

## Antecedents of Perceived Organizational Support

### ANTÉCÉDENT DE LA PERCEPTION DE SOUTIEN ORGANISATIONNEL

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**Abstract:** The main aim of this study is to identify the relationship between three variables (i.e. trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop) and perceived organizational support. This study also aims to identify the most effective predictor of perceived organizational support. The respondents comprise 312 lecturers from 25 private institutions of higher education in three Malaysian states (Kedah, Penang and Kelantan). Correlation analyses show high positive relationship between antecedents (trust; access to information; and access to opportunity to learn and develop) and perceived organizational support. Regression analysis indicates that all three antecedents under study are significant predictors of perceived organizational support. Trust is identified as the most effective predictor of perceived organizational support. In addition to managerial implications and limitations of the study, direction for future research are also suggested at the end of this study.

**Key words:** Perceived organizational support; private higher education; trust; access to information; access to opportunity to learn and develop

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**Résumé:** L'objectif principal de cette étude est de déterminer la relation entre les trois variables (à savoir la confiance, l'accès à l'information et l'accès aux possibilités d'apprendre et de se développer) et la perception de soutien organisationnel. Cette étude vise également à identifier le facteur prédictif le plus efficace de la perception de soutien organisationnel. Les sondés comprennent 312 enseignants de 25 établissements de l'enseignement supérieur privés dans trois régions de Malaisie (Kedah, Penang et Kelantan). Les analyses de corrélation montrent une relation positive entre les antécédents (la confiance, l'accès à l'information et l'accès aux possibilités d'apprendre et de se développer) et la perception de soutien organisationnel. L'analyse de régression indique que tous ces trois antécédents étudiés sont des facteurs prédictifs importants de la perception de soutien organisationnel. La confiance est identifiée en tant que le facteur prédictif le plus efficace de la perception de soutien organisationnel. A part les implications et les limitations directoriales, l'orientation pour des recherches ultérieures sont également proposées à la fin de cette étude.

**Mots-clés:** perception de soutien organisationnel; enseignement supérieur privé; confiance; accès aux informations; accès aux possibilités d'apprendre et de se développer

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ministry of Education has set the target to make Malaysia as the centre of educational excellence and meet the vision of making education in Malaysia world-class (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001). Quality of higher education in any country depends on the quality of the institutions as well as the excellence of the lecturers. To help meet this vision a national quality agency, named Malaysian Qualifications Agency (which is the merger of National Accreditation Board and the Divisions of Quality Assurance of Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education), was approved in 2007 under Malaysian Qualification Act 2007. This agency is formed to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). MQF is an instrument that develops and classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that is approved nationally and is at par with international good practices (StudyMalaysia.com, 2009).

In order to meet the increasing social demand on higher education, Malaysia has privatized the higher education sector by relaxing the restrictions in establishing private schools, institutions and colleges (Lee, 2004). A substantial number of part-time lecturers are hired to overcome the shortage of lecturers and to reduce costs. Most lecturers shift from one institution to another to take advantage of the higher salaries offered (Lee, 2004). The intention to remain in an institution is influenced by organizational commitment (Khatri, Chong & Budhwar, 2001). Organizational commitment is often conceptualized as affective attachment to the organization and is manifested through the shared values, desire to maintain membership in the organization and willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). If employees perceive that the organization values their contribution then they will show more commitment towards their organization (Eisenberger et al, 1986).

Organizational support theory holds that in order to meet socioemotional needs and to assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995). Perceived organizational support fosters affective commitment by meeting employees' socio-emotional needs and different employees will have different perceptions regarding support that they receive from the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002) suggest that organizational commitment be identified as a consequence of POS. The obligation that arises because employees feel the need to reciprocate the support received should also lead to affective commitment to the organization. Similarly, Khurram (2009) finds that higher levels

of POS are predictive of higher level of organizational commitment among the university teachers.

Accordingly, the positive relationship between POS and favorable job conditions was found to be six times greater when the presence of those conditions were attributed to the organization's discretion rather than to external constraints (Eisenberger et al., 1997). POS has been found to be related to human resource practices such as job security, autonomy, training, participation in decision-making and opportunities for rewards and promotions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The favourableness of a specific human resource practice should increase POS to the extent that it is attributed to the voluntary, intentional actions of the organization. According to social exchange theory, when a person or entity does a favour for another, the recipient of the favour is obliged to reciprocate (Blau, 1964).

In this study, perceived organizational support refers to the extent to which lecturers feel that they are recognized for their contributions and the extent to which the organization cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The lecturers' perception on organizational support is exhibited by the extent to which lecturers feel that the management cares about their well-being and work satisfaction, and the extent to which the management values their contributions and achievements. Such perceived organizational support would increase employees' felt obligation to help the organization reach its objectives, their affective commitment to the organization, and their expectation that improved performance would be rewarded.

### **1.1 Antecedents to Perceived Organizational Support**

The concept of POS is based on a social exchange theory whereby employees extend their effort and loyalties in return for the material commodities and social rewards given to them by the organization (Blau, 1964). POS is influenced by various aspects of the organizations treatment to the employees (Eisenberger et al, 1986). Actions taken by the administrator may also contribute to employees' POS. The manner in which organization treats its employees through managerial actions may strongly influence employees' POS (Eisenberger et al, 1986). This study examines trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop as antecedents to perceived organizational support.

### **1.2 Trust.**

Trust is significantly related to perceived organizational support (Kazanchi, 2005). Employees' trust in an organization is likely to influence their perception on the quality of their exchange relationship with the organization i.e. POS. Trust is defined as an assumption that other people can be counted on to do what they said (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1997) define trust based on behavioural, communication and attitude or judgement aspects. Open and task-oriented communication can increase the level of employee trust (Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph, 2001). According to Whitener et al. (1998), administrators that allocate some time to explain in details about certain decisions taken are more likely to be seen as trustworthy. The accuracy of information flow also has a strong relationship with employees' trust on the administrators (Whitener et al., 1998).

Trust in educational institutions can be seen from relational aspect with reference group such as students, teachers, administrators and organization (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). When employees trust each other, they assume that all parties would not take advantage on others (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). Employees will appreciate and respect their individual differences (Blanchard et al., 2001). When trust is built, leadership is no longer to ensure that rules and regulations are obeyed, hence control decreases when trust increases (West-Burnham & O'Sullivan, 1998).

### **1.3 Access to information**

Information sharing is a mechanism that enables employees to be accounted for to achieve their goals and achieve the goals at a higher level (Blanchard et al., 2001). When a leader is willing to share information, either good or bad, they acquire employees' trust. Employees will feel that they have the attention from their leader and that they are trusted by their leader. Information in the form of data and technical knowledge needed can be acquired through training and education (Blanchard et al., 2001).

Actions to limit information available to employees lead to the assumption that employees cannot be trusted or are too ignorant that they might misuse the information (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). Through information sharing, continuous improvement can be implemented. Training should be given to employees to enable them to understand, interpret and use the information provided to them rightfully (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001).

#### **1.4 Access to opportunity to learn and develop**

According to Chien (2007), in a knowledge- based economy, knowledge, skills and abilities must be up to date to remain creative and innovative in the dynamic world. Therefore, employees should search for the right kind of knowledge, skills and behaviour needed to carry out their job well and effectively. To fulfil the increased need for multiknowledge-workers, training should be diversified and organizations should change their training contents (Chien, 2007). Multiple individual needs can be fulfilled through training and education. Training in facilitative leadership, teamwork and change management can help provide needed knowledge in collaborative problem-solving (Strauss, 2002).

Organizations are increasingly using intangible investments in people, such as training, to influence employee performance, satisfaction and commitment (Johlke, Stamper & Shoemaker, 2002).

Professional development, not only function to increase the individual performance, improve ineffective practices and provide bases to implement a certain policy, but also to facilitate change in an educational institution (Blandford, 2000). Professional development enables a teacher to expand and suit his practices, to reflect on his experience, research and practices to fulfil the students' needs and contribute to the institution by interacting professionally with society and outside agencies (Blanford, 2000). Professional development also increases teachers' understanding about their roles and determination to achieve the goals of the institution (Harding et al., 1981). The professional development activities require time and resources (Harding et al., 1981). Principals should encourage and support professional development by giving incentives and resources required to implement the program continuously (Blandford, 2000).

It is proposed in this study that trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop will positively influence POS. The hypotheses can be summarized as follow:

- Hypothesis 1: POS is positively related to trust.
- Hypothesis 2: POS is positively related to access to information.
- Hypothesis 3: POS is positively related to access to opportunity to learn and develop.

This study is conducted to:

- i Identify the level of antecedents of POS (trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop)
- ii Identify the level of POS of lecturers.
- iii Identify the relationship between antecedents and POS.
- iv Identify the most effective predictor of POS.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted at the non-university private higher education institutions. A total of 312 lecturers from 25 institutions from three states in Malaysia (Penang, Kedah and Kelantan) were included as respondents in this study. 54% of the respondents were female and 46% of them were male. To measure trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop, a total of 18 items

were used. Respondents were required to respond to these items using 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

## **2.1 Trust**

To measure trust, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) develop Omnibus T-Scale instrument. This instrument comprises 26 items that measure three dimensions of trust i.e. trust of faculty to principal, trust of faculty to colleagues and trust of faculty to customers (students and parents). For the purpose of this study, only subscale of faculty trust to principal was used. The construct comprised eight items and includes vulnerability, benevolence, reliable, competent, sincerity and openness. The term principal was changed to the administrator to take into consideration the influence of the high level administration that involved directly, not necessary that of a principal alone.

## **2.2 Access to information**

Access to information was measured using four items from the instruments of Spreitzer (1996). This instrument was modified such that the item to measure lecturers' access to information on strategy and goal of the organization was divided into two separate items.

## **2.3 Access to opportunity to learn and develop**

Four items from Short and Rinehart's (1992) instrument to measure professional development were modified. The term school was replaced with institution as this study was conducted in private higher education institution and not school. One item was added to measure the access to opportunity to participate in programs that can develop the skills and knowledge of lecturers.

## **2.4 Perceived organizational support**

For the purpose of practicality, this study measured organizational support using only eight items that were selected and modified based on the short-form scale of perceived organizational support developed by (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) state that the use of a shorter form is not problematic because the original scale is unidimensional and highly reliable. However, both aspects of recognition on the employees' contribution and care toward the employees' well-being should be included in the questionnaire. Each item was measured using the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items in the questionnaire were modified to suit the purpose of the study without affecting its psychometric and nomological characteristics. For example, the term organization was replaced with management.

Correlational research methodology was used especially to study the relationship between independent variables (trust, access to information, access to opportunity to learn and develop) and POS. This study also identifies the best antecedent that contributes to the POS of lecturers. Regression analysis was used to identify the dependent variable from what we know about one or more independent variables (Hair et al., 2006).

# **3. ANALYSES OF RESULTS**

### **3.1 Reliability and validity of scales**

Prior to the empirical assessment of reliability and validity, the researcher examined each item of every scale for evidence of content validity. The number of items and corresponding Cronbach alpha coefficients for the variables under study are as shown in Table 1. The reliability analysis indicates that the coefficients of Cronbach alpha for the scales are higher than .70 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

### **3.2 Descriptive analysis**

The descriptive analysis shows that only access to opportunity to learn and develop has been evaluated at high level. Access to opportunity to learn and develop has the highest score (mean = 5.06, SD = 1.06) while POS received the lowest score (mean = 4.36, SD = 1.13). Access to information, trust and POS are all reported at moderate levels. Table 2 shows the value of mean and standard deviation for each variable under study.

### **3.3 Correlation analysis**

Correlation analysis was conducted to study the relationship between antecedents and POS. The results show that all antecedents have high positive relationship with POS ( $r$  values of .62, .69 and .85) while trust has high positive relationship with both POS ( $r = .85$ ). These results support all the three hypotheses (Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3). Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients for the relationship between the antecedents and POS. The interpretation of Pearson correlation coefficient is based on Cohen (1988).

### **3.4 Regression analysis**

The multiple regression analysis shows that all antecedents i.e. trust ( $t_{311} = 16.17, p < .05$ ), access to information ( $t_{311} = 2.44, p < .05$ ) and access to opportunity to learn and develop ( $t_{311} = 6.64, p < .05$ ) are significant predictors of POS. Trust is the most important predictor of POS ( $\beta = .66$ ) followed by access to opportunity to learn and develop ( $\beta = .22$ ) and access to information ( $\beta = .10$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that POS is a function of trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop at .05 level of significance. Adjusted  $\beta$  value of .767 shows that 76.7% of variance in POS is explained by its linear relationship with trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop.

## **4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted in only three Malaysian states i.e Penang, Kedah and Kelantan. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all non-university private higher education institutions throughout the country. Even though, there are many antecedents of POS that can be identified from the literature review done, this study only examines trust, access to information, and opportunity to learn and develop. This study utilizes survey methods using questionnaires that are filled out by lecturers. The perception of respondents on the study can influence their interpretation, attitude and behaviour, and subsequently influence their response in the questionnaires (Baron & Kalsher, 2001).

## **5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As this study has been conducted in the non-university private higher education institutions in Malaysia, the results may offer some practical implications which can be adopted by the institutions to increase the level of POS among lecturers. Trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop were found to enhance the perceptions of support from the institutions. Therefore, the administrator should emphasize on these antecedents in the effort to increase the perception of organizational support.

This study finds that the level of trust among lecturers is moderate. The moderate level of trust to the administrator may result from the lecturers' assumption that the administrator does not have integrity and competence to carry out their work. The actions taken by the administrator may contradict with what they say. Lecturers may also feel unsatisfied with the administrator's concern about their well-being and job satisfaction and feel that the administrator may only be interested in cutting costs or maximizing profits.

Open communication is important to facilitate transparency in decision making and actions. According to Blanchard et al. (2001), open communication can increase the employees' trust. The management should be transparent and should inform the lecturers of any decisions or action taken including the evaluation criteria for the purpose of promotions, salary increment and the provision of incentives or other rewards. According to Whitener et al. (1998), the management that allocate time to explain in detail about a certain decision made is more likely to be seen as trustworthy. Therefore, the management should be transparent and sincere in making decisions. The management also has to ensure that no discrepancy exist between the organization's vision and objectives with the real action taken. The management has to make sure that they fulfill all their promises and act as they say. The management also can increase the trust of lecturers towards them by creating a supportive work climate. The management has to abstain from using threats and forces on lecturers because this will make the lecturers afraid and do not trust the management.

The level of access to opportunity to learn and develop is reported high. This finding implies that lecturers are satisfied with the administrator in giving them the opportunity to learn continuously, opportunity to grow and develop as professionals and the opportunity to collaborate with other lecturers. This study also finds that the level of access to information were reported at moderate level. The moderate level reported for access to information implies that lecturers may not really know about the strategies, goals and vision of the institution and are not satisfied with their access to needed strategic information.

The administrator can improve the lecturers' access to opportunity to learn and develop by encouraging mentoring among senior and novice lecturers. This will facilitate sharing and development of skills and knowledge among lecturers in the institution. Lecturers should also be given opportunity to attend courses, seminars and training to increase their knowledge and skills. These courses, seminars or training can be conducted internally or outside of the institution and can be conducted by lecturers, facilitators or speakers from inside or outside agencies. Lecturers' participation in these programs will provide them more opportunity to develop new knowledge and develop networking with others. Discussions and forums can also be organized from time to time to facilitate sharing of knowledge and brainstorming of ideas among lecturers. Good relationship resulting from mentoring and networking, for example, can create strong bonds among lecturers and encourage teamwork spirit as well as increase the lecturers' affection and sense of belonging to the institution.

On the other hand, POS receives the lowest evaluation from lecturers. Lecturers may not be satisfied with the administrator concern about their well-being and job satisfaction. Lecturers may also feel that their work performance is not appreciated. The management may not also show their recognition for lecturers' work achievement and does not give incentives to lecturers for their achievements and

successes.

This study finds that all antecedents (trust, access to information, access to opportunity to learn and develop) have high positive correlation with POS. Regression analysis, on the other hand, concludes that all antecedents are significant predictors of POS with trust as the most important predictor of POS followed by access to opportunity to learn and develop and access to information. Therefore, the administrator should increase the perceived support by carrying out interventions that can enhance trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conducted only at three states in Peninsular Malaysia. Therefore, similar studies are hoped to be carried out at other states in order to get more global information about the variables studied. It is hoped that these studies to be generalizable to all non-university private higher education institutions throughout the country. Future researches are also suggested to take into account other antecedents based on literature reviewed so that more antecedents can be studied. Future researchers are suggested to use the combination of both the quantitative and qualitative methods in gathering information holistically on a variable.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study emphasized the importance of trust, access to information and access to opportunity to learn and develop as antecedents of POS. The findings can also help the management of an educational institution to take the relevant intervention to increase POS of lecturers.

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## TABLES

**Table 1: Reliability analysis of scales**

Variables under study	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Trust	8	.891
Access to information	4	.874
Access to opportunity to learn and develop	5	.829
Perceived organizational support	8	.897

**Table 2: Descriptive analysis of variables under study**

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD
1. Trust	4.52	1.18
2. Access to information	4.98	1.22
3. Access to opportunity to learn and develop	5.06	1.06
4. Perceived organizational support	4.36	1.13

**Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficients**

Variables	POS
Trust	0.85
Access to information	0.69
Access to opportunity	0.62