Perceived Organizational Support: Inferior Versus Superior Performance by Wary Employees

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Retail employees in Study 1 and employees from multiple organizations in Study 2 completed a questionnaire investigating the moderating effect of perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship of employees' fear of exploitation in exchange relationships (reciprocal wariness) and their in-role and extra-role job performance. When POS was low, reciprocal wariness was negatively related to in-role and extra-role job performance. With high POS, reciprocal wariness was positively related to extra-role performance and either positively related to in-role performance (for retail employees) or showed no reliable relationship with in-role performance (for the multiorganizational sample). In deciding on their work effort, reciprocal-wary employees considered how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Implications for employee–employer exchange relationships and workforce cynicism are discussed.

Social exchange theory assumes that the reciprocation of valued resources fosters the initiation, strengthening, and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Gouldner (1960) argued that the exchange process is governed by a universal norm of reciprocity obligating individuals receiving benefits to compensate the donor. Extending this approach to work organizations, employee–employer relationships may be viewed as the trade of employee effort and loyalty for socioemotional benefits (e.g., esteem and approval) and tangible resources (e.g., pay and fringe benefits; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Etzioni, 1961; Kotter, 1973; Levinson, 1965; March & Simon, 1958; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1980; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). The norm of reciprocity requires employees receiving increased benefits from their work organizations to compensate their employer with higher work performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993).

The strength of exchange relationships is influenced by the participants' anticipated costs and benefits (Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Individuals expecting that their partners possessed or were likely to possess valued resources showed greater reciprocation of aid (Eisenberger, & Speicher, 1992; Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987; Pruitt, 1968). Giving large amounts of aid can be seen as an investment based on the expectation that one's partner will reciprocate generously (Gouldner, 1960). However, such investments carry risk. Exchange relationships may be damaged when one individual repeatedly fails to receive the compensation he or she feels is deserved. The undercompensated individual may question the other's willingness to live up to the reciprocity norm, lessening his or her investment in the relationship.

Suspicion of others' intentions to live up to their exchange obligations may result not only from recent mistreatment but also from a generalized fear of mistreatment in social exchange (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987). Individual differences in generalized fear of exploitation have been found to influence the exchange of resources in interpersonal relationships (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987). We extended this research to the employee–employer relationship. We show how generalized fear of exploitation can undermine employee work performance and how this poor performance can be ameliorated by employees' perceptions that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

Reciprocation Wariness

Employers' motivation for maintaining a strong exchange relationship with employees may be lessened by short-term financial gains available from actions and policies not viewed by employees as in their best interests. Believing the elimination of jobs and reduction of employee benefits will reduce expenses and produce quick profits, many organizations have in the past two decades reduced their workforce...
and weakened traditional employee benefits. Fewer compa-
nies today than in the past implicitly guarantee long-term
employment, provide generous pay increments and com-
prehensive health benefits, or subsidize general education
courses (Dipboye, Smith & Howell, 1994; Kalleberg,
Knake, Marsden, & Spaeth, 1996; Muchinsky, 1997).

Publicity given to reductions in workforce and employee
benefits has contributed to a mistrust of work organiza-
tions to treat employees equitably (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989;
Mirvis & Kanter, 1992). For example, employees who re-
main with an organization following an organizational
downsizing have typically not received new benefits com-
mensurate with the resultant increased responsibilities.
Many employees believe that their organization holds them
in low regard and ignores their interests (cf. Anderson,
1996; McLean Parks & Kidder, 1994). The fraying of the
employee—employer exchange relationship lessens employ-
ees’ motivation to exceed minimal standards of perform-
ance or to help the organization in ways beyond the scope
of specified job roles (Rousseau, 1995).

Unwillingness to exceed minimal performance require-
ments may be especially great among employees predis-
posed to expect mistreatment in exchange relationships (cf.
Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987; Gouldner,
1960; M. S. Greenberg & Westcott, 1983). Eisenberger et
al. (1987) identified reciprocity wariness as a generalized
cautiousness in reciprocating aid stemming from a fear of
exploitation in interpersonal relationships. Individuals ei-
ther receiving or extending aid may be mistreated by others
who violate the reciprocity norm. Because individuals giv-
ing aid often have the opportunity to select the time and type
of repayment, they can place exorbitant demands on the
recipient (Cialdini, 1993). Further, individuals extending
aid cannot be sure that the recipient will provide equitable
compensation. Therefore, some degree of reciprocity
wariness serves as a realistic protection against misuse of
the reciprocity norm.

Reciprocation-wary individuals express a general hesi-
tance to accept help (Eisenberger et al., 1987). Being fearful
that others will use the norm of reciprocity to exploit them
if they respond generously to favorable treatment, wary
individuals are hesitant to provide aid, return aid, or con-
tribute a great deal to a social relationship until they are
convinced that the other party can be counted on to act
responsibly. As a personality variable, reciprocation war-
iness involves a general predisposition to fear and is an
attempt to avoid exploitation. This generalized cautiousness
can be distinguished from situational influences on fear of
exploitation such as the identity of an exchange partner or
work versus nonwork settings.

Eisenberger et al. (1987) studied the effects of wariness
on reciprocation using a prisoner’s dilemma bargaining task
designed to mimic everyday situations in which cooperation
by two participants would produce substantial gains but in
which exploitation of one participant by the other could
result in a short-term advantage. Students whose question-
naire responses indicated high reciprocation wariness re-
turned less aid following beneficial treatment by a partner
and viewed their benefactors less favorably than low-wary
students (Eisenberger et al., 1987). High-wary individuals
also showed less generosity in a bargaining task than low-
wary individuals following receipt of a communication of-
fering cooperation (Cotterell et al., 1992). Friends and
roommates of high-wary individuals viewed them as rela-
tively selfish and uncaring (Cotterell et al., 1992). Students
who were supervised by high-wary resident assistants eval-
uated those assistants as relatively unapproachable, hesitant
to develop close relationships, and unresponsive to student
needs (Cotterell et al., 1992).

Highly wary individuals show greater reciprocation of
favorable treatment when they believe the exchange of
resources is unlikely to result in their exploitation. When
offered protection against mistreatment, wary individuals
can behave generously. High-wary individuals were more
generous than low-wary individuals following the receipt of
minimal aid; the return of this help would allow them to
cautiously probe the intentions of others (Eisenberger et al.,
1987). High-wary individuals were also more generous than
low-wary individuals at the start of a bargaining task if they
were assured of a large number of bargaining trials (Cot-
terell et al., 1992). High-wary participants may have re-
sponded favorably to the expectation of the long-term in-
teraction as providing opportunities to test the good faith of
their partner. This evidence supports the interpretation that
high-wary individuals are not indiscriminately selfish; they
behave generously in situations that reduce the likelihood of
exploitation.

Because people tend to attribute others’ actions to disposi-
tional factors (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; E. E. Jones & Nis-
bett, 1972) and employees tend to personify the organiza-
tion and its actions (Levinson, 1965), the willingness of
the organization to live up to exchange obligations would be
doubt by reciprocation-wary individuals. In employment
settings, wary employees may be reluctant to invest their
efforts beyond what their job explicitly requires unless
convinced the employer is committed to a strong exchange
relationship. Obtaining the dedication and superior perfor-
ance of reciprocation-wary employees may be especially
difficult because of the widespread publicity given layoffs
of long-term employees, increased workloads, and restric-
tions of employee benefits. Reciprocation-wary individuals
may view such treatment of employees as confirmation of
their suspicions that the organization cannot be counted on
to satisfy its exchange obligations. Because of uncertainty
concerning an organization’s intent to reward high work
effort, employees with strong reciprocation wariness may
perform poorly.

Reciprocation wariness can be distinguished from equity
sensitivity, another individual difference related to the exchange of resources between employee and employer. Individuals with high equity sensitivity show an increased concern that their ratio of gains to costs in exchange relationships be equivalent to that of others (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987; King, Miles, & Day, 1993; Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1994). Equity-sensitive individuals have been found to be highly accepting of the norm of reciprocity (King et al., 1993). Reciprocity-wary individuals, in contrast, show average endorsement of the reciprocity norm. Further, in contrast to equity-sensitive individuals, they frequently underreciprocate aid for fear that their generosity will result in an escalating exchange relationship in which they will be mistreated (Eisenberger et al., 1987).

Wary individuals can also be distinguished from entitled individuals, who show little discomfort from overreward (King et al., 1993). Rather than an effort to gain a competitive social advantage, wary individuals may accept rewards and withhold compensation in an attempt to protect themselves from unscrupulous partners who could demand exorbitant returns. Prior evidence shows that after wary individuals are convinced that partners are willing to reciprocate favorable treatment appropriately, they are equally or more generous than others (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987).

Reciprocation Wariness and Perceived Organizational Support

Poor work performance by reciprocity-wary employees may be improved by convincing them that the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that, to meet needs for approval, affiliation, and esteem, and to determine the organization’s readiness to reward increased effort, employees form a general belief concerning the extent to which the organization thinks highly of their contributions and promotes their welfare. Such perceived organizational support (POS) may be encouraged by employees’ tendency to ascribe humanlike characteristics to their organizations (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Levinson (1965) noted that organizational policies and decisions carried out by agents of the organization are often viewed as indications of the organization’s intent, rather than being attributed solely to a particular individual. On the basis of POS, employees infer the organization’s commitment to them and readiness to reward greater effort. POS serves to increase the expectation of material resources (e.g., pay, fringe benefits) and symbolic resources (e.g., praise, approval) resulting from increased work effort.

Eisenberger et al. (1986) found that employees expressed consistent agreement with various statements concerning how much the organization appreciated their contributions and would treat them favorably or unfavorably in a variety of situations, which is consistent with the view that employees form a general belief concerning the organization’s commitment to them. POS has been found to be influenced by policies, procedures, and decisions indicative of the organization’s concern with employee welfare and the organization’s favorable evaluation of employee contributions. POS was positively related to perceived sufficiency of pay and to perceived sufficiency of family-oriented policies and actions (Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994), high-quality employee–supervisor relationships, favorable developmental training experiences and promotions (Wayne et al., 1997), clearly stated guidelines defining appropriate work behavior and job demands (Hutchison, 1997; B. Jones, Flynn, & Kelloway, 1995), participation in goal setting, receipt of performance feedback (Hutchison, 1997; Hutchison & Garstka, 1996), supportive communications with immediate supervisors and upper management (Allen, 1992, 1995), and procedural justice in performance-appraisal decisions (Fasolo, 1995; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998).

On the basis of the reciprocity norm, employees who perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being are obligated to increase their in-role and extra-role performance. In contrast, repeated indications that the organization does not value employee contributions and fails to reward increased performance reduce employees’ perceived obligations (Rousseau, 1995) and increase self-serving behaviors at the expense of the organization’s welfare (Murphy, 1993). POS was found to be positively related to affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Guzzo et al., 1994; Hutchison, 1997; Hutchison & Garstka, 1996; B. Jones et al., 1995; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Wayne et al., 1997), evaluative and objective measures of performance of standard job activities (Armelia, Eisenberger, Fasolo & Lynch, 1998; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990), help given to coworkers (Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997; Witt, 1991), constructive suggestions for improving the operations of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1990), and influence tactics designed by employees to make supervisors aware of their dedication and accomplishments (Shore & Wayne, 1993). POS was negatively related to absenteeism (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990) and turnover intentions (Guzzo et al., 1994; Wayne et al., 1997). Consistent with the view that POS meets socioemotional needs, POS lessened the relationship between nurses’ lengths of contact with AIDS patients and negative affect (George, Reed, Ballard, Colin, & Fielding, 1993). Also, the relationship between POS and impaired-driving arrests was greater among state police officers with high socioemotional needs (Armelia et al., 1998).

POS may be used by employees as an indicator of the organization’s benevolent or malevolent intent in the ex-
change of employee effort for reward and recognition. Where POS is an experience-based attribution concerning a particular organization's policies, norms, and procedures as they affect employees, reciprocation wariness is a persisting personality trait or disposition involving a fear of exploitation in social exchange relationships. The specificity of POS to a particular exchange partner (one's organization) and its malleability due to experience differentiate POS from the durable trait of reciprocation wariness. At low POS, reciprocation-wary employees should work less hard on behalf of the organization than other employees. In contrast, at high POS, reciprocation-wary employees should view the organization as willing to act as a responsible exchange partner, leading such employees to increase their work effort. Therefore, the poor performance of wary employees, stemming from their fear of exploitation in social exchange, may be mitigated by high POS.

We examined the moderating effects of POS on the relationship between employees' reciprocation wariness and two forms of work performance—in-role and extra-role—known to influence organizations' success (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Williams & Anderson, 1991; Witt, 1991; Wolfe Morrison, 1994). A critical distinction between in-role and extra-role performance involves the extent to which organizations require the behaviors to maintain good standing in the organization (George & Brief, 1992; Wolfe Morrison, 1994; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In-role job performance involves employee actions needed to adequately fulfill employees' job descriptions (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Extra-role performance refers to discretionary actions contributing to organization effectiveness and lying outside formal role requirements (George & Brief, 1992). George and Brief categorized pro-organizational extra-role behaviors as helping coworkers in their assigned tasks, protecting the organization from potential problems, making constructive suggestions to improve the functioning of the organization, and gaining knowledge, skills, and abilities that will be of benefit to the organization.

With retail employees as participants in Study 1 and employees from a variety of organizations as participants in Study 2, we tested the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** When POS is low, in-role job performance and extra-role job performance will decrease as reciprocation wariness increases.

**Hypothesis 2:** High POS will reduce or eliminate the negative relationships of reciprocation wariness with in-role job performance and extra-role job performance.

**Study 1: Performance by Wary Retail Employees**

Employees of a chain of discount electronics and appliance stores were surveyed concerning their POS and reciprocation wariness. We asked employees' supervisors to evaluate in-role and extra-role job performance and used these data to examine the predictions that reciprocation wariness would be negatively related to performance when POS was low and that the inferiority of performance would be lessened by high POS.

**Method**

**Sample and Procedure**

We administered the survey to 323 employees at eight of the organization's sites located in the northeastern United States. In conference rooms at each site, employees voluntarily completed the survey during their regularly scheduled working hours. 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 principal investigators in sealed envelopes. Of the 323 employees, 93% (N = 300) returned questionnaires with their names, as needed to identify their supervisors, and were included in the final sample. Of the final sample, 42% were sales-support, hourly-paid employees (e.g., cashiers, clerks, stockers), 34% were hourly salespeople, 20% were salaried-support employees, and 4% were salaried salespeople. The mean tenure of these employees was 3.12 years (SD = 3.11 years), and 30% were women.

We had each employee's supervisor rate the employee on in-role and extra-role performance using an evaluation scale that we supplied. Supervisor evaluations of employee performance were completed privately by each employee's supervisor during regular work hours within 1 week following the employee's completion of the survey. Supervisors received the same guarantees of confidentiality that were given to participants. Supervisors rated an average of 2.6 employees (SD = 1.9, Min = 2, mode = 1, range = 8).

Regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between reciprocation wariness and employee job performance, as moderated by POS.

**Measures**

**POS.** We used Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch's (1997) short version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) to assess the extent to which employees perceived that the organization valued their contributions and cared about their well-being (see Table 1). This version of the SPOS contains 8 of the 36 items that loaded highly on the main POS factor reported in the scale's source article by Eisenberger et al. (1986) and that apply to a wide variety of organizations (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Respondents indicated their extent of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Prior studies surveying a variety of occupations and organizations have provided evidence for the high internal reliability and unidimensional nature of the survey (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Settoon et al., 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997). Confirmatory factor analysis of the short version of the SPOS similarly indicated a unidimensional structure, and the items showed high internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .90; Eisenberger et al., 1997).

**Reciprocation wariness.** To assess wariness, we used Eisenberger, Speicher, Leeds, Lynch, and Banicky's (1998) revision of
Table 1
Study 1 and Study 2 Factor Loadings for the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My organization really cares about my well-being.</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My organization shows very little concern for me. (R)</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My organization cares about my opinions.</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me.</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Reciprocation Wariness Scale (see Table 2; Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987). The two source articles (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987) for the original scale reported that the wariness items had a unitary factor with high internal reliability (α = .80) and negligible relationships with scores on Crowne and Marlowe’s (1964) Social Desirability Scale, Christie and Geis’s (1970) Machiavellianism Scale, and Kuhlman, Camac, and Cunha’s (1986) measures of social goal orientation (e.g., cooperative, competitive, and individualistic social goal orientations; Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987). The revised version of the scale includes six high-loading items from the original source questionnaire (Eisenberger et al., 1987) that assess hesitation to accept or extend help (e.g., “You should not bend over backwards to help another person”), sense of exploitation when asked a favor (“I feel used when people ask favors of me”), three additional items designed to assess wary individuals’ concerns with receiving compensation for helping others (e.g., “When I help someone, I often find myself thinking about what is in it for me”), and one item concerned with others’ exploitative motivation (“People who act nicely toward others are often just trying to get something”). The four new items replaced three items with low loadings on the original scale and one item that was confusing because it contained two negative clauses. In preliminary research with a sample of 176 university undergraduates, we found that the revised Reciprocation Wariness Scale showed a unitary factor structure, a high degree of internal reliability (Cronbach’s α = .80), and a low relationship with an 11-item short form of Crowne and Marlowe’s (1964) measure of social desirability (r = −.14, ns). Because the Reciprocation Wariness Scale has been used only with college students and part-time college employees, we examined the wary items’ utility of factor structure and internal reliability for our samples in Study 1 and Study 2. Respondents indicated their extent of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Supervisors responded to descriptive items concerning employee performance by indicating the extent of their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = disagree, 5 = very strongly agree; see Table 3). Supervisors were asked to compare each rated employee with the average of other employees holding similar jobs. In creating our extra-role measure of performance, we used George and Brief’s (1992) conceptualization of employee proactive behaviors designed to anticipate and rectify

Table 2
Study 1 and Study 2 Factor Loadings for the Reciprocation Wariness Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It generally pays to let others do more for you than you do for them.</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I help someone, I often find myself thinking about what is in it</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The most realistic policy is to take more from others than you give.</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In the long run, it is better to accept favors than to do favors for</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. You should give help only when it benefits you.</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. You should only help someone if that person will help you in the</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How many favors you do for someone should depend on how many favors</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I feel used when people ask favors of me.</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. You should not bend over backwards to help another person.</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. People who act nicely toward others are often just trying to get</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

organizational problems and to investigate new ways of increasing organizational effectiveness. In our view, no one scale adequately distinguished between the domains of in-role and extra-role behaviors as defined by George and Brief and as discussed in the introduction. Therefore, we drew items from several scales that were relevant to this distinction and carried out factor analyses in Studies 1 and 2 to assess the unidimensionality of the two types of employee performance. In-role performance was assessed by seven items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) and two items adapted from Smith, Organ, and Near (1983; see Table 3, items 2 & 3) to assess the extent to which employees fulfilled standard job responsibilities. To assess extra-role performance, seven items best representing discretionary acts by employees that serve to increase organizational effectiveness, listed in Table 3, were adapted from several scales of employee extra-role behaviors (McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Smith et al., 1983; Van Dyne, Graham, & Diener, 1994; Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Results

Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations

The unidimensionality of each survey measure was assessed using a principal components analysis and scree test (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989, p. 635). The items from the SPOS produced a large break in the scree plot with a single eigenvalue greater than 1.0 and high loadings on a single factor accounting for 58% of the total variance (see Table 1). The reciprocity wariness items also produced a large break in the scree plot with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. High loadings on the single factor captured 41% of the total variance (see Table 2).

As a result of the conceptual similarity of items assessing employee in-role and extra-role performance behavior, a factor analysis with an oblique rotation (Stevens, 1996, p. 369) was carried out on all the items. The analysis produced two large eigenvalues and a break in the scree plot suggesting the presence of two components. The pattern of each item’s high loading on its principal factor and low loading on the alternative factor, displayed in Table 3, also suggested a two-factor solution for employee performance behavior. These two factors accounted for 59% of the total variance. Because the factor analysis suggested independence between the two scales, in-role and extra-role performance were retained as separate constructs.

Scale means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are displayed in Table 4. The measures of POS, reciprocity wariness, in-role job performance, and extra-role job performance all showed high levels of internal reliability. In-role and extra-role performance shared 18% of common
Table 4
Study 1 and Study 2 Scale Properties, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>M*</th>
<th>SD*</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>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>organizational support</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>(.90/.89)</td>
<td>- .08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Reciprocity</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>- .13*</td>
<td>(.77/.82)</td>
<td>- .09</td>
<td>- .02</td>
<td>- .13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extra-role</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>(.91/.90)</td>
<td>- .05</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>(.87/.88)</td>
<td>- .16*</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In-role</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>- .13*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance</td>
<td>5. Tenure</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>- .25**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>- .05</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Organizational</td>
<td>39.37</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>- .06</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>size</td>
<td>7. Age</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>- .12</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Salary</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. For Study 1, N = 300; for Study 2, N = 221. Correlations for Study 1 appear above the diagonal; correlations for Study 2 appear below the diagonal; Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal (Study 1/Study 2). Tenure and age are measured in years. Education values indicate the highest levels obtained: 1 = undergraduate, 2 = some graduate, 3 = Masters, 4 = PhD or professional degree. Salary is measured in thousands of dollars: 1 = less than 20, 2 = 20–30, 3 = 30–40, 4 = 40–50, 5 = 50–60, 6 = more than 60. Organizational size is measured in number of employees: 1 = less than 200, 2 = 200–700, 3 = more than 700.

* Study 1. ** Study 2.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

variance, suggesting a modest degree of overlap in supervisory evaluation of the two measures. The patterns of loadings from the factor analysis and each scale's high internal reliability suggested that all scales measured relatively independent aspects of employee performance behavior. Moreover, Nunnally (1967, p. 211) stated that it is rare to find differences of greater than 20 points between the internal reliability and the correlation coefficient of two scales measuring the same construct given a sample size near 300. The internal reliability of in-role and extra-role performance exceeded the correlation coefficient by more than double the size of this criterion.

POS showed a reliable positive relationship with in-role job performance although not with extra-role job performance. Employees with more tenure showed reduced reciprocation wariness and greater extra-role job performance. No other relationships were statistically significant.

Moderating Effects of POS

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to assess moderating effects of POS on the relationship between reciprocation wariness and employee in-role and extra-role performance. To reduce potential collinearity between the interaction terms and their component variables, all component scales were centered (Aiken & West, 1991). To control for differences in tenure among employees that might be responsible for observed covariation among POS, reciprocation wariness, and performance, the employees' numbers of years of employment in the organization were entered as the first step in a hierarchical regression analysis (additional demographic variables were available for Study 2). The second step of the regression analysis added POS and reciprocation wariness. The third and final step of the analysis added the multiplicative composite of POS and reciprocation wariness to the equation to assess its effect after partialing out the effects of the other predictors in the model (see Table 5). The primary interest of the third step in the regression analysis was the significance of the interaction between POS and reciprocation wariness.

In Step 1, tenure showed no reliable relationship with in-role job performance. The effect of POS, entered in Step 2, was statistically significant. Entering the interaction term in the third step of the analysis accounted for a reliable amount of variance in in-role performance. The significant interaction between POS and reciprocation wariness suggested that the relationship between reciprocation wariness and employee in-role performance became less negative as POS increased. To examine this interaction in more detail, simple regression lines representing the relationship between reciprocation wariness and POS were plotted separately at low and high levels of POS (i.e., 1 SD above and below the mean; Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983; see Figure 1). Simple slope analyses indicated that, as predicted, for employees with low POS there was a significant negative relationship between wariness and in-role performance, t(295) = -2.12, p < .03. In contrast, for employees with high POS, there was a significant positive relationship between wariness and performance, t(295) = 2.19, p < .05. The overall pattern of results supported the study’s hypotheses suggesting that POS reduced the negative relationship between reciprocation wariness and in-role performance.

A similar regression analysis was carried out for extra-role performance (see Table 5). Step 1 of the analysis showed a reliable relationship for tenure, suggesting that employee extra-role performance increased with job tenure. The addition of POS and reciprocation wariness did not account for a reliable amount of additional variance in
Table 5
Study 1 Hierarchical Regression Analysis for In-Role Performance and Extra-Role Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>In-role performance</th>
<th>Extra-role performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wary ideology</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity wariness</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS × Wary interaction</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For in-role performance, final model, \(F(4, 295) = 3.17, p < .01\), and total \(R^2 = .04\). For extra-role performance, final model, \(F(4, 295) = 4.21, p < .01\), and total \(R^2 = .05\). \(B\) indicates unstandardized regression coefficients. \(β\) indicates standardized regression coefficients. Tenure is measured in years. POS = perceived organizational support.
* \(p < .05\). ** \(p < .01\).

Step 2. In Step 3, as with in-role job performance, the predicted interaction between POS and reciprocation wariness was reliable. The relationship between reciprocation wariness and extra-role performance became less negative as POS increased. As shown in Figure 1, among employees with low POS, there was a significant negative relationship between wariness and extra-role performance, \(t(295) = -2.67, p < .01\). In contrast, for employees with high POS, there was a significant positive relationship between reciprocation wariness and extra-role performance, \(t(295) = 2.54, p < .01\).

Results were consistent with the predictions. Among employees with low POS, there was a negative relationship of reciprocation wariness with both in-role job performance and extra-role job performance. The more wary the employees, the less likely they were to exceed the minimal acceptable level of conventional job performance or to engage in pro-organizational behavior. The moderating effect of POS on the relationship between reciprocation wariness and in-role performance was stronger than expected. We had anticipated that the negative relationship between reciprocation wariness and performance would be reduced or eliminated at high levels of POS. Among employees with high POS, those who had high reciprocation wariness showed greater in-role and extra-role performance than those having low reciprocation wariness.

This result may be compared with the previous finding with college students that increasing the expected length of an interpersonal interaction had a far greater incremental effect on the generosity of high-wary individuals than low-wary individuals (Cotterell et al., 1992). Among high-wary employees, POS may increase the expected stability of the exchange relationship and the belief that the organization will recompense dedication and increased effort. Under such conditions, high-wary employees may be more willing than other employees to increase their efforts for the organization.

Study 2: Performance by a Diverse Sample of Wary Employees

A diverse sample of employees drawn from a variety of organizations was surveyed to assess the generality of the findings obtained with a single-organization sample of retail employees. A mail survey was used to assess the POS and reciprocation wariness of a random sample of university alumni. Work supervisors were asked to evaluate the employee’s in-role and extra-role job performance. These procedures allowed a systematic replication examining the first study’s findings that (a) there was a negative relationship between reciprocation wariness and both in-role job performance and extra-role job performance among employees with low POS, (b) the negative relationship between wariness and performance was lessened by POS, and (c) at high levels of POS, there was a positive relationship between reciprocation wariness and performance.

Method

Names and phone numbers of 465 alumni (ages 25–60) of an eastern United States university were randomly generated from university records to obtain a sample working in diverse occupations and in a variety of organizations. Contacting each prospective participant by phone, we asked individuals to participate in a study examining work, health, and daily life. Alumni agreeing to participate were mailed a questionnaire packet including an informed consent, survey of self-report measures, a postage-paid return envelope, an alumni sticker as an incentive for completing the survey, and a request for permission to contact the employee’s
immediate work supervisor for a performance evaluation. Alumni participants were given an option to receive summary details of the survey by mail to them when analyses were complete. The scales assessing POS and reciprocation wariness, identical to those used in Study 1, were included in a larger series of questions concerning work and home life. Because of the diversity of the alumni sample, each respondent was requested to provide information concerning his or her age, organization size, tenure in the organization, salary, and level of completed education. To maximize survey return rates, follow-up letters were sent to participants failing to respond at 7 days, 3 weeks, and 6 weeks after the initial mail request (Dillman, 1978). Each follow-up contact included a letter that stressed the value of the survey research and the importance of participants’ responses. The final follow-up letter included a duplicate copy of the questionnaire.

Upon receiving participants’ consent to contact their immediate work supervisor, we sent a confidential letter to the supervisors explaining that one of their subordinates was participating in a study concerning work and daily living. Attached to the letter was the performance evaluation questionnaire (identical to that used in Study 1), a postage-paid return envelope, and the consent form signed by their subordinate granting permission for the supervisor to respond to questions concerning their work. We gave the supervisors written assurance that the evaluations would be used for research purposes only and would not be viewed by their subordinate.

Of the employees contacted by phone, 427 (92%) agreed to participate and completed self-report surveys. Of these participants, 283 granted permission to contact their work supervisors. Of the 283 work supervisors contacted by the investigators, 221 (78%) completed and returned the evaluation of the participants’ performance. This final sample of 221 employees, for whom supervisory evaluations had been obtained, were employed in various jobs within private industry (35%), education (33%), public sector (20%), and health care (12%). Of the final sample, 45% worked in large organizations (more than 700 employees), 21%
worked in mid-size organizations (200–700 employees), and 33%
worked in small organizations (fewer than 200 employees). The
average age of employees in the final sample was 39.4 years
(SD = 7.8), of whom 59% were female.

Results

Scale Characteristics

As in the first study, scale unidimensionality was as-
essed by using factor analysis with principal component
extraction. In the case of the performance evaluation scales,
the factor structure of the in-role and extra-role items were
examined using an oblique rotation (Stevens, 1996, p. 369).
As hypothesized, results indicated that the factor structure
of each scale was comparable to those in Study 1 (see
Tables 1, 2, and 3). Scale means, standard deviations, in-
ternal reliabilities, and intercorrelations are displayed in
Table 4. As in the first study, the measures of POS, recip-
rocation wariness, in-role job performance and extra-role
job performance all showed high levels of internal reliabil-
ity. Although the relationship between the in-role and extra-
role performance assessments was higher than in Study 1,
the internal reliability of these measures continued to ex-
ceed their correlation by an amount sufficient to indicate
independence between the measures (Nunnally, 1967,
p. 211).

The bivariate positive relationship between POS and em-
ployee in-role performance found in Study 1 was replicated
with the alumni sample, and a positive relationship between
POS and extra-role performance was also obtained. As in
the first study, a negative relationship was found between
tenure and reciprocation wariness. The new demographic
variables included in the second study showed moderate to
high intercorrelations, with POS negatively related to or-
ganization size.

Moderating Effects of POS

Hierarchical regression analyses, used to assess moderat-
ing effects of POS on the relationship between reciprocation
wariness and employee in-role and extra-role performance,
were equivalent to the first study except for the inclusion of
additional demographic variables as covariates. Because the
performance evaluations of our diverse sample of employ-
ees might be influenced by a variety of variables unrelated
to POS or reciprocation wariness, we used demographic
variables readily available to us to reduce such sources of
error variance. The first step of the analysis therefore re-
gressed in-role performance on employee tenure, age, sal-
ary, education, and size of the employee’s organization. For
in-role job performance, the block of demographic variables
had no reliable effect in Step 1 of the analysis (see Table 6).
In Step 2, POS and reciprocation wariness were added to the
equation. Although the addition of the main effects ac-
counted for a reliable amount of variance in Step 2 overall,
no predictor accounted for unique variance above and be-
yond other predictors in the model. Finally, adding the
interaction of POS and reciprocation wariness in the third
step accounted for a reliable amount of variance in in-role
performance. The interaction was the only reliable effect in
the model, which suggests that the relationship between
reciprocation wariness and employee in-role performance
became less negative as POS increased. To examine the
interaction in more detail, simple regression lines represent-
ing the relationship between reciprocation wariness and
POS were plotted separately at low and high levels of POS
(i.e., 1 SD above and below the mean; Aiken & West, 1991;
Cohen & Cohen, 1983; see Figure 2). Simple slope analyses
indicated that for employees with low POS, there was a
significant negative relationship between wariness and in-
role performance, t(212) = -3.37, p < .01. In contrast, for
employees with high POS, there was an unreliable relation-
ship in the positive direction between reciprocation war-
iness and in-role performance, t(212) = 0.52, p > .10. Thus,
the negative relationship between reciprocation wariness
and in-role job performance found in Study 1 among em-
ployees with low POS was successfully replicated in the
present study. Similarly, the relationship became less nega-
tive at higher levels of POS. However, the positive relation-
ship between reciprocation wariness and in-role job
performance found in the first study was not reliable within
the alumni sample.

A similar regression analysis was carried out for extra-
role performance (see Table 6). Education, entered in
Step 1, was positively related to extra-role performance.
The addition of POS and reciprocation wariness in Step 2
did account for a significant amount of variance; both POS
and employee education showed significant positive main
effects on extra-role performance. Entering the interaction
term in the final step of the regression analysis explained a
significant amount of additional variance. In this final step,
only the main effect of POS and the interaction between
POS and reciprocation wariness were unique predictors. As
with in-role job performance, the reliable interaction be-
tween ROS and reciprocation wariness suggested that the
relationship between reciprocation wariness and extra-role
performance became less negative as POS increased. Con-
sistent with the findings of the first study, Figure 2 shows
that among employees with low POS, there was a signifi-
cant negative relationship between wariness and extra-role
performance, t(212) = -2.12, p < .05. Also consistent with
the findings of the first study, there was a significant posi-
tive relationship between wariness and extra-role per-
formance for employees with high POS, t(212) = 2.11, 
p < .05.

In summary, the results of the alumni study were similar
in most respects to the findings with the retail organization.
For instance, in both studies we found that (a) reciprocation
### Table 6

**Study 2 Hierarchical Regression Analysis for In-Role Performance and Extra-Role Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>In-role performance</th>
<th>Extra-role performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization size</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization size</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity wariness</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization size</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in organization</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity wariness</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS × Wary interaction</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* For in-role performance, final model, F(8, 212) = 2.61, p < .01, and total R² = .09. For extra-role behavior, final model, F(8, 212) = 3.16, p < .01, and total R² = .11, p = .01, two-tailed. B indicates unstandardized regression coefficients. β indicates standardized regression coefficients. Tenure and age are measured in years. Education values indicate the highest levels obtained: 1 = undergraduate, 2 = some graduate, 3 = Masters, 4 = PhD or professional degree. Salary is measured in thousands of dollars: 1 = less than 20, 2 = 20–30, 3 = 30–40, 4 = 40–50, 5 = 50–60, 6 = more than 60. Organizational size is measured in number of employees: 1 = less than 200, 2 = 200–700, 3 = more than 700. POS = perceived organizational support.

wariness was negatively related to in-role and extra-role job performance among employees with low POS, (b) the negative relationship between reciprocity wariness and in-role and extra-role job performance became less negative as POS increased, and (c) there was a positive relationship between reciprocity wariness and extra-role job performance among employees with high POS. The only major difference between the two studies was that the positive relationship between reciprocity wariness and in-role job performance found for retail employees in Study 1 was not statistically reliable with the multiorganizational sample in Study 2.

**General Discussion**

POS affected the relationship between employees’ reciprocity wariness and their in-role and extra-role job performance. When POS was low, reciprocity wariness was negatively related to supervisors’ evaluations of performance. With high POS, reciprocity wariness was positively related to extra-role job performance and was either positively related to in-role job performance (retail employees) or showed no reliable relationship with in-role job performance (multiorganizational sample). In deciding whether to work beyond the minimum required in standard job activities and engage in extra-role actions that aid the organization, reciprocity-wariness employees consider the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

As predicted, among employees with low POS, reciprocity wariness was negatively related to in-role and extra-role job performance. These results are consistent with previous findings that high-wary college students reciprocated less aid than low-wary students and that high-wary resident-hall assistants were unresponsive to student needs (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1986). When POS is low, wary employees’ fears of exploitation appear to reduce their willingness to work hard at their jobs. A vicious cycle may ensue in which inferior performance leads to unfavorable treatment by the organization, further increasing the reciprocity-wariness employees’ alienation from their employers.

The moderating effects of POS on the relationship between reciprocity wariness and performance were stronger than expected. We anticipated that POS would reduce or
eliminate the inferior performance of wary employees. With high POS, wary employees showed greater extra-role performance than low-wary employees. Moreover, with high POS, high-wary retail employees showed greater in-role performance than low-wary employees. POS may reduce wary employees' fear of exploitation and encourage them to take the risk that the organization will fail to reciprocate high effort with favorable treatment.

Wary employees may be pleasantly surprised and relieved by indications that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. According to Aronson and Lindner (1965), when aversive treatment is expected, favorable treatment reduces anxiety and thereby increases enjoyment of the treatment and liking for the benefactor. The expectation of aversive treatment led college students to respond more positively to favorable treatment (e.g., Aronson & Lindner, 1965; Berscheid, Brothen, & Graziano, 1976; Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993; Burgoon, Le Poire, & Rosenthal, 1995; Mettee, Taylor, & Friedman, 1973). Reciprocation-wary employees may respond to POS in a similar manner; unexpected favorable treatment may lessen anxiety, increase affective attachment to the organization, and motivate greater efforts on the organization's behalf.

Some of the items on the Reciprocation Wariness Scale (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987) express a disinclination to return aid without explicitly stating a fear of exploitation. Therefore, it might be supposed that the wariness scale measures selfishness rather than a fear-based avoidance of reciprocation. Indeed, individuals scoring highly on the Reciprocation Wariness Scale were rated as uncaring and selfish by their friends and roommates (Cotterell et al., 1992). However, incorporated in the scale are additional items that explicitly assess a concern with ex-
ploitation and form a unitary factor with the items expressing a hesitation to return aid. Further, the present and previous studies (Eisenberger et al., 1987; Cotterell et al., 1992) found that the negative relationship between reciprocation wariness and reciprocation of favorable treatment was eliminated or reversed when exploitation seemed unlikely.

Equity sensitivity theory (Huseman et al., 1987) provides a possible alternative interpretation for the superior performance by wary employees having high POS. King et al. (1993) reported that equity-sensitive individuals are less satisfied than others with overreward. Working harder might reduce such discomfort by restoring equity. It is possible that reciprocation-wary employees are highly discomfited by excessively positive outcomes for their performance, resulting in high POS, and that they attempt to restore equity by increasing job performance. However, as previously noted, where equity-sensitive individuals are more accepting of the norm of reciprocity than others (King et al., 1993), reciprocation-wary individuals show typical acceptance of the reciprocity norm. Being fearful of exploitation, reciprocation-wary individuals respond less favorably to aid than others except when exploitation seems unlikely; then, they respond to favorable treatment with equal or greater reciprocation than others (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987). Therefore, the superior performance of high-wariness employees who have high POS appears to be better explained by a belief that their efforts will be reciprocated rather than a discomfort with inequity.

In the multiorganizational sample, the negative relationship between wariness and in-role performance was eliminated by POS but was not replaced by a positive relationship as found with the wary employees’ extra-role performance. The lack of a significant positive relationship between wariness and in-role performance in the multiorganizational sample may be due to a ceiling on the measurement of in-role performance. The job status of these college-educated employees was generally higher than for the retail employees who, in the first study, did show a positive relationship between POS and in-role performance. Consistent with previous findings that the favorableness of evaluations is positively related to job status, employees of the multiorganizational sample in Study 2 received higher ratings than the retail employees in Study 1. The ratings of the multiorganizational sample on in-role performance were particularly high, limiting the opportunity to demonstrate more-favorable evaluations of performance among high-wariness employees than low-wariness employees. Nevertheless, the multiorganizational sample did demonstrate poor in-role performance among wary employees when POS was low and the elimination of inferior in-role performance when POS was high.

The findings suggest that although high-wariness employees are hesitant to risk exploitation by performing beyond minimally required levels, POS enhances confidence that the organization will fulfill its exchange obligations and thereby encourages greater effort. Reciprocation-wary individuals accept the obligations produced by giving or receiving aid (Eisenberger et al., 1987), but are concerned about the potential misuse of the reciprocity norm by donors who may demand unreasonable compensation and by recipients who may decline to provide fair compensation. Reciprocation-wary employees can be distinguished from employees who reject the reciprocity norm as a basis of work performance and who are generally unresponsive to POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Once reciprocation-wary employees were convinced of the organization’s appreciation of their contributions and concern for their welfare, they exerted greater extra-role behavior than did low-wariness employees and equal or greater in-role behavior. Among wary employees, POS may reduce fear of exploitation, increase expectation that high effort will be appropriately rewarded, and create an obligation to reciprocate favorable treatment (Armeli et al., 1998). These factors would increase the in-role and extra-role performance of reciprocation-wary employees.

Among wary employees with low POS, suspicion that the organization holds them in low esteem and wishes to take advantage of them may reduce the degree of positive affect experienced at work. Besides increasing wary employees’ readiness to reciprocate favorable treatment, POS may enhance wary employees’ positive affect by providing a congenial work environment. According to George and Brief (1992), positive affect contributes to extra-role performance that involves aiding fellow employees, taking proactive actions to protect the organization from risk, offering constructive suggestions, and gaining knowledge and skills beneficial to the organization. By increasing positive affect among reciprocation-wary employees, POS may heighten extra-role performance.

As with all cross-sectional research, the present findings do not establish the causal direction of the results. Instead of the hypothesized effect of reciprocation wariness on performance as moderated by POS, performance might have influenced reciprocation wariness as moderated by POS. Specifically, employees who performed poorly because of their low POS and who suffered no aversive consequences for their poor performance might have concluded that the organization was uninterested in taking advantage of them, leading to low reciprocation wariness. Employees who performed well because of their high POS might have been viewed by management as dedicated to their jobs and might have been asked to take on added responsibilities without adequate compensation, leading to increased reciprocation wariness.

Because we replicated our findings in the retail organization with a multiorganizational sample, this alternative explanation would hold only if organizations generally ignore poor performers and mistreat high performers. Further,
the mistreatment of high performers would lower POS, lessening the observed interaction (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Finally, reciprocation wariness refers to a general personality trait less readily changed by recent experience than POS. Therefore, an effect of reciprocation wariness on performance, as moderated by POS, appears more plausible than the inverse direction of causation.

An important topic for future research is the relationship among reciprocation wariness, POS, and the psychological contract between employee and employer. Employee expectations concerning the exchange of resources with the work organization may be viewed as part of an implicit agreement perceived by the employee as specifying the reciprocal obligations of the employee and employer and the debt each owes the other for meeting these obligations (Kotter, 1973; Nelson, Quick, & Joplin, 1991; Rousseau, 1989, 1990). Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) argued that psychological contracts vary in strength and generality: At one extreme are narrowly focused, transactional agreements concerned with exchange of clearly delineated types of job performance expended for specified pay and other material benefits; at the other extreme are relational contracts that are broad in scope, involving employee beliefs that the organization is committed to their long-term best interests in return for their dedication and commitment. Relational contracts were found to be maintained by organizational actions that met employee needs and created trust that the organization would treat employees beneficially in the future; in contrast, transactional contracts resulted from organizational actions that undermined the perception that the organization was concerned with the employees' welfare (Robinson & Wolfe Morrison, 1995; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). When POS is low, reciprocation-wary employees should prefer transactional contracts to relational contracts because specification of the responsibilities of employer and employee would help prevent exploitation. POS should increase wary employees' willingness to establish a relational contract on the basis of trust in the organization to look after their best interests and reward them for high effort.

The present results have implications for attempts by organizations to restore strong exchange relationships in an era when many employees believe that employers are exploitative. Elimination of implicit guarantees of lifetime employment, reduction of annual salary increments, and reduced medical and educational benefits have made many employees suspicious that their dedication and added efforts will be compensated neither by socioemotional benefits nor by tangible rewards. Our results suggest that the performance of disgruntled employees may be improved by steps that increase POS. We found that inferior performance among individuals predisposed to be cynical and suspicious was reversed by POS.

Employees' doubts that the organization intends to treat them fairly can result either from personality-based fear of exploitation in interpersonal relationships (reciprocation wariness) or from direct experience in the organization. Employees having little reciprocation wariness who hear about seemingly harsh employee layoffs and benefit reductions may develop a mistrust of the organization. Whether a particular employee's fear of exploitation by the organization results from personality or recent experience, expressed concern for employee welfare and recognition of employee accomplishments can restore confidence and encourage pro-organizational behavior. J. Greenberg (1990) described how the traumatic effects of wage reductions at a manufacturing company were reduced by the company's efforts to show respect and concern for employees. At one facility, the company explained how lost business contracts forced the company to temporarily reduce its payroll. At a second facility, pay cuts were merely announced with little expression of concern and regret. Workers in the first facility expressed less frustration and resentment, and engaged in less theft than employees in the second facility.

Managers and supervisors can communicate the organization's positive valuation of employees' contributions by recognition and reward for superior in-role and extra-role performance. Antecedents of POS have been found to include timely promotions for excellent performance (Wayne et al., 1997) and procedural justice in performance appraisals (Fasolo, 1995; Moorman et al., 1998). The favorableness of job conditions contributed more to POS if judged to be the result of voluntary action by the organization than if believed to be the result of such constraints as contractual obligations, government regulations, or a tight labor market that could lure away employees (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

As a substitute for employee commitment based on the presumption of long-term employment, some organizations have attempted to establish a hybrid psychological contract involving the exchange of employee dedication and flexibility concerning job responsibilities in return for training and educational opportunities that will increase the employees' value and employability in case of layoffs (Gowing, Kraft, & Quick, 1998; Rousseau, 1995). This approach agrees with findings that POS was related to favorable developmental training experiences (Wayne et al., 1997). Organizations may also seek to communicate positive valuation of its employees by helping them meet pressing demands in their private lives (Rousseau, 1995). Flexible work schedules, provisions for child care, time off for family emergencies, counseling for emotional problems, aid with arranging care for aging parents, and nontraditional work arrangements such as telecommuting are among the methods organizations can use to reduce conflict between work and family life (Muchinsky, 1997). Grover and Crooker (1995) reported that organizations offering such family-responsive human resource policies showed greater employee affective attachment and lower turnover inten-
tion. Moreover, POS was found positively related to perceived sufficiency of family-oriented policies and actions (Guzzo et al., 1994).

The present findings suggest the continued importance of a favorable exchange relationship between employer and employee at a time when implicit long-term guarantees of employment are being replaced by employment of uncertain duration. We found that among employees who are predisposed to question the organization’s benevolent intent toward them, POS produced superior in-role and extra-role performance. Taking actions to convince employees that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being offers an effective countermeasure against the demotivating effects of employee cynicism and skepticism.

References


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