

## Perception of Supervisory Support, Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support on job satisfaction. The study sample comprised of 115 part-time MBA students registered with a local public university. Correlation was used to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and multiple regressions was used to investigate the impact of supervisor support and organizational support on job satisfaction. Results reveal that only supervisor support has a significant impact on job satisfaction, while, organizational impact does not have any significant impact on job satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** supervisor support, organizational support, job satisfaction

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, there has been strong tendency to adopt downsizing strategy to deal with economic pressures in the environment (Makawatsakul & Kleiner, 2003). Organizational downsizing and organizational decline has been frequent phenomena due to fundamental and structural changes in the world economy (Selmer & Waldstrom, 2007). In an economic downturn or recession, involving the national or regional economy, job opportunities may not be numerous and few employees may want to leave their current employment voluntarily. Hence, organizational downsizing involving staff reductions became the main strategy employed in an attempt to arrest the organizational decline and for the survival of the firm (Freeman & Cameron, 1993). For example Lee and Corbett (2006) reported that at least one third of large and medium-size US companies have downsized their workforces every year since 1988, and more than 85 per cent of *Fortune* 1,000 firms pared their white-collar work force between 1987 and 1991 (Cascio, 1993).

The economic downturn of 2009 and 2010, exposed the fragility of the manufacturing sector in Malaysia, where, World Bank (2010) reported that during the period of recession, 120,000 employees were laid-off, where 77.8% of the retrenched employees came from the manufacturing sector. International

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Monetary Fund (2010) in their World Economic Outlook also reported that Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate has been dropping from 9.2 percent (from 1991 to 1997) to 4.3 percent (from 2001 to 2009). The main reason for the drop in GDP is due to the lower level of worker's productivities (Choong & Lau, 2011). As such it is only appropriate that the study is conducted since the implementation of downsizing exercises would have affected the psychological state of the employees and this in turn would have affected their job satisfaction.

Against the backdrop of the uncertain economic situation, it is apparent that the level of supervisory support and organizational support provided by the employees' supervisors and organizations would play an important role in alleviating the employees' feelings of insecurity and providing morale support to the layoff survivors. The effects of both supervisory and organizational support on job satisfaction are crucial, especially for organizations in manufacturing sector, if employees' job satisfaction is low, it will affect the quality of production, productivity, creativity and innovation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Perception of Supervisor Support**

In the context of social exchange relationships, perceived supervisor support (PSS) refers to the employees' perception of their relationship with their supervisor and how well they can rely on the supervisor to care for their individual concerns (Hsu, 2011). This relationship has been described by Gagnon and Michael (2004) as "the degree to which an employee feels that they are supported by their supervisor". The rationale for the perceived supervisor support is due to the fact that supervisors are considered as the crucial persons or agents responsible for maintaining the psychological contract of employees (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997). Thus, supervisory support plays an important role in the employees' well-being. According to Eisenberger *et al.* (2002) employees are more likely to remain with an organization if they feel that their supervisors value their contributions and well-being, communicate well with them, and treat them with respect and recognition. In other words, in work climate where there is a high level of supervisory support, the employees will be obligated to "repay" their supervisor and/or organization (Hsu, 2011).

Employees develop general views concerning the degree to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being (Pepe, 2010). The degree to which employees perceive that supervisors offer employees support, encouragement and concern is known as perceived supervisor support or PSS (Kotte & Sharafinski, 1988; Burke, Borucki & Hurley, 1992). The supervisor is seen to be representing the organization because they appraise the employees'

effort and they manage the reward system, thus, the supervisors' action can affect the employees' organizational wellbeing (Teaklab *et al.*, 2005). This is consistent with the organizational support theory which holds that beneficial treatment received from supervisors should lead to a felt obligation to aid the organization and to affective organizational commitment, both of which should reduce turnover (Rhoades *et al.*, 2001).

## 2.2 Perception of Organizational Support

Grounded in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), the perception of organizational support (POS) perspective is guided by the principle that most employees need to feel that their organization respects and supports them. Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) found that, in order to determine the organization's readiness to reward increased work effort and to meet needs for praise and approval, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Erickson & Roloff, 2007).

According to La Mastro (2009) individuals evaluate the behaviour of organizational agents towards them and infer the general motive underlying that treatment, with the categories that are considered important varying considerably between organizations and between persons. Some individuals might base their sense of POS upon factors such as the organization members' willingness to provide them with special assistance in order to complete a project. Others might develop a strong sense of POS based on the organization members' willingness to provide them with additional opportunities for training in an area that was of particular interest to them. Furthermore, employees are frequently sensitive to relevant environmental and organizational constraints that might limit the ability to provide them with desired rewards (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997).

Brockner, Grover, Reed, De Witt and O'Malley (1987) found that organizational support plays an important role in preserving the morale of layoff survivors. Armstrong-Stassen (1997) discovered that surviving managers who had been told their jobs were redundant, perceive decreased organizational support. According to Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades (2001) POS is positively related to employees' sense of "felt obligation" to care about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its goals. In addition, Naumann, Bennet, Bies and Martin (1998) argued that the degree of organizational support may be particularly salient to employees during difficult times, such as downsizing (Erickson & Roloff, 2007).

Overall, it appears that employees who feel that their organization appreciate and value their contribution will experience high levels of POS, which in turn, will encourage the employees to reciprocate the favourable treatment with attitudes and behaviours that will benefit the organizations (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davids-La Mastro, 1990).

### **2.3 Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is one of the most widely studied work-related attitudes in the fields of industrial and organizational psychology, and organizational behaviour (Spector, 1997). Job satisfaction is one of the factors that influence employees' job experience. When there is an enhancement of employees' job satisfaction within the organization, this will lead to an increase in their overall organization productivity and performance (Choong & Lau, 2011). Job satisfaction will also result in an improvement in the employees' creativity and innovation (Dickson & Lorenz, 2009).

Job satisfaction can be defined as individual's cognitive, affective and evaluative reaction towards his or her job (Greenberg & Baron, 1997). According to Vroom (1964) when an individual's job or job experience is evaluated and appraised by the organization, this will result in pleasant feelings and positive emotional state for the employees. The evaluation and appraisal is a form of feedback for the employees and this feedback will influence the employees' emotional state which will impact on the level of job satisfaction of the employees (Choong & Lau, 2011).

### **2.4 Perception of Supervisor Support and Job Satisfaction**

The quality of supervisor- subordinate relationship has been linked to work outcomes (Golden & Veiga, 2008) and Hooper and Martin (2008) state that employee perceptions of supervisory support have a high correlation to positive job outcomes such as performance, satisfaction, turnover intention, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior (Adams, 2008). Perceptions of a supportive management team, like perceptions of involved co-workers, also are likely to influence job satisfaction directly (Kirmeyer & Lin, 1987). If an employee perceives that supervisors show concern for workers and provide socio-emotional support in general, this will lead to a positive appraisal of the environment and increase job satisfaction directly (Kopelman *et al.*, 1990). In other words, supervisors that are perceived as generally supportive of the workforce help to increase job satisfaction among employees (Babbin & Bolles, 1996).

Previous literatures regarding workplace social support have focused on evaluating the impact of support received from various sources, typically supervisors and colleagues (Brough & Frame 2004; Pears 2004). Supervisor social support, in particular, has been identified as a factor in alleviating the negative consequences of occupational stress across a variety of job contexts (Brough & Pears, 2004). In a study conducted by Schirmer and Lopez (2001) on

250 university employees discovered that the perception of support from supervisors significantly reduced reported levels of psychological strain. Similar result was found by Bliese and Castro (2000) in their study of US Army personnel, where, the result indicated that the effects of psychological strain were reduced by high levels of supervisor support. Beehr and McGrath (1992) stressed that studies should be focused on the direct relationship between supervisor support and organizational stress outcomes since other investigations have failed to demonstrate the moderating effect of supervisor support.

According to Galleta *et al.* (2011) a lack of support from the direct supervisor could prompt employees' dissatisfaction and burnout. Supervisor support is an important element in organizational management as it has an indirect impact through job satisfaction on the employees' intention to remain employed in the organization (Tourangeau & Cranley, 2006). High scores in job satisfaction and intention to remain employed are reported when the managers are perceived as being supportive (Sourdif, 2004). Therefore, the study postulates that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Perception of supervisor support is significantly related to job satisfaction

## **2.5 Perception of Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction**

The effect of perception of organizational support on job satisfaction is consistent with the literature on person- organization fit, where, the organization is expected to fulfill its obligation in order to gratify the employees needs (Shore & Tetrick, 1991). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) reported a positive and significant link between POS and job satisfaction and this link suggests that when the employer takes the initiative to improve an employee's working conditions by, for example, proposing to increase or expand his or her expertise, employer decisions are then perceived as signals of support that increase employee job satisfaction (Paille *et al.*, 2010). In fact, evidence provided by previous studies have shown that perceived organizational support was positively associated with levels of job satisfaction, high level of perceived organizational support resulted higher level of job satisfaction (Burke & Greenglass, 2000; Burke, 2003; Stamper & Johlke, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen, Cameron & Horsburgh, 1996). The study postulates that:

*Hypothesis 2:* Perception of organizational support is significantly related to job satisfaction.

Based on the relationships established above, derived from the social exchange theory, the framework for the current study is provided as below:

**Independent Variable**

**Dependent Variable**

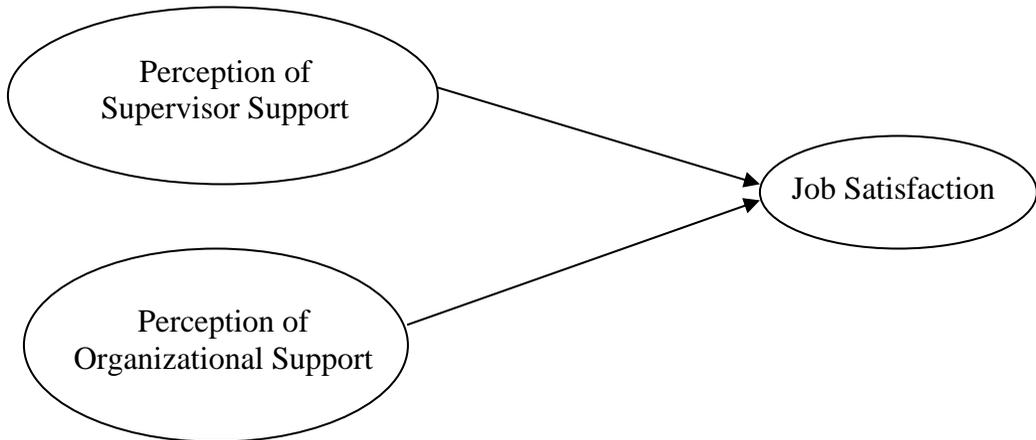


Figure 1: Framework of Study

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was employed to gather data for the present study. The survey contained five items to measure perception of supervisor support, eight items to measure perception of organizational support and nine items to measure job satisfaction. The survey was distributed and collected from 115 part-time MBA students who are mid-level executives and engineers working in the manufacturing sector and attending MBA classes conducted by a local public university. The survey was collected from July 2009 until July 2011. The data gathered was analyzed using the multiple regression properties of SPSS version 16.

#### 3.1 Variables and Measures

*Perception of supervisor support:* Supervisor support was measured using Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau's (1980) five-item scale. Respondents respond to a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

*Perception of organizational support:* The eight items for this variable is a shortened version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support by Eisenberger et al. (1986), the same items were utilized by Hochwater et al. (2003). Respondents respond to a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

*Job satisfaction:* Nine items from Brayfield and Rothe’s (1951) measure assessed job satisfaction. This scale has demonstrated acceptable characteristics across a wide variety of employee domains (Moorman, 1989). Respondents respond to a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

**4. RESULTS OF ANALYSIS**

Correlations among variables are given in Table 1. Both supervisor support and organizational support are significantly correlated with job satisfaction. The result of correlations indicate that providing support to the employees, whether, it comes from the supervisor or the organization itself is important in enhancing employees’ job satisfaction. This is consistent with the social exchange theory, where, the support provided by both supervisors and organizations will be able to influence the employees’ emotional outcome.

Table 1: Correlation among Variables

	Organizational Support	Job Satisfaction	Supervisor Support
Supervisor Support	.691**	.718**	
Organizational Support		.489**	.691**
Job Satisfaction	.718**	.691**	

*Correlation significant at \*\*p < .01 level*

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the impacts of both supervisor support and organizational support on job satisfaction. In other words, the results of the regression analysis would provide a more accurate picture, which of the two variables are more significant in influencing employees’ sense of job satisfaction. The results of the regression are depicted in Table 2. The results indicate that supervisor support has a significant effect on job satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported. The results also indicate that Organizational support has no significant effect on job satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is refuted.

Table 2: Results of Regression

Variables (sig.)	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std.error
Supervisor Support	.453	.086	.726	5.281	.000*
Organizational Support	-.006	.061	-.013	-.092	.927

*Dependent variable: Job satisfaction*

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study is to test the effects of both perceptions of supervisor support and organizational support on employees' job satisfaction. The two supportive variables are considered to be critical, especially, in an uncertain economic environment. External factors such economic downturn affects the firms' performance and this in turn will affect the administration and the operation of the firms, resulting in emotional disturbances for the employees, thus affecting their job satisfaction and directly, their performance.

Supervisors' roles in organizations are crucial, since, they are perceived to be the agents responsible for maintaining employees' psychological contract (Herriot & Pemberton, 1997). Supervisors' roles in structuring the work environment, providing information and feedback to the employees have an impact on the affective reactions of the employees (Durham et al., 1997). The results of the study reflected this behavior, where, the employees perceive their supervisors to be more supportive, concerned and care more about their well-being and this is the reason that the relationship between supervisor support and job satisfaction are significant. This is consistent with the organizational support theory, where, the perceived organizational support is strongly perceived when the employees feel that the supervisors value their contributions, respect their opinions and communicate with them. However it is important to point out, that the significance of the relationship between supervisor support and job satisfaction can also be contributed that the roles played by the supervisor are personal ones. Since supervisors are able to communicate directly with the subordinates, listen to their grievances and console them and give feedback, their roles are viewed positively compared to the roles of organizational support.

Previous studies have acknowledged that perceived organizational support was positively associated with levels of job satisfaction, furthermore past studies have also cemented the fact that high level of perceived organizational support resulted in higher level of job satisfaction (Burke & Greenglass, 2000; Burke, 2003; Stamper & Johlke, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen, Cameron & Horsburgh, 1996). However, the results of the current study indicate that the effect of perception of organizational support was not significant in predicting job satisfaction. Several factors have to be taken into account for the result. The period of the data collection could be one of the contributing factors, since, during that particular period the manufacturing sector was badly affected by the global economic downturn and most of the manufacturing firms carried out downsizing exercises in order to survive. This will result in emotional distress for the employees since they would feel that the firm does not value their contribution and care for their well-being, this environment could create a sense of distrust and animosity towards the organizations, which in turn will result in the employees perceiving the firm as not supporting them difficult and uncertain period. This is a possible reason why in this study perception of organizational

support does not have a significant effect on job satisfaction. Another factor where perceived organizational support is reduced occurs when the employees review their obligations and their feelings towards the organizations when they perceive the organizations have failed in fulfilling their obligations towards the employees. Obligations of the organizations are like their promises to the employees; failure in keeping their promises will also result in employees perceiving the organizations negatively and thus, affecting the employees' perception of organizational support.

The results of this study, obviously, clarify the importance of the roles played by both supervisor support and organizational support when the organizations are facing difficult, uncertain and turbulent economic environment. The supportive roles exercised by both the supervisors and organizations can influence the emotional outcome of the employees, if the employees are satisfied with their jobs, they will be more productive and innovative. The results also indicate that the organizations cannot ignore the psychological contract that they have with the employees, be it during good or bad times.

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