



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(5): 738-740
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 16-03-2017
Accepted: 17-04-2017

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Perceived organizational support and work engagement

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Abstract

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement among employees. Using a sample of employees the primary data for the study was generated. Data analysis revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement. The meaning of this result and implications of this finding are discussed in this study.

Keywords: Perceived organizational support, work engagement, social exchange theory

Introduction

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) refers to employees' perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution, and is concerned about their well being Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001) [3, 14]. Research on perceived organizational support (POS) began with the observation that if managers are concerned with their employees' commitment to the organization, employees are focused on the organization's commitment to them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986) [3].

Research on perceived organizational support has been found to have important work related consequences that include employee performance, reduced absenteeism and turnover (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) [3, 13]

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa (1986) [3] developed the organization support theory, in the framework of social exchange theory to examine the commitment process of the employees towards their organizations Review of literature indicates that perceived organizational support has a significant impact on the several work outcomes that include commitment, turnover, job satisfaction and performance (Eisenberger, Rhoades & Cameron, 1999; Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001; Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997) [4, 14, 17, 19, 22].

Meta-analytic research study on perceived organizational support conducted by Rhoades & Eisenberger, (2002) [13] indicated perceived organizational support to have several antecedents that include (a) perceptions of procedural or distributive justice and organisational politics (Moorman, Blakely & Niehoff, 1998) [12], (b) job conditions such as autonomy and pay (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1999) [4], (c) supervisor support (Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Wayne *et al.*, 1997) [22] and (d) human resource (HR) practices such as reward systems, decision making opportunities and growth opportunities (Wayne *et al.*, 1997) [22].

Organizational support theory developed by Eisenberger and his team (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) [3, 13] assumes that employees' form a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This belief is contingent on the organization's readiness to reward employees increased work effort and the extent to which it meets their socio emotional needs. This perception of organizational support among the employees results in employees' obligation to help the organization reach its objectives, their affective commitment to the organization, and their expectation that improved performance would be rewarded. Behavioral outcomes of POS would include increases in in-role and extra-role performance and decreases in withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover intentions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) [3, 13]

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Contemporary organizations need employees who are psychologically connected to their work; who are willing and able to invest themselves fully in their roles; who are proactive and are willing to work beyond their job description. They need employees who feel energetic, and are committed to high quality performance standards. When employees perceive organizational support it strengthens their cognitive and emotional evaluation of their job this would propel employees to be engaged in their work. This also gets justified from the social exchange theory perspective, if employees perceive that the organization cares for their well-being and supports them, and then employees may reciprocate and would show more engagement in their work. The present study attempts to investigate the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement of employees working in Indian organizations.

Work Engagement

Work engagement has recently emerged as an important construct in the organizational behaviour literature was one of the first to theorize about work engagement. He described engaged employees as physically, cognitively, and emotionally connected with their work roles. There are several definitions and conceptualizations of work engagement existing in the literature however the definition given by Schaufeli and his team members in 2004 has been the most popular, frequently used, and most cited definition of work engagement existing in the literature. According to Work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (p. 74). Work engagement describes how employees experience their work at the work place. Research on work engagement has revealed that engaged employees are highly energetic, self-efficacious individuals who exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Employees high on work engagement are said to have positive attitude, create their own positive feedback, in terms of appreciation, recognition and success describes four reasons as to why engaged employees perform better than non-engaged employees, "First, engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including gratitude, joy and enthusiasm. These positive emotions seem to broaden people's thought-action repertoire, implying that they constantly work on their personal resources. Second, engaged workers experience better mental health. This means that they can focus and dedicate all their skills and energy resources to their work. Third, engaged employees create their own job, and personal resources. Finally, engaged workers transfer their engagement to others in their immediate environment "(p.267). To what extent the perceived organizational support perceptions of the employees has a bearing on their work engagement is the purpose of the resent investigation.

Method

Research Design

The present research study is designed on a quantitative research framework. This research study is a non-experimental research study. No variables are manipulated in this research study. This research adopts a cross sectional survey research method. The research study is a correlational research study. Reliable and valid instruments-were used to generate primary data from the sampled employees in this research study.

Sample

The sample for the present study comprised of 345 full time employees drawn from nine different organizations. Their age range was from 34 to 51 years. Most of the employees were holding middle level managerial position.

Measures

Survey of perceived organizational Support Scale:

Perceived organizational support scale developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa (1986) ^[3] was used in the present study. This scale had eight items, and each item in the scale had a five point Likert type response format ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Several research studies using survey of perceived organizational support scale, conducted on diversified occupations and organizations across several countries, demonstrated the high internal consistency and uni-dimensionality of the scale. Exploratory factor analysis conducted on this scale resulted in a single factor solution for the eight items. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale in the present study was found to be 0.82, indicating reliability of the scale.

Work Engagement Scale: The Utrecht work engagement scale developed by This scale has 17 items, having a seven point response format ranging from 0= Never to 6= Always. This scale has well established construct validity and reliability established in the literature. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale in the present study was found to be equal to 0.89, suggesting reliability of the scale.

Procedure

A survey was undertaken in nine organizations, employees were contacted at their respective work sites, after establishing the initial rapport and getting the informed consent, questionnaires were administered on them. Employees were encouraged to give frank and honest responses to all the items in both the questionnaires. Confidentiality of their responses was assured to them.

Results and Discussion

To examine the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement of executives zero order correlation coefficients were computed and are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient between Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Perceived Organizational Support	0.789	0.000
Work Engagement		

From table 1 it can be observed that the correlation coefficient computed between perceived organizational support and work engagement is positive and found to be significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that there is significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement

Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that perceived organizational support has a significant relationship with work engagement. This demonstrates the importance of perceived organizational support for enhancing work engagement among the employees. The results of the present study are consistent with the earlier studies done on perceived organizational support and work engagement in the literature. The results of the study indicate that management and organizations need to go beyond the existing formalized contractual relationship that exists between the employee and the organization and provide employees with adequate financial and psychological backing and support in order to develop in them the feeling that the organization cares for their effort and has a concern for their well-being. This concern of the organization will develop perceived organizational support among the employees. Human resource departments of the organizations should play a proactive role in developing this perception among the employees. The development of perceived organizational support in employees will enhance their work engagement resulting in increased organizational effectiveness. The results of the present study may further be corroborated by conducting further studies using longitudinal research designs to examine how perceived organizational support has an effect on the work engagement of employees over a period of time.

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