



A Study of Relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement of Administrative Staff in Newly-Established Universities of China

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and work engagement of administrative staff in newly-established universities of China. For this purpose, this article reviewed related literature and theories, proposed a single hypothesis. Primary data was collected by the self-administrated questionnaire which included 2 scales and 33 items. The findings showed that there was a positive relationship between POS and work engagement, and also illustrated that POS was the predictor of work engagement. In view of the low level of POS determined by study survey, it was suggested that newly-established university should improve administrative staff's work engagement by concerning their POS.

Indexing terms/Keywords: perceived organizational support (POS), work engagement, administrative staff, newly-established university

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1. Introduction

Work engagement is a concept that is widely concerned in current management practice and academic research. It is an important construct for organizations to improve their performance and gain competitive advantage (Cesário & Chambel, 2017; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009). Therefore, work engagement has been popularized by organizations as well as the research/academic community. On the other hand, perceived organizational support (POS) has received more and more attention from the academic community since the organization support theory (OST; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) was proposed. The concept of POS provides new directions and ideas for the organization and scholars to improve work engagement of employees. In the past decade, more and more academic studies have linked POS with work engagement. However, there still remains a gap in relevant literature, which elicits the need for further empirical study in this area within diverse culture background and different demographic segments. As a special group of human resources and education practitioner, university administrative staff's POS and engagement is still under researched. Hence, this study attempts to fill this academic gap.

The "Chinese Undergraduate Education Quality Report" (Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education, 2017) for the first time shows that since the 21st century, a large number of new universities in China have emerged. There are 678 newly-established universities, accounting for 55.6% of the total of 1,219 universities in the whole country, newly established universities have become an important part of higher education in China. Under the context of the popularization of higher education in China, the administrative level of newly-established universities can affect running of Chinese higher education. However, the status quo of newly-established university administrative staff is not concerned by the academic field of education management and human resource management (Zhuang, 2017). Therefore, this study explores the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement of administrative staff in newly-established universities of China, in order to provide useful reference and evidence for newly-established universities, education management departments and policy makers to improve university administration and to further deepen the reform of human resources management system.

2. Literature Review

Perceived Organizational Support

Study on POS began with the observation that if managers is concerned with their employees' commitment to the organization, employees are focused on the organization's commitment to them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). According to OST, employees can perceive the extent to which the organization provides them working support, values their contribution and pays attention on their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees develop POS so that they can meet for approval, esteem and affiliation, furthermore to assess the benefits of increased work effort (Kurtessis et al., 2015). The concept of POS has had a major impact on management field in recent years. It is an independent concept that differs from organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and psychological contract. Many scholars have focused on the measurement, antecedents and consequences of POS (Ahmed & Nawaz, 2015).

Work Engagement

The concept of engagement was first proposed by Kahn (1990). In literature research, engagement is usually divided into employee/personal Engagement and work/job engagement. Researcher Kahn (1990) is the representatives of the concept of employee/personal engagement, while Researcher Schaufeli (2002) is the representative of the concept of work/job engagement, which usually appear in research related to job burnout and work stress. Generally speaking, According to Kahn's point of view, personal engagement refers to the harnessing of employees selves to their work/job role (Kahn, 1990). It means that employees employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during their role performances (Kahn, 1990). However, from the perspective of job burnout, Maslach (2001) defines work commitment as the opposite of job burnout. From his opinion, engagement can be described as energy, involvement and efficacy,



in contrast with burnout which can be described as exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. On this basis, Schaufeli (2002) put forward different views, arguing that work engagement is a completely different concept from job burnout, describing a positive and work-related state of employees, including three dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption.

3. Underline Theories

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is a sociological theory that emerged in the United States in the 1960s and spread widely around the world. Because of its emphasis on psychological factors in human behavior, it is also called a behavioral social psychology theory. This theory advocates that all human behaviors are subject to some sort of exchange activity that can bring remuneration and rewards (Blau, 1964). Therefore, all social activities of human beings can be attributed to an exchange, and the social relations formed by people in social exchange are also an exchange relationship. The theory of social exchange was founded by Homans (1958). The main representatives are Blau (1964) and Emerson (1976). Based on the theory of social exchange, it can be considered that when the organization gives more support to employees and it is perceived by employees, employees will be better put into work, that is, employees use engagement as an exchange of organizational support.

JD-R Model (Demands-Resources Model)

JD-R model (demands-resources model) proposed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) is currently the most widely used in the field of work engagement research. The model considers that all job characteristics can be divided into job demands and job resources in different occupations. Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, energy and emotional consumption of employees caused by the characteristics and requirements of the job (such as work pressure, work - family conflict), whereas job resources refer to physical, psychological, organizational, and social resources (such as support, harmony, autonomy and feedback) which help employees achieve their work goals and promote personal growth, learning and development (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014, 2017). Empirical studies have shown that job demands can reduce the employee's work engagement and lead to health problem, while job resources can reduce employee's strain and burnout, and promote work engagement (Sacks, 2006). JD-R model provides a theoretical basis for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of job and organization characteristics on work engagement. It can be considered that the organization's support for employees is like improving job resources and reducing job demands, thus may can enhance employee's work engagement.

4. Research Framework

According to relevant literature review and theories, the logic relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement might be positive. Related to this study, when administrative staff in newly-established universities feels the concern of the university, the support of the work, and the well-being, they believe that strengthening engagement should be exchanged for perceived organizational support. From another perspective, newly-established university's organizational support for administrative staffs is similar to improving job resources and reducing job demands, which might make administrative staff have a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, that is work engagement.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in the study.

H: Perceived organizational support is able to positively predict work engagement.

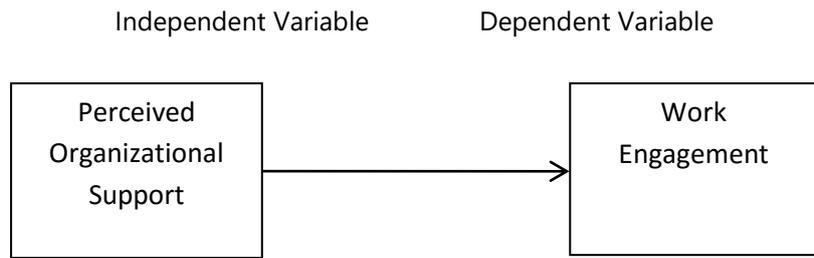


Figure 1 Theoretical framework

5. Research Methodology

Research Instrumentation

The self-administrated questionnaire was adopted in this study to be an effective way to collect the data. And this questionnaire consists of two scales: one is POS scale, including 24 items, and the other one is work engagement scale, including 9 items. These two scales are developed with the help of previous academic articles in the same research area. A five-point Likert rating scale was used for items. In addition, the main demographic variables were also assessed in questionnaire, including gender, marital status, age, educational background and academic rank.

Sampling

Simple random sampling technique was utilized in the study to collect data. The researcher distributed questionnaires at 10 different newly-established universities with the help of friends and colleague. A total of 448 administrative staffs from different departments and sectors in newly-established universities was invited to respond the questionnaire. After removing 22 incomplete and invalid questionnaires, there was still a usable sample of 426 questionnaires yielding a reasonably high response rate of 89.1 percent.

Validity and Reliability

In the study, SPSS 22 is making use for performing the test of validity and reliability. Validity of the questionnaire was checked with the help of factor loading. The values of factor loading of all 33 included in the questionnaire are higher than 0.50, which range between 0.618 and 0.847. Reliability of questionnaire is checked by Cronbach alpha. If the alpha coefficient value of the scale is higher than 0.8, it means that the reliability is good (Hair, 2006). Conducting the reliability test resulted in achieving Cronbach's alpha's values range from 0.886 to 0.947, which means that data is reliable and can be used for further analysis.

6. Results

Descriptive Statistic

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of POS and work engagement

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
POS	426	2.776	0.683
Work Engagement	426	2.709	0.719



Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the two variables. It can be seen from table 2 that the average value of POS and work engagement of administrative staffs in Chinese newly-established universities is 2.776 and 2.709 respectively, the standard deviation is 0.683 and 0.719 respectively. According to descriptive statistic, it can be found that the POS and work engagement of the newly-established university administrative staff are at a relatively low level because they even do not reach the intermediate level of 3 points.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 The result of correlation analysis

	POS	Work Engagement
POS	-	
Work Engagement	0.646**	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 describes that correlation between POS and work engagement. It is obvious that POS and work engagement are positively correlated with each others. There is strong correlation between POS and work engagement.

Regression Analysis

Table 3 The results of regression analysis

	B	T	P
(Constant)	1.111	11.258	0.000
POS	0.646	17.449	0.000
R Square	0.417		
F	304.467		0.000
Durbin-Watson	1.814		

Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

Predictors: (Constant), POS

The relationship and impact of independent variable on dependant variable is described by regression analysis and showed in table 3. P-value indicates that the actual level of relationship. Generally, $P < 0.05$ is considered to be statistically significant, , and $P < 0.001$ is considered to be extremely statistically significant. The value of F indicates the extent of relationship between dependent and independent variables. The higher the F value, the stronger the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The R square is used to evaluate the degree of fit of the model, which is generally considered to be acceptable above 0.25.



According to table 3, regression analysis in this study gives the value of $\beta = 0.646$ and value of $P = 0.000$ for the relationship of POS with work engagement. This illustrates that POS has significantly positive effect on work engagement. In another word, it implies that POS may cause 64.6% variation in work engagement.

7. Discussion and Practical implications

This study has important implications for higher education management and human resource management, especially under the cultural background of Chinese education management. University administrative staff shoulders the important responsibility of higher education administration. Their work engagement has a direct and far-reaching impact on the development of higher education. Therefore, improving the work engagement of administrative staff should become an important task of the education management (Weng, 2014). According to this study findings, the level of work engagement of administrative staffs in Chinese newly-established universities needs to be improved, and the level of POS of these staffs is also low. On the other hand, this study also indicates that relationship between POS and work engagement is positive, and POS plays significant role in endorsing work engagement in newly-established universities. Therefore, newly-established university should enhance the level of work engagement of administrative staff by utilizing the concept of POS in organizational culture and human resource management. Combined the current status of Chinese higher education management, university and higher authorities can improve POS of administrative staff in many ways. For example, caring about administrative staffs' well-being, and trying to improve their salaries; putting their interests in important positions when formulating policies; providing them with the fair promotion opportunities as the teaching staff, and striving to create a suitable institutional environment; providing timely assistance when they encounter problems at work, and providing them with good working conditions; providing support for them to participate in appropriate training or further education, and providing them with opportunities for professional growth; respecting their contributions to university development and identifying their value. These practices can improve POS of administrative staffs, thereby enhance their work engagement, thus contribute to the further development and improvement of higher education management.

8. Conclusion, Limitation and suggestion

In accordance with the research findings, the relationship between POS and work engagement is positive, and the POS can impact significantly work engagement of administrative staff in newly-established universities of China. Therefore, newly-established universities may strengthen work engagement by promoting the perception of organizational support among administrative staff.

The collection of data in this study is limited to several newly-established universities in China, so that the sample is not sufficiently representative. In future studies, sampling from a larger range may be considered to enhance sample representation. Moreover, other countries and other types of universities should also be sampled to see if the relationship between POS and work engagement is different in various culture context. In addition, impact of other important construct like perceived income adequacy, perceived supervisor support, job satisfaction on university administrative staffs should be checked for improvement of higher education management.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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