1 and POS at Time 2 were long enough for PSS to influence POS but not so long that the effect would have substantially decayed (Maruyama, 1998, pp. 115–117).

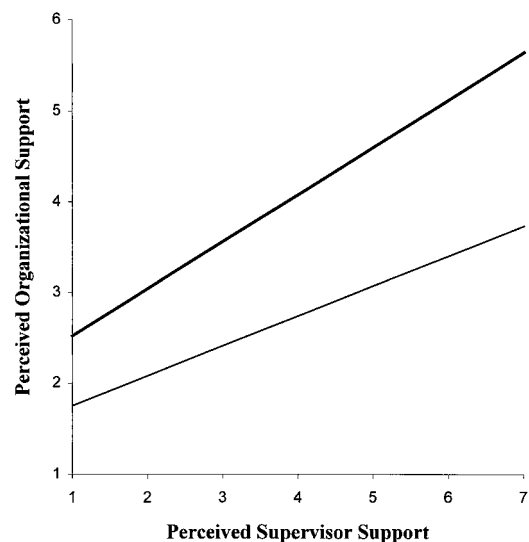


Figure 2. The relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and perceived organizational support (POS) as a function of the supervisor's perceived organizational status (Study 2). High status is indicated by the top, bold line, and low status is indicated by the bottom line. High and low supervisor's perceived organizational statuses are, respectively, 1 *SD* above and 1 *SD* below the mean.

Table 5
Study 3: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|---|-------|--------|---------|
| 1. Tenure | 60.22 | 48.83 | — | .00 | .21*** | -.21*** |
| 2. Perceived supervisor support | 4.34 | 1.24 | | (.90) | .58*** | -.11* |
| 3. Perceived organizational support | 3.38 | 1.31 | | | (.87) | -.24*** |
| 4. Turnover | .13 | .34 | | | | — |

Note. $N = 493$. Internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses on the diagonal. For turnover, stayers were coded as 0 and voluntary leavers as 1.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Although the relationship between PSS and temporal change in POS provides stronger evidence of causality than does simultaneous measurement of PSS and POS, the observed association could still be due to variables other than those for which we controlled (Finkel, 1995). The finding of a positive relationship between PSS and change in POS is nevertheless consistent with organizational support theory, according to which supervisors, as representatives of the organization, contribute to POS. Our use of individual scale items as indicators of PSS and POS at both times had the benefit of taking into account autocorrelated error variances between successive measurements of the same latent variables over time (Maruyama, 1998, pp. 111–112). Future research might include more distinctive indicators of PSS and of POS to better assess measurement error (Farkas & Tetrick, 1989).

The failure to find a cross-lagged relationship between POS and temporal change in PSS is less definitive. We cannot assume that the duration required for PSS to influence POS is the same as that required for POS to influence PSS (Maruyama, 1998, p. 116). One might argue that the relationship should be bidirectional. To the extent that employees believe that supervisors are influenced by the organization's views, support for employees by the organization should increase PSS (cf. Yoon & Thye, 2000). The present research examined changes of POS and PSS over a 3-month interval, which may have been too short to observe a relationship between POS and change in PSS. Future research might assess the possibility of such a longer-term relationship by examining PSS and POS several times, using the same 3-month interval between successive measurements as in our study. POS could then be related to changes in PSS over 3 months, 6 months, or longer.

Study 2 found that the relationship between PSS and POS was greater for employees who perceived their supervisors to have high informal status within the organization. Organizations generally have a high regard for members who are reputed to embody favored characteristics. Therefore, perceived high standing of a supervisor within the organization would generally be seen by employees as indicating the supervisor's exemplification of the organization's character. Perceived high supervisor status was found to involve beliefs concerning the organization's positive valuation of the supervisor's contributions and its concern about the supervisor's well-being; the supervisor's influence in important organizational decisions; and the autonomy and authority accorded the supervisor in his or her job responsibilities.

From the viewpoint of organizational support theory, the individual employee's attribution of informal status to the supervisor, whether accurately reflecting the beliefs of others in the organization or not, should moderate the relationship between PSS and POS. Employee perceptions of supervisor status would be based on personal observation of upper management's treatment of supervisors as well as the communicated views of upper management, supervisors, and fellow employees. Future research might examine the relative contributions of these sources of belief concerning informal supervisor status.

PSS may also contribute to perceived supervisor status. Being viewed favorably by a supervisor who plays an important role in the organization may enhance fulfillment of socioemotional needs and increase expectations of future favorable treatment from the organization. Therefore, employees who believe that their supervisor values their contributions may be motivated to view the

Table 6
Study 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Turnover on Perceived Supervisor Support and Perceived Organizational Support

| Regression steps | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | Wald |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Tenure | -.02 | .00 | 20.18*** |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Tenure | -.02 | .00 | 20.69*** |
| Perceived supervisor support | -.27 | .11 | 6.59* |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Tenure | -.02 | .01 | 16.31*** |
| Perceived supervisor support | .00 | .12 | 0.01 |
| Perceived organizational support | -.53 | .13 | 16.18*** |

Note. Wald coefficient is Z^2 .

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

supervisor as having an important organizational role. However, it should be noted that the relationship between PSS and perceived supervisor status was moderate, indicating that some employees were reporting high supervisor support even when supervisors were not perceived to have high status. Perceived supervisor status, whatever its sources, enhanced the relationship between PSS and POS. Support from a supervisor who is perceived to strongly embody the organizational ethos is more likely to be taken as organizational support than is support from a supervisor whom, the employee believes, less well represents the organization.

Study 3 found evidence consistent with POS's mediation of a negative PSS–voluntary turnover relationship. Employees who believed that the supervisor valued their contributions and cared about their well-being showed increased POS, which in turn was related to decreased turnover. This finding is consistent with organizational support theory, which holds that beneficial treatment received from supervisors should increase POS, leading to felt obligation to aid the organization and to affective organizational commitment, both of which should reduce turnover (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001). The presumptive mediation effect was complete in that PSS did not have a statistically significant relationship with turnover beyond the mediational role played by POS. Employees with low POS may believe that their prospective success in the organization is greatly limited. Thus, a reduction of POS, resulting from low PSS or other sources, may increase employees' likelihood of quitting the organization.

In all three studies, PSS was higher on average than POS. Because supervisors have greater daily contact with most employees than do upper level managers, they may be able to more readily convey positive valuations and caring. To foster personal loyalty, many supervisors may exaggerate their positive valuation of their subordinates and their own role in obtaining benefits for subordinates, resulting in greater PSS than POS. Future research might examine how supervisor self-presentational behaviors influence PSS and POS.

Study 1 of the temporal relationships between PSS and POS involved Belgian university graduates, whereas Studies 2 and 3, concerning the moderating effect of perceived supervisor organizational status on the PSS–POS relationship and the mediating influence of POS on the PSS–turnover association, involved U.S. retail sales employees. The confirmation of organizational support theory's predictions with samples of differing nationality and job type adds to the generality of the findings. Future studies might assess organization-level and national-level differences in PSS–POS relationships. For example, because small organizations usually have fewer levels of hierarchy than large organizations, employees in small organizations might generally identify their supervisors more with the organization's basic character than those in large organizations, resulting in stronger PSS–POS relationships. Also, in some collectivistic nations, employees may prefer to view themselves as part of a highly integrated hierarchy of organizational authority (termed *vertical collectivism* by Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Such identification could increase employees' perception that supervisors embody the organization's character, resulting in a greater PSS–POS relationship than in individualistic cultures.

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