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Disentangling organizational support construct

The role of different sources of support to newcomers' training transfer and organizational commitment

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the differential role that organizational support (perceived organizational support (POS)), supervisory support (perceived supervisory support (PSS)) and colleague support (perceived colleague support (PCS)) – as perceived by newcomers – play in the transfer of the latter's training as well as the development of affective and normative commitment towards their work organization.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a sample of 251 new hires, a series of regression analyses was conducted to test direct and moderating effects.

Findings – Findings showed that all three forms of organizational support examined had independent and direct effects on the dependent variables. Only perceived peer support did not add incrementally to the prediction of normative commitment when the other two support sources entered the equation. Further, the results supported the role of POS as a moderator in the supervisor support-training transfer relationship as well as its role as a moderator in the colleague support-affective commitment relationship. Specifically, high POS was found to strengthen the PSS-training transfer and PCS-affective commitment relationships, while low POS weakened these relationships.

Research limitations/implications – Since data are based on self-reports, common method bias may have inflated the relationships among the variables. The paper contributes to both research and practice by providing support for the distinction between the three forms of organizational support.

Practical implications – The paper contributes to both research and practice by providing support for the distinction between the three forms of organizational support.

Originality/value – This investigation extends previous research by demonstrating the existence of the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between PSS and newcomers' training transfer, and between PCS and newcomers' development of affective commitment towards their work organization.

Keywords Organizational supports, Skill transfer, Commitment, Greece, Skills

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Perceived organizational support (POS) constitutes a subject of increasing interest within the field of organizational studies. It refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their employing organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Theoretical and empirical research has identified entities other than the organization (namely, the supervisor and co-workers) with which employees could experience reciprocal attachment (e.g. Kottke and Sharafinski, 1988).

The dominant theoretical basis for most research on the various forms of organizational supports has been social exchange theory, which alludes to the existence of a norm of reciprocity (i.e. exchange of resources) as a basis for employee relationships with their work organization/supervisor/co-workers (e.g. Blau, 1964; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Shore and Wayne, 1993). There are three possible processes underlying the consequences of POS (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). First, when employees perceive that their work organization – as well as its agents – value their contributions and well-being, they feel obligated to reciprocate through both in-role and extra-role behaviors and work-related attitudes. Second, conveyed caring and respect helps to meet important individual needs for esteem, affiliation and approval at work. A third explanation has been that organizations' recognition and approval strengthen employees' belief that increased performance will be recognized and rewarded.

Moreover, no study has examined the role of social support within the work environment (as provided by the organization, supervisor and peers) using a sample of newcomers. Newcomers constitute a special group of employees in terms of the importance of the informal relationships they form with supervisors and colleagues for their successful socialization (Reichers, 1987; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; Morrison, 2002). The nature and quality of these relationships between new hires and organizational members have been found to impact on the former's adjustment to their new work setting (Jones, 1983; Major *et al.*, 1995). Moreover, empirical findings have indicated that newcomers seek social support as a strategy in their attempts to adapt to their work organization (Feldman and Brett, 1983; Fisher, 1986). Thus, taking into account the crucial role of social support to new hires, the study sets out to examine the role of different forms of social support within work organizations on newcomers' training transfer as well as the development of their organizational commitment.

Moreover, to date, organizational support has mostly been studied as a general that incorporates various support sources even though the necessity of distinguishing among various support sources has already been suggested (e.g. Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003). While the work organization, the supervisor and peers have been acknowledged as important sources of employees' support, to the current researcher's knowledge, no study has simultaneously investigated all three support sources with the aim of achieving a finer understanding of whether and how each form actually come to influence employees. Finally, unlike the bulk of the extant research, this study focuses on the examination of the role of socio-emotional (rather than practical or "instrumental") support; in other words, it examines the extent to which employees perceive that each of the three organizational entities are willing to lend emotional support and assistance.

Specifically, the present study aims to address the research gap identified by disentangling the general construct of organizational support to its various forms (i.e. organizational, supervisor and peer support) and examining their simultaneous role on newcomers' training transfer and organizational commitment development. Second, this study also aims to address contradictory findings contesting the role of supervisor support to employees' attitudes and behaviors. In addition, given the fact that limited research has been conducted in Greek organizations, the present study aims to provide baseline information regarding organizational support in Greece. Finally, this study extends existing research on organizational supports, by providing knowledge on the

extent to which research undertaken mainly within North American contexts are transferable to a Greek work context which has been found to have culture-specific HRM practices (e.g. Myloni *et al.*, 2004).

From a practical standpoint, and given the fact that extensive resources are dedicated to newcomers' effective organizational adjustment, the findings will contribute to practitioners' knowledge of the relative effectiveness of – and the mechanism by which – each source of support may enhance training transfer and build organizational commitment. Such knowledge is of pivotal importance when taking into account that a large amount of human and financial resources are devoted by organizations to newcomers' socialization as a means of ensuring the latter's effectiveness as well as successful adjustment to the organization. Moreover, by exploring the simultaneous role of the three organizational support sources, the study aims to provide insights regarding possible indirect relationships among support relationships that employees develop with their supervisor and peers and work organization.

Next, a review of the extant work on the three forms of support is presented, followed by a review of training transfer and organizational commitment. Then, specific research questions are formulated regarding the mechanisms through which organizational supports impact the dependent variables.

Three sources of organizational support

In the same manner that employees develop perceptions concerning the extent to which they are valued and cared for by the organization, they also develop global perceptions in regard to the extent to which their supervisor or their colleagues value their contributions and care about their well-being. POS has been described as an employee's belief that his/her work organization respects and values his/her contributions as well as caring about his/her well-being. The employee interprets the support provided by his/her employer as a demonstration of commitment towards him/her (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), which in turn tends to enhance desirable attitudes and behaviors. POS has been found to act as an antecedent of a series of employees' attitudinal and behavioral patterns; employees have been found to reciprocate POS with affective and normative commitment (e.g. Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Wayne *et al.*, 1997; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001), while a POS-training transfer link has also been illustrated (e.g. Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Hutchins, 2007).

Perceived supervisor support (PSS) alludes to the degree to which employees perceive that their supervisor cares about them and values their contributions (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002); this construct constitutes an indicator of the quality of exchange relationships between employees and supervisors. Relevant review indicates that supervisors act as organizational representatives, by assessing and directing employees' performance and overall behavior (Levinson, 1965; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002); as a consequence, indications of favorable treatment (i.e. supervisor support) can be seen as a tool by which the organization communicates its support to the employees and are thus regarded by employees as reflective of the organization's views. While favorable treatment received by supervisors has been found to strongly relate to POS (e.g. Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), there is empirical evidence reporting that POS and PSS are non-redundant constructs (e.g. Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003; Maertz *et al.*, 2007). In general, supervisor-level constructs, such as leader-member exchange – and supervisor support in particular – have been found to have an independent effect on behavior, while

explaining significant incremental variance in outcomes beyond organization-level effects (e.g. Maertz *et al.*, 2007; Wayne *et al.*, 1997). Numerous studies have illustrated that supervisor support has an effect to skill transfer process (e.g. Xiao, 1996; Awoniyi *et al.*, 2002; Gumuseli and Ergin, 2002); most of these studies have focused on the supervisor's instrumental support (as exemplified by the latter's support towards employee's application of new knowledge on the job or in terms of the feedback provided), rather than focusing on the provision of social support.

In the meantime, there have been empirical studies that have contested the PSS-training transfer relationship (e.g. Facteau *et al.*, 1995; van der Klink *et al.*, 2001; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005). For instance, Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) conducted their study in a US work organization using a sample of employees who had recently attended at least one training course. Using structural equation modeling, they found that supervisor's (instrumental) support was unrelated to skill transfer. A possible explanation offered for this finding has been that employees of the organization studied depended less on their supervisors for training outcomes than on organizational-level policies. Similarly, Facteau *et al.*'s (1995) study in 35 departments of a government state agency used a sample of 967 managers (first-line, middle and upper levels of management) and found that supervisor support resulted in a decrease in transfer outcomes; this result has been attributed to an indirect relationship between these constructs which is mediated by employees' motivation to learn. Finally, van der Klink *et al.*'s (2001) study in banking organizations (using two samples of bank tellers) did not provide any evidence for the impact of supervisory behavior on training transfer. Thus, the review of extant research indicates inconclusive findings regarding the role of supervisor support to employees' training transfer.

Perceived colleague support (PCS) refers to the degree to which employees perceive that their co-workers care about their well-being as well as respecting their contributions (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002). In general, co-worker relationships have been found to play a pivotal role in newcomers' socialization (Feldman, 1977). As applied in the case of PSS, PCS has predominantly been studied in terms of "functional" support (i.e. provision of feedback). PCS has been found to be associated with organizational affective (but not normative) commitment (e.g. Self *et al.*, 2005). Regarding training transfer, PCS has been found to consistently predict training transfer (e.g. Facteau *et al.*, 1995; Bates *et al.*, 2000; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005). However, even though extant research has emphasized the crucial role that peers play in the transfer process, there has been a call to examine whether PCS adds incrementally to the prediction of outcome variables (e.g. Maertz *et al.*, 2007).

Training transfer and organizational commitment

Training transfer generally refers to the generalization, application and maintenance of the trained knowledge and/or skills to the actual job context (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Given the fact that extant training research has long identified a gap between learning and sustained workplace performance (e.g. Baldwin and Ford, 1988) as well as the widespread use of formal training programs, the need has arisen for empirical research on the effectiveness of newcomers' training, as portrayed by the transfer of training knowledge and skills to the actual work.

Recent empirical research has acknowledged the importance of work environment influences, such as organizational supports on training transfer (e.g. Kontoghiorghes,

2004; Burke and Hutchins, 2007). The social exchange approach has been used to inform this stream of research; organization's approval and respect towards its employees should increase the latter's feeling of competence as well as their anticipation that their increased performance will be valued; in return, employees are likely to feel obligated to increase their positive outputs and actively collaborate to achieve the company's goals (through transferring the skills/knowledge they have acquired during training) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

Commitment to the organization has been considered to be a major hallmark of newcomers' successful adjustment. In general, the committed employee is typically described as "one who stays with the organization through thick and thin [...] protects company assets [and] shares company goals" (Meyer and Allen, 1997, p. 3). Affective and normative commitment have been the most widely researched commitment dimensions due to their association with organizationally desirable outcomes. In particular, affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to the organization, while normative commitment alludes to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

The predominant theoretical framework underpinning most of the research which has examined the relationship between perceived organizational supports and commitment (mainly affective) has been social exchange approach, according to which when employees feel that the organization – both directly as well as via its agents – meets their socio-emotional needs, such as affiliation and emotional support; this feeling enhances affective commitment since employees reciprocate by valuing and respecting their organization, as well as contributing towards the achievement of its goals. The relationship between POS and normative commitment has been less studied, even though it taps on the possibility that reciprocation is based on employee's felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare. Empirical studies have generally supported the direct effects model of each organizational support form on various employees' attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Facteau *et al.*, 1995).

In summary, the review of extant research on the field has illustrated that, in general, supervisor and colleague-related perceptions influence outcomes separately from organization-related perceptions. However, the aforementioned review has also demonstrated that:

- there is inconclusive evidence regarding the role of PSS on training transfer;
- PCS-normative commitment link has not been investigated; and
- there has been a call to examine whether PCS adds incrementally to the prediction of the outcome variables.

Extant research has demonstrated that positive social support from experienced organizational members (as demonstrated via the socialization practice of "investiture"), has been found to lead to perceptions of better fit and thus to internalization of organizational values and development of emotional link with the organization (i.e. organizational commitment) (Simosi, 2010). Thus, it is argued here that experienced caring and respect from their supervisors (PSS) and peers (PCS) is likely to fulfill newcomers' needs for emotional support, sense of belonging, create a sense of indebtedness and as a consequence, make the latter more willing to reciprocate by attitudinal and behavioral manifestations (i.e. accepting the goals/values of the

organization, exerting effort towards these goals as well as transferring the skills gained through training to their actual work):

> *H1.* Each organizational support source adds incrementally to the prediction of both organizational (affective and normative) commitment and training transfer.

POS as moderator between supervisor/peer support-training transfer/organizational commitment relationship

Empirical research has demonstrated the existence of inter-relations between the various forms of organizational support (Kottke and Sharafinski, 1988; Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Self *et al.*, 2005); as mentioned earlier, such inter-relations have been explained by employees' tendency to attribute organizational agents' actions to the organization's – rather than personal – intent. However, the nature of the relationship among the three forms of organizational support, in the sense of their simultaneous effect of organizational support on outcome variables, has been found to be inconclusive. For instance, there has been inconsistent evidence regarding the direction of causality between POS and PSS (e.g. Eisenberger *et al.*, 2002; Yoon and Thye, 2002). In other studies, POS has been found to act as a mediator in the relationship between PSS and affective commitment (Hutchison, 1997; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001). Finally, in their study of organizational downsizing survivors, Erickson and Roloff (2007) found that POS and PSS compensate each other in the prediction of a general construct of organizational commitment; in specific, when POS was perceived to be low, perception of supervisor support would strengthen employees' commitment towards their organization and vice versa. However, it is worth mentioning that Erickson and Roloff's study focused on downsizing survivors, who constitute a special sample in the sense that they experience extremely negative effects due to downsizing (e.g. very low morale, loss of trust towards their employer).

As the aforementioned review has demonstrated (e.g. Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Levinson, 1965), employees develop distinct perceptions about the social support offered to them by different organizational entities (i.e. organization, supervisor, peers). Consequently, and given the unique exchange relationships that employees may hold with various organizational entities, it is possible that employees experience a high level of support with one entity (e.g. organization) while at the same time may experience low level of support with another entity (e.g. supervisor). In the meantime, during organizational socialization, newcomers experience great uncertainty, which they attempt to reduce by becoming familiar with the new work environment as well as with the demands of their role. During this period, organizational policies, norms and culture provides newcomers with a sense of continuity and predictability, while POS serves as an assurance that the organization will assist the newcomer to carry out his/her job effectively and to deal with stressful situations. During the first few months of employment, employees also have incomplete information regarding the terms of their employment relationship; thus, they are actively involved in making sense of the terms and conditions of the exchange agreement between themselves and their organization (e.g. Rousseau, 2001).

The present study argues for the moderating role of POS for employees' particular attitudinal and behavioral variables (e.g. training transfer and organizational commitment). In other words, new hires are likely to respond differently to the support offered by the supervisor and colleagues, depending on their perception of

organizational support. In specific, the argument posits that the contribution of PSS
and PCS to newcomers' successful socialization (as exemplified by their transfer and
commitment to the organization) is subject to the extent to which newcomers perceive
the organization as a supportive environment. POS transmits to newcomers a sense of
"protection", continuity, a feeling being cared for and valued while at the same time
invokes new hires' heightened self-esteem. Under such circumstances, the supervisor's
perceived positive orientation towards them (PSS) is likely to accentuate the propensity
that PCS will invoke high levels of training transfer and organizational commitment. In
contrast, the supervisor's support is likely to become less important for newcomers'
decision to transfer skills/knowledge acquired through training as well as the
development of organizational commitment when they perceive that their work
organization constitutes an unsupportive environment. Following a similar vein of
reasoning, newcomers are more likely to reciprocate PCS by favorable attitudes and
behaviors towards the organization when they feel that they are valued and supported
by their organization. In contrast, when newcomers judge their work organization as
unsupportive, they will be less likely to reciprocate perceived peers' support with either
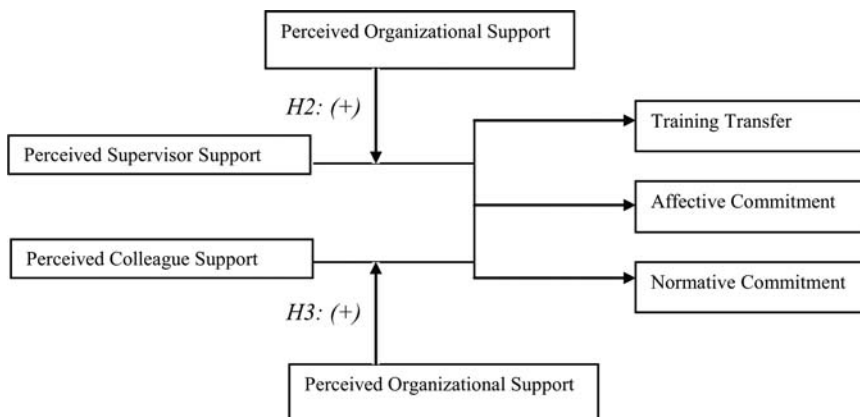training transfer or organizational commitment:

H2. POS will moderate the association between supervisor support and training
   transfer as well as organizational (affective and normative) commitment such
   that the relationship becomes stronger as the level of POS increases.

H3. POS will moderate the association between peer support training transfer as
   well as organizational (affective and normative) commitment such that the
   relationship becomes stronger as the level of POS increases.

The moderator hypotheses presented above are illustrated schematically in Figure 1.

Method

Participants and procedures

For the purpose of the present study, data were collected from 251 new hires of one
service organization. All study participants were entry-level employees who were
appointed five months prior to the study; almost each of the participants worked in a

Figure 1.
Hypothesized moderation
of the PSS-outcome
variables and
PCS-outcome variables by
POS

different department of the organization. Since the organization appointed a large number of new hires at the same time, there was no difference in the tenure of the study participants. Of the total sample, 55 percent of the respondents were male and 45 percent were female. Regarding their age, 8 percent of the sample were between 15 and 25 years old, 60 percent were between 25 and 30 years old, 23 percent were between 30 and 35 years old, while 9 per cent were above 35 years old.

Collection of completed questionnaires was performed in a way that the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents was ensured. All respondents returned their questionnaires; all but three questionnaires were usable and were included in the analysis.

Organizational context

Data were collected from new hires appointed by a Greek public-sector service organization. While under probation period for almost a year, tenure in this organization is permanent. A few years before the study took place, the roles that new entrants were assigned to were restructured; specifically, sales and service tasks – which were previously performed by different roles – were combined into the same role. The particular organization is characterized by a centralized organizational structure.

Upon appointment, new hires are assigned to a particular branch of the organization, where they learn on the job. After a couple of weeks, new hires participate in groups in the first round of off-site formal training. Informal discussion with the Training Manager as well as examination of the training leaflets indicated that official training focuses mainly on the acquisition of task-related skills/information and secondarily on dissemination of organizational goals and values. Then, newcomers return to their work site for approximately four months and after that, they participate in the second round of formal training. Formal training is mainly offered in the form of oral presentations and lecture notes; these notes, together with written material, are studied throughout their first year of tenure. Twice during this year, newcomers sit written examination (via internal mail) assessing the degree of knowledge acquired during their training. Data collection took place during the first day of the second round of off-site, official training. Thus, all study participants had attended the same two-week formal training program around four months ago and had the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired in their work site.

Measures

Skill transfer was measured using seven items from Xiao's (1996) scale and two items from Facteau *et al.*'s (1995) scale on skill transfer. An item reads "I can accomplish the job tasks better by using new knowledge acquired from training transfer". Cronbach's α for the scale in this study was 0.86.

Affective and normative commitment were assessed using the scale of Meyer *et al.* (1993). Five items were used in order to measure each form of organizational commitment. Example items are "I am emotionally attached to my organization" (affective commitment), and "I owe a great deal to this organization" (normative commitment. The Cronbach's α estimate was 0.81 for affective commitment and 0.83 for normative commitment.

To assess employees' perceptions of organizational support, seven items from Eisenberger *et al.*'s (1986) scale were used. There is documented evidence regarding the

psychometric properties of the scale (see Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Wayne *et al.*, 1997; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Questions included mapped both facets of the definition of POS (i.e. valuation of employees' contribution and care about the latter's well-being). An item reads "My organization really cares about my well-being". The Cronbach's α estimate for this study was 0.83.

Perceived supervisor support (PSS) was measured using four items. Following Eisenberger *et al.* (2002). PSS was measured with the same items used to rate POS, in which the phrase "my organization" was replaced with the word "my supervisor"; the same measurement tactic has been used by previous studies (e.g. Kottke and Sharafinski, 1988; Bishop *et al.*, 2000). An item reads "My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values". Co-efficient α was 0.82.

Perceived colleague/peer support (PCS) was measured five items from the initial SPOS scale (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986); the term "organization" was replaced with the term "colleague". An example item is: "My colleagues show very little concern for me" (reverse-scored). Co-efficient α was 0.81.

In order to account for the possibility of existence of multicollinearity due to the use of items with the same wording for the measurement of the different forms of support, a Harman's one-factor test was performed (Harman, 1967; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986); the three variables were entered into a principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation. Following examination of the scree plot and the eigenvalues stemming from the principal axis factor analysis of the three organizational support forms, three factors were extracted which accounted for 55.47 of the total variation while not a single factor accounted for most of the variance; the results of this analysis suggested that common method variance was not deemed present.

For all scales used in this study, respondents rated their agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used. Finally, factor analysis (using oblique rotation) was conducted for all three support scales; the analysis confirmed the existence of three distinct factors for organization-related supports.

Analysis and results

Tables I and II report descriptive statistics, Cronbach's α values, and inter-correlations of study variables. Correlation analyses indicated that all three organizational supports were positively related to the dependent variables studied. Specifically, perceived organizational support demonstrated statistically significant correlations with training transfer (0.53, $p < 0.001$), organizational affective commitment (0.37, $p < 0.001$) as

Variable	M	SD	α
Training transfer	14.78	4.59	0.86
Affective commitment	10.96	2.74	0.81
Normative commitment	10.99	2.99	0.82
POS	15.07	3.81	0.83
PSS	9.18	2.68	0.82
PCS	11.31	2.52	0.80

Note: $n = 251$

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations and
Cronbach's α coefficients
of the variables

well as organizational normative commitment (0.46, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, perceived supervisor support was statistically correlated with training transfer (0.43, $p < 0.001$), affective (0.52, $p < 0.001$) and normative commitment (0.49, $p < 0.001$). In addition, perceived colleague support was found to be significantly correlated with training transfer (0.42, $p < 0.001$), affective (0.46, $p < 0.001$) and normative commitment (0.31, $p < 0.001$). Finally, medium-size positive correlations were found to relate each of the three organizational supports with the other two; specifically, there was a significant relationship (0.36, $p < 0.001$) between POS and each of the other two supports, while PSS is also significantly related to PCS (0.34, $p < 0.001$).

Hierarchical regression analyses
Hierarchical regression analyses (e.g. Aiken and West, 1991) were performed in order to examine the strength of the effect of each support source on the three dependent variables (i.e. training transfer, affective and normative organizational commitment) (*H1*). As illustrated in Table III, the three dimensions of social support explain 39 percent of the variance in training transfer, 37 percent in organizational affective commitment and 33 percent in normative commitment. In addition, each of the three organizational supports examined were found to have a significant main effect on both training transfer and affective commitment to the work organization; these findings demonstrate that each socialization tactic explains a statistically significant proportion of incremental variance in training transfer (ΔR^2 ranging from 14 percent to 7 percent) and affective commitment (ΔR^2 ranging from 28 percent to 4 percent). Finally, while significant main effects were found for both POS and PSS when regressed on normative commitment, PCS was not found to have an additive effect on normative commitment above and beyond the effect of the other two organizational supports. Thus, *H1* was only partially confirmed.

The hierarchical regression analyses conducted to examine the effects of PSS, PCS and POS on affective and normative commitment also revealed the existence of two mediation effects, for which no hypotheses had been formulated; the relationship between POS and affective commitment was found to be partially mediated by PSS as well as by PCS (Sobel tests: z-value = 0.12, $p < 0.05$ for both cases) (see Table IV).

Moderating effects
H2 and *H3* predicted that POS moderated the association between PSS/PCS and each dependent variable such that the relationship became stronger as the level of POS increased. To test for moderation effects, a three-step hierarchical multiple regression

Variables		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Training transfer	(1)	–					
Affective commitment	(2)	0.40[*]	–				
Normative commitment	(3)	0.39[*]	0.47[*]	–			
POS	(4)	0.53[*]	0.37[*]	0.46[*]	–		
PSS	(5)	0.43[*]	0.52[*]	0.49[***]	0.36[*]	–	
PCS	(6)	0.42[*]	0.46[*]	0.31[*]	0.36[*]	0.34[*]	–

Table II.
Correlation coefficients of the variables

Notes: $n = 251$; [*]$p \le 0.001$

Steps and variables	Coefficient β		
Step 1			
1. POS	0.54***	0.37***	0.46***
F	101.14***	40.45	65.69
df	1,249	1,249	1,249
R^2	0.29	0.14	0.21
ΔR^2	0.29	0.14	0.21
Step 2			
1. POS	0.44***	0.21***	0.32***
2. PSS	0.27***	0.44***	0.37***
F	67.09***	54.84***	60.26***
df	2,248	2,248	2,248
R^2	0.35	0.31	0.33
ΔR^2	0.16	0.17	0.12
Step 3			
1. POS	0.38***	0.13**	0.30***
2. PSS	0.22***	0.37***	0.35***
3. PCS	0.21***	0.29***	0.09*
F	52.45***	49.38***	41.26***
df	3,247	3,247	3,247
R^2	0.39	0.37	0.33
ΔR^2	0.04	0.07	0.0*

Notes: Method: step-wise; *$p > 0.05$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table III.
Results of regression
analysis of organizational
supports on training
transfer, affective and
normative commitment

Models and variables	Affective commitment	PSS	PCS
Model 1			
POS	0.37*		
R^2	0.14		
Model 2			
POS		0.36*	0.36*
Model 3			
PSS	0.44*		
POS	0.21*		
R^2	0.30		
ΔR^2	0.04*		
PCS	0.38*		
POS	0.24*		
R^2	0.26		
ΔR^2	0.3*		

Note: *$p < 0.001$

Table IV.
Results of regression
analyses for POS and
PSS/PCS on affective
commitment

was employed (e.g. Cohen *et al.*, 2003). To control for differences in age and gender that
might be responsible for observed covariation among the variables examined, the
demographic variables were also introduced first in the regression equation. In step 1,
the predictor variable was entered. In step 2, POS was entered. In step 3, the product

variables, computed by multiplying POS with PSS (Table V) and multiplying POS with PCS (Table VI) were added. In order to reduce the problem of multicollinearity due to the correlation between the variables entered in the model and the interaction term, all predictors were centered prior to being entered into the regression analyses. Overall, five moderated regression analyses were formed; no moderation effects were tested for PCS and normative commitment link, since PCS was not found to hold a significant positive contribution to the development of normative commitment, when POS and PSS were also entered in the regression analysis. Tables V and VI report the results of the moderated regression analyses used to test *H2* and *H3*.

Moderating effects of POS on PSS – employee outcomes relationship. The analysis showed that the interaction term added significantly only to the prediction of one employee outcome: training transfer (Model 1). As Table V indicates, training transfer was significantly related to the POS by PSS interaction term ($b = 0.11$, F change $= 4.11$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$). Contrary to expectation, there was no significant moderating effect of POS on the relationship between PSS and organizational commitment, since the interaction term did not account for a statistically significant increment of variance ($b = 0.04$, F change $= 0.48$,

	R	Adjusted R^2	R^2 change	Change	β
Model 1					
Age					-0.44^*
Gender	0.07	-0.00	0.10^*	0.68	-0.56^*
Step 1					
PSS	0.41	0.16	0.16^{***}	45.10	0.41^{***}
Step 2					
POS	0.58	0.32	0.16^{***}	57.67	0.44^{***}
Step 3					
PSS × POS	0.59	0.33	0.01^{**}	4.11	0.11^{**}
Model 2					
Age					-0.07^*
Gender	0.07	-0.00	0.00^*	0.70	0.03^*
Step 1					
PSS	0.51	0.30	0.04^{***}	15.18	0.23^{***}
Step 2					
POS	0.56	0.30	0.04^{***}	15.18	0.23^{***}
Step 3					
PSS × POS					
Model 3					
Age					0.07
Gender	0.07	-0.00	0.00^*	0.60	-0.01
Step 1					
PSS × POS	0.51	0.25	0.25^{***}	78.75	0.51^{***}
Step 2					
POS	0.60	0.35	0.10^{***}	35.65	0.34^{***}
Step 3					
PSS × POS	0.6	0.34	0.00^*	0.07	-0.01

Notes: Values of β are taken from the last equation; $^*p > 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

Table V.
Results of hierarchical regression analysis, examining the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between PSS and training transfer (Model 1), affective (Model 2) and normative commitment (Model 3)
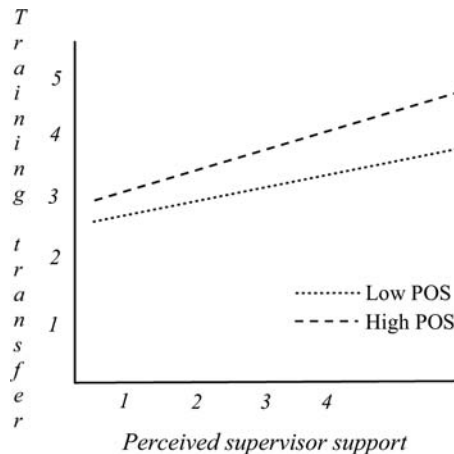
	R	Adjusted R^2	R^2 change	Change	β
Model 1					
Age					0.04*
Gender	0.07	−0.00	0.00*	0.67	0.05*
Step 1					
PCS	0.42	−0.16	0.17****	47.99	0.42****
Step 2					
POS	0.58	0.43	0.15****	54.30	0.43****
Step 3					
PCS × POS	0.59	0.33	0.00*	2.54	0.09*
Model 2					
Age					−0.08*
Gender	0.8	−0.00	0.00*	0.70	0.03*
Step 1					
PCS	0.46	0.20	0.20****	57.59	0.45****
Step 2					
POS	0.51	0.25	0.05***	15.80	0.25***
Step 3					
PCS × POS	0.52	0.26	0.01**	5.38	0.14**

Notes: Values of β are taken from the last equation; *$p > 0.05$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; ****$p < 0.001$

Table VI.
Results of hierarchical regression analysis, examining the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between PCS and training transfer (Model 1) – affective commitment (Model 2)

$\Delta R^2 = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$ for affective commitment – Model 2), ($b = -0.001$, F change $= 0.07$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$ for normative commitment – Model 3). To examine whether the interaction effect on PSS-transfer link support the direction as specified in *H2*, this interaction was plotted following the procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991) by displaying different lines for high and low levels of POS (i.e. $+1$ and -1 standard deviations from the mean). As Figure 2 illustrates, the slopes (betas), which showed the relationships between POS, PSS and training transfer were positive and significant. That is, the positive effect of PSS on new hires' willingness to

Figure 2.
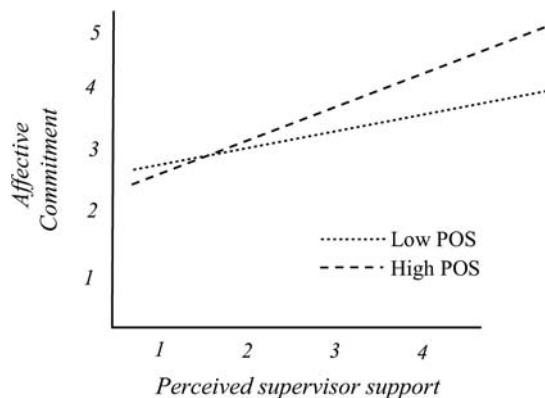Effects of PSS on training transfer at different values of POS

transfer the skills/knowledge acquired through training was found to be stronger when they perceived their work organization as supportive, as compared to situations that they regarded the organization as unsupportive. The above results provided partial support for *H2*.

Moderating effects of POS on PCS-employee outcomes relationship. As Table VI shows, training transfer was not significantly related to the POS by PSS interaction term ($b = 0.09$, F change $= 2.54$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.007$, $p > 0.05$), result which indicates that, contrary to what anticipated, there were no interaction effects. Nevertheless, the analysis indicated that the interaction term added significantly to the prediction of affective commitment (Model 2) ($b = 0.14$, F change $= 5.38$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$). These findings provided partial support for *H3*. To further clarify the interaction effects of POS on PCS-affective commitment relationship, regression lines were plotted for high and low levels of POS. Figure 3 illustrates these positive and significant interactions. While the relationship between PCS and affective commitment remained always positive and statistically significant, the magnitude of the association became stronger going from low to high levels of POS.

Discussion
The present study focused on the examination of the role of three forms organizational support on newcomers' training transfer and organizational commitment. The analysis concluded in the following noteworthy points.

First, in accordance with previous empirical research (e.g. Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003; Maertz *et al.*, 2007), this study provides evidence that POS, PSS and PCS are non-redundant constructs; thus, the findings support the idea that both supervisors and peers forge their own independent attachments with employees, even when the latter are newly hired. Moreover, the results indicate that in total, all three forms of support examined here can explain a great percentage of the variance on the outcomes examined (ΔR^2 ranging from 0.033 to 0.39). The bivariate correlations which were found to exist between the variables examined in this study were in general similar to the ones reported in the relevant studies (e.g. Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002); this finding can be seen as reflective of the similarity of the present sample with the Northern American samples on which most relevant studies have been based.

Figure 3.
Effects of PCS on affective commitment at different values of POS

The main contribution of this study lies in the fact that it extends previous research by demonstrating the existence of the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between:

- PSS and newcomers' training transfer; and
- PCS and newcomers' development of affective commitment towards their work organization.

Since the direction of the moderating effect was positive in both cases, the analysis suggests that POS accentuates the relationship between PSS and training transfer and PCS and affective commitment.

In regard to the moderated PSS-training transfer relationship, it seems that when new hires feel that they are valued by their organization, they also anticipate that their increased performance will be valued; under such circumstances, the supervisor's positive orientation towards them is more likely to motivate them to increase their positive outputs towards the job, by inducing them to transfer the skills/knowledge acquired through training. However, when the organization conveys signals of lack of support and respect towards them, which makes question whether their increased output (i.e. training transfer) will be recognized and rewarded, then supervisor's support is less likely to induce newcomers' training transfer. In the meantime, the analysis indicated that that PSS-organizational commitment relationship was not moderated by POS; this finding suggests that when new hires actively accept the goals and the values of the organization, become emotionally attached and develop a sense of indebtedness towards it, supervisor's support is sufficient to invoke a sense of obligation to reciprocate and induce high emotional ties with the organization, even when the work environment is perceived to be unsupportive. Since the development of organizational commitment has been associated with employees' feeling that their socio-emotional needs have been fulfilled (which also results in increased self-worth), it seems reasonable to suggest that POS acts as a moderator in the PSS-training transfer relationship by drawing mainly on the psychological mechanism of reciprocation due to anticipation of performance rewards. One explanation of why this is the case may lie in the context; evaluation (and subsequent reward) of employees' training outcomes may mainly depend on organizational policies rather than supervisors' assessment.

In regard to the moderating role of POS on PCS-affective commitment relationship, it can be argued that when an organization's positive orientation towards newcomers invokes the latter's willingness to reciprocate (as a result of the enhancement of their self-esteem), peers' support further augments their affective commitment towards the organization. Instead, in the case of an adverse working environment, peers' support may still invoke willingness to reciprocate through commitment, but this relationship is likely to be weaker. In the meantime, the finding that POS did not moderate the PCS-training transfer relationship indicates that even when the work environment is perceived to be unsupportive, PCS induces feelings of competence and self-efficacy that contribute to increased training transfer. The plausibility of this explanation can be further understood when taking into account that colleagues act as sources of job-related information in the particular organization, due to the similarity of tasks performed among employees at the same level of hierarchy. It thus seems plausible to suggest that POS acts as a moderator in PCS- affective commitment relationship by

drawing mainly on the psychological mechanism of new hires' self-worth enhancement.

Another finding of the study that is worth noting was the existence of partial mediation effects of PSS and PCS on the POS-affective commitment relationship. This non-anticipated finding is at odds with most existing research, which has illustrated that POS acts as a mediator in the relationship between PSS and affective commitment (Hutchison, 1997; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001). This finding suggests that supervisors or colleagues, through the caring and respect they provide to newcomers, promulgate a "positive" organizational climate, such as social support and concern for employees' well-being; as a consequence, newcomers are more likely to experience increased levels of commitment. While a possible explanation for this finding could be related to the use of a sample of newcomers in the present study, this finding warrants further investigation.

Taking into account the existence of inconclusive findings of empirical studies regarding the role of supervisor support to employees' training transfer (e.g. Facteau *et al.*, 1995; Xiao, 1996; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005), the present findings are in accordance with most existing studies and illustrated the existence of PSS-training transfer link. Since the organizational context of the present study was similar to that in Chiaburu and Marinova's study, in the sense that newcomers' training outcomes in the particular organization studied depended less on their supervisors than on prescribed organizational procedures, a proposed direction for future research would be to examine the existence possible indirect (moderated or mediated) relationships between PSS and training transfer. For example, the moderating role of POS on the PSS-training transfer relationship, as found in the present study, may well be an explanation for the inconclusive findings regarding this issue.

Limitations and implications of the study

This study has certain limitations. One such limitation refers to its cross-sectional nature; in order to be conclusive on the causal relationships among the concepts examined, a longitudinal design would be needed. The fact that the study relied on self-report data constitutes another problem; future studies need to address this issue, by using multiple sources of data collection.

Moreover, all data were collected from the same respondents at a single point in time using the same collection method. Thus, there is a possibility that the associations found among variables may have been inflated as a result of common method variance; the fact that analysis revealed the existence of weak correlations between certain variables, may be seen as an indication that common method variance did not constitute a problem in the present study. In addition, despite the fact that the measures' reliabilities were found to be acceptable, it is possible that the use of shortened versions of all three forms of organizational support measures may have had an impact on the present findings.

Finally, it is worth noticing that the present investigation was conducted using data from a single organization, which limits the generalization of the results to other work settings, industries or even cultural contexts. Therefore, it is of outmost importance to examine whether similar patterns of relationships as these found among the variables examined in this study hold in other work settings or other cultures.

The present study extended existing research on social support in the context of employing organizations by examining multiple sources of support. As far as research

implications are concerned, the findings pinpoint the importance to disaggregate the more general construct of organizational support into its components/sources; through the concurrent examination of POS, PSS and PCS, this study aimed to increase our understanding of how employees experience the effects of different organizational supports, by proposing a model incorporating three forms of organizational support and two employee outcomes (training transfer and organizational commitment). Nevertheless, there is a need to investigate whether the direct, mediating and moderating effects found (as well as the direction of these effects) hold true in other work settings as well as for other work outcomes as well as for employees with longer tenure in their work organization. Moreover, future research needs to focus on the different psychological mechanisms (e.g. anticipation of rewards, increased self-worth) through which POS, as well as other sources of social support, result in specific outcomes.

In regard to the practical implications of this study, the present results are important for informing human resource practitioners' decisions on enhancing skill transfer and invoking newcomers' organizational commitment. Specifically, the design of effective training programs would be facilitated by a better understanding of the situational factors (such as organizational supports and their inter-relationships) which interact to influence employees' training transfer. On the one hand, the moderating role of the POS to PSS-training transfer and PCS-organizational commitment relationship suggests that organizations need to put emphasis on providing a supportive work environment so that their training programs are effective and they induce increased organizational commitment in their newcomers. On the other hand, the findings referring to the direct (i.e. non-moderated) effects of supervisor on organizational commitment and peer support on training transfer are particularly important, especially in cases where employees work under unsupportive or adverse work conditions. Specifically, the finding that supervisor support may induce both affective and normative commitment, irrespective of the work environment, suggests that in the case of adverse work conditions, organizations need to invest in supervisor support as a means of communicating subtle meanings and organizational norms to newcomers and inspiring them to align with the interests of the organization. Similarly, in an unsupportive work environment, the role of peer support needs to be emphasized in an attempt to "replace" the lack of POS and induce training transfer.

Moreover, special training programs could be designed for supervisors as well as more experienced employees in order to assist them in their role as transfer agents or commitment "activators" for new hires. These findings are of particular importance for human resource management nowadays, since on the one hand, organizations become more decentralized and consequently the role of the supervisor more visible, while on the other hand, the role of self-managing and autonomous work teams is emphasized.

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Further reading

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