Support at Work to Fuel Engagement: A Study of Employees of Indian Banking Sector

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is positively and significantly related to employees' productivity, creativity, innovativeness, customer service and in-role and extra-role behaviours. Providing employees with support at workplace may be a strategic way to enhance their level of engagement. The purpose of this study is to explore whether perceptions of perceived organization support, perceived supervisor support and perceived co-worker support are related to employee engagement. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the proposed hypothesis on sample of 218 employees of public sector banks in India. Findings revealed that all these dimensions of support are significant predictors of employee engagement. The study conclusively states that support at workplace may play an extrinsic motivational role in enhancing employee engagement in Indian public sector banks.

Keywords: Perceived Organization Support, Perceived Supervisor Support, Perceived Co-worker Support, Employee Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

A significant HR challenge for organizations aiming to have a competitive advantage over others is to have physically, psychologically and emotionally engaged employees in their jobs (Kahn 1990, 1992). Past research (e.g., Saks 2006; Demerouti et al. 2001; Ng and Tay 2010 cited from Sze and Angeline 2011) has already established that engagement is positively and significantly related to employees' productivity, creativity, innovativeness, customer service and in-role and extra-role behaviours. Providing employees with support at workplace may be a strategic way to enhance their level of

engagement. The purpose of this study is to explore whether perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS) and perceived co-worker support (PCS) are related to employee engagement. Specifically, we have proposed that when employees perceive these dimensions at workplace to be supportive, they would reciprocate by engaging more in their jobs Perception of employees of public sector banks (PSBs) in India have specifically been chosen for this purpose.

2. PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

POS is defined as people's "global belief about the extent to which the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions" (Eisenberger et al. 1986 p. 501). It is also the assurance that aid will be available from the organization when it is needed to carry out one's job effectively and to deal with stressful situations (Rhoades et al. 2002). Based on the organizational support theory, Eisenberger et al. (1986) have further stated that it is employees' tendency to assign humanlike characteristics to their organization, that supports the development of POS. In other words, POS focuses on the employer's side of the exchange as perceived by employees. On the basis of the Social Exchange Theory (SET), it is believed that POS "refers to the organization's contribution to a positive reciprocity dynamic with employees, as employees tend to perform better to give back for perceived organizational support" (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002 cited from Cherubin 2011).

2.1 PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The relationship between POS and engagement has been widely researched (e.g., Saks 2006; Zacher and Winter 2011; Fairlie 2011; Wefald et al. 2011; Wickramasinghe and Perera 2012; Biswas et al. 2013) and a positive relationship has been found between these two constructs. On the basis of SET, Rhoades et al. (2001) have argued that employees who have higher POS might become more engaged to their job and organization as part of the reciprocity norm to help the organization. Similarly Saks (2006) has also stated that when employees believe that their organization is concerned about them and cares about their well-being, they are likely to respond by attempting to fulfill their obligations to the organization by becoming more engaged. Employees feel safe in work environments which are characterized by openness and supportiveness; hence perceived organizational support may predict employee engagement. Biswas et al. (2012) have asserted that POS allows employees to feel that their organizations value their work and that they are optimally using job resources, which, in turn, fuels their engagement at work. Zacher and Winter (2011) have also considered organizational support as an important Psychological resource of employees that helps them reduce their strain. Thus, based on the above discussion on theory and research, we propose that:

H1: Perceived Organizational Support is positively related to Employee Engagement.

3. PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

Kottke and Sharafinski (1988) have defined PSS as general views of employees concerning the degree to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being. Support from the supervisor refers to the positive feedback and benefits which employees receive from their supervisors as a result of their contributions (Otken and Erben 2010). As supervisors act as agents of the organization,

employees would view their supervisors' favourable or unfavourable orientation toward them as indicative of the organization's support (p. 1076).

3.1 PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Supervisors are in a good position to influence employees' work attitudes and behaviours as they are visible and proximally closer to their subordinates (Becker and Kernan 2003; Chen and Francesco 2000; Cheng et al. 2003). Several empirical studies (e.g., Saks 2006; Fairlie 2011; Zacher and Winter 2011; Wefald et al. 2011; Cherubin 2011; Rurkkhum and Bartlett 2012; Biswas et al. 2013; Poon 2013; Alfes et al. 2013) have supported the positive association between PSS and engagement studies. PSS has also been considered as an important predictor of employee engagement as lack of support from supervisors leads to burnout (Maslach et al. 2001). Researchers like Bates (2004) and Frank et al. (2004) have argued that first-line supervisors are believed to be especially important for building engagement and to be the root of employee disengagement. As supervisors have responsibility for directing and evaluating subordinates' performance and implementing organizational policies and procedures, they could motivate employees to be more engaged in their jobs by providing timely and constructive feedback and by adopting fair rewards and promotion (Cheng et al. 2003 cited from Sze and Angeline 2011). An important aspect of engagement, namely psychological safety (Kahn, 1990) may arise from care and support provided to employees by their immediate supervisors. Hence on the basis of the above discussion we suggest that:
 H2: Perceived Supervisor Support is positively related to Employee Engagement.

4. CO-WORKER SUPPORT

Co-workers have the ability to define the social environment at work (Schneider 1987). Co-worker support refers to co-workers assisting one another in their tasks when needed, by sharing knowledge and expertise as well as providing encouragement and support (Zhou and George 2001). It can be defined as the extent to which individuals view other workers in their organization as being helpful and supportive of them (Liao et al. 2004). Such support may include caring for fellow co-workers, giving them tangible aids, and/or providing them with useful information (Ducharme and Martin 2000; Parris 2003). In an environment where co-worker support is high employees are able to discuss ideas more openly and honestly and there is a positive relationship to job satisfaction (Fass et al. 2007).

4.1 CO-WORKER SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Several empirical evidences are available in literature regarding positive association between co-worker support and engagement. Studies (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Schaufeli et al. 2008; Xanthopoulou et al. 2008; Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2008) following the Job Demands-Resources model have taken co-worker support as a job resource and have established positive linkage between the constructs. Working in a lean organization with highly talented and co-operative co-employees has been conceptualized as an essential requirement for high level of employee engagement (Andrew and Sofian 2012). Trusting and supportive interpersonal relations among employees lead to psychological safety (Kahn 1990). Employees who viewed their work to be more involving, cohesive and supportive were found to be more satisfied with their jobs (Schaefer and Moos 1991), and are hence likely to be more engaged. Co-

worker support as part of social support at workplace leads to positive work environment since it is associated with emotional concern, instrumental aid, information or appraisal (Carlson and Perrewé 1999). In a work environment in which employees receive adequate support from their co-workers, they may feel energetic and dedicated and may often be fully immersed in their work (Karatepe et al. 2010). Review of past studies prompts us to hypothesize that:

H3: Perceived Co-worker Support is positively related to Employee Engagement.

5. RESEARCH PLAN

5.1 METHOD

A survey was conducted across 25 branches of PSBs with headquarters in northern India with questionnaire as the tool of survey. The questionnaire was distributed to 297 employees of these branches. The participating employees were also asked to provide their demographic information (i.e., age, gender and tenure of service) in the first section of the questionnaire. The process of data collection took around a month and the final number of usable questionnaires stood at 218, registering a response rate of 73.4 per cent.

Demographic data in Table 1 show male representation at 74.6 per cent. With respect to age, the highest representation is of the age group of below 30 years (39.3 per cent), and the lowest at 26.9 per cent of those aged between 30-45 years. The composition of respondents in terms of length of service with their respective banks reflected that the shortest and longest tenures are of 9.0 per cent (less than a year) and 25.9 per cent (more than 6 years) respectively.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Percent (%)
Gender	
Male	74.6
Female	25.4
Age	
Less than 30 years	39.3
30-45 years	26.9
More than 45 years	33.3
Length of Service with Bank	
Less than 1 year	9.0
1-3 years	38.8
3-6 years	26.4
More than 6 years	25.9

5.2 MEASURES

Perceived Organizational Support was measured by the eight-item short-form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) (Eisenberger et al. 1997). A sample item is "My organization really cares about my well-being" (α=0.691). Participants responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. *Perceived Supervisor Support* was measured by the four-item scale adapted from SPOS (Rhoades et al. 2001). Sample item is "My supervisor

cares about my opinions" (α= .695). Participants responded using five-Point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. *Perceived Co-worker Support* was measured by using the Co-worker Support Scale by Mabe (2010), Which is a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Sample item is "My co-worker can be relied on when things get tough at work" (α= .675). *Work Engagement* (construct used for employee engagement) was measured by using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) suggested by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Examples include: "At work I feel bursting with energy" (vigour); "I am proud of the work I do" (dedication); "I am immersed in my work" (absorption) (α=0.815). A five-point Likert-type scale was used with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

6. RESULTS

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables considered in the study. The correlation values support the hypotheses. Work engagement is positively related with perceived organizational (r=0.425 at p<0.01), supervisor (r=0.500 at p<0.01) and co-worker (r=0.466 at p<0.01) support. Another interesting correlation between POS and PSS (r=0.769 at p<0.01) is noticeable; correlations between POS and PCS (r=0.604 at p<0.01) and between PSS and PCS (r=0.702 at p<0.01) are also found significant. Incidentally, previous literature does not provide evidence of any correlation between these two dimensions of support and hence no association between them was hypothesized in the study.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of Variables

	Mean	SD	Work Engagement	Perceived Organization Support	Perceived Supervisor Support	Perceived Co-worker Support
Work Engagement	4.4345	.82366				
Perceived Organizational Support	3.4285	.55770	.425*			
Perceived Supervisor Support	3.5274	.59624	.500*	.769*		
Perceived Co-worker Support	3.7019	.61990	.466*	.604*	.702*	1.000

*significant at 0.01 level.

Table 3: Multivariate Regressions Predicting Work Engagement

	Work Engagement	ΔR^2
Control Variables		
Age of employee	-.142	
Gender of employee	-.086	
Length of service with the bank	.095	
Predictor Variables		

Perceived Organization Support	.324[*]	
Perceived Supervisor Support	.131[**]	
Perceived Co-worker Support	.271[*]	.380
R^2	.480	
Adjusted R^2	.461	

(*p**<*0.01, p***< *0.05).*

To perform a more rigorous examination of the hypotheses, hierarchical multiple regression was performed in the next step. Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis predicting engagement. Control variables were entered in the first block and support (i.e., *Perceived Supervisor Support, Perceived Organizational Support,* and *Perceived Co-worker Support*) variables were added in the second block to calculate the changes in R^2. When added to the equation, all the three types of support were found to be significant in the model; specifically, we have β= 0.324 (at p<0.5) for *Perceived Organizational Support,* for *Perceived Supervisor Support* we have β= 0.131 (at *p<0.05*); and *Perceived Co-worker Support* also predicted engagement (β= 0.271 at *p<0.01*). Looking at the R^2 values for the model we may conclude that the regression equations accounted for 48 per cent of the variance in employee engagement.

7. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of support at workplace (organizational support, supervisor support and co-worker support) on engagement among employees of Indian PSBs. Findings revealed that all these dimensions of support are significant predictors of work engagement. This finding is consistent with those of previous researchers (e.g., Hakanen et al. 2006; Llorens et al. 2006). Hence this study has contributed to enriching the body of knowledge on engagement literature within the Indian banking industry. Furthermore, the study results are also consistent with the Job Demands-Resources model which assumes support at workplace as a job resource that enhances employee engagement. We can conclusively state that support at workplace may play an extrinsic motivational role as a component of job resources and drive an individual's willingness to contribute their efforts and abilities to the work task. The findings also empirically support Blau's (1964) social exchange theory; we may hence state that if work environment is supportive employees will feel obliged to reciprocate by displaying favourable attitude in the form of work engagement.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Employee engagement has been receiving increased attention from researchers due to its related positive individual and organizational consequences like employee performance, employee retention, productivity, loyalty and customer satisfaction. Keeping in perspective the benefits of an engaged workforce, organizations are considering ways to promote engagement of their workforce. Towards this end, our findings may be helpful for Indian public sector banks, which may design a supportive work environment to enhance engagement of their employees. Our research is also useful in understanding the nature of the behavioural contributions made by employees to their organizations as a function of availability of support at work.

9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In spite of sincere efforts on the part of the researchers, this study has some limitations. First, our study was restricted to evaluating the engagement levels of employees in various public sector banks in India from a relatively small sample, which may result in reducing the statistical significance of the results and generalization of the findings on employees of private sector and foreign banks cannot be ascertained. Future studies might seek to evaluate the discussed constructs in this study in a more diverse geographical area for better generalization of the findings. Further, the three dimensions of support at workplace have been modelled in a linear manner using traditional regression analysis; using Structural Equation Modelling could definitely lead to more interesting insights on the inter-relationship among these three dimensions. Future research may also consider linking support at workplace to variables such as job demands in predicting engagement or may further be extended to determine job outcomes like organizational commitment and turnover intention.

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