Affective Commitment to the Organization: The Contribution of Perceived Organizational Support

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Three studies examined the interrelationships among work experiences, perceived organizational support (POS), affective commitment (AC), and employee turnover. Using a diverse sample of 367 employees drawn from a variety of organizations, Study 1 found that POS mediated positive associations of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC. Study 2 examined changes of POS and AC in retail employees over a 2-year span (N = 333) and a 3-year span (N = 226). POS was positively related to temporal changes in AC, suggesting that POS leads to AC. Study 3 found a negative relationship between POS and subsequent voluntary employee turnover that was mediated by AC in retail employees (N = 1,124) and in poultry- and feed-processing workers (N = 262). These results suggest that favorable work conditions operate via POS to increase AC, which, in turn, decreases employee withdrawal behavior.

Employees’ emotional bond to their organization (i.e., their affective commitment [AC]) has been considered an important determinant of dedication and loyalty. Affectively committed employees are seen as having a sense of belonging and identification that increases their involvement in the organization’s activities, their willingness to pursue the organization’s goals, and their desire to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). In agreement with this view, studies have found associations between AC and absenteeism, performance, and turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982), with turnover being most strongly related to AC (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Concerning antecedents of AC, Meyer and Allen (1997, p. 45) noted that work experiences such as organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support have demonstrated stronger associations with AC than have structural features of the organization (e.g., decentralization) or personal characteristics of employees. However, there has been little work examining the mechanisms responsible for these relationships.

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995) may help explain employees’ emotional commitment to their organization. This approach assumes that in order to meet socioemotional needs and to assess the organization’s readiness to reward increased efforts, employees form general beliefs concerning how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived organizational support [POS]). POS may be encouraged by employees’ tendency to ascribe humanlike characteristics to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Levinson (1965) noted that actions by agents of the organization are often viewed as indications of the organization’s intent rather than solely as actions of a particular individual. This personification of the organization, suggested Levinson, is abetted by the organization’s legal, moral, and financial responsibility for the actions of its agents; by organizational culture that provides continuity and prescribes role behaviors; and by the power the organization’s agents exert over individual employees. Because employees personify the organization, they would view favorable or unfavorable treatment as indicative of the organization’s benevolent or malevolent orientation toward them.

On the basis of the reciprocity norm, POS would create a felt obligation to care about the organization’s welfare and help the organization reach its objectives. Employees could fulfill this indebtedness through greater AC and increased efforts to aid the organization (cf. Eisenberger et al., 1986; Mowday et al., 1982; Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1980; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Accordingly, felt obligation mediated part of the relationship of POS with AC and performance (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). POS would also increase AC by fulfilling needs for esteem, approval, and affiliation, leading to the incorporation of organizational membership and role status into social identity. The fulfillment of socioemotional needs by POS is suggested by findings that the association between POS and performance was greater among employees having high socioemotional needs (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998).

Numerous studies have reported that POS and AC are strongly associated yet empirically distinct (e.g., D. Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 1999; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Hutchison, 1997; Hutchison & Garstka, 1996; Jones, Flynn, & Kelloway, 1995; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1992; Wayne et al., 1997). POS and AC have also been found to have similar antecedents and consequences. Although POS is often assumed to contribute to AC (e.g., D. Allen et al., 1999; Eisenberger et al., 1986), the two constructs have been measured simultaneously so that the direction of causality is uncertain. Additionally, little

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consideration has been given to why POS and AC have similar antecedents and consequences. To address these questions, we carried out a series of studies examining the interrelationships among employee work experiences, POS, AC, and employee turnover. Specifically, we considered (a) the mediating role of POS in the association between favorable work experiences and AC (Study 1), (b) the causal direction of the association between POS and AC (Study 2), and (c) the mediating role of AC in the association of POS with voluntary employee turnover (Study 3).

POS as a Mediator of the Relationships Between Work Experiences and AC

Three major categories of work experiences—organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support—have been found to be positively related to AC (Meyer & Allen, 1997). However, little attention has been given to mechanisms that may be responsible for these associations. Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Trippoli (1997) argued that organizational actions indicating caring and positive regard act to increase AC. Similarly, Meyer and Allen (1997, pp. 46–47) and D. Allen et al. (1999) suggested that the associations between favorable work experiences and AC are partially mediated by POS.

According to organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Shore & Shore, 1995), POS is strengthened by favorable work experiences that employees believe reflect voluntary and purposeful decisions made by the organization. Thus, the relationship between favorable work experiences and POS was stronger when those experiences were attributed to the organization’s discretionary acts as opposed to actions the organization was forced to undertake by external constraints (Eisenberger et al., 1997; see also Koys, 1991). Generous rewards, just procedures for making decisions that affect employees, and benevolent treatment by supervisors are discretionary actions that should increase POS. POS would enhance AC by producing a felt obligation to care about the organization’s welfare and by the incorporation of organizational membership and role status into social identity (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Organizational Rewards

According to organizational support theory, favorable opportunities for rewards convey a positive valuation of employees’ contributions and thus contribute to POS, which, in turn, increases AC. Accordingly, opportunities for recognition, pay, and promotion have been found to be positively associated with POS (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Eisenberger, Rhoades, & Cameron, 1999; Guzzo et al., 1994; Wayne et al., 1997). Organizational rewards have also been found to be related to AC (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Gregerman, 1992; Mottaz, 1988). Mottaz explained such findings on the basis of employees’ exchange of emotional attachment for benefits received from the organization. Gregerman suggested that favorable rewards led to greater AC by conveying the firm’s supportiveness and dependability. Gaertner and Nollen suggested that rewards increased employees’ perceptions of organizational support.

These explanations for the relationships between organizational rewards and AC are consistent with the view that POS may mediate these relationships (Eisenberger et al., 2001). D. Allen et al. (1999) found with one employee sample but not another that POS mediated the relationship between promotional opportunities and AC. Using several types of rewards and a diverse employee sample drawn from a variety of organizations, we wished to obtain more definitive evidence of POS as a mediator of the relationships between organizational rewards and AC.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice concerns the perceived fairness of means used to determine the amount and distribution of resources among employees (Greenberg, 1990). Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997) distinguished between structural and social determinants of procedural justice. Structural determinants involved formal rules and policies concerning decisions that affect employees, including employee input in the decision process (i.e., their voice), adequate notice before implementing decisions, and receipt of accurate information. Social aspects of procedural justice, sometimes called interactional justice, involved the quality of interpersonal treatment in resource allocation. Social aspects included treating employees with dignity and respect and providing information concerning how outcomes are determined. Structural and social aspects of procedural justice were found to be related to AC (Gellatly, 1995; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Koys, 1991).

Repeated instances of procedural justice should contribute to POS by indicating a concern for employees’ welfare (Shore & Shore, 1995). Fasolo (1995) reported that procedural justice was positively related to POS, and Moorman, Blakely, and Niehoff (1998) found that POS mediated procedural justice’s relationship with extra role behaviors carried out on the organization’s behalf. Structural and social aspects of procedural justice were also found to be related to AC (Gellatly, 1995; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Koys, 1991). However, the possible mediation of the relationship between procedural justice and AC by POS has not previously been assessed.

Supervisor Support

Hutchison (1997) reported reliable relationships between supervisor support and POS and between POS and AC. AC was found to be associated with additional measures of supportive and caring treatment by employees’ supervisors, including leader consideration (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; DeCotis & Summers, 1987; Mottaz, 1988), and high-quality leader–member exchanges (S. Toon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997). Beneficial treatment received from a supervisor should increase POS to the extent that such treatment is attributed to the organization’s policies, procedures, or general culture (Levinson, 1965) rather than to the supervisor’s idiosyncratic motivation. We therefore wished to assess the mediation by POS of the relationship between supervisor support and AC.

In summary, organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support have been found to be associated with both POS and AC. However, additional evidence is needed concerning whether these work experiences make independent contributions to POS and whether the relationships between work experiences and AC are mediated by POS.
Hypothesis 1: POS mediates positive relationships of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC.

Direction of the Relationship Between POS and AC

According to organizational support theory, POS increases AC partly by creating an obligation to care about the organization’s welfare (Eisenberger et al., 2001). The reciprocity norm encourages employees to reciprocate the organization’s concern with their well-being. Meeting this obligation helps maintain the self-image of those who repay their debts, avoids the stigma associated with reciprocity norm violation, and encourages future favorable treatment by the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001). POS may also increase AC by incorporation of organizational membership and role status into social identity. The perception that the organization values one’s contribution and cares about one’s well-being evidently meets needs for esteem, affiliation, emotional support, and approval (Armeli et al., 1998). Such emotionally satisfying experiences may lead employees to identify the organization’s well-being with their own and feel emotionally bound to the organization.

The view that POS contributes to AC (D. Allen et al., 1999; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2001; Hutchison, 1997; Meyer & Allen, 1997) is supported by the positive relationship commonly found between POS and AC. However, POS and AC have been assessed simultaneously, leaving unclear the direction of causality. We used repeated measurements of POS and AC to gain evidence about the direction of causality. 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). Therefore, in Study 2 we examined the relationship between POS and temporal changes in AC.

Hypothesis 2: POS is positively related to changes in AC over time.

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

Insufficient consideration has been given as to why POS and AC are related to similar outcomes. Of various AC outcomes that have been studied, reduced voluntary employee turnover has been the strongest and most consistent (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Farkas & Tetrick, 1989; Porter, Crumpton, & Smith, 1976; Whitener & Walz, 1993). Voluntary turnover is of particular interest because POS has thus far been found to be associated with turnover intention (D. Allen et al., 1999; Guzzo et al., 1994; Wayne et al., 1997) but not with actual turnover. On the basis of organizational support theory, POS should decrease voluntary employee turnover partly via AC (D. Allen et al., 1999; Eisenberger et al., 1990). POS would promote AC via felt obligation and incorporation of organizational membership as an important part of social identity. The resultant strengthening of the employee’s emotional bond to the organization would reduce employees’ rate of turnover.

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

Study 1: POS as a Mediator of Relationships Between Work Experiences and AC

Using employees from a variety of work organizations, we examined POS as a mediator of the relationships between favorable, organizationally determined work experiences (organizational rewards, procedural justice, supervisor support) and AC. We controlled statistically for employee tenure and the size of the organization.

Method

Sample and Procedure

To obtain a diversity of job types and organizations, we took a random sample from university records of names and phone numbers of 438 alumni (ages 25–60) of a university located in the eastern United States. Each prospective participant was contacted by phone. Alumni agreeing to participate were mailed a questionnaire packet containing the survey, a postage-paid return envelope, and an alumni sticker as an incentive for participation. Following Dillman’s (1978) suggestions for maximizing return rates, we mailed follow-up letters to noncompliant participants 7 days, 3 weeks, and 6 weeks after the initial mail request. Each follow-up letter stressed the value of the survey research and the importance of their participation, with the final letter including a duplicate questionnaire.

Of the employees contacted, 399 (91%) agreed to participate, and of those, 367 (92%) returned usable, completed questionnaires. The final sample averaged 38.6 years (SD = 8.1) of age and 9.0 years (SD = 7.3) of prior employment with their organization. Sixty percent were women. Overall, 33% of the respondents worked in private business, 31% in educational institutions, 20% in other public-sector jobs, 11% in healthcare facilities, and 5% in other private nonprofit institutions. Forty-seven percent of the respondents worked in large organizations (more than 700 employees), 20% in midsize organizations (200–700 employees), and 33% in small organizations (less than 200 employees).

Measures

Covariates. Employee tenure in the organization and the size of the organization were obtained from responses to the questionnaire.

Perceived organizational support. Prior studies surveying many occupations and organizations provided evidence for the high internal reliability and unidimensionality of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). We used the eight-item short form (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999). Items from this and the following scales are listed in Table 1. Except where otherwise noted, respondents indicated the extent of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Affective organizational commitment. Five items from Meyer and Allen’s Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) and one item concerning pride in organizational membership from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) were used to assess AC. Researchers using the Affective Commitment Scale have reported that it forms a single factor with high reliability (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1990; Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994; Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1995). N. J. Allen and Meyer (1990) reported that the Affective Commitment Scale correlated .83 with the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire.

Organizational rewards. Three items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1997) were used to assess beliefs concerning the favorableness of opportunities for recognition, pay, and promotion. Respondents answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unfavorable, 5 = very favorable).
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confirmatory Factor Item Loadings: Study 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor and item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Organizational Support*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My organization really cares about my well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My organization shows little concern for me. (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My organization cares about my opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Organizational Commitmentb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel personally attached to my work organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am proud to tell others I work at my organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Working at my organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I would be happy to work at my organization until I retire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I really feel that problems faced by my organization are also my problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Rewardsc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Recognition for good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity for advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Opportunity for high earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Justicec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I am usually not told about important things that are happening in this work organization. (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Decisions in work are usually made without consulting the people who have to live with them. (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Meetings are frequently held to discuss work problems with my co-workers and me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Supportd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My supervisor cares about my opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My work supervisor really cares about my well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My supervisor shows very little concern for me. (R)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note. N = 367. All loadings are standardized. R = reverse scored. * Items are from the short form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Lynch et al., 1999). b Items 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 are from the Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997, with permission from Sage Publications); Item 3 is adapted from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979). c Items are adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1997). d Items are from Beehr et al. (1976). e Items are adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986).

Procedural justice. Three items from Beehr, Walsh, and Taber (1976) were used to measure procedural justice. These items are consistent with Cropanzano & Greenberg’s (1997) conceptualization of (a) structural aspects of justice as involving voice and giving advance notice about decisions and (b) social aspects of procedural justice as involving adequate explanations of decisions and treating employees with respect.

Perceived supervisor support. Following the procedure used by Kottke and Sharafinski (1988) and Hutchison (1997), four items were adapted from the SPOS by replacing the term organization with the term supervisor. The items were selected on the basis of their high loadings on the SPOS (coefficient alphas ranged from .74 to .84) and their conveyance, in their adapted form, of general indications concerning a supervisor’s positive valuation of the employees’ contributions and care about the employees’ well-being.

Results

Discriminant Validity of the Constructs

First we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to examine the distinctiveness of the work experience variables, POS, and AC. We used AMOS software (Arbuckle, 1997) with maximum likelihood estimation to compare the fit of four nested models ranging from a single-factor model to the hypothesized five-factor model: (a) a one-factor model incorporating all five constructs; (b) a two-factor model combining the work experience variables (Factor 1) and combining POS and AC (Factor 2); (c) a three-factor model comprising the work experience variables (Factor 1), POS (Factor 2), and AC (Factor 3); and (d) the hypothesized model distinguishing all five constructs.

The results of these analyses are shown in Table 2. Based on sequential chi-square difference tests (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982), each more differentiated model fit the data better. Further, the hypothesized five-factor model was the only model that satisfied the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993) criterion of .05 or less and that had comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973) values above their recommended cutoffs of .90. Table 1 shows the standardized item loadings, all of which loaded reliably on their predicted factors; the lowest loading was .41. Due to the high correlation between POS and AC, as a supplemental analysis we compared a one-factor model combining POS and AC to a two-factor model with POS and AC as separate factors. According to a sequential chi-square
Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analyses Model Fit Indices: Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>AGFI</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One factor</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1,632.36*</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td>.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two factor</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1,340.79*</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>291.57*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three factor</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>729.81*</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>610.98*</td>
<td>.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five factor</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>451.82*</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>277.99*</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(N = 367\). The one-factor model includes organizational rewards, procedural justice, supervisor support, perceived organizational support (POS), and affective commitment (AC). The two-factor model combines organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support (Factor 1) and POS and AC (Factor 2). The three-factor model comprises organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support (Factor 1), POS (Factor 2), and AC (Factor 3). The five-factor model treats the five constructs as separate factors. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; Difference = difference in chi-square from the next model; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. * \(p < .05\).

difference test, the two-factor model was a significantly better fit to the data than the one-factor model: \(\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1, \ N = 367) = 399.04, \ p < .001\). Therefore, we treated the five constructs separately in subsequent statistical analyses.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities and intercorrelations among measures are displayed in Table 3. Scale scores were computed by averaging together the appropriate items for the work experience scales, POS, and AC. As predicted, measures of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support were positively related to both POS and AC.

Mediating Role of POS

The pattern of correlations satisfied Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger's (1998, p. 260) first condition for demonstrating mediation—namely, that the exogenous variables (organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support) be related to the outcome variable (AC). Structural equation modeling was used to assess the remaining conditions required for mediation because it allows for an examination of the relationships among constructs with measurement error removed. Kenny et al. (1998, p. 258) stated that the steps necessary to test mediation are the same using multiple regression or structural equation modeling. For all of the factors, scale items were used as indicators of the latent variables. To set the metric of the latent variables, we chose the highest loading item from each scale based on the confirmatory factor analysis as a reference indicator; the loadings for these indicators were set to a value of one. The models were estimated from the covariance matrix and used maximum likelihood estimation.

The first model tested was the hypothesized model in which POS mediated the relationships of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC. For ease of presentation, we present the structural model rather than the full measurement model in Figure 1, and the results for tenure and organizational size are presented in the text. The model showed adequate fit to the data (RMSEA = .05; CFI = .95; TLI = .94), \(\chi^2(283, \ N = 367) = 547.36\). Tenure was significantly related to AC but not to POS (\(\beta_s = .11\) and .02, respectively). Organizational size was significantly related to POS but not to AC (\(\beta_s = -.18\) and -.06, respectively). Standardized path coefficients can be seen in Figure 1. As predicted, organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support were uniquely related to POS, thereby satisfying Kenny et al.'s (1998) second condition for mediation that the exogenous variables should be related to the mediator (POS). Also, POS was significantly related to AC. This retention of a significant relationship between POS and AC, controlling for work experiences, satisfied Kenny et al.'s third condition for mediation.

To demonstrate the significance of the mediational effect, we also needed to show that the associations of organizational re-

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations: Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organizational size</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational rewards</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Procedural justice</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.62)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisor support</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. POS</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. AC</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(N = 367\). Scale score correlations are given above the diagonal. Correlations of .12 or above were significant at the .05 level. Internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses along the diagonal. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment.
wards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC were reduced when POS was included in the predictive model. Kenny et al. (1998, p. 260) showed that the statistical significance of the indirect effect of the predictor variable on the outcome variable via the mediating variable is equivalent to this drop. Therefore, we multiplied the unstandardized path coefficient for a given relationship between a work experience (organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support) and POS by the unstandardized path coefficient for the association between POS and AC. This indirect effect path coefficient divided by the standard error yielded a test statistic approximately distributed as Z. Consistent with the fourth and last criterion for mediation, organizational rewards had a unique indirect association with AC (b = .25, Z = 3.63, p < .05), as did procedural justice (b = .38, Z = 4.48, p < .05) and supervisor support (b = .34, Z = 5.28, p < .05).

As additional assessment of model fit, we compared the hypothesized model with an alternative model that incorporated the original paths and added direct paths from each work experience to AC. Although more complex than the hypothesized model, the alternative model did not fit the data better, according to a chi-square difference test: \( \chi^2_{diff}(3, N = 367) = .26, ns \). In the alternative model, the paths found statistically significant in the original model remained so, whereas the added paths were not significant.

In sum, POS mediated the associations of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC. These findings suggest that favorable work experiences attributable to the organization’s discretionary actions (organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support) contribute to POS; further, POS mediates the relationships between favorable work experiences and AC.

Study 2: Directionality of the Relationship Between POS and AC

We measured POS and AC at two points in time and used structural equation modeling to examine the direction of the relationship between POS and AC. On an exploratory basis, we selected a 2-year interval with one employee sample and a 3-year interval with a second sample. Tenure was used as a covariate.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Both samples consisted of employees working for a large electronics and appliance sales organization located in the northeastern United States. The initial questionnaire administration (Time 1) took place at nine locations for employees studied over the 2-year interval and at eight locations for the employees sampled over the 3-year interval. Employees voluntarily completed the survey during their regularly scheduled working hours in conference rooms at each site. The questionnaire was readministered at Time 2 in the same locations as before. 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. Participants were asked to provide their social security numbers, which were needed to match their responses for the two questionnaire administrations.

The 2-year sample consisted of 333 employees, of whom 45% were hourly paid sales-support employees (e.g., cashiers, clerks, stockers); 31% were salaried sales-support employees (e.g., accountants, human resource personnel, store managers); 17% were hourly paid salespeople, and 4% were salaried salespeople. On average, these employees had been with the organization for 43.2 months (SD = 35.9) prior to the administration of the first questionnaire. Sixty-three percent were men. The 3-year sample consisted of 226 employees, of whom 34% were hourly paid salespeople, 30% were salaried sales-support employees, 27% were hourly paid sales-support employees, and 9% were salaried salespeople. Average tenure prior to the first questionnaire administration was 54.6 months (SD = 45.4). Seventy-three percent were men.

Measures

Tenure. Tenure prior to the initial survey was obtained from company records.

Perceived organizational support. We used seven items from the SPOS (Eisenberger et al., 1986) with factor loadings ranging from .71 to .84. Study 2 was begun prior to the publication of the short form of the SPOS (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Lynch et al., 1999) used in Study 1. Therefore, five of the items were the same as those used in Study 1 and two were different.

Affective organizational commitment. The items were the same as those used in Study 1.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among measures at Times 1 and 2 for each sample are displayed in Table 4. Scale scores were computed by averaging POS items and AC items. As predicted, POS for each sample at Time 1 was related to AC at Time 2.

Distinctiveness of POS and AC

Using confirmatory factor analysis, we first assessed the discriminant validity of the POS and AC constructs at each time point for each sample. At Time 1 and Time 2, we compared (a) a model with all of the items loading on a global POS–AC latent variable (Model 1) and (b) a second model with the POS and AC items loading on two separate latent variables (Model 2). The chi-square difference between Model 1 and Model 2 was significant at each time point for both the 2-year-lag sample (Time 1: \( \chi^2_{diff}(1, N = \)
Table 4
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations: Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2-year-lag sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>43.24</td>
<td>35.92</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time 1 POS</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>(.78)</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Time 2 POS</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Time 1 AC</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time 2 AC</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3-year-lag sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>54.60</td>
<td>45.37</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time 1 POS</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Time 2 POS</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Time 1 AC</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time 2 AC</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 333 for the 2-year-lag sample; N = 226 for the 3-year-lag sample. All correlations were significant at the .05 alpha level. Scale score correlations are given above the diagonal; internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses along the diagonal. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment.

333]) = 79.70, p < .05; Time 2: \(\chi^2\text{[1, }N = 333] = 183.67, p < .05\) and the 3-year-lag sample (Time 1: \(\chi^2\text{[1, }N = 226] = 115.11, p < .05\); Time 2: \(\chi^2\text{[1, }N = 226] = 87.10, p < .05\), indicating that Model 2 showed better fit to the data than Model 1. These findings suggest that POS and AC are distinct though closely related.

**Causal Relationship Between POS and AC**

Cross-lag panel models were estimated for each sample to assess the relationships between Time 1 POS and the temporal change in AC, and between Time 1 AC and the temporal change in POS (see Figure 2). Time 2 latent variable variances were allowed to covary (Finkel, 1995, p. 29). Additionally, we allowed for autocorrelated error variances by freeing the error covariances of identical terms over time (Finkel, 1995, p. 61). Tenure at Time 1 was included as an exogenous variable.

The estimated cross-lagged models with standardized regression coefficients are shown in Figure 2 (the 2-year-lag values are to the left of each slash; the 3-year-lag values are to the right of each slash). For ease of presentation, we do not show the model’s measurement component, and we describe the effects of the covariate (tenure) in the text. For the 2-year-lag sample, tenure was associated with a change in AC but not in POS (\(\beta_s = .14\) and .08, respectively). For the 3-year lag, tenure was related to changes in

*Figure 2.* Structural equation model of the relationships between perceived organizational support (POS) and affective commitment (AC) over time in the 2-year-lag and 3-year-lag samples in Study 2. Numbers to the left of the slash are 2-year-lag values; those to the right of the slash are 3-year-lag values. *p < .05, one-tailed. **p < .01, one-tailed.
both POS and AC (both $\beta$s = .19). Of more central interest, for the 2-year sample, POS was positively related to the temporal change in AC. In contrast, AC was not associated with the temporal change in POS. The fit indices indicated adequate fit of the 2-year sample to the data (RMSEA = .05, goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = .90, CFI = .95, TLI = .94), $\chi^2(302, N = 333) = 543.25, p < .05$. Similarly, the 3-year sample showed a positive relationship between POS and the temporal change in AC and the absence of an association of AC with the temporal change in POS. Fit indices again indicated adequate fit to the data (RMSEA = .06, GFI = .86, CFI = .93, TLI = .92), $\chi^2(195, N = 226) = 535.30, p < .05$. In sum, consistent with Hypothesis 2, POS was found to be reliably related to temporal changes in AC over a 2-year and a 3-year period in different samples of employees. In contrast, initial AC was not reliably related to changes in POS. These findings provide evidence that POS leads to AC.

Study 3: AC as a Mediator of the Relationship Between POS and Employee Turnover

Findings from Studies 1 and 2 show that POS mediates the effect of work experiences on AC and that over time, POS seems to be associated with changes in AC, but not the reverse. These results suggest that changes in POS precede changes in AC. Additional evidence for the antecedent nature of POS in the commitment process would be gained by showing that AC mediates common consequences, including voluntary employee turnover. According to organizational support theory, POS strengthens AC, which, in turn, should reduce turnover by strengthening employees’ sense of belonging and identification with the organization (cf. Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1982). Therefore, AC should mediate a negative association between POS and employee turnover (Hypothesis 3). Because a relationship between POS and turnover has yet to be demonstrated, we examined turnover during a 6-month period in two quite different organizations: a retail sales organization and a poultry- and feed-processing plant.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The first sample consisted of 1,249 employees at eight sites of the sales organization examined in Study 2. Administration procedures were the same as those in Study 2. Eleven hundred and sixty-three employees (93%) returned completed questionnaires. We excluded from the analysis 39 employees who were laid off during the 6 months following the survey, leaving a sample of 1,124 employees. Forty-four percent of the final sample were hourly paid sales-support employees, 35% were hourly paid salespeople, 17% were salaried sales-support employees, and 4% were salaried salespeople. The average tenure of these employees was 35.2 months ($SD = 36.2$). Sixty-seven percent were women. The turnover rate was 14%. Employees who left had been with the organization less time than those who stayed ($M_s = 19.08$ and 37.86, respectively), $F(1, 1122) = 39.08, p < .001$. Therefore, we controlled statistically for tenure in our mediation analysis.

Sample 2 consisted of 309 employees at a medium-sized firm located in the northeastern United States which processed chicken and eggs for human consumption and that manufactured animal feeds. Using the same procedures as those in the second study, we administered questionnaires in plant cafeterias. Two hundred and seventy-two employees (88%) returned completed questionnaires. We excluded from the analysis 10 employees who were laid off during the 6 months following the survey, leaving a sample of 262 employees. Sixty-two percent of the final sample processed or packaged chicken, 20% manufactured animal feeds, and 18% cleaned or packaged eggs. The turnover rate for this sample was 10%.

Measures

Tenure. To control for employee tenure in the sales organization, the number of months that each employee worked for the organization prior to the administration of the questionnaire was obtained from company records. Such information was not available for the poultry- and feed-processing employees.

POS and AC. Items for both samples were the same as those used in Study 2.

Turnover. Six months following the survey administration, we obtained voluntary employee turnover data from organizational records.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among measures are displayed in Table 5. As predicted for both samples, POS was positively related to AC and negatively related to turnover. These relationships satisfied Kenny et al.’s (1998) first two conditions for demonstrating mediation—namely, that the exogenous variable (POS) be related to the mediator (AC) and the outcome variable (turnover). Also, for Sample 1, tenure was positively related to POS and AC and was negatively related to turnover.

Distinctiveness of POS and AC

Following our procedure in Studies 1 and 2, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis for each sample to assess the discriminant validity of POS and AC. Consistent with the findings of the first two studies, sequential chi-square difference tests indicated that the two-factor model with POS and AC as separate factors produced a significantly better fit to the data than a one-factor model for each sample (retail sample $\chi^2_{diff}(1, N = 1,124) = 142.8$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1: Retail employees ($N = 1,124$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tenure</td>
<td>35.15</td>
<td>36.21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. POS</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. AC</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Turnover</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2: Poultry- and feed-processing employees ($N = 262$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. POS</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. AC</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Turnover</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All correlations were significant at the .05 alpha level. Internal reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are given in parentheses along the diagonal. Regarding turnover, employees who stayed were coded as 0, and those who left voluntarily were coded as 1. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment.
PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Mediating Role of AC

Because turnover was a binary variable, we used hierarchical logistic regression to assess the mediating role of AC in the relationship found between POS and turnover. Tenure was available as a covariate for Sample 1. Inasmuch as we used logistic regression, statistical significance was assessed with the Wald statistic, which approximates a Z-squared distribution. Regarding the retail employee sample, Kenny et al.’s (1998) third mediation requirement, that AC be associated with turnover while controlling for POS, was met (see Step 3 in the top half of Table 6). Satisfication of the fourth and final mediation requirement, that the relationship between POS and turnover be reduced when AC is entered into the equation, is suggested by the nonsignificant relationship between POS and turnover in the final regression step. More precisely, using the same equation as in the first study, we found that the lessening of the relationship between POS and turnover produced by the introduction of AC into the equation was statistically significant (b = .14, SE = .07, Z = 2.10, p < .05).

Findings were similar for the employees of the poultry- and feed-processing organization. The bottom half of Table 6 shows that AC was negatively related to turnover when controlling for POS (the third mediation requirement). Further, the relationship between POS and turnover was no longer significant when controlling for AC, and the reduction in the strength of the association between POS and turnover produced by the introduction of AC into the equation was statistically significant (b = .32, SE = .16, Z = 2.07, p < .05). The fourth and final mediation requirement was thereby met.

For both samples of employees, the evidence supported Hypothesis 3 that AC mediates a negative relationship between POS and voluntary employee turnover. These results are consistent with those of the first two studies indicating that POS plays an antecedent role in the commitment process. The findings follow from organizational support theory, which holds that POS reduces turnover partly by strengthening employees’ emotional bond to the organization.

General Discussion

Using a diverse sample of employees from a variety of organizations, Study 1 found that POS mediated positive associations of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with AC. Study 2 provided evidence that POS leads to AC. Study 3 reported that AC mediated negative relationships between POS and subsequent voluntary turnover. Taken together, the findings suggest that favorable work experiences operate via POS to increase AC, which, in turn, decreases employee turnover.

Mediation by POS of the Relationships Between Work Experience and AC

The present study is one of the few that specifically focuses on mechanisms that may be responsible for observed relationships between work experience and AC. According to organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1997; Shore & Shore, 1995), favorable work experiences ascribed to the organization’s voluntary, intentional acts contribute to POS. POS should increase AC on the basis of the reciprocation of positive regard and caring and the incorporation of organizational membership and role status into social identity. We found that organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support had unique associations with POS and that POS mediated the relationship between these work experiences and AC. The results extend previous findings showing that each of these factors was related to POS and AC. Employees evidently distinguish the favorableness of different work experiences and sum them to determine organizational support, which leads to greater AC.

Causal Direction of the Relationship Between POS and AC

We found that POS was positively related to changes in AC over time, providing evidence that POS contributes to AC. These rela-

Table 6
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Turnover on Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Affective Commitment (AC): Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Wald</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Wald</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1: Retail employees</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>35.82**</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>35.14**</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>-.180</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>7.09**</td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>4.67*</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>4.67*</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2: Poultry- and feed-processing employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>-.59</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>11.10**</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. B indicates unstandardized regression coefficient. Wald coefficient is Z squared.
*p < .05. **p < .01.
tionships were found over 2-year and 3-year periods. The results supplement prior findings involving the simultaneous assessment of POS and AC that left the association’s causal direction indeterminate. Although we controlled for tenure, the findings do not, of course, rule out the possibility that some omitted third variable is responsible for the association between POS and AC.

These findings are consistent with the suggestion by Mowday et al. (1982) that AC is malleable across a person’s career. Besides the gradual accumulation of work experiences that influence POS and AC (Shore & Shore, 1995), unexpected events of personal significance may have a major impact. For example, managers who had been designated as “surplus” showed reduced POS (Armstrong-Stassen, 1997). Such a sudden change in POS might rapidly alter AC. Similarly, being denied an expected promotion or pay raise or receiving such benefits unexpectedly might produce a substantial change in POS, with consequent alteration in AC.

Future research might examine changes in POS and AC across a greater portion of employees’ careers and consider the effects of traumatic organizational events on POS and AC.

AC was unrelated to temporal changes in POS, providing no evidence that AC leads to POS. On theoretical grounds, one might argue that the relationship between POS and AC should be bidirectional. Employees with high AC may be more likely than others to believe that favorable treatment reflects the organization’s benevolent intent rather than external constraints, thereby increasing POS. Further, AC has been found to have negative relationships with absenteeism and to have positive, if weak, relationships with various kinds of performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982).

Lowered absenteeism or increased performance, resulting from AC, may be rewarded in many organizations, leading to greater POS. Possibly, relationships between AC and temporal changes in POS would be found with intervals shorter than those used in the second study and therefore more sensitive to the effects of sudden or unexpected events. Whether or not the causal relationship between POS and AC turns out to be bidirectional, Study 2 provides evidence that POS leads to AC.

**Mediation by AC of the Relationship Between POS and Employee Turnover**

We found with sales employees and poultry- and feed-processing workers that AC mediated the relationship between POS and subsequent turnover, supplementing previous findings that POS was related to turnover intentions and that AC was related to turnover. These results suggest that employees’ belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being increases AC which, in turn, reduces turnover.

The turnover findings have important practical consequences. Substantial costs may be involved in searching for new employees, training them, and foregoing the contributions of seasoned employees during recruitment and training. Reichheld and Teal (1996) found that when a stock brokerage firm reduced its annual voluntary turnover rate from 20% to 10%, the estimated average long-term value of new hires doubled. Organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support appear to be readily modifiable work experiences that lead to AC via POS and thereby reduce employee turnover. Findings from Study 2 showing that POS was associated with changes in AC over periods of 2 and 3 years suggest that the relationship between POS and turnover may last substantially longer than examined in this study. Future studies might consider AC-mediated associations of POS with turnover over longer intervals to examine the durability of such relationships.

**Implications for Related Theoretical Approaches**

Our findings are consistent with organizational support theory and other social exchange approaches holding that employees reciprocate favorable treatment with greater commitment and performance (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982; Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1980; Shore & Shore, 1995; Wayne et al., 1997). Although the present studies did not directly assess the reciprocation process, Eisenberger et al. (2001) found that the relationship between POS and AC was partly mediated by employees’ felt obligation to care about the organization’s welfare and help the organization reach its goals. Moreover, the relationship between POS and felt obligation was greater among employees who strongly accepted the reciprocity norm as applied to work. Recognizing that feelings of obligation may not always instill the positive affect associated with AC, POS appears to establish a context in which felt obligation becomes integrated into a favorably experienced relationship with the organization.

The employee–employer relationship appears to be dynamic, with employees monitoring and responding to changes in the organization’s apparent commitment to them. Rousseau and her colleagues (e.g., Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998) argued that employees develop a psychological contract concerning the mutual obligations between themselves and their employer. Repeated contract violations increase the likelihood of employee withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and voluntary turnover (Rousseau, 1995). Relational contracts, involving open-ended, long-term commitments by employees and organizations to look out for each other’s welfare, were found to be maintained by organizational actions that met employees’ needs and created trust in the organization to fulfill its obligations (Robinson & Wolfe Morrison, 1995; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). In the present view, high POS conveys the organization’s preference for a strong relational contract with an employee, whereas low POS communicates the organization’s preference for a weak relational contract, with consequences for felt obligation to the organization and AC. Research is needed on the relationships among POS, psychological contracts, felt obligation, and AC (cf. Meyer & Allen, 1997; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994).

Eisenberger et al. (1997; see also Kocs, 1991) reported that favorable work experiences were associated with POS to the extent that employees believed them to be under the organization’s voluntary control. The necessity that favorable treatment be discretionary in order to influence POS suggests that some work experiences may contribute to AC by means other than POS. For example, work experiences intrinsic to the job itself (e.g., autonomy, variety, and challenge) might be attributed more to the job’s nature than to organizational support. Positive relationships found between intrinsic job characteristics and AC (e.g., Colarelli, Dean, & Konstans, 1987; Dunham, Grube, & Casteneda, 1994; Hackett et al., 1994) might be mediated by perceptions of competence (Meyer & Allen, 1997), the enjoyment of intrinsically interesting activities (Eisenberger et al., 1999), or the fit between work experiences and
employee values (e.g., Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989; Motz, 1988). In addition, rewards that are contingent on performance have been found to influence perceptions of competence (Eisenberger et al., 1999); thus, performance-contingent rewards may contribute to AC by increasing both POS and perceived competence.

In summary, the present studies provide convergent evidence that perceived organizational support plays an important role in the commitment process, helping to explain how basic work experiences influence affective commitment and, ultimately, employee withdrawal behavior. Organizational support theory and related social exchange accounts help bring order to the myriad of empirical findings on the antecedents and consequences of affective commitment.

References


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