

Role of Social Support at Workplace: Myth or Reality

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Abstract

The present study examined the impact of Social support (SS) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on employees' (who received trainings) satisfaction with received SS and TT. The main focus was to evaluate the different aspects of SS, and their impacts on employees' satisfaction and the impact of employees' satisfaction on TT dimensions. SS was measured in terms of emotional support, interpersonal support, material support and organizational support. A cross sectional survey design was used and total of 204 employees completed adopted measures of SS, satisfaction from received SS and TT from four public sector organizations: National Institute of Management (NIM), Sardar Bahadur Khan University (SBK), University of Balochistan (UOB) and Civil Secretariat of Balochistan. The data was analyzed using regression technique. The results indicated that trainees having higher level of SS were highly satisfied. All four facets of SS received statistical support which showed that trainees who received adequate levels of support were highly satisfied. The results also showed a positive relationship between satisfactions and TT which imply that highly satisfied trainees were able to transfer learned material at their workplace. On the whole, results indicated that trainees need a high level of SS that increases their satisfaction level and this satisfaction level enhance their TT capability. The research study has emphasized several dimensions of SS that influence the satisfaction level of trainees. The findings of this study will also be helpful for HR practitioners to realize the importance of SS while developing the training programs and especially in selection of trainees. This research study will be valuable for exploring the different aspects of SS for future research.

The study is important as it explains the different dimensions of SS, perceived satisfaction from SS and TT in Pakistani (Balochistan) context. The paper emphasizes the importance of SS needed to attend training programs. This was the first attempt to include organizational support as a part of SS

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because most of the friendship and social ties develop among colleagues at workplace. This support should be provided to trainees from the perspective of their family, friends, and organizational level.

Keywords: Social Support, Satisfaction, Training Transfer

Introduction

Most of the times the role of personal associations always causes a significant effect in perusing the desired goals. This is a common phenomenon in the life of an individual to seek support from acquaintances, friend and colleagues. Most of the studies in the social relationship has been augmented from the past three decades (Bravo, 1989; Mitchell & Trickett, 1980; Reblin & Uchino, 2008). This is due to the intention of an individual to perform better at workplace (Tansky & Cohen, 2001); enhanced learning will create the increased level of harmony during training (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013) when the needed SS is available. These relationships “make life meaningful” (Argyle, 1989).

SS is termed as human collaboration with acquaintances and coworkers who exchange the emotional, interpersonal and material resources (Bravo, 1989; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Thoits, 1982). Work place where we develop ultimate relationships (Duck, 1988). While, POS explained the perception of employees of being wrathful to their organization. (Argyle, 1989; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). SS is considered as an important element to boost the commitment level of employees who are attending the training (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997).

Many scholars have studied the positive impacts of SS and POS on employees’ personal lives and workplace separately: e.g. SS and career success (Burke & McKene, 1995); SS and objective career success (OCS), (Powell, 2006), SS and perceived relationships that give benefits (Schwarzer, Dunkel-Schetter, & Kemeny, 1994), SS and work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999); SS and intensified self-esteem (Caplan, 1982); SS and TT (Dan, Chiaburu, Karen & Holly, 2010).

TT is considered as the learning of novel information and application of learned material back to workplace (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Though, TT may increase the level of self-motivation in accomplishing the tasks. POS create the friendly environment which foster the process of learning (Ng & Sorensen, 2008) that develops a sense of belongingness toward organization, and develop a tendency to attain a higher level of learning (e.g., Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Organizational support has been associated with

different work outcomes (e.g. Job satisfaction, affective commitment and job involvement) empirically or theoretically that facilitate transfer of training (Burke & Hutchins, 2007)

Some researchers have found connection among TT and POS (see e.g. Dan et al., 2010; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The research on the relationship between these variables is limited and mostly conducted in advanced countries. The study was conducted in Balochistan context. The limitation in previous studies did not consider POS as the part of SS collectively. Hence, this study will bridge the gap exist in literature.

Literature Review

Social Support

Informal assistance given by friends, relatives, and others is considered as social support (SS) (Cohen, 1990; Cowen, 1982). SS construct comprised of “closeness” and support expected from near ones (Bravo, 1989). SS is defined as the “existence or availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us” (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983).

SS was reflected in multidimensional facets (House, 1981; Thoits, 1982). Most of the studies clearly identified the diverse dimensions of support like informational; emotional, and instrumental support (Cooke, Betty, Marilyn, Hamilton, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1988; Grant & Parker, 2009). Four dimensions of support had been identified by House (1981) needed to survive were ; emotional support (empathy, love and trust), instrumental support (time and money), informational support (guidance and advice) and appraisal support (affirmation, social comparison, and feedback (see e.g. Bernal, del Río, & Molina, 2003; Ducharme & Martin, 2000; House ,1981). These dimensions of SS was also discussed by (Cohen & Wills, 1985) instead of appraisal support they used the term social companionship

Thoits (1982) reasoned that in the perception of SS, extent and types of SS were insignificant (e.g., instrumental and socio emotional) but also sources of support (e.g. family, friends and coworkers) was an important factor (Nelson & Quick 1991). The SS should cover perceived organizational and social perspectives to broaden the dimensions of SS with diverse aspect (Bernal et al., 2003) especially when employees engaged in training are focused.

Training Transfer

Knowledge skills and abilities applied by the trainees at their work place would be considered as TT (Broad & Newstrom, 1992; Kirwan & Birchall, 2006; Wang & Wilcox, 2006). TT assists in enhancement of performance (Hatala & Fleming, 2007; Kirwan & Birchall, 2006).

TT technique influenced by work climate was considered as main predictor of TT construct (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Holton, Cheng & Naquin, 2003). During training work climate characterized as the important element that support in acquisition of knowledge (Burke & Saks, 2009; Blume et al., 2010; Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Different studies recommended that transfer of knowledge among individuals was considered as basic requirement of TT (Burke & Saks, 2009; Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Holton, 1996; Sarason et al., 1983) and if the trainees learn new knowledge and skills there is all likelihood to put on this knowledge at work place (Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons, & Kavanagh, 2007).

Theory building and hypotheses

Different academicians investigated satisfaction as a comprehensive concept with numerous dimensions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Price, 1997). Furthermore, empirical validation of SS was significantly related with satisfaction (Thoits, 1985). As Hobfall, Nadler and Lieberman (1986) found that close bonds contributed to satisfaction with support received. Thus, based on this assumption a hypothesis was suggested:

Hypothesis 1 = Perceived SS is positively related with satisfaction.

TT was influenced by four dimensions of SS i.e. emotional; interpersonal; material and organizational support. Different studies explained SS in different facets like self-efficacy of trainees (House & Kahn, 1985; Gaudine & Saks, 2004; Stevens & Gist, 1997), adoption of new methods (Fisher & Ford, 1998), and transfer of skill at workplace (Axtell & Maitlis, 1997). Some of the scholars argued that highly satisfied employees have a tendency to acquire new knowledge and methods (Price, 1997; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Silver, Dwyer & Alford, 2006; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995). The investigation of Winterton (2004) revealed that personnel's satisfaction causes low turnover intention, high commitment and high level of learning Rouillier and Goldstein (1993)

Tracey et al. (1995) suggested post training outcomes can be enhanced through satisfaction level of personnel. Thus

Hypothesis 2: Satisfaction received from SS is positively related to TT.

Method:

Sample:

Sampling technique was non probability sampling with sample of 204 employees from four public sector organizations; University of Balochistan, Civil Secretariat, National Institute of Management Sciences, and Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University. The sample comprised of 17 grades and above. Total questionnaires were 340 and 308 were returned with 90% response rate. Gender distribution was 123 males and 185 females, with average age of 38.43 years ($SD = 7.95$).

Measures

SS Questionnaire

Scale established by Bernal et al. (2003) was used to measure the SS which was based on three constructs of SS i.e., 1) interpersonal emotional (2 emotional, and 3) material. While, POS Eisenberger et al. (1986) was added to measure the perceived organizational support with the intention to widen the range of SS. Seven-point Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) was used to measure the items of SS. The coefficient alphas for, interpersonal support.84, emotional support.70 material support .85 and POS .90.

Satisfaction

Bernal et al. (2003) scale of "Satisfaction" was used to measure the construct. Satisfaction was assumed as level of gratification received from SS. Seven-point Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) was used to measure the items of SS. Seven-point Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) was used to measure the items of SS. The Cronbach alpha was .86.

TT:

The construct of TT was hypothesized as usage of learned material back to place of work. The scale of TT was adopted from Xiao (1996). 7 point Likert scale was used to measure the construct of TT .0.89 was the value of Coefficients alpha.

Results

SEM was used to analyze the path between the variables of SS, satisfaction and TT.

As displayed in Table 1, the values of χ^2 321.10 with df 186 χ^2/df 1.67 showing the significant acceptable data model fit with CFI= .86; GFI =.82; NFI= .80; and RMSEA =.03.

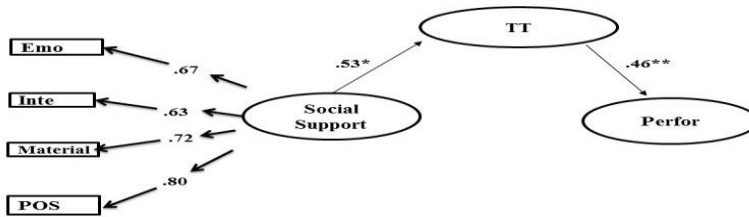
Table 1:

Table1: *Fit indices for CFA of role of Emotional Intelligence in developing Effectuation*

| χ^2 | df | χ^2/df | sig | CFI | GFI | NFI | RMSEA |
|----------|-----|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------|
| 321.10 | 186 | 1.67 | .00 | .86 | .82 | .80 | .03(.02,.04) |

Fit indices showed acceptable data model fit.

Hypothesis 1 was accepted due to significant relationship between SS and satisfaction ($\beta=.53$, $p<.001$). Significantly effect of SS on satisfaction ($\beta=.46$, $p<.001$) supported our Hypothesis 2.



*Figure1: Structural model. Emo = emotional support; Inte = interpersonal support; Material= material support; POS = perceived organizational support; TT = Training transfer; perfor = Performance. ** $p < .01$.*

Discussion

The results demonstrated that SS was a significant predictor of satisfaction. The finding of the study revealed that when perceived SS upsurges, the amount of satisfaction increases with the received support that enhances the TT. Past research on SS discussed the relationship of this constructs with multiple factors and TT (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002).

Satisfied Employees better transfer what they have learned during training (Ali & Akhter, 2009) and contribute more to trainings effectiveness. Those employees who receives higher level of emotional support, interpersonal support and material support from their colleagues, friends and family, their results of applying learned material at work place shows high propensity. These employees show higher level of performance and more significant behaviors (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Tansky & Cohen; 2001; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). These results highlight the importance of SS along with the POS that broadens the concept of SS. The reason behind this notion is that in Balochistan tribal culture people consider their colleagues like a family members and herein friendship ties are stronger at their workplace.

Consequently, personnel who have SS and POS tend to show more satisfaction level about their work and satisfaction is subject to raise in application of learned material during their training back to their organization this is in line with the results of Machin and Fogarty (1997), where he explored the factors linked with TT effects in development of contentment. These factors (i.e. role of environment, training materials and methods) showed a significant effect in producing the satisfaction level of employees. (Thayer & Teachout, 1995). Employees are likely to place greater value on training programs that are highly respected by colleagues, supervisors, and managers (Velada et al., 2007). Organizations that are able to create an environment where training is supported and valued by employees will be able to achieve greater commitment outcomes (Bartlett, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1990; House, 1988).

Limitation and suggestions

SS is very precarious in carrying out the employees' satisfaction who are involved in trainings. For instance few studies presents the fact that some individuals strive for formal support (Husaini, Moore & Cain, 1994).limitatitonof the study was the consideration of few facets in measuring the SS while many more can be explored in future studies.

Small sample size was another limitation of the study. Further consideration of big sample (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) could depict clearer picture of SS and TT.

Volume and magnitude of SS (House, 1987) couldn't be inspected due to time constraints. Consequently, future studies can be address the volume and magnitude of SS in more elaborative way. This would bridge the gap in SS, TT and satisfaction of trainees.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to find links between SS (along with POS) with satisfaction received and its impact on TT. The results showed a positive and significant relationship between all study variables. It was found that employees who were having higher SS were more satisfied with the received support (Locke, 1976) and hence enabled their transfer of training (learned knowledge and skills) at their workplace (Tracey, Hinkin, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 2001). Therefore, this research provides the extended model of SS during training. Nonetheless, there are some limitations of the study. Thus, for future studies it is recommended to investigate the environmental factors which increase the level of TT, effects of different facets of SS on TT and more demographics can be explored in finding the dimensions of SS.

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