

Perceived Organizational Support

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Evidence is presented that (a) employees in an organization form global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, (b) such perceived organizational support reduces absenteeism, and (c) the relation between perceived organizational support and absenteeism is greater for employees with a strong exchange ideology than those with a weak exchange ideology. These findings support the social exchange view that employees' commitment to the organization is strongly influenced by their perception of the organization's commitment to them. Perceived organizational support is assumed to increase the employee's affective attachment to the organization and his or her expectancy that greater effort toward meeting organizational goals will be rewarded. The extent to which these factors increase work effort would depend on the strength of the employee's exchange ideology favoring the trade of work effort for material and symbolic benefits.

The word *commitment* is often used in everyday language to denote the "sense of being bound emotionally or intellectually to some course of action" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1979), which may include a person's relationship with another individual, group, or organization. There has been an increasing concern with factors that influence the stability and intensity of employee dedication to organizations as employers. The frequent allusion to employment as the trade of effort and loyalty for material commodities or social rewards (e.g., Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; Levinson, 1965; March & Simon, 1958; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) suggests the usefulness of developing a detailed social exchange interpretation of organizational commitment. The present research investigates processes involved in employees' inferences concerning the organization's commitment to them, and the contribution of such perceived organizational support to employees' commitment to the organization.

One major view of organizational commitment emphasizes the economic costs of leaving a current employer (Becker, 1960; Farrell & Rosbult, 1981). For example, employees may believe that specialized skills acquired in their present job have less application elsewhere and would therefore be less valued (Scholl, 1981) or that frequent job changes may damage a person's reputation for stability or loyalty (Becker, 1960; Staw, 1981). The

degree of involvement in organizational activities may similarly depend on such economic benefits as anticipated promotions and pay raises (Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; March & Simon, 1958). In contrast to these economic views of commitment, others have stressed emotional ties to the organization (e.g., Buchanan, 1974, 1975; Etzioni, 1961; Hrebiniak, 1974; Kelman, 1961; Levinson, 1965). The most detailed account to date of affective attachment to the organization characterizes organizational commitment as an "employee's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Identification, in this case, means the employee's sense of unity with the organization. Such affective attachment, as assessed by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, has been found to influence productivity, absenteeism, and turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1984; Mowday et al., 1982).

The preceding economic and affective interpretations of organizational commitment may be integrated and extended into a social exchange approach that emphasizes employees' beliefs concerning commitment to them by the organization. Beliefs in organizational support or malevolence may be fostered by employees' anthropomorphic ascription of dispositional traits to the organization. Levinson (1965) noted that employees tend to view actions by agents of the organization as actions of the organization itself. The personification of the organization, Levinson suggested, is abetted by the following factors: (a) the organization has a legal, moral, and financial responsibility for the actions of its agents; (b) organizational precedents, traditions, policies, and norms provide continuity and prescribe role behaviors; and (c) the organization, through its agents, exerts power over individual employees. The personification of the organization was assumed to represent an employee's distillation of views concerning all the other members who control that individual's material and symbolic resources.

We are indebted to the following individuals for their suggestions and efforts on behalf of this project: Chaudene Baker, Jane Bradshaw, Linda Fox, James Jones, D. Michael Kuhlman, Donna Manzo, John Ogilvie, Liane Schaeffer, Jeff Quinn, Jerry Seibert, Robin Sigman, and Georganne Walters.

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We suggest that in order to determine the personified organization's readiness to reward increased work effort and to meet needs for praise and approval, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Such perceived organizational support would depend on the same attributional processes that people use generally to infer the commitment by others to social relationships. That is, perceived organizational support would be influenced by the frequency, extremity, and judged sincerity of statements of praise and approval (Blau, 1964). Other rewards such as pay, rank, job enrichment, and influence over organizational policies would affect perceived support to the extent that they signified the organization's positive evaluations of the employee (cf. Brinberg & Castell, 1982).

Perceived organizational support would be influenced by various aspects of an employee's treatment by the organization and would, in turn, influence the employee's interpretation of organizational motives underlying that treatment. This implies that there will be agreement in the degree of support that the employee would expect of the organization in a wide variety of situations. These would include the organization's likely reaction to the employee's future illnesses, mistakes, and superior performance, and the organization's desire to pay a fair salary and make the employee's job meaningful and interesting. Perceived support would raise an employee's expectancy that the organization would reward greater effort toward meeting organizational goals (effort–outcome expectancy). To the extent that the perceived support also met needs for praise and approval, the employee would incorporate organizational membership into self-identity and thereby develop a positive emotional bond (affective attachment) to the organization. An effort–outcome expectancy and affective attachment would increase an employee's efforts to meet the organization's goals through greater attendance and performance.

Several studies have investigated particular beliefs by employees about their organization that might contribute to the perception that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. By increasing effort–outcome expectancies and affective attachments, such beliefs should have positive effects on the regularity of work attendance and the level of work performance. Buchanan (1974) found that with managers in business and government, beliefs that the organization recognized their contributions and could be depended on to fulfill promises were positively related to affective attachment as measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. Steers (1977) reported similar effects of the same beliefs on the affective attachments of hospital staff, engineers, and scientists. Cook and Wall (1980), using a large and diverse sample of British blue-collar workers, found that trust in management to treat employees fairly was positively correlated with separate questionnaire measures of identification, involvement, and loyalty. Patchen (1960) investigated absenteeism by nonsupervisory workers in an oil company that emphasized to its employees the importance of a high level of job attendance. He noted that the employees' current level of pay showed little relation to absenteeism but that the perceived fairness of the pay correlated negatively with absenteeism. Hrebiniak (1974) found with hospital staff that perceiving the organization environment as "be-

nign, cooperative, or consistent" increased the rated utility of continued employment in the organization. These results are consistent with the present view that perceived organizational support strengthens employees' effort–outcome expectancy and affective attachment to the organization, resulting in greater efforts to fulfill the organization's goals.

We assume that an employee's increase in work effort resulting from development of a greater effort–outcome expectancy and affective attachment depends on an exchange ideology favoring the trade of work effort for material and symbolic benefits (cf. Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; Levinson, 1965; March & Simon, 1958; Mowday et al., 1982). Such exchange ideologies stem from the norm of reciprocity that holds that people should help those who have helped them (Gouldner, 1960). Perceived organizational support would be predicted to strongly influence the absenteeism and performance of individuals with a strong exchange ideology but to have little influence on those with a weak exchange ideology.

We report evidence on the breadth and consistency of the employee's beliefs concerning the organization's commitment to him or her, and the effects of such perceived organizational support and of the employee's exchange ideology on absenteeism. The hypotheses were that (a) employees form global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being; (b) such perceived organizational support reduces absenteeism; and (c) the strength of the relation between perceived organizational support and absenteeism is greater for employees with a strong exchange ideology than those with a weak exchange ideology.

Study 1: Globality of Perceived Organizational Support

It seems likely that perceived organizational support would be affected by diverse aspects of an employee's treatment and would, in turn, influence the employee's inferences concerning the reasons for that treatment. To test the globality of the employees' beliefs concerning support by the organization, we constructed 36 statements representing various possible evaluative judgments of the employee by the organization and discretionary actions the organization might take in diverse situations to benefit or harm the employee. Evidence that employees form global beliefs concerning commitment by the organization would be indicated by the employee's perception that the organization's various evaluative judgments of him or her are consistently favorable or unfavorable to a high or low degree, and the expectancy that the organization would treat the employee beneficially or harmfully in a variety of situations.

Method

The commitment statements were incorporated into the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) for which employees used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) to indicate the extent of their agreement with each item. In order to control for an agreement response bias, half the statements were positively worded and half were negatively worded. We will categorize these statements in detail to illustrate their diversity.

As listed in Table 1, statements referring to evaluative judgments attributed to the organization include satisfaction with the employee as a

Table 1
Survey of Perceived Organizational Support

Statement	Factor loading	
	1	2
1. ^a The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	.71	-.07
2. ^a If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so. (R)	.69	.10
3. ^a The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (R)	.72	-.11
4. ^a The organization strongly considers my goals and values.	.74	-.22
5. The organization would understand a long absence due to my illness.	.60	.19
6. ^a The organization would ignore any complaint from me. (R)	.71	.00
7. ^a The organization disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me. (R)	.73	-.04
8. ^a Help is available from the organization when I have a problem.	.74	-.12
9. ^a The organization really cares about my well-being.	.83	-.14
10. The organization is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.	.80	-.21
11. The organization would fail to understand my absence due to a personal problem. (R)	.62	.12
12. If the organization found a more efficient way to get my job done they would replace me. (R)	.59	.12
13. The organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.	.66	.12
14. It would take only a small decrease in my performance for the organization to want to replace me. (R)	.64	.35
15. The organization feels there is little to be gained by employing me for the rest of my career. (R)	.64	.24
16. The organization provides me little opportunity to move up the ranks. (R)	.43	-.10
17. ^a Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice. (R)	.80	-.08
18. The organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions.	.67	-.17
19. If I were laid off, the organization would prefer to hire someone new rather than take me back. (R)	.65	.38
20. ^a The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.	.72	.01
21. ^a The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.	.82	-.18
22. ^a If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me. (R)	.73	-.08
23. ^a The organization shows very little concern for me. (R)	.84	-.08
24. If I decided to quit, the organization would try to persuade me to stay.	.60	.14
25. ^a The organization cares about my opinions.	.82	-.08
26. The organization feels that hiring me was a definite mistake. (R)	.60	.37
27. ^a The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	.76	-.01
28. The organization cares more about making a profit than about me. (R)	.59	-.06
29. The organization would understand if I were unable to finish a task on time.	.60	-.03
30. If the organization earned a greater profit, it would consider increasing my salary.	.65	-.18
31. The organization feels that anyone could perform my job as well as I do. (R)	.66	.21
32. The organization is unconcerned about paying me what I deserve. (R)	.50	-.18
33. The organization wishes to give me the best possible job for which I am qualified.	.67	-.15
34. If my job were eliminated, the organization would prefer to lay me off rather than transfer me to a new job. (R)	.56	.30
35. ^a The organization tries to make my job as interesting as possible.	.72	-.18
36. My supervisors are proud that I am a part of this organization.	.65	.13

Note. (R) indicates the item is reverse scored.

^a These items were retained for the short version of the survey.

member of the organization (26, 36) and with the employee's performance (1, 27, 31); anticipation of the employee's future value (15); appreciation of the employee's extra effort (3); consideration of the employee's goals and opinions (4, 25); the organization's concerns about fair pay (32), job enrichment (35), full use of the employee's talents (33), the employee's satisfaction on the job (21), and the employee's well-being (7, 9, 22, 23, 28). Statements referring to actions affecting the employee that the organization would be likely to take in hypothetical situations include willingness to help with job problems (10); replacing the employee with a lower paid new employee (2); responses to the employee's possible complaints (6), mistakes (13), worsened performance (4), improved performance (17), requested change of working conditions (18), requested special favor (20), decision to quit (24), and failure to complete a task on time (29); retention of the employee following job obsolescence (12, 34); rehiring after layoff (19); and opportunities for promotion (16).

The directions for the SPOS were as follows:

Listed below and on the next several pages are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about

the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working—[name of organization]—please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement.

Appended to the questionnaire was a stamped envelope addressed to the first author at the university, including a code number used to identify the employee, and a cover letter guaranteeing confidentiality. The investigators distributed the questionnaires to employees of the nine organizations listed in Table 2.

Results and Discussion

A total of 361 employees responded with the return rate varying from a low of 40% for the credit bureau to a high of 80% for the telephone company, with an average of 52% across all employees. As can be seen from the means and standard deviations presented in Table 2, the average SPOS score varied con-

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Organizations Participating in the Development of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support

Organization and employees	Sample size	Mean SPOS score	SD
Manufacturing firm, white-collar workers and secretaries	36	5.67	0.72
Credit bureau clerical workers	12	5.08	0.89
Manufacturing firm, white-collar workers	30	4.81	0.93
Telephone company, line workers	12	4.67	0.91
Bookstore bookkeepers and clerks	17	4.60	1.04
Law firm secretaries	19	4.49	0.85
High school teachers	50	4.30	1.24
Financial trust company employees	120	3.79	1.03
Postal clerks	65	2.88	1.34

siderably from one organization to another. Responses to the survey by the combined sample of employees were analyzed by the method of principal components in order to determine the number and strength of factors present. This analysis indicated that the presumptive Perceived Support factor accounted for 93.9% of the common variance and that a possible minor second factor accounted for only 6.1%. The Perceived Support factor accounted for 48.3% of the total variance and the possible second factor for 4.4%. The proportion of total variance accounted for by the Perceived Support factor is quite high considering the diverse content of the items. Next, the survey was subjected to factor analysis with varimax rotation, Kaiser normalization, with a two-factor solution. Factor loadings presented in Table 1 show that the Perceived Support factor loaded higher on every one of the 36 statements than did the possible second factor. Moreover, the lowest of the 36 Perceived Support loadings was greater than the highest of the 36 loadings for the minor second factor.

Finally, a reliability and item analysis was performed on the survey. The analysis resulted in a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .97, with item-total correlations ranging from .42 to .83. The mean and median item-total correlations were .67 and .66, respectively.

In sum, every one of the 36 items showed a strong loading on the main factor, with minimal evidence for the existence of other factors. The substantial factor loading of each statement and the high proportions of relative variance and total variance accounted for are notable since the items were constructed to include a wide variety of ascribed organizational attitudes and possible actions relevant to employees' interests. These findings indicate that employees develop global beliefs concerning the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

Study 2: Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Exchange Ideology on Absenteeism

Our social exchange analysis assumes that perceived organizational support would increase an employee's expectancy that

greater effort toward meeting the organization's goals will be rewarded. Furthermore, to the degree that the perceived organizational support also met needs for praise and approval, the employee would incorporate organizational membership and role status into self-identity and thereby develop an affective bond to the organization. The extent to which these factors increased work effort would depend on the strength of the employee's exchange ideology favoring the trade of work effort for material and symbolic benefits.

Method

To test the prediction that the effects of perceived support on absenteeism depend on the strength of an employee's exchange ideology, a five-item Likert-type exchange-ideology questionnaire was developed. The exchange-ideology questionnaire (Table 3) measures the strength of an employee's belief that work effort should depend on treatment by the organization. A short version of the SPOS, comprising the 17 items with the highest factor loadings as designated in Table 1, and the exchange-ideology questionnaire were administered to 97 private high school teachers. The annual total numbers of days absent and periods absent (blocks of one or more consecutive days) were obtained for each teacher.

Results and Discussion

The teachers returned the questionnaires by mail, producing a return rate of 73%. Separate factor analyses performed on the SPOS and exchange-ideology questionnaires with the private school teachers showed that the dominant factors accounted for 50.0% and 55.4%, respectively, of the total variance. Next, a two-factor solution with oblique rotation was obtained for the combined set of SPOS and exchange-ideology questions. As expected, each questionnaire formed its own factor, with items on one factor producing negligible factor loadings on the other factor. The low correlation between the surveys of $-.10$ confirms their independence. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the SPOS and the exchange ideology questionnaire were .93 and .80, respectively.

Table 3
Factor Analysis on Exchange Ideology Questionnaire (Private High School Teachers, N = 71)

Item	Factor loading
1. An employee's work effort should depend partly on how well the organization deals with his or her desires and concerns.	.63
2. An employee who is treated badly by the organization should lower his or her work effort.	.60
3. How hard an employee works should not be affected by how well the organization treats him or her. (R)	.64
4. An employee's work effort should have nothing to do with the fairness of his or her pay. (R)	.65
5. The failure of the organization to appreciate an employee's contribution should not affect how hard he or she works. (R)	.80

Note. (R) indicates the item is reverse scored.

Table 4
Correlations of Perceived Organizational Support With Absenteeism for Low, Middle, and High Exchange Ideologies (Private High School Teachers) (N = 71)

Absenteeism	Exchange level			Overall correlation
	Low	Middle	High	
Periods	-.05	-.35*	-.44*	-.28**
Days	.08	-.31	-.30	-.20*

Note. All tests are one tailed.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

As predicted, the effect of perceived organizational support was greater for teachers with a strong exchange ideology than those with a weak exchange ideology. Consistent with previous findings that the number of periods of absenteeism was a more reliable measure than the number of days absent (Chadwick-Jones, Brown, & Nicholson, 1982; Mowday et al., 1982), the results were stronger for the periods measure. One-tailed statistical tests were used to test specific hypotheses. Prediction of the direction of the results comes from the social exchange interpretation as supported by the first study and by prior research described in the Introduction. The high school teachers were divided into thirds based on their scores on the exchange-ideology questionnaire. As may be seen in Table 4, there was a moderate negative correlation of perceived support with periods absent for the third of the teachers with the highest exchange-ideology scores and there was little correlation for the third of the teachers with the weakest exchange ideology. The effects were similar with days absent, although the correlation for the teachers with the high exchange ideology was only marginally significant.

A useful supplementary analysis that has the benefit of making full use of quantitative differences in the teachers' questionnaire scores is hierarchical multiple regression. The variance in absenteeism accounted for by the interaction between perceived support and exchange ideology was obtained by entering their multiplicative composite into the analysis following entry of the two separate factors (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The main effect of perceived support accounted for 8.0% of the variance in periods absent ($p < .01$) and 4.2% of the variance in days absent ($p < .05$). The interaction between perceived support and exchange ideology accounted for an additional 2.6% of the variance in periods absent ($p < .08$) and 4.0% of the variance in days absent ($p < .05$).

Regression analyses are more sensitive to the variability of an effect across individuals than to the effect's average size. Because of large individual differences in absenteeism, the modest size of the explained variance in absenteeism fails to convey the considerable influence of perceived organizational support and exchange ideology on the average amount of absenteeism. Figures 1 and 2 show that the effects of perceived support on the numbers of periods absent and days absent are strongly influenced by the strength of an employee's exchange ideology. The absenteeism of teachers with the top third, middle third, and bottom third of perceived support scores was compared at each of the three strengths of exchange ideology. For teachers with

a high or moderate exchange ideology, perceived high support produced half the number of absence periods and absence days than perceived low support, $t(62) = 2.58$, $p < .01$, and $t(62) = 2.00$, $p < .025$ respectively. Among the low-exchange teachers, the level of perceived support had negligible effects, $t(62) = .36$ and $-.32$, respectively. These results support the view that perceived organizational support increases an employee's efforts to meet the organization's goals through greater attendance, and that the magnitude of this relation depends on the strength of the employee's exchange ideology.

General Discussion

The present findings are that (a) employees form global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being; (b) such perceived organizational support reduces absenteeism; and (c) the relation between perceived organizational support and absenteeism is greater for employees with a strong exchange ideology than those with a weak exchange ideology. These findings favor the integration and extension of previous theories of organizational commitment into a social exchange approach. We suggest that in order to meet needs for praise and approval and to infer the organization's readiness to reward greater efforts to meet organizational goals, employees form global beliefs concerning the organization's commitment to them. Perceived organizational support is assumed to increase the employee's affective attachment to the organization and his or her expectancy that greater work effort will be rewarded. The extent to which these factors influenced work effort would depend on the strength of the employee's exchange ideology favoring the trade of work effort for material and symbolic benefits.

We found that employees believed themselves the recipients of general evaluations by the organization that were consistently favorable or unfavorable and that influenced their treatment in a variety of situations. The employee's belief that favorable or unfavorable treatment depends on organizational support may be enhanced by the following two factors: (a) people tend to attribute others' behavior to dispositional tendencies, rather than to external constraints (Jones & Nisbett, 1972), especially when making inferences regarding the behavior of powerful individuals (Thibaut & Riecken, 1955); and (b) employees personify the organization, viewing actions by agents of the organization as actions of the organization itself (Levinson, 1965).

As in everyday life, perceived organizational support would be increased by the receipt of praise and approval. Much of the value of such symbolic benefits depends on the perceived sincerity of the donor (Blau, 1964). Therefore, indiscriminate praise given to all employees or other easily penetrable facades of disingenuous approval by agents of the organization would reduce perceived organizational support. Material rewards such as pay, rank, job enrichment, and influence over policy would increase perceived support to the extent that they signified positive evaluations. In other words, increases in material rewards and symbolic rewards that the employee attributes to the organization's own disposition would increase perceived support. The same rewards, if attributed to such external factors as a

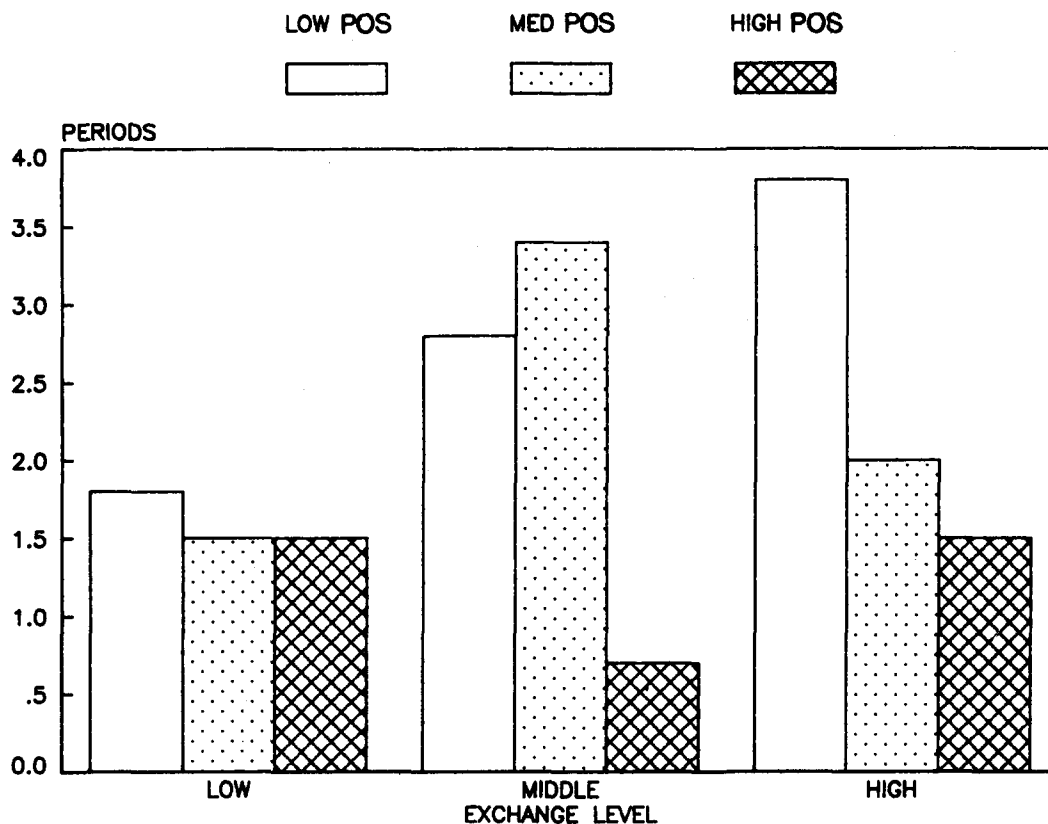


Figure 1. Average annual periods absent (blocks of one or more days) by private high school teachers as a function of three degrees of perceived organizational support combined factorially with three strengths of exchange ideology.

strong labor union or the threat of unionization, would reduce perceived support.

Gouldner has succinctly described the evidence used by recipients of material rewards to determine whether the rewards resulted from positive evaluation by the donor or from external pressures on the donor:

The value of the benefit and hence the debt is in proportion to and varies with—among other things—the intensity of the recipient's need at the time the benefit was bestowed ("a friend in need . . ."), the resources of the donor ("he gave although he could ill afford it"), the motives imputed to the donor ("without thought of gain"), and the nature of the constraints which are perceived to exist or to be absent ("he gave of his own free will . . .") (Gouldner, 1960, p. 171).

At least two more attributional heuristics should probably be added to the list. A favor specific to the recipient's need is valued more than a favor that is universally rewarding (Schopler, 1970), which suggests that various leadership behaviors would have potentially greater influence on perceived organizational support than would static or impersonal organizational policies. Also, the value of the benefit will be greater to the degree that the donor's motivation does not appear due to a desire to gain valued resources from the recipient (Jones and Davis, 1965). Each of the preceding conditions is taken by the recipient as

evidence that the donor cares about one's well-being and therefore can be counted on for future aid (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Schopler, 1970).

We assume that employees develop global beliefs concerning organizational support, in part, to infer the organization's readiness to reward greater effort toward meeting organizational goals. The desire for prediction and control evidently enhances one's attention to possible dispositional causes of others' behavior (Miller, Norman, & Wright, 1978; O'Neil, 1971). Identifying others who are strongly committed to a social relationship allows "individuals to invest their resources in reinforcing those stable dispositions in others which are maximally beneficial to themselves" (Greenberg, 1980, p. 5; see also Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Schopler, 1970). Employees' perceptions concerning commitment from the organization may be used to judge the potential gain in material benefits and symbolic benefits that would result from increased work effort.

Employees would also wish to infer the degree of organizational support in order to meet needs for praise and approval. Mowday et al. (1982) suggested that the satisfaction of needs for praise and approval is an important determinant of affective attachment. Affective attachment, involving the incorporation of organizational membership and role status into one's self-identity, would raise the expected value of greater participation

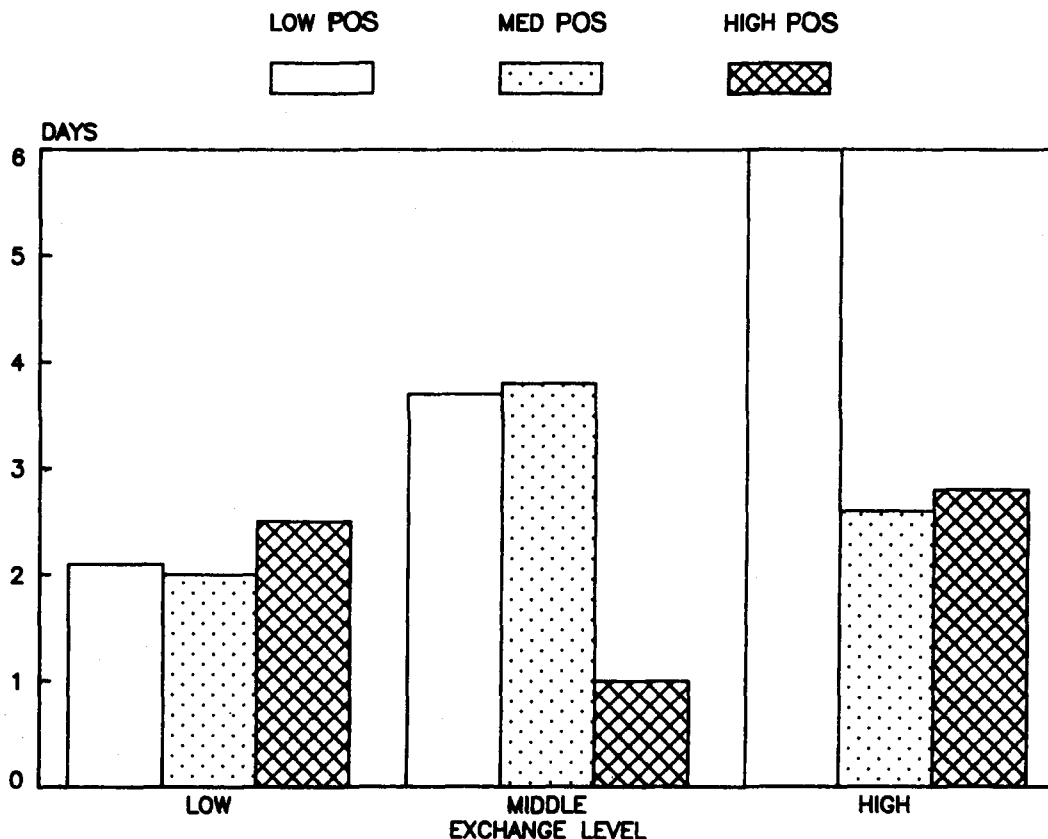


Figure 2. Average annual days absent by private high school teachers as a function of three degrees of perceived organizational support combined factorially with three strengths of exchange ideology.

by (a) increasing the tendency to interpret the organization's gains and losses as one's own, (b) creating positive evaluation biases in judging the organization's actions and characteristics, and (c) increasing the internalization of the organization's values and norms.

Research on organizational commitment has failed to find a consistent relation between absenteeism and productivity or among different measures of productivity (e.g., Angle & Perry, 1981; Steers, 1977). Perhaps strongly committed employees concentrate their efforts on the kinds of performance favored explicitly or implicitly by the organization, to the detriment of other performance measures. For example, reward for performance quality may produce a generalized tendency toward quality at the cost of speed, and vice versa (Eisenberger, Mitchell, McDermitt, & Masterson, 1984). When the organization's preference concerning the direction of increased effort is unclear, perceived support would produce an active exploration by employees to determine the organization's priorities. Beginning in childhood, individuals may learn to investigate the needs of powerful persons and groups as a result of competition with other dependent individuals to obtain the favor of parents and socially popular peers. This is suggested by findings with children and college students that task-oriented reward produced an increase in subsequent attention to the priorities of the reinforcing agent (Eisenberger, Leonard, Carlson, & Park,

1979; Eisenberger, Park, & Frank, 1976; Greenberg, & Bar-Tal, 1976). Perceived organizational support would cause employees to respect organizational priorities more fully.

We found that employees reciprocated perceived organizational support by altering their efforts to meet organizational goals, as indicated by absenteeism. Employees with a moderate or strong exchange ideology showed large differences in absenteeism as a function of perceived support. In contrast, employees who believed it inappropriate to tie their participation to treatment by the organization showed little relation between perceived support and absenteeism. According to Gouldner (1960), the norm of reciprocity is taught as a moral obligation and serves as a starting mechanism for the mutually beneficial exchange of help. Thus, one may aid others in order to incur obligations and thereby establish a mutual exchange of rewards or to enhance the current level of exchange. The reciprocation of aid, in turn, reinforces giving by the original donor (Blau, 1964). The present findings suggest that employees differ greatly in their acceptance of the reciprocity norm in regard to work.

In conclusion, our findings indicate the heuristic value of viewing organizational commitment as a consequence of social exchange processes. Employees held global beliefs concerning the organization's commitment to them. Such perceived organizational support affected the employees' absenteeism, especially that of individuals with stronger exchange ideologies. Fu-

ture research might investigate (a) the effects of perceived organizational support on work performance, as well as on absenteeism; (b) the effects of perceived support on attitudinal measures of employees' affective attachment to the organization and their expectancy of reward for increased effort; (c) the relation between perceived support and job satisfaction, which should be greater for employees who have high needs for praise and approval or who are highly motivated to obtain future material benefits from the organization; and (d) the relative effectiveness of various leadership behaviors in strengthening perceived organizational support.

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