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Perceived Organisational Support and Employee Performance – the Example of a Polish IT Enterprise*

Abstract

Objective: This article analyses the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee performance generally and in a large Polish IT enterprise.

Research Design & Methods: The conceptual framework for the research was a theory of perceived organisational support. The research was intended to provide insight into the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee performance.

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The article focuses on insights from a survey addressed to the employees of a large Polish IT enterprise. The empirical research was done with CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviews). The project was funded by the National Science Centre in Poland (funds allocated on the basis of a decision no. DEC-2014/15/B/HS4/04326).

Findings: The results showed that the perceived organisational support described herein is associated with employee performance. Moreover, the state of perceived organisational support and employee performance in the large Polish IT enterprise was diagnosed.

Implications/Recommendations: The main implication of the research was that managers should focus on those issues which improve perceived organisational support to increase the performance of all employees in their organisations. Regarding future research directions, further research should be undertaken to analyse the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee performance in various industries across the country and longitudinally at different organisational levels.

Contribution: This research generates new scientific knowledge about the role of perceived organisational support in shaping employee performance at an IT enterprise.

Keywords: perceived organisational support, employee performance, IT company, employees.

JEL Classification: M12, M51, L86.

1. Introduction

In management sciences, considerable research has studied perceived organisational support (POS) as the basic construct used to define employee–employer relationships. That research-based evidence (Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002, Harris, Harris & Harvey 2007, Coyle-Shapiro & Shore 2007, Riggle, Edmondson & Hansen 2009, Turek & Czaplińska 2014, Kurtessis *et al.* 2015) shows that POS is important for both organisational performance and employee well-being (Wójcik-Karpacz 2018, Kwarciński 2019). POS has been found to be positively related to a wide range of favourable employee work attitudes and behaviours, and negatively related to deleterious attitudes and behaviours at work (Caesens, Stinglhamber & Ohana 2016). Therefore, it may be assumed that through the application of appropriate human resource management (HRM) practices, employees' behaviour can be changed.

However, employees' perception of HRM practices is sometimes not consistent with the practices themselves (Gojny-Zbierowska 2016). Furthermore, the need to manage employee performance (EP) is simultaneously communicated in the literature. Performance assessment provides information on employees' efforts and is considered a critical aspect of HRM (Boswell & Boudreau 2002). The evaluation of results presented by the values of specific indicators has consequences for non-managerial employees as well as their supervisors. This is the first quantita-

tive empirical research conducted in the field of POS and evaluation of employee performance in a large Polish IT enterprise.

The main objective of this article is to identify the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee performance (EP) generally and in a large Polish IT enterprise specifically. By continuing the course of considerations set out by the article's objectives, the understanding of both constructs, i.e. perceived organisational support and employee performance, was first presented.

2. Literature Review

Perceived Organisational Support from the Perspective of Social Exchange Theory

Perceived organisational support was first recognised as an important regulator of employee-organisation relationships in the late 1980s in the US. It is defined as employees' general beliefs "concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro 1986, p. 501).

Organisational Support Theory (OST) states that, based on the theory of social exchange (Blau 1964) and due to the norm of reciprocity, POS imposes on employees a perceptible obligation to reciprocate the organisation's valuation and care by developing attitudes and ways behaving that benefit the organisation. In addition to the benefits for the organisation, research has shown that high POS is also positive for employees' sense-of well-being both at and outside work (Caesens, Stinglhamber & Ohana 2016).

The theory of social exchange says that there is a dyadic relationship between an individual employee and his or her employing organisation, including tangible and intangible resources. Social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations to reciprocate (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore 2007). As employees wish to maintain a balance between the "give" and "take" from the organisation, they are likely to assess the favourable or unfavourable treatments they receive from their organisation on a regular basis. The employee-employer relationship is therefore, according to the theory, a social exchange.

However, in order to clarify the perceived support, it is necessary to determine the source of stimuli which become information for the employee and to what extent he or she is supported by the organisation. The source of stimuli come from the agents of the organisation – those who act on behalf of the organisation, and represent it to employees (their supervisors, in other words) (Levinson 1965). Employees personify the organisation, identify specific persons with the organisation, and identify their behaviour and attitudes with that of the organisa-

tion. This results from three factors: firstly, the organisation which controls and exerts influence on employees through its representatives (or agents); secondly, the organisation has legal, moral and financial responsibility for the activities of its representatives; and thirdly, the organisational culture determines the desired and expected attitudes and behaviour. Thanks to these factors, the behaviour of the organisation's representatives affects the support they are perceived to provide, and the other way round: the sense of support influences the interpretation of behaviour and the motives underlying it. Hence, many human resource management practices, both finance- and non-finance-related, determine the sense of support an employee receives from the organisation. At the same time, the value of the object of exchange is subject to constant valuation; the employee estimates the organisation's contribution through the prism of his or her experiences and expectations. The perception and assessment of the exchange is considered as either favourable or not based on an individual set of meanings the employee assigns to behaviours and objects (Gojny-Zbierowska 2016).

What Does "Employee Performance" Mean?

Employee performance is not identified by actions themselves, but by their evaluation (Motowidlo, Borman & Schmit 1997). The evaluation of employee performance concerns the individual's behaviour in the workplace (Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llugar 2018). Employee performance concerns the tasks, jobs and responsibilities which the organisation needs someone to do well. Employee performance evaluation are done on the extent to which the employee does the job expected of them (Groen, Wilderom & Wouters 2017). In other words, the evaluation assesses the employee's qualitative and quantitative output, and reflects how the employee does his or her work. This may be determined by means of objective data (for example, amount of product made per hour, or hourly productivity) or by the evaluation of performance done by the employee's supervisors, co-workers, as well as the employee him or herself (Rothbard & Wilk 2011, Sykes, Venkatesh & Johnson 2014, Harrington & Lee 2015).

Employee performance reflects only those activities which are scalable and/or measurable (Campbell *et al.* 1993). Hence, the evaluation of performance is treated as a tool for managing employee efficiency and effectiveness (Spicer & Ahmad 2006) or as a tool for measuring employee performance, thanks to which organisational goals can be properly achieved (Mullins 2010). That is why employees would usually like to have measures that reflect their actual actions. The use of appropriate indicators of employee performance in practice may result in their contribution being reliably assessed and subsequently appreciated by their supervisors (Groen, Wilderom & Wouters 2017).

3. Methodology

The group of respondents consisted of employees working at a large IT enterprise. The first criterion for selecting such an enterprise for research was a pragmatic one: it opened up the possibility of conducting research among employees. The second criterion referred to the appropriate size of enterprise, measured by the number of employees. Large enterprises with the biggest number of employees were preferred. Establishing such criteria was dictated by the purpose of empirical research.

In this case, those employees provide the company's global clients with comprehensive solutions at every stage of the software development process. During the research period, over 900 people were employed by the company. HR management was particularly interested in problems related to POS, because this enterprise is keenly interested in evaluating the overall level of POS, first, but then also at more detailed levels, such as team comparisons, to identify high and low POS areas, and take adequate actions to improve or maintain the existing POS level.

Empirical research was conducted in November 2017 using the CAWI method, following top management's approval the project. The survey was repeated twice. The diagnosis covered several complementary areas and two groups of respondents. However, only selected issues are presented in this article (the diagnosis of POS and EP diagnosis and POS–EP relationship). POS was evaluated only by employees (809 questionnaires were sent to employees and 509 were returned), while the employees' performance was evaluated by their supervisors (number of sent questionnaires: 809 questionnaires were sent, while the 572 questionnaires were included in the further statistical analysis. Incomplete questionnaires were removed, reducing the size of the research sample. Ultimately, 478 fully completed questionnaires were subject to statistical analyses.

Each questionnaire contained the employee's ID number for identification purposes of employees and their supervisors at the stage of sending online questionnaires, as well as at subsequent stages of research (data collection, data processing).

The company's management began to show increased interest in how to measure both phenomena reliably and accurately in order to be able to better manage them. The survey was based on measurement tools of both variables tested in other pieces of research. Earlier, these measures were translated by the forward-back translation method and adapted to the working conditions and organisational structure of the enterprise. First, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Then, the mean levels and standard deviations from these values were analysed. For the purposes of these analyses, due to the

large number of questionnaires received back, employees' responses were averaged within individual scales.

4. Measures

Independent Variable

Perceived organisational support (POS) was an independent variable. POS is a relatively persistent condition, so it is measurable. In most of the empirical research that has been done to date, the relative static perception of POS has been analysed, and treated as a stable variable which varies among individuals. Research that has analysed POS and its consequences has been based on interpersonal projects, and that is also the case for the present research. Thus, POS was considered a permanent experience (i.e. referred to as a "feature"). Persistent POS refers to the general perception of how well employees feel supported and appreciated by their organisation.

The factors measuring POS were taken from the scale designed by R. Eisenberger, P. Fasolo and V. Davis-LaMastro (1986). Required in planning, measuring and assessing POS effects, this scale ensures that the phenomenon is properly measured. Nine items of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) were used. This shortened version of the SPOS has been used in previous research (i.e. Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro 1990, Wayne, Liden & Shore 1997). Employees indicated their agreement to the nine items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). L. Rhoades and R. Eisenberger (2002) claim that the use of the shortened scale for POS is not problematic because the original scale has excellent psychometric properties in addition to its one-dimensional measure. Similarly, in this research, the reliability of scale measured with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was high, amounting to $\alpha = 0.900$. This means that the measures are statistically reliable. The questionnaire used therefore allowed for a reliable assessment of POS to be made.

Dependent Variable

In this study, employee performance (EP) is a dependent variable. The items measuring it were taken from the scale by S. Wayne, R. C. Liden and L. M. Shore (1997). Their operationalisation of the construct involves the individual employee's performance being assessed by his/her supervisors. Using this measurement reduces distortions of employee performance assessments that could take place if performance were self-assessed. Some researchers (Bommer *et al.* 1995, Welbourne, Johnson & Erez 1998, Erez *et al.* 2015) even suggest that employees can optimise the performance of their work, for example, to the levels of indi-

cators for performance preferred in their organisation. In order to avoid such problems, they recommend employees’ performance be assessed by their supervisors. S. Wayne, R. C. Liden and L. M. Shore (1997) measured employee performance without these deficiencies. Their measures were adapted in this research: six 7-point Likert scale items (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient $\alpha = 0.935$), where supervisors are asked to evaluate the performance of each employee individually. The value of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient $\alpha = 0.935$ indicates high consistency of individual responses from respondents. Both measures were accepted by the IT enterprise’s representatives. The measures were translated using the forward-back translation method. The use of both standardised measures made it possible to compare the results obtained in subsequent periods in this enterprise. The measures can also be used as a benchmark for assessing POS and EP in other enterprises in the IT sector as well as other sectors.

5. Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Variables

The next step analysed the mean levels and standard deviations of individual issues. For the purposes of the analyses, due to many returns, employees’ responses were averaged within individual measures. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics (i.e. means and standard deviations) of the scales used.

Table 1. Perceived Organisational Support Ratings: Descriptive Statistics

Items	Mean	s.d.
[Name of company] management shows very little concern for me ^a	5.09	1.52
[Name of company] management cares about my general satisfaction at work	4.96	1.28
[Name of company] management really cares about my well-being	5.12	1.26
[Name of company] management strongly considers my goals and values	4.70	1.31
[Name of company] management cares about my opinions	4.91	1.37
Even if I did the best job possible, [Name of company] management would fail to notice ^a	5.21	1.54
[Name of company] management is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability	5.24	1.16
[Name of company] management takes pride in my accomplishments at work	5.12	1.25
Help is available from [Name of company] management when I have a problem	5.76	1.15

Measured on a seven-point scale for all items. ^a Item was reverse-coded.

Source: the authors.

The following can be concluded from the analysis of mean levels and standard deviations of all POS items:

- average rating (5.0) of the respondents' answers exceeded the mid-point on a 7-point scale for each POS item. This means the POS level is high, though it can still be improved;

- the mean standard deviation, from 1.15 to 1.54, indicates low volatility.

POS was generally high or very high in all dimensions, as evidenced by high or very high levels of POS items, respectively. Employees most appreciated access to help received from their supervisors when they had a problem. The mean level of this indicator was 5.76, which deviated from the mean value on average by 1.15. Such a standard deviation value means that a certain group of employees highly appreciates the support they receive from their supervisors, most likely because it brings them relief in difficult and stressful situations. As can be seen, it is not only the forms of help that are important for employees, but also their availability, likely because thanks to this employees can feel safer and more confident in their work environment.

Employees also highly appreciate the help they receive from their supervisors when they need it to do their job to the best of their ability. The mean level reported for this indicator was 5.24, which deviates from the mean value on average by 1.16.

The IT enterprise's management ensures the well-being of its employees. The mean well-being level of this indicator was 5.12, suggesting that the employees have a strong sense of well-being in the workplace. The 5.12 mean deviated from the mean value on average by 1.26 point, meaning that the enterprise has a group of employees with a very strong sense of well-being, and another that does not. Particularly, the respondents' responses from the second group indicate that well-being is not fully used to manage this organisation. While supervisors may have done a lot in this area, the persisting deficiency of such support could be supplemented, for example, by improving the approach to employee well-being care programmes. Of course, that is only if the enterprise's management seeks to improve this area of organisational support.

The mean level of overall job satisfaction, coming in at 4.96, reflects the high consistency between employees' needs and the way they are met by their supervisors. This level deviated from the mean value on average by 1.28. This means that some of the needs of a certain group of employees are either not met at all, or only somewhat, by the supervisors. Another group of employees, in turn, highly appreciates the care supervisors take in their overall satisfaction at work.

Employees (4.70 on average) appreciate management taking into account their goals and values, though that does not preclude the possibility of linking them further with the enterprise's goals and values. In this regard, employee ratings

ranged the most widely, deviating from the mean value on average by 1.15. point. The standard deviation value indicates that there is one group of employees whose goals and values are largely taken into account by management, and another whose goals and values are considerably less taken into account by their supervisors.

To summarise the above results: the enterprise is very supportive of employees which brings many tangible benefits to the employees. However, this does not mean it could not improve that support.

In addition, high POS would provide indications that help will be received when needed, which leads employees to anticipate the future with more confidence and thus generates a greater sense of well-being.

The implementation of this objective also required the mean employee performance levels and standard deviations from these levels to be analysed. The performance of individual employees was assessed by their supervisors. Questions in the survey addressed to the supervisors contained the individual employee ID, which had to be known in order to for a supervisor to assess the performance of particular employees.

Supervisors' answers to the questions assessing employees' performance were developed in the form of mean levels and standard deviations, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Employee Performance Ratings: Descriptive Statistics

Items	Mean	S.d.
Overall, to what extent has this employee [employee's ID ...] effectively fulfilled his/her roles and responsibilities? (from very ineffectively – 1, to very effectively – 7)	5.56	1.12
Overall, to what extent has this employee [employee's ID ...] performed his/her job as you would like it performed? (from very weak performance – 1, to excellent performance – 7)	5.55	1.07
In my estimation, this employee [employee's ID ...] gets his/her work done very effectively (from “strongly disagree” – 1, to “strongly agree” – 7)	5.55	1.16
Rate this employee's [employee's ID ...] overall level of performance (from very weak performance – 1, to excellent performance – 7)	5.46	1.01
If you entirely had your way, to what extent would you change the manner in which this employee [employee's ID ...] performs his/her job? ^a (from “I would change everything” – 1, to “I would change nothing” – 7)	5.17	1.31
All in all, this employee [employee's ID ...] is very competent (from “strongly disagree” – 1, to “strongly agree” – 7)	5.78	1.14

ID – individual employee identifier. Measured on a seven-point scale. ^a Item was reverse-coded.

Source: the authors.

Based on the analysis of the mean level and standard deviations of six components of employee performance (EP), it was established that, in general, the average rating of each component exceeds 5.0 on a 7-point scale. That is, significantly above the mean point, meaning the assessments tended to be high. However, the standard deviations reflecting the diversity of supervisors' opinions oscillated around values at ± 1.01 to 1.31, so the diversity of answers among individual employees was relatively small.

Importantly, the component assessments relating to the evaluation of various aspects of the work performed (items from "a" to "e") are generally lower, but not much, than the assessment of the component relating to employees' competencies (5.75 on average). It can be said that generally at a high or very high mean level, assessments made by managers of employee performance were positive, given the small value of standard deviation. However, high employee performance recorded does not mean it cannot be improved.

To sum up, at the IT enterprise, high or very high ratings of perceived support, and a high degree of willingness on the part of employees to do the work required of them does not automatically mean that one variable impacts the others. These findings require further elaboration. Therefore, the next step of the research was to analyse how the support employees perceive is related to their performance.

Correlations between the Variables

To determine if there is a relationship between the variables, an *r*-Pearson correlation analysis was performed in the SPSS for MAC programme. The analysis of *r*-Pearson correlation required the calculation of meta-variables as the mean values of adequate items included in the survey.

One of the meta-variables was POS, which was calculated by averaging the responses to the 9 items making up the scale (items are shown in the table). Another meta-variable was EP, which was calculated by averaging the responses to the 6 items making up the scale (items are shown in Table 3).

Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are presented in Table 3.

The research results show that the enterprise has a relatively high level of both POS and EP in aggregate terms. Furthermore, the *r*-Pearson correlation shows that the positive relationships between POS and EP are very weak, but statistically significant. This means that improving POS, even only slightly, has an impact on employee performance. Therefore, in order to increase employee efficiency, it is important to determine how employees perceive the support they receive from the IT enterprise. If POS improves, employee performance does, too.

In conclusion, POS is a weak predictor of EP. In other words, perceived organisational support plays a weak positive role in shaping the individual effectiveness of employees. Improving employee efficiency requires a different approach:

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables

Items	1	2
1. Perceived Organisational Support	1	–
2. Employee Performance	0.117 ^a	1
Mean	5.13	5.52
Standard deviation (s.d.)	1.01	1.14

N = 478. Measured on a seven-point scale. ^a Significant correlation at the level of *p* < 0.05.

Source: the authors.

directing the attention of IT enterprise’s management to providing employees with appropriate support included in the organisation’s design.

6. Concluding Remarks

The approach used in the research (individual-level empirical research) has provided insight into the POS–EP relationship at a lower level than team and organisational ones.

The importance of perceived organisational support for improving employee performance has been empirically proven. The weak, positive, but significant relationship shown to exist between POS and EP provides some grounds to for including POS in the model of factors that boost employee efficiency. POS can therefore be treated as an internal organisational tool for profiling employee performance. At the same time, however, POS should be adjusted as employees experience new events, receive new resources, or obtain new information from their organisation. This can improve the POS rating and help it boost individual employee performance, and ultimately the organisation as a whole. These findings also testify to the usefulness of cyclical research in the organisation.

At the same time, this research has promising practical implications for the organisation. The diagnosis of perceived organisational support and employee performance in the IT enterprise provided the basis for managers to make more conscious decisions regarding the improvement or maintenance of POS and EP at existing levels. Even in a situation where a high level of POS already brings many tangible benefits to the organisation and its employees themselves, there are some areas in which the management may take measures to improve or maintain the level of POS. In addition, dissemination of descriptive statistics separately for POS and EP in this enterprise reveals how different issues are related to the level of POS and EP, and what their current level is. The results of this research may also be used as a reference for other organisations from the IT sector or another one.

As these research findings are specific to a concrete IT enterprise, future research may include enterprises from the same sector or another one. It would also be wise to extend the research to identify the role of POS as a contextual variable in the analysis of performance factors not only at the individual level, but also at that of team and organisation, using longitudinal studies. Finally, selecting a single IT enterprise for the present research has necessarily meant the empirical research results could not be more widely representative.

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Postrzegane wsparcie organizacyjne i wyniki pracowników – przykład polskiego przedsiębiorstwa IT

(Streszczenie)

Cel: W artykule badaniu została poddana relacja między postrzeganym wsparciem organizacyjnym a wynikami pracowników. Dodatkowo przedstawiono diagnozę stanu postrzeganego wsparcia organizacyjnego i wyników pracowników w polskim przedsiębiorstwie IT.

Metodyka badań: Podbudową koncepcyjną tych badań jest teoria postrzeganego wsparcia organizacyjnego. Badanie to ma na celu zapewnienie wglądu w związek między postrzeganym wsparciem organizacyjnym a wynikami pracowników. Artykuł koncentruje się na spostrzeżeniach z ankiety, która została przeprowadzona wśród pracowników polskiego przedsiębiorstwa IT. Do przeprowadzenia badań empirycznych wykorzystano metodę CAWI (*computer assisted web interviews*). Projekt został sfinansowany przez Narodowe Centrum Nauki (środki przyznane na podstawie decyzji nr DEC-2014/15/B/HS4/04326).

Wyniki badań: Rezultaty badania wskazują, że postrzegane wsparcie organizacyjne jest powiązane z wynikami pracowników. Ponadto przedstawiają one poziom postrzeganego wsparcia organizacyjnego i wyników pracowników w dużym polskim przedsiębiorstwie IT.

Wnioski: W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań stwierdzono, że kierownicy powinni skoncentrować się na kwestiach, które poprawiają postrzeganie wsparcia organizacyjnego przez pracowników, aby zwiększyć wyniki wszystkich rodzajów pracowników w ich organizacjach. Jeśli chodzi o przyszłe kierunki badań, należy podjąć dalsze działania w celu rozpoznania powiązania postrzeganego wsparcia organizacyjnego z wynikami pracowników w różnych branżach w całym kraju i na różnych poziomach organizacyjnych, stosując badania podłużne.

Wkład w rozwój dyscypliny: Studia te wzbogacają wiedzę naukową na temat roli postrzeganego wsparcia organizacyjnego w kształtowanie wyników pracowników oraz stanu tych zjawisk w konkretnym przedsiębiorstwie IT.

Słowa kluczowe: postrzeganie wsparcia organizacyjnego, wyniki pracowników, przedsiębiorstwo IT, pracownicy.