

Advancing Organizational Support Theory into the Twenty-First Century World of Work

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Abstract

Purpose This review focuses and aids the development of organizational support theory, which explains relationships between employers and employees based on social exchange. Many studies have explored the theory's central construct, perceived organizational support (POS), or the degree to which employees believe their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Since the last review of POS literature in 2000, the occupational landscape has shifted, increasing nontraditional work relationships and the importance of managing an international workforce while considering influences on employee well-being. This review discusses how the recent POS research reflects these trends.

Design/Methodology/Approach This review focused on how themes in the POS research since 2000 have enhanced organizational support theory as relevant to the twenty-first century world of work.

Findings Four important theoretical themes have developed since 2000 that enhance organizational support theory: considerations of employee well-being, nontraditional workers, international and cross-cultural issues, and developments tied to the use of multilevel modeling.

Implications Giving both researchers and practitioners a synthesized view of the current status of POS research, this review serves as a springboard for new developments. It also integrates the multitude of recent studies into organizational support theory, focusing theoretical progress.

Originality/Value This is the first review and theoretical integration of the POS literature since 2002. It is a valuable resource for all interested in the field, with theoretical insights, useful tables, explanatory figures, and references.

Keywords Organizational support theory · Social exchange · Perceived organizational support · Employee well-being · Nontraditional workers · International and cross-cultural issues · Theoretical development

The central construct within organizational support theory (OST), perceived organizational support (POS), refers to the degree to which employees believe their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). In 2002, Rhoades and Eisenberger published the first review of the POS literature, which comprised more than 70 studies published between the introduction of POS in 1986 and 2000. Since then, scholarly attention to POS has dramatically increased. Several factors may explain this surge in scholarly interest in POS, including (a) its relationships with organizationally relevant outcomes such as citizenship behavior and turnover, (b) its relevance across occupational contexts, (c) its highly reliable measurement using Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, and (d) its strong grounding in OST, which has focused scholarly advancement.

The world of work, however, is shifting. Rapid globalization and technological advancements, for example, are

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increasingly potent sources of organizational change (Barkema et al. 2002; Burke and Ng 2006). The changing world of work, coupled with the amount of research attention POS is receiving, makes an account of how recent POS research contributes to OST necessary to help advance the theory and guide future research. Although research attention to POS has sharply increased since the 2002 meta-analysis, no studies have attempted to integrate recent literature into OST. Ng and Sorensen (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of support-related constructs, but their study focused primarily on coworker and supervisor support, not on new POS literature since the 2002 meta-analysis.

The goal of this article is to aid theoretical development. We take the perspective of highlighting how the recent research can be integrated into OST to enrich the theory and aid future theoretical development. We organized our review based on the main themes that emerged in our review of the POS literature since 2000, discussing their relevance to the changing organizational landscape. We aim to provide focus to the organizational support literature by illuminating theoretical insights and provide specific ideas and guidance for future research.

Overview of Organizational Support Theory

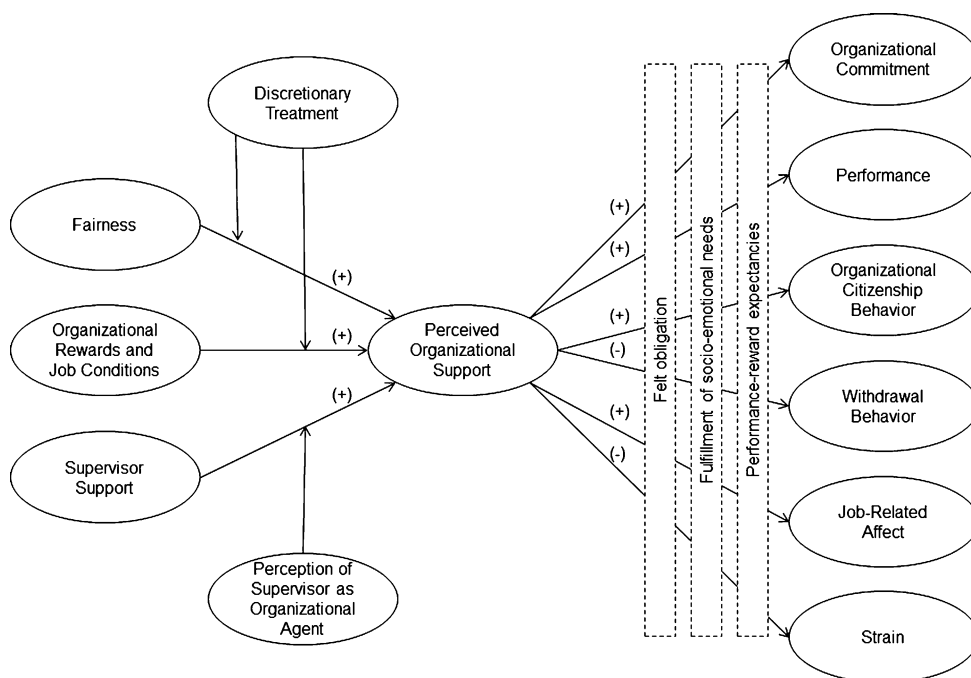
OST considers the development, nature, and outcomes of POS (e.g., Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Shore and Shore 1995). According to the theory, employees develop POS in response to socio-emotional needs and the organization’s readiness to reward

increased efforts made on its behalf (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Shore and Shore 1995). The theory is an application of social-exchange theory to the employer–employee relationship. As such, OST maintains that, based on the norm of reciprocity, workers trade effort and dedication to their organization for such tangible incentives as pay and fringe benefits and such socio-emotional benefits as esteem, approval, and caring (Eisenberger et al. 1986).

Figure 1 shows relationships among POS and associated constructs suggested by Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) first review of empirical work on OST. Rhoades and Eisenberger found that POS has three main categories of antecedents: fairness, favorableness of organizational rewards and job conditions (which includes such job aspects as training, autonomy, and role stressors), and supervisor support. Although other antecedents were explored (e.g., demographics and personality characteristics), these were found to have very small relationships with POS. Figure 1 also depicts the role of employees’ attributions of discretionary treatment, based on the notion employees value resources more if they are voluntarily given rather than forced (e.g., Blau 1964). For supervisor support, it is related to POS to the extent that the supervisor is viewed as an agent or representative acting on behalf of the organization, also depicted in Fig. 1.

Additionally, Fig. 1 depicts main consequences of POS: commitment, performance, citizenship behavior, withdrawal behaviors, job-related affect, and strain. OST specifies three processes underlying the relationship between POS and its consequences. First, based on the

Fig. 1 Theoretical model representing relationships suggested by organizational support theory according to Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) meta-analysis



reciprocity norm, employees who perceive organizational support feel obligated to reciprocate toward the organization. Second, POS helps to fulfill socio-emotional needs such as needs for esteem, approval, and affiliation, leading to organizational membership and role status becoming part of one's social identity and helping to reduce occupational strain and to enhance employee well-being (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Finally, POS helps to determine the organization's readiness to reward efforts made on its behalf (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002).

Some studies since the 2002 meta-analysis have provided support for OST's assumptions through the use of longitudinal designs (e.g., Choi 2006; Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades et al. 2001; Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe 2003). Choi found that POS predicted helping behaviors for coworkers measured 1 year later. Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe found that POS predicted affective commitment 3 months later. Both Eisenberger et al. and Rhoades et al. used a type of longitudinal design referred to as a cross-lag panel design (which involves measuring both the predictor and outcome variables at both time points rather than each at just one time point as in the Choi and Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe studies). By measuring both the predictor and the outcome variable at two time points cross-lag panel designs allow the reverse direction of causality to be tested and provide evidence regarding how one variable influences changes in another variable over time (Finkel 1995). Eisenberger et al. provided evidence that perceived supervisor support led to positive changes in POS over time but not vice versa. Rhoades et al. showed that POS led to enhanced affective commitment over time but not vice versa. Above and beyond cross-sectional research, all these longitudinal studies have provided stronger causal evidence regarding a variety of relationships relevant to POS such as the contribution of supervisor support to POS, the reciprocation of POS with enhanced affective commitment, and the reciprocation of POS with increased helping behavior.

Theoretical Themes in Recent Perceived Organizational Support Research

To determine theoretical themes in the POS literature since the first review and meta-analysis by Rhoades and Eisenberger in 2002, first, we searched the PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, and Business Source Premier electronic databases for any studies published in English using the keywords "organizational support," "perceived support," or "perceived organizational support." Then, we searched for any studies published from 2000 to 2010 that cited (a) Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) study which was the seminal paper that introduced the POS construct or (b) the Rhoades

and Eisenberger (2002) paper which was the first meta-analytic review of POS and had the word "support" in their abstracts. We conducted these citation searches using the Web of Science cited-reference search within the ISI Web of Knowledge database. Next, we merged the list of studies from the cited reference search with the list generated using keyword searches and removed duplicates. This resulted in 592 studies. We removed five studies based upon their previous inclusion in the Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) meta-analysis, resulting in a new total of 587 studies.

We then closely examined each study to determine whether the study actually examined POS as it has been defined since its inception: global beliefs regarding the degree to which an employee perceives that his or her work organization values his or her contributions and cares about his or her well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). This process involved all three of the authors examining the studies and discussing any disagreements until we achieved 100% agreement. During this close inspection, we found that many studies ($n = 338$) defined and studied organizational support in a way that was not in alignment with the construct's definition or as a tangential discussion point. Of these 338 studies, 49 mentioned POS tangentially while discussing social exchange theory but did not examine POS in their studies (e.g., Becker and Kernan 2003; Yi and Gong 2009), 23 mentioned POS briefly as a discussion point but did not examine POS in their studies (e.g., Allen 2006; Cinite et al. 2009), 39 focused exclusively on supervisor or managerial support rather than organizational support (e.g., Cole et al. 2006; Sawang 2010), 74 dealt with social support (e.g., from coworkers or other sources) instead of organizational support (e.g., Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Tyler 2006), and 153 were concerned with support for a specific initiative (e.g., family friendly environments, Huffman et al. 2008; new system implementation, Tsai et al. 2010). Therefore, our final sample included 249 studies.

Of these 249 studies, 222 used the well-validated and reliable Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, which is the definitive measure used to assess POS (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). The remaining studies ($n = 27$) used measures developed for their specific study or qualitative methods. We carefully read these 249 studies, taking notes on aspects of their designs and findings. Those notes formed the basis for this review.

Out of these 249 studies, four primary theoretical themes emerged: employee well-being ($n = 43$), nontraditional employee–employer relationships ($n = 15$), international or cross-cultural studies ($n = 77$), and multilevel POS ($n = 12$). The remaining 102 studies replicated prior studies ($n = 25$) were unique in focus (i.e., less than three studies on the topic which is consistent with the decision criteria for inclusion in the Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002

review) and therefore could not be considered a theme ($n = 34$) or were categorized as belonging to a secondary theme ($n = 43$). These eight secondary themes—unions, expatriates, job fit, trust, teams, personality, customer service, and psychological contract—were considered secondary because they had less than 10 studies per theme but had at least three associated with each theme. To provide focus regarding the advancement of OST, the major thrust of this article focuses on the four primary themes derived from 147 studies listed in Table 1, with a brief discussion of the secondary themes derived from 43 studies appearing in “Discussion” section. To show how OST has been and can continue to be developed by these primary themes, we demonstrate how each theme advances the theory beyond the basic model depicted in Fig. 1.

Employee Well-Being

OST acknowledges that a healthy employee–employer relationship fulfills important socio-emotional needs for workers and thus may enhance employee well-being as indicated by variables such as reduced strain, increased job-related affect such as positive mood and job satisfaction, as well as safety. Consistent with prior research, we consider socio-emotional needs to include needs for affiliation, esteem, or emotional support (Armeli et al. 1998). These basic needs serve to bolster one’s self-concept and well-being.

POS research up to the time of the first published review in 2002, however, more heavily emphasized the role of the norm of reciprocity as the explanation for relationships between POS and outcomes. This is understandable, as Blau (1964) discussed the socio-emotional component of social exchange as important, yet tangential to the role of felt obligation. However, there has been increased interest in employee stress, health, safety, and burnout in organizational research during the last decade, in part due to concerns over the effects on employees of meeting the demands of a global economy (Macik-Frey et al. 2007). Also, organizations play a central role in most people’s lives; as such, employees may come to rely on their relationships at work and with the organization itself for the fulfillment of socio-emotional needs. Thus, OST could benefit from an examination of how recent studies on POS help explicate the role of POS in contributing to employee well-being.

Much of the recent POS research has focused on employee well-being, examining occupational stress including work-life balance, coping, employee health, and occupational safety in relation to POS. Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) review did include some studies in this realm (i.e., 14 studies examining how role stressors relate to POS, 5 studies examining the relationship of POS with

strain); however, this area has seen substantial development since that time. We discuss OST advances in four primary areas of employee well-being (see Fig. 2): (a) the direct and buffering role of POS, (b) choice of coping strategies, (c) work-life balance as related to POS, and (d) the importance of POS in contributing to a safer work environment.

Direct and Buffering Role of POS

Research that has explored the role of felt obligation (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Eisenberger et al. 2001) explain in part why employees feel a duty to reciprocate favorable treatment by a supportive organization through behaviors such as additional effort and motivation. Namely, felt obligation refers to the duty perceived by an employee to add value to the organization in return for a perception of support from the organization. OST holds that this process occurs when an employee perceives support from the organization and then feels indebted to the organization and begins to seek ways through which he or she can restore balance in the employee–organization relationship. Felt obligation, however, holds less explanatory power in describing why POS would result in enhanced well-being. Thus in Fig. 2, which visually represents our discussion of the theoretical theme of employee well-being, we separate the mechanisms involved in OST into those we believe are more relevant to effort and motivation and those we believe are more relevant to well-being.

A number of studies since 2000 have investigated the direct relationship between POS and various aspects of employee health and well-being variables (see Table 1). Findings include relationships between increased levels of POS and improved general health (Bradley and Cartwright 2002), a sense of accomplishment and contribution (Jain and Sinha 2005), decreased somatic complaints (Dupré and Day 2007), burnout (Kang et al. 2010) and anger (O’Neill et al. 2009), and increased organization-based self-esteem (Fuller et al. 2003; Lee and Peccei 2007). Thus, POS appears to have a direct effect on employee well-being.

It is likely that POS is contributing to greater physical and psychological well-being because the socio-emotional support function of POS meets needs for esteem, affiliation, and emotional support. To the extent that POS meets such needs, strain should be reduced and thus well-being enhanced. Initial support for this idea comes from Fuller et al.’s (2003) research, which found that organization-based self-esteem partially mediated the relationship between POS and organizational commitment. Future research, however, could attempt to measure the socio-emotional needs of employees and the degree to which the fulfillment of such needs may be a theoretical mechanism influencing well-being (see Fig. 2).

Table 1 Studies of perceived organizational support (POS) by theoretical category

Theoretical category	Studies
<i>Employee well-being</i>	
Direct and buffering role of POS	Babalola (2010) Bradley and Cartwright (2002) Byrne and Hochwarter (2006) Casper et al. (2002) Dupré and Day (2007) Fuller et al. (2003) Harlos and Axelrod (2005) Ilies et al. (2010) Jain and Sinha (2005) Jawahar et al. (2007) Kang et al. (2010) Ladebo (2009) Lee and Peccei (2007) Moore and Casper (2006) Mendelson et al. (2000)
Coping strategies	Armstrong-Stassen (2004)
Work-life balance and POS	Behson (2002) Casper and Buffardi (2004) Casper and Harris (2008)
Safe behavior as reciprocation	Credo et al. (2010) DeJoy et al. (2004, 2010) Gyekye and Salminen (2007)
<i>Nontraditional employee–employer relationships</i>	
Multiple sources of POS	Ang and Slaughter (2001) Bishop et al. (2002) Boezeman and Ellemers (2007, 2008a, b) Boezeman and Ellemers (2008b) Buch et al. (2010) Camerman et al. (2007) Connelly et al. (2007)
Antecedents of POS	Camerman et al. (2007)
<i>International or cross-cultural studies</i>	
POS and affective commitment in non-U.S. samples	Addae et al. (2006) Aubé et al. 2007 Camerman et al. (2007) Campbell and Campbell (2003) Capon et al. (2007) Chan (2001) Chiu et al. (2005) Choi (2006) Connell et al. (2003) Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2006) Cross and Travaglione (2004) Currie and Dollery (2006) Darolia et al. (2010) Dobрева-Martinova et al. (2002) Feng and Angeline (2010) Guerrero and Herrbach (2008, 2009) Hui et al. (2004) Kinnunen et al. (2008)
	O'Neill et al. (2009) Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2009) Parzefall and Salin (2010) Pawar (2009) Reinardy (2007) Richardson et al. (2008) Saks (2006) Stamper and Johlke (2003) Travis and Mor Barak (2010) Wallace et al. (2009) Walters and Raybould (2007) Wilson et al. (2004) Witt and Carlson (2006)
	Marjanovic et al. (2007) Casper et al. (2007) Dupré and Day (2007) Muse et al. (2008) Haines et al. (2001) Kath et al. (2010) Mearns and Reader (2008) Wallace et al. (2006)
	Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2006) Gakovic and Tetrick (2003) Liden et al. (2003) Van Breugel et al. (2005) Veitch and Cooper-Thomas (2009) Webster and Adams (2010) Liden et al. (2003)
	Kuvaas (2008) Ladebo (2009) Lapalme et al. (2009) Lee and Peccei (2007) Leveson et al. (2009, 2010) Lin (2006) Loi et al. (2006) Moideenkutty et al. (2001) Quenneville et al. (2010) Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe (2003) Tumwesigye (2010) Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) Vandenberghe et al. (2007) Veitch and Cooper-Thomas (2009) Villanueva and Djurkovic (2009) Wang et al. (2010) Wang (2009a) Yoon and Thye (2002)

Table 1 continued

Theoretical category	Studies		
POS, attitudes, and behavior in non-U.S. samples	Adebayo (2005)	Kim et al. (2009)	
	Asgari et al. (2008)	Knight and Leimer (2010)	
	Bartol et al. (2009)	Konrad et al. (2010)	
	Bhanthumnavin (2003)	Kuvaas (2008)	
	Biron (2010)	Ladebo (2009)	
	Cardona et al. (2004)	Laschinger et al. (2006)	
	Carmeli and Zisu (2009)	Liao et al. (2004)	
	Chen et al. (2005)	Loi and Ngo (2010)	
	Choi (2006)	Mearns and Reader (2008)	
	Chuang and Liao (2010)	Pazy and Ganzach (2009)	
	Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2006)	Pundt et al. (2010)	
	Darolia et al. (2010)	Quenneville et al. (2010)	
	Djurkovic et al. (2008)	Rabl (2010)	
	Edwards (2009)	Saks (2006)	
	Edwards and Peccei (2010)	Sturges et al. (2010)	
	Ehigie and Otukoya (2005)	Tremblay et al. (2010)	
	El Akremi et al. (2010)	Van Emmerik and Euwema (2008)	
	Erturk (2010)	Vandenberghe et al. (2007)	
	Feng and Angeline (2010)	Wang et al. (2010)	
	Ferres et al. (2005)	Wang (2009a, 2010)	
	Gyekye and Salminen (2009)	Wong et al. (2010)	
	Harlos and Axelrod (2005)	Yimo (2007)	
	Huang et al. (2004)	Zampetakis et al. (2009)	
	Hui et al. (2004, 2007)	Zhang and Jia (2010)	
	Humborstad et al. (2008)		
	Hung and Wong (2007)		
	POS and cultural differences	Bradley and Cartwright (2002)	O'Donohue et al. (2007)
		Erdogan et al. (2004)	Patrick and Laschinger (2006)
		Farh et al. (2007)	Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe (2004)
		Haar (2006)	Stinglhamber et al. (2006)
	<i>Multilevel POS</i>	Liao et al. (2004)	Xiaofeng et al. (2005)
		Anand et al. (2010)	Lavelle et al. (2009)
		Brandes et al. (2004)	Shanock and Eisenberger (2006)
Brown et al. (2007)		Tangirala et al. (2007)	
Byrne et al. (2005)		Vandenberghe et al. (2007)	
Choi (2006)		Zagenczyk et al. (2010)	
Donsbach and Shanock (2008)			
Erdogan and Enders (2007)			

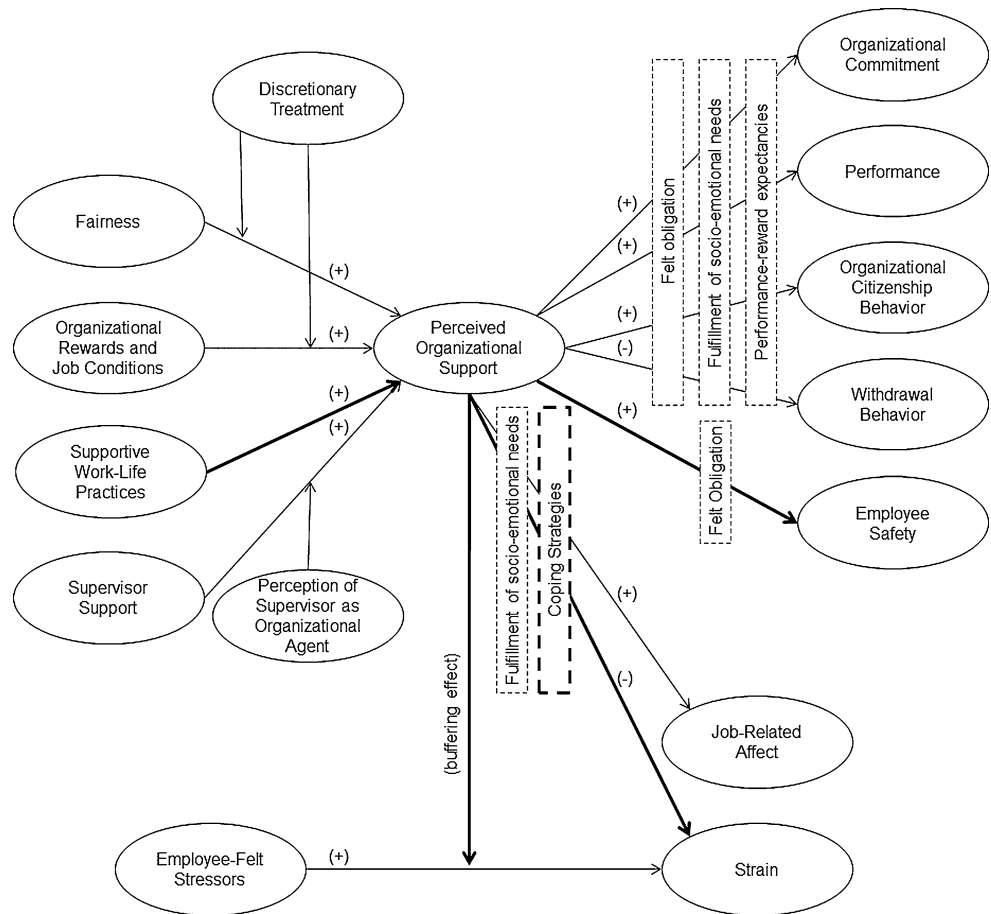
Note: $N = 147$ studies. POS perceived organizational support. In the current paper, we focused on categories in this literature that we believe have potential to advance organizational support theory within the current organizational landscape of increased globalization and in consideration of methodological advancements. Studies in multiple categories are repeated. The studies not listed above either replicated similar findings as demonstrated by Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis or included the POS construct but investigated diverse topics not directly related to the categories listed. *Italics* denote primary theoretical category

Additionally, POS may aid well-being by serving as a buffer between stressors and well-being. Although the Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) review mentioned the potential buffering role of POS between stressors and strains, little empirical work had been conducted at that time specifically examining the buffering role of POS. Recent studies have advanced OST by emphasizing the buffering role of POS in the relationship between such stressors and outcomes such as employee well-being and performance (see Table 1 for list of studies). For example, Jawahar et al. (2007) found negative direct relationships between POS and two aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization), and that POS moderated the relationship

between role conflict and emotional exhaustion, such that people with low POS experienced a stronger relationship between role conflict and emotional exhaustion than those with high POS. Similarly, POS was found to have a buffering effect such that relationships between chronic pain and lower performance (Byrne and Hochwarter 2006) are weaker for employees with high POS than for employees with low POS. High-level POS has also been associated with weaker relationships between workload and two well-being outcomes: affective distress and blood pressure (Ilies et al. 2010).

These studies suggest that POS may offer socio-emotional support which helps to buffer negative influences of

Fig. 2 Depicts extensions of organizational support theory within the domain of employee well-being. *Bold lines* represent newly tested relationships between constructs. The buffering effect, while having been previously tested, has received much more attention since 2000 than it did prior to Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) review



the workplace on employee well-being. In terms of OST, a combination of interrelated processes may occur when employees sense that their work organization is fulfilling their socio-emotional needs. Employees may simply have better well-being or become more attached to the organization because being an organizational member helps fulfill their socio-emotional needs. The process of reciprocation is also relevant such that people might be inclined to perform better, or engage in other ways of helping the organization in part because their socio-emotional needs have been met (e.g., Armeli et al. 1998).

Research opportunities abound in the area of POS and employee well-being, however, as the relationships among some types of stressors, POS, and outcomes may be more complicated than the buffering models proposed above. For example, consider the findings presented by Casper et al. (2002). Their data suggest a three-way interaction among POS, work interfering with family, family interfering with work, and continuance commitment. Continuance commitment is a type of organizational commitment in which attachment to the organization stems from a lack of alternatives or the perceptions of a high level of sacrifice associated with leaving the organization (Allen and Meyer 1996). Casper et al.’s study suggests that in the case of high

levels of work interfering with family, POS moderates the negative relationship between family interfering with work and continuance commitment such that this relationship is stronger in high-POS conditions than in low-POS conditions. In the case of low levels of work interfering with family, POS does not appear to moderate the relationship between family interfering with work and continuance commitment. Therefore, when employees perceive a great deal of bi-directional work-to-family conflict, POS is likely to have the most influence on reducing continuance commitment.

Furthermore, recent research from Richardson et al. (2008) found that POS did not moderate the relationships between either hindrance or challenge stressors and resulting strains. More recently, Wallace et al. (2009) found that the positive relationship between challenge stressors and role-based performance was stronger when POS was high; however, they did not find a moderating effect for POS regarding the relationship between hindrance stressors and role-based performance. Future research should give attention to the various stressors and strains under investigation and attempt to delineate more clearly the role of POS and the conditions under which it may influence well-being (e.g., when other sources of

support are not present, when facing chronic versus acute stressors, when workers are highly distributed geographically, etc.). Such efforts may help to clarify this area of POS research and help advance OST.

Coping Strategies

Additionally, Fig. 2 depicts recent work on occupational stress which adds to our understanding of OST by considering coping strategies as a new mechanism through which POS may affect employee well-being outcomes. To the extent that POS provides informational or instrumental support, POS may augment the coping strategies available to employees. Instrumental support refers to the provision of necessary resources and assistance; informational support involves the provision of necessary clarification or advice (Cohen and Wills 1985). The organization would be in an ideal position to provide such resources or information compared to other sources of support, such as coworkers or family, and thus POS helps to serve the function of providing informational and instrumental support in addition to its socio-emotional need fulfilling role.

Recent work demonstrates that POS may affect how employees cope with occupational stress. For example, in a longitudinal two-part study, Armstrong-Stassen (2004) found that POS predicted the use of control-oriented coping strategies among nurses experiencing an organizational downsizing. Also, Marjanovic et al. (2007) found that organizational support, using items from the SPOS measure adapted to reflect the availability of necessary information, predicted lower levels of state anger and avoidance behavior. Thus, POS may allow employees to cope more effectively with occupational stressors, which could explain findings that relationships between stressors and negative outcomes are generally weaker among employees who have high POS (e.g., Jawahar et al. 2007; Byrne and Hochwarter 2006). Knowing that POS may relate to types of coping strategies employees use has important implications for OST. In particular, high POS may not only fulfill socio-emotional needs but also affect choice of coping strategy. These studies provide preliminary evidence that POS might affect how employees cope with stress on the job, but to date they are few. Thus, a direction for future research would be to continue to examine the extent to which POS affects the type of coping strategy chosen by employees and to what extent the strategy chosen affects well-being, absenteeism, and performance.

Work-Life Practices and POS

Several studies have shown that specific work-life practices can lead to increased POS, such as dependent care assistance and flexible work schedules (Casper and Harris

2008), and work-life benefits (Muse et al. 2008). Signaling theory as explicated by Casper and Harris (2008) may explain the mechanisms through which these types of organizational practices influence POS, as employees may perceive these practices as visible manifestations of invisible organizational characteristics. Namely, dependent care assistance and flexible work schedules may signal aspects of support from the organization to employees. Consistent with OST, they may also be particularly good for enhancing POS because they are likely to be viewed as discretionary treatment. Supportive work-life practices are relevant to employee well-being in that such practices, perhaps through enhanced POS, result in higher job satisfaction and lower family-to-work and work-to-family conflict (e.g., Behson 2002),

Safe Behavior as Reciprocation

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimates that approximately 3.9 million nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses were treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments in the year 1999 alone (NIOSH 2004). Given the prevalence of occupational injuries and their associated financial costs, many researchers are investigating ways to improve workplace safety. POS appears to influence the creation of safe work environments in two ways. First, POS may be an important aspect of creating an environment in which employees perceive that management cares about their safety as part of their well-being. Working in such a supportive climate may lead employees to be more willing to report errors, discuss unsafe working conditions, and encourage each other to behave in a safe manner—conditions that may reduce costly accidents at work. Consistent with this notion, Wallace et al. (2006) found that POS contributed to safety climate, which related to fewer on-the-job accidents among 9,429 transportation workers. Other research has further developed the link between POS and safety climate (e.g., DeJoy et al. 2010). Similarly, findings reported by Mearns and Reader (2008) suggest that employees reciprocate POS through safe behavior, as workers with high POS were more likely to assist coworkers and report errors in potentially unsafe work situations than those with low POS.

Interestingly, however, it appears that other factors may be more relevant than POS in predicting employees communicating their safety concerns upward (e.g., to senior management). For example, dominance analysis findings from Kath et al. (2010) suggest that leader-member exchange, management attitudes about safety, and job demands that interfere with safe behavior contributed the most to this outcome. As such, POS is likely an important part of an overall workplace experience that influences safety—not a stand-alone solution to safety issues.

Also, to the extent that safe behavior is relevant in the workplace, POS coupled with safety messages or incentives may help channel reciprocation efforts to enhance safety-related behaviors (see Fig. 2). For example, Haines et al.'s (2001) study of employees' reactions to safety incentives suggests that employees in a high-POS environment reciprocate support from their supervisors or organizations by exhibiting extra-role behavior. When an organization has formal incentives for safety and high POS, employees feel obligated to participate in the safety-rewards program. OST argues that POS engenders among employees a general felt obligation to reciprocate toward the organization in positive manner. Haines et al.'s findings imply that if managers wish to channel employees' reciprocation efforts toward some particular end (e.g., safety, increased sales, quality, etc.), they should couple POS with distinct incentives and messages tied to the specific goal.

Additionally, future research could investigate the various ways in which POS influences safe behavior as well as the nonsafety-related outcomes of organizational support for safety. It is important to note that POS is different than organizational support for safety or other specific initiatives, as POS refers to global perceptions of support from the organizations instead of specific perceived support for certain practices. Theoretically, however, it appears that at least in some instances that support for specific organizational norms or behaviors is reciprocated by employees in ways similar to global POS. Future research could investigate this phenomenon further.

Summary of Employee Well-Being Advancements to Organizational Support Theory

To summarize, research on employee well-being has extended OST by demonstrating the role of POS as buffering the negative relationship between employee-felt stressors and employee well-being. Second, POS directly influences employee well-being perhaps because POS engenders the fulfillment of socio-emotional needs and provides a means of both informational and instrumental support. Finally, safe behavior appears to be another way in which employees reciprocate POS. We suggest that felt obligation mediates the relationship between POS and employee safety, and that socio-emotional needs, and choice of coping strategy may mediate the relationship between POS and employee well-being (see Fig. 2). Future researchers could advance OST by explicitly testing these proposed mechanisms.

Nontraditional Employee–Employer Relationships

Given that the workforce is becoming increasingly dependent upon nontraditional work relationships including temporary and contract workers (e.g., Kalleberg 2000),

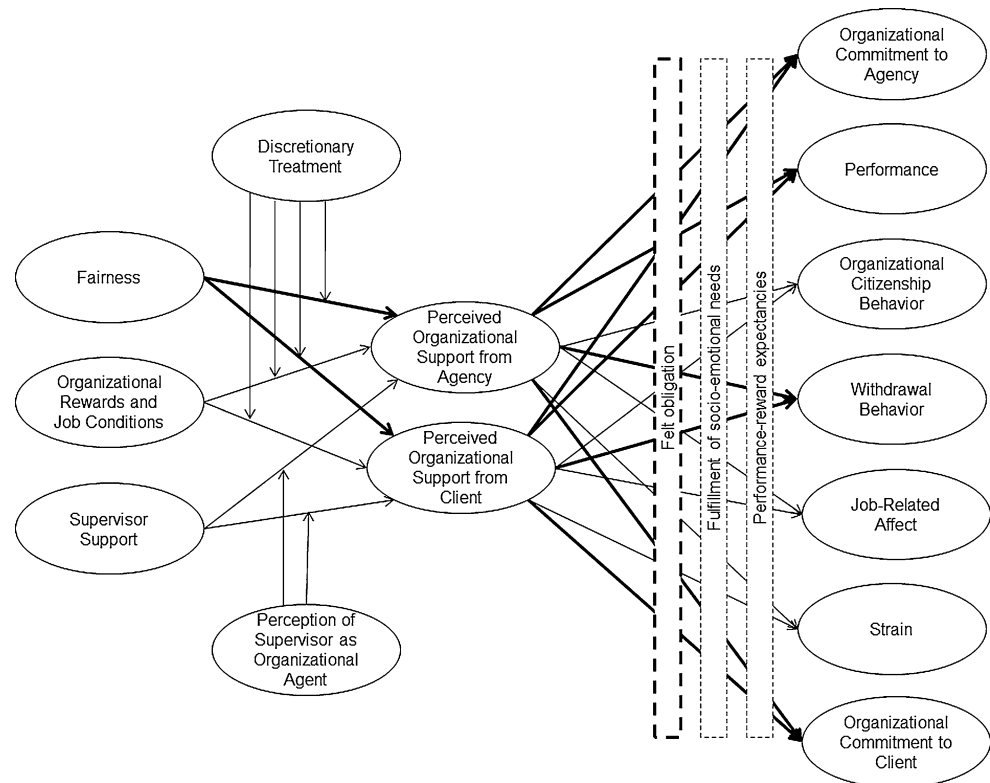
OST needs to address the development, processes, and outcomes of POS for these increasingly common categories of employees. For example, increased mobility among social exchange partners due to utilization of temporary or contract workers who move in and out of the organization as needed, may make the development of POS more difficult. Also, based on the current explication of OST, it is unclear whether this increasingly transient labor force develops the same felt obligation to reciprocate POS as traditional workers and how the antecedents of POS may vary depending on the source of POS.

OST, like many areas of organizational behavior, has assumed an ongoing, fulltime employment relationship between an employing organization and an employee (Cameraman et al. 2007; Connelly et al. 2007; Eisenberger et al. 1986). Generally considered traditional employment arrangements, these long-term, fulltime employment relationships stem from a notion of shared purpose and reciprocal commitment (Bishop et al. 2002). To maintain competitive advantage, however, today's organizations need flexibility in staffing arrangements, which has precipitated a well-documented shift away from fulltime, lifelong employment toward short-term and contingent relationships with employers (Kalleberg 2000).

Nontraditional work relationships are "employment relations that depart from standard work arrangements in which it was generally expected that work was done full-time, would continue indefinitely, and was performed at the employer's place of business under the employer's direction" (Kalleberg 2000, p. 341). Temporary employment in the United States involves agencies who recruit, hire, fire, pay, and sometimes train employees, placing them to work in client organizations (Kalleberg 2000). In long-term contracting relationships, a contractor (e.g., a temporary staffing agency) supplies employees to an organization to fulfill a set of duties on a long-term basis (Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006; Kalleberg 2000). Both forms of employment situations comprise contingent work situations (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Liden et al. 2003).

The research on nontraditional relationships and POS is just beginning, with 11 empirical articles to date (see Table 1). Thus, as we discuss each theoretical implication, the same study may be cited more than once. However, we believe that this budding line of research shows promise of having important implications for OST and thus warrants discussion although the research to date is limited. Implications for OST include (a) multiple sources of POS with implications for commitment and performance, (b) differing needs and expectations resulting in potentially different antecedents of POS, and (c) commitment and performance that fulfills and contributes simultaneously to multiple employer–employee relationships. Figure 3 depicts how we have fit such research into OST.

Fig. 3 Model depicts theoretical developments and future research possibilities regarding contingent workers. *Bold lines* represent newly tested relationships between constructs. All relationships are positive with the exception of the relationships between both types of perceived organizational support and two outcomes, withdrawal behaviors and strain



Multiple Sources of POS

Working for two employers simultaneously (e.g., the staffing agency and the client organization) makes understanding the psychological processes that underlie the development of POS and resulting commitment and work behavior of contingent workers complex (Liden et al. 2003; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006). Contingent work results in a triangle of employment relationships between the contract agency, the client organization, and contingent employees (Kalleberg 2000; Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Liden et al. 2003). Employees have a relationship with the organization in which they actually work (client organization) as well as with the staffing organization (Camerman et al. 2007). The relationship with the client organization generally involves more contact time but is more temporary in nature than the relationship with the staffing agency (Camerman et al. 2007). A relationship also exists between the client and the staffing organizations which employees can enhance; for example, those who work hard on the client's behalf positively represent the staffing organization (Connelly et al. 2007; Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Liden et al. 2003).

Liden et al. (2003) pointed out that contingent workers receive treatment from both the client and the staffing organizations and thus would form perceptions of organizational support from both. Supporting this notion, scholars have found evidence that contingent workers form POS

regarding their staffing organization (Camerman et al. 2007), client organization (Bishop et al. 2002; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006, Liden et al. 2003), or both (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006). As depicted in Fig. 3, an implication for OST, therefore, is that nontraditional workers would form perceptions of organizational support from more than one source.

Antecedents of POS

By having two relationships and thus two sources of POS, contingent workers may have different needs and expectations regarding their relationships with the staffing and the client organizations (Liden et al. 2003). Thus, an implication of contingent work for OST may be differences in antecedents of POS across the two types of organizations. As shown in Fig. 3, fairness has been the main antecedent of POS studied so far with contingent workers. Liden et al. (2003) found positive relationships between procedural justice from the staffing agency and staffing agency POS and between procedural justice from the client organization and the client organization POS. Liden et al., however, noted that procedural justice is slightly different across the two types of firms. The client organization provides the supervisor, resources and information needed to do one's job, and the schedule and job assignments, thus procedural justice would be based on the fairness of such practices (Liden et al. 2003). The staffing agency

determines pay procedures and the procedures for assigning employees to organizations, thus procedural justice from the staffing organization would be based on the fairness of such practices (Liden et al. 2003). Additionally, Camerman et al. (2007) argue that quality of and access to information may be particularly important to contingent workers' perceptions of support from the staffing agency because they have infrequent contact with the staffing organization and thus may feel left out of typical communication channels. Thus informational justice from the staffing agency would contribute strongly to perceptions of that company and would help to maintain the relationship. Thus, a practical implication of linking fairness to POS for nontraditional workers is that the types of fair practices that result in POS from the client and the staffing agency may differ. Future research should also explore how the traditional antecedents of POS may differ for nontraditional workers.

Commitment and Performance Within Multiple Employer–Employee Relationships

Commitment has been an important focus of study with regard to nontraditional work relationships, perhaps because such employees may experience reduced identification with the organization if they consider their involvement as fleeting or if their commitment is split between two organizations (Bishop et al. 2002; Connelly et al. 2007). Gakovic and Tetrick (2003) and Liden et al. (2003), however, note that social-exchange processes such as the norm of reciprocity are pervasive and should apply to all types of employment arrangements. Consistent with this view, a number of studies have shown POS from the staffing organization enhances commitment to the staffing agency and POS from the client organization enhances commitment to the client organization (Camerman et al. 2007; Connelly et al. 2007; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006; Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Liden et al. 2003).

Perhaps an even more important implication of contingent work for OST is that POS from either organization may spillover to affect commitment to the other organization. Connelly et al. (2007) found POS from the client organization predicted affective commitment to the client organization as well as affective commitment to the staffing agency, suggesting that contingent workers may evaluate their staffing agencies on the basis of treatment from their client organization. This idea is consistent with Liden et al. (2003), who noted that the staffing agency is responsible for placing contingent workers in client organizations; therefore, employees may blame them if the client organization treats them poorly. Thus, POS from the client organization may be important for maintaining

employee commitment to both the client and the staffing organizations.

Similarly, POS from the staffing organization may affect commitment and behavior at the client organization. For example, Buch et al. (2010) found that POS from the staffing agency moderated the relationship between development of contract workers and their performance. Investing in developing contract workers only resulted in higher performance for those workers who had high POS from their staffing agency, thus the POS from the staffing agency spilled over to affect what occurred on the client job site. Another example is that contingent workers who are committed to the staffing agency would want client organizations to view the staffing agency in a positive light. This is a way to repay support from the agency and to help ensure that the client organization will want to continue the relationship with that staffing organization (Connelly et al. 2007; Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006; Liden et al. 2003). Employees who perform well at the client organization make the staffing organization appear favorably. Coyle-Shapiro et al. note that this is especially true for boundary spanners who interact with customers. Their actions represent the client organization because they are the contact through which customers interact with the client organization. Therefore, by providing good work performance or citizenship behaviors in the client organization, a worker simultaneously fulfills obligations to both “employers” (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2006). Similarly, contingent workers may engage in more citizenship behaviors at the job site if their hope is to get picked up as a full-time worker at the client organization. POS at the client organization may play a role. Some preliminary evidence of this comes from Webster and Adams (2010) who found that POS related to citizenship behaviors for part-time workers who wanted to become full-time workers. They would engage in citizenship behaviors when working in organizations with high POS with the hope that the supportive organization would notice their efforts and their work status would change to full-time, but less so in organizations with low POS because they did not believe the organization would change their work status.

Summary of Nontraditional Work Relationship Advancements to Organizational Support Theory

Recent POS research illustrates that basic social-exchange processes inherent in OST are relevant to nontraditional work arrangements. There are, however, several new implications of nontraditional relationships for OST. Nontraditional employees work within a dual-employment situation, forming POS about both organizations, which can express support in different ways. To date procedural justice and informational justice appear related to POS for

contingent workers, but more research on the unique and common antecedents of POS from each organization is needed. Another interesting implication for OST is that POS from one source may spill over to influence commitment to the other organization as well as the organization providing the support.

International or Cross-Cultural Studies

As noted by Gelfand et al. (2006), considering cross-cultural and international issues is crucial within the organizational sciences to keep pace with the globalization of organizations. It appears that research on OST has followed the globalization trend. Since 2000, 88 studies using the SPOS measure have focused on international research questions, cross-cultural issues, or studied non-U.S. samples in their investigations of POS. Some studies corroborated prior findings within different cultures (e.g., Lee and Peccei 2007); others incorporated society-level variables within an international sample (e.g., Farh et al. 2007).

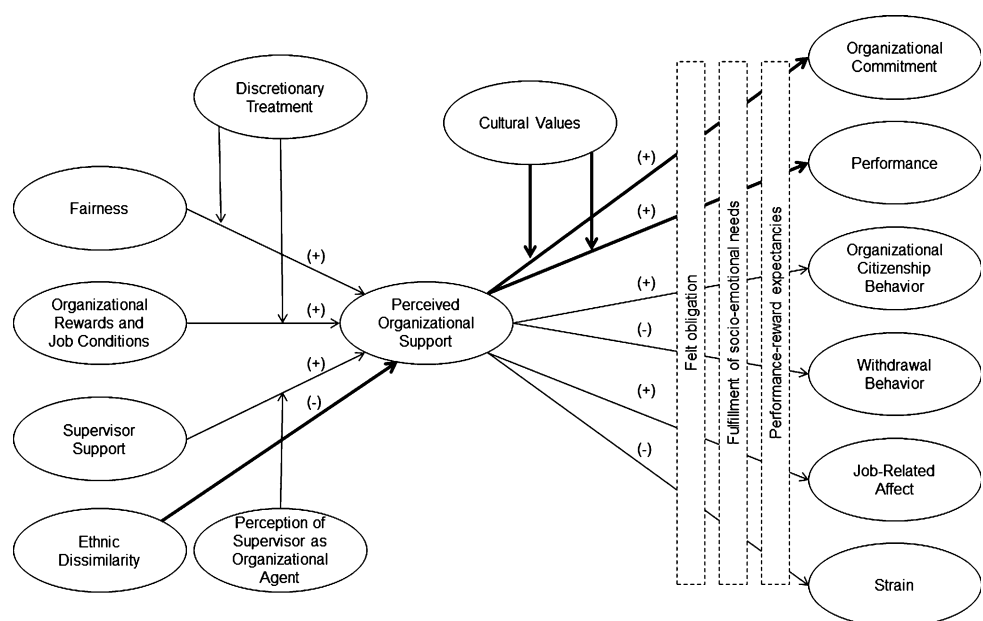
Given the implicit assumption within OST that the norm of reciprocity is universal—i.e., perceived support will engender a felt obligation to reciprocate positively regardless of cultural differences—it is highly important to examine POS outside of the United States, where the vast majority of research has been conducted to date. The prevalence of POS as a construct seems to extend beyond North America, and the cross-cultural studies discussed here appear to support its theoretical nomological framework and to suggest new relevant variables and potential boundary conditions for OST (see Fig. 4).

POS and Affective Commitment in Non-U.S. Samples

One of the most commonly reported outcomes of POS is increased affective commitment (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002); this finding appears to hold net of cultural differences. For example, studies have replicated the POS-affective commitment relationship in diverse samples including Canadian employees (Aubé et al. 2007; Lapalme et al. 2009; Quenneville et al. 2010) and military service members (Dobrevva-Martinova et al. 2002), temporary workers in Belgium (Camerman et al. 2007), Korean employees (e.g., Lee and Peccei 2007; Yoon and Thye 2002), contracting-organization employees in the United Kingdom (Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006), attorneys in Hong Kong (Loi et al. 2006), university faculty members (Van Knippenberg and Sleebos 2006) in the Netherlands, employees in China (e.g., Chen et al. 2005; Hui et al. 2004), employees in Taiwan (Chiu et al. 2005), pharmaceutical sales representatives in India (Moideenkutty et al. 2001), Australian hospital workers (Ferres et al. 2005), and alumni from a Belgian University (Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe 2003). In all these studies (and others with similar findings, see Table 1), the relationship between POS and affective commitment to the organization was strong and positive, suggesting that the norm of reciprocity and the influence of POS on employees' organizational commitment generalize globally.

Furthermore, similar findings regarding POS in non-Western countries such as Korea (Lee and Peccei 2007; Yoon and Thye 2002), Taiwan (Lin 2006; Wang 2009a, b), China (e.g., Chen et al. 2005), India (Darolia et al. (2010), Malaysia (Feng and Angeline 2010), and Nigeria (Ladebo

Fig. 4 Model represents relationships among constructs within organizational support theory. *Bold lines* represent relationships that have been supported in cross-cultural or samples outside of the United States, *dotted lines* represent relationships that have not yet been tested outside of the United States



2009) are of particular interest to multinational corporations given current globalization trends. If OST holds in non-Western countries as these findings appear to show, organizations within China, for instance, may be able to expect POS to bolster employees' affective commitment. More research is necessary, however, as different cultures may perceive demonstrations of support differently. For example, some cultures may perceive group rewards and supervisor–employee interactions differently in terms of what constitutes support. Therefore, although research suggests that POS has a relationship with affective commitment largely irrespective of culture, the antecedents of POS within those cultures may vary and future research could investigate such differences.

POS, Attitudes, and Behavior in Non-U.S. Samples

Rhoades and Eisenberger's review (2002) demonstrated POS's positive relationship with desirable employee behaviors, including in-role and extra-role performances. Recent cross-cultural studies suggest that workers within a wide variety of cultures also choose to reciprocate positively toward the organizations through both their affective commitment and behavioral effort. For example, research has suggested a positive relationship between POS and in-role performance, extra-role performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, or helping behaviors in samples from the United Kingdom (Mearns and Reader 2008), Iran (Asgari et al. 2008), Korea (Choi 2006), China (e.g., Chen et al. 2005; Hui et al. 2007; Hung and Wong 2007), Taiwan (Chuang and Liao 2010; Wang 2009a, b), Belgium (Vandenbergh et al. 2007), India (Darolia et al. 2010), Thailand (Bhanthumnavin 2003), and Nigeria (Ehigie and Otukoya 2005). Furthermore, Kuvaas (2008) found that POS moderates the relationship between perceptions of developmental human resources practices and individual performance among Norwegian bank employees and Humborstad et al. (2008) found that POS mediated the relationship between empowerment and service willingness among Chinese workers. For OST, these findings imply that employees from different cultures not only feel obligated to reciprocate POS through affective commitment, but also that they reciprocate POS through enhanced performance.

In addition, a number of recent international studies suggest relationships between POS and performance-related outcomes such as service-oriented role definitions (Wang 2010), knowledge sharing (Bartol et al. 2009), psychological safety (Carmeli and Zisu 2009), innovation (Pundt et al. 2010), individual entrepreneurial behavior (Zampetakis et al. 2009), and corporate entrepreneurship (Zhang and Jia 2010). For a full list of studies that have begun to study POS and various other job attitudes (e.g.,

organizational identification, Erturk 2010) see Table 1. Regarding OST, we see these studies as a first as validating many of the established relationships between POS and key outcomes (such as those listed in Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002) in non-U.S. samples. This is an important step in the development of OST. We also see the burgeoning research involving POS outside of the United States as an important signal to researchers regarding internationalization of management and organizational psychology research in general.

POS and Cultural Differences

A small-yet-emerging area of research that has advanced OST involves POS and cultural differences (see Fig. 4). For example, Farh et al. (2007) examined two such constructs—Chinese traditionality and power distance—as potential moderators of the relationship between POS and its outcomes. Their findings suggest that the POS–outcome relationships were stronger for employees with low scores regarding traditional values or power distance than for those scoring higher on either attribute. Thus, although many studies have shown positive relationships between POS and affective commitment across cultures, differences in cultural values may affect the strength of those relationships. These findings are important and relevant given current trends in globalization and multinational corporations expanding into cultures with values that potentially differ from those of the corporation's parent country. Furthermore, workers in newly globalized organizations may find themselves at odds with values held by the organization. Regarding POS, however, Erdogan et al. (2004) found that high levels of POS buffer the consequences of work-value incongruence. Therefore, organizations that are expanding into new cultural venues would likely benefit by supporting their employees.

Interestingly, therefore, the research discussed above suggests both that culture may moderate the relationship between POS and its outcomes and that POS may moderate the relationship between variables related to culture (e.g., work-value incongruence) and their consequences. The theoretical explanation for the former is that cultural norms may shape the manner in which employees reciprocate POS. Regarding the latter, the theoretical explanation is that when employees face discrepant cultural values, consistent support from the organization can provide them with some measure of stability, ameliorating negative outcomes of cultural discrepancies.

Given current trends toward globalization, the demographic homogeneity of many organizations may decrease. With regard to POS, findings reported by Liao et al. (2004) are particularly interesting, as they found that ethnic dissimilarity negatively predicted both POS and

organizational commitment. As the study authors argue, it appears that ethnically dissimilar employees and supervisors may see themselves as disparate in terms of social identity, leading to less productive communication and relationships between employees and organizational agents. Such relationships, then, would be likely tied to lower levels of POS. Thus, supervisors within organizations that have culturally heterogeneous labor forces may need to expend additional effort to ensure employees feel supported. Future research could investigate how the antecedents of POS may differ based upon an organization's demographic composition.

Summary of International and Cross-Cultural Advancements to Organizational Support Theory

As depicted in Fig. 4, a number of cross-cultural studies support OST's postulations regarding the relationships between POS and both organizational commitment and performance. A smaller subset of studies regarding cultural values provide initial evidence of relevant moderators of the relationships between POS and its outcomes, and ethnic dissimilarities may lead to lower POS. Future research should explore reasons for this latter finding as organizations continue to diversify their workforces in the quest for innovation and competitive advantage. Numerous other relationships within OST remain untested in non-Western cultures, most noticeably within the realm of antecedents of POS. We find this area of research to be a rich source for future POS research.

Multilevel Perceived Organizational Support

Multilevel modeling has been experiencing rapid growth as a tool to address the inherently nested nature of organizational issues and research questions (Kozlowski and Klein 2000). The potential for examination of multilevel issues leaves open the possibility of new insights for OST. POS researchers are beginning to use multilevel modeling to analyze multilevel variables among superior–subordinate dyads, work teams, departments, and other nested types of data within organizations (Choi 2006; Erdogan and Enders 2007; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006; Tangirala et al. 2007; Vandenberghe et al. 2007). Also, multilevel modeling will allow for the possibility of assessing group level and organization level variables that may affect POS, and the exploration of whether POS can be conceived of at the group and organization level (collective perceptions of support) that would vary across multiple organizations. Figure 5 portrays the enhancements to the basic OST model depicted in Fig. 1 based on multilevel findings to date.

Recent POS research using multilevel modeling has primarily begun to extend OST by enhancing our understanding of why supervisors are supportive to subordinates, especially the role that high POS experienced by those in leadership roles plays in supporting their subordinates. Most prior studies on POS had concentrated on employees who are not responsible for managing or supervising others. Multilevel work has allowed researchers to explore the possibility that supervisors' attitudes toward the organization and their quality of relationship with those higher in the organization may trickle down to affect attitudes and performance of the subordinates below them (see Fig. 5). Although previous studies of POS have included supervisors, the use of multilevel modeling allows researchers to assess the influence of cross-level relationships (e.g., supervisor-level variables on subordinate-level variables) as well as relationships between employees at the same level (e.g., subordinate-level variables).

Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) were the first to use such an approach in the POS literature. They considered the unique position of supervisors as both recipients of support from above and providers of support to those below them and found support for the notion that supervisors' own POS may lead to greater support shown to subordinates, resulting in higher POS, in-role and extra-role performances of subordinates. The theoretical implication of this finding is that supervisors may use supportive treatment of their subordinates as a means of reciprocating favorable treatment from the organization. Erdogan and Enders (2007) argued that supervisors with high POS would have more resources to exchange with subordinates, thus POS of supervisors may play a large role in helping supervisors be able to provide the kind of support they desire. Erdogan and Enders found that the positive relationship between leader and member exchange (LMX) and job satisfaction was stronger when supervisors had high POS. Moreover, LMX related to performance only when supervisors had high POS. They noted that benefits of supervisor POS seem to extend primarily to those subordinates who are in good favor with the supervisor (those who have high LMX). Similarly, Tangirala et al. (2007) found that LMX has a stronger positive effect on employees' attitudes toward the organization when the supervisors' relationship with his or her boss is strong (which they call leader–leader exchange).

Summary of How Multilevel POS Research Has Contributed to Organizational Support Theory

The use of multilevel modeling has added to OST by allowing the examination of potential influences of supervisor's own attitudes and experiences at work on the support provided to subordinates and subordinates' attitudes

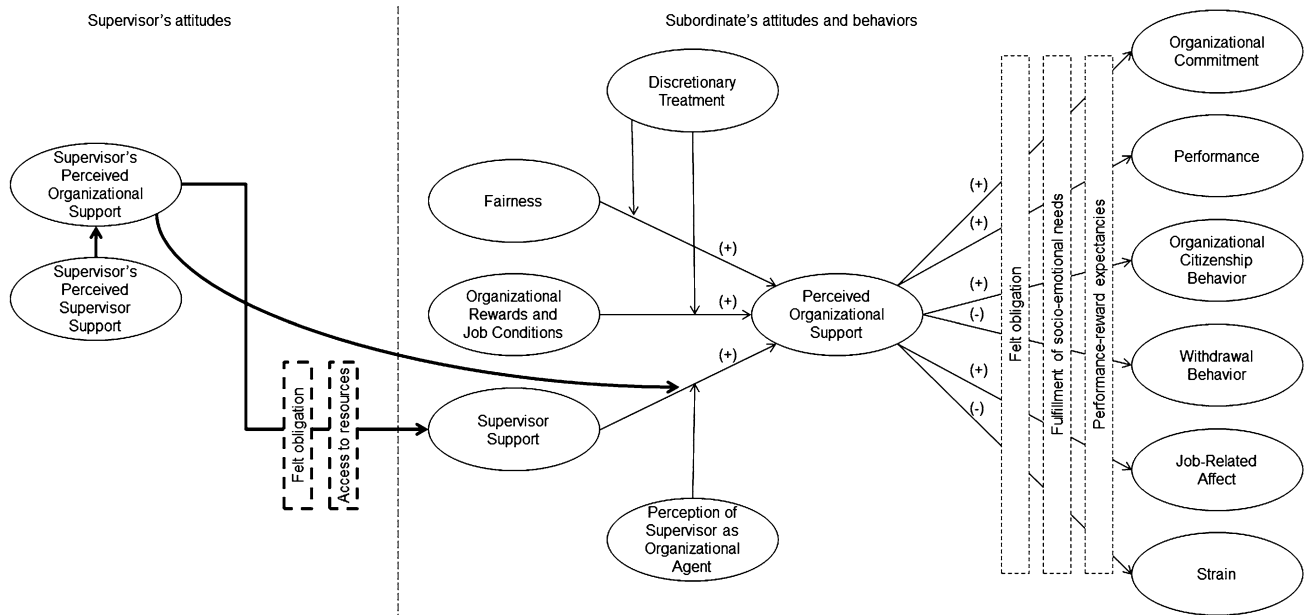


Fig. 5 Model represents multilevel relationships as proposed extensions of organizational support theory. *Bold lines* represent newly tested relationships between constructs

and behaviors (see Fig. 5). The findings to date suggest that supervisors who feel supported by the organization reciprocate with more supportive treatment for subordinates. The mechanisms through which this may occur include a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate good treatment by treating subordinates well, or increased access to resources such as information, facilitating the supervisor’s ability to inform subordinates. These mechanisms have yet to be empirically tested (see Fig. 5).

Discussion

In closing, our theoretical analysis showing how recent research on POS can be integrated into OST is intended to help advance OST and to focus future research. We discussed several themes in the recent POS literature and how they contribute to and have the potential to extend OST. We believe that meeting the demands of a global economy has resulted in several themes in the POS literature that reflect the twenty-first century world of work, including (a) how stress and support may affect employee well-being, (b) increased the use of nontraditional workers (e.g., temporary and contract workers), and (c) the importance of understanding work relationships across the globe. Additionally, the increased availability and use of multilevel modeling in recent years has helped advance OST by considering how POS at one level of the organization may affect those below. Building on the basic OST framework in Fig. 1, we also depicted how the themes we discussed extend OST visually in Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Employee Well-Being: Theoretical and Practical Implications and Future Research

The increased competition that organizations face due to technology and globalization could have implications for employee well-being if workers subsequently experience increased stress. Therefore, from a practical standpoint for organizations, focusing on the implications of POS for employee well-being may be an increasingly important undertaking. In terms of implications for OST, theoretically, POS serves both a socio-emotional need-fulfilling role and results in a felt obligation to reciprocate. We argue that the socio-emotional need-fulfilling role of POS may be more important for enhancing employee well-being and buffering the potential negative effects of employee stressors whereas the felt obligation resulting from POS may be more important for such outcomes as performance and citizenship behaviors that are beneficial to the organization. We also acknowledge that having one’s needs met could also enhance one’s obligation to reciprocate. Further, we suggest that choice of coping strategy may be included in OST as an additional mechanism that might mediate the relationship between POS and well-being outcomes due to the instrumental and informational support afforded by POS which could aid coping. Research is needed to explicitly study these ideas with possible subsequent revision of OST. The main practical implication of these ideas is that

Also, clarification is needed to further explain precisely how POS influences well-being, either as a main effect or as a buffering effect. Future research should attempt to

ascertain whether these views are compatible, and the conditions under which they hold. In the realm of occupational safety, one of the main implications for OST of our findings is that safety climate or other safety cues such as goals or incentives for safety may help to channel reciprocation toward safety in response to high POS. OST considers the felt obligation resulting from POS to be a generalized obligation but cues from the environment, such as the notion that safety is valued, may help channel the obligation in ways that benefit the organization and employee. The practical implications of this idea are also clear. POS, coupled with cues in the environment regarding safety could be used to reduce the number of accidents and costs to organizations when such events occur.

Finally, work-life practices may be particularly good at enhancing POS because such practices are likely to be viewed as offered at the discretion of the organization. Consistent with OST, such discretionary treatment would enhance POS more than treatment that is viewed as standard or contractual (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Thus, practically, employers might advertise work-life practices when attracting employees. Research suggests work-schedule flexibility and dependent care assistance may influence anticipated organizational support, which, in turn, influenced job-pursuit intentions (Casper and Buffardi 2004). Therefore, demonstrations of high POS may be an important facet when recruiting talented job candidates.

Nontraditional Work Relationships: Theoretical and Practical Implications and Future Research

Recent research on OST as relevant to nontraditional work relationships aids our understanding of the changing employment landscape which includes more contingent workers. This research has implications for OST by considering how relationships with both a staffing agency and a client organization may result in multiple sources of POS that may affect the commitment and performance of contingent workers. An interesting next step may be to determine the extent to which both forms of POS are needed to maintain commitment for the duration of the assignment.

Another implication for OST is that contingent workers can simultaneously repay their obligation to their staffing agency and their client organization with high performance at the client organization. Satisfy their felt obligation to two parties at once is new to OST. It works because effort at the client organization by the contingent worker benefits the staffing agency's image and thus facilitate a good relationship with the client organization.

The main practical implication of the nontraditional relationship research on POS is that to successfully compete in the global economy, organizations must exhibit flexibility. One way to achieve flexibility is to engage employees

through a variety of work relationships including contingent staffing, thus it is good for employers to know that POS from both the staffing agency and the organization in which the contingent worker is placed can result in higher commitment and performance, and that such POS can be developed even though workers are temporary. Future research in this area could help explore how POS develops and the importance of early socialization experiences for both traditional and nontraditional workers, as well as including expatriate workers into subsequent studies.

For example, future research could investigate the development of POS during job-candidate recruitment and early socialization experiences. During the recruitment phase, job seekers may consider the amount of anticipated organizational support should they join the organization alongside other recruitment incentives such as salary, health insurance, and other fringe benefits. What job seekers consider important in an organization they will be with temporarily or in a foreign country may differ from what they would consider important to selecting a supportive organization if they anticipate a long-term assignment. Organizational newcomers, in addition, employ a number of tactics as they attempt to make sense of their role within a new organization (Van Maanen and Schein 1979; Ashforth and Saks 1996). Newcomers may use socialization tactics as ways to learn about how much the organization cares about its employees' well-being and values their contributions.

Future research should explore whether nontraditional workers are exposed to socialization experiences to the same degree as traditional workers. Perceptions of support may start very early in workers' tenure and may affect their behavior during the time they are employed. As such, an additional area for future research includes investigating how POS develops among newcomers while considering individual differences such as social-identity consciousness (Highhouse et al. 2007), which may influence newcomers' impressions of the organization and their reactions to those impressions. Continued work regarding how the antecedents and outcomes of multiple sources of POS might differ across relationships is especially needed, given that fairness is the only antecedent to date that has been explored with regard to nontraditional workers.

International POS Research: Theoretical and Practical Implications and Future Research

The main theoretical implication of research on POS in international contexts is that the assumptions of OST tested so far (as indicated in Fig. 4) in other cultures have held. Particularly, much of the research has shown that POS appears to be reciprocated with greater affective commitment and greater performance in a variety of cultures. A

practical implication of this research is that it has begun to demonstrate that OST is useful to organizations within a wide variety of cultural contexts and can help organizations understand how to compete by successfully managing an increasingly global workforce. Recent international research has also begun to expand and test the limits of OST by examining some boundary conditions for the benefits of POS. For example, Farh et al. (2007) found that the degree to which POS resulted in affective commitment and performance depended on cultural values of power distance and Chinese traditionalism such that those with high Chinese cultural values had high performance and commitment regardless of POS. In terms of theoretical development, research on boundary conditions such as the Farh et al. study would expand OST in ways that provide guidance for managers dealing with employees whose values that might affect how they respond to POS in ways different than U.S. workers.

As depicted in Fig. 4, however, to date only a few of the relationships explicated in OST have been tested internationally. Future research on POS should continue to explore whether the relationships hold across cultures, whether they differ in strength, whether new antecedents or outcomes are relevant, and why. Particularly, to advance OST, research is needed to test the degree to which the main groups of antecedents of POS according to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) which include fairness, supervisor support, and rewards and job conditions, can enhance POS across cultures. For example, it may be that fairness is important to everyone but how fairness is expressed and expectations regarding fairness may differ across cultures. Similarly, what constitutes a supportive supervisor in one context (organizational or cultural) may not hold in other contexts.

Multilevel Perceived Organizational Support: Theoretical and Practical Implications and Future Research

The recent use of multilevel modeling to assess influences and outcomes of POS from other sources (supervisors, team members, etc.) has begun to extend OST by linking phenomena that occur at higher levels in the organization (e.g., supervisor, work group) to individual attitudes and behavior. For future research, multilevel modeling shows promise as a tool for enhancing OST by exploring interdisciplinary ideas that cross macro- and micro-organizational foci. For example, multilevel modeling could help researchers explore how structural characteristics of organizations such as their size, or centralization of decision making might trickle down to influence POS and subsequent employee behavior. Given that POS is a meso-level variable in that it represents workers' view of the

organization but can connect higher-level variables such as organizational structure to individual variables such as performance, POS appears to be a construct that lends itself well to interdisciplinary research.

The main theoretical implication of the POS multilevel studies to date for OST is that supervisors who have a favorable exchange relationship with those above them in the organization may be in a better position to provide good treatment of subordinates in part because provision of support to those below is a way for supervisors to reciprocate POS. Also, supervisors who have a good relationship with those above them will likely have more resources (e.g., access to information) to exchange with subordinates. These studies have provided initial insight regarding the trickle-down effects of supervisors' attitudes, but more work is needed to determine the mechanisms through which supervisor POS leads to better subordinate outcomes.

Future research could also extend multilevel research on POS to relationships other than supervisor–subordinate relationships. Some recent studies have begun to do this, examining group or unit-level variables (such as group trust, Choi 2006; friendship network POS, Zagenczyk et al. 2010; or unit-level POS, Vandenberghe et al. 2007) that may affect lower level employees' POS or how POS leads individual employees to exhibit helping behaviors. The main practical implication of the multilevel research on POS to date is that supervisors attitudes toward working in their organization matter and organizations wishing to have supportive supervisors will want to pay attention to not only the POS of lower-level employees but also how supported their supervisors are feeling.

Secondary Themes

The themes discussed in this review represent the four main themes in the POS literature since the Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) review. We did, however, notice a few minor themes beginning to emerge in the POS literature, with three or more (but <10) current studies in each theme. An in-depth discussion of each of these minor themes is beyond the scope of this work; however, we list these studies according to their themes—perceived union support, POS and expatriate adjustment, person-job fit and POS, team POS, personality characteristics as relevant to POS, POS as relevant to customer service workers, and research integrating psychological contracts and POS—in Table 2. Given the nascent stage of each of these themes, it is premature in our opinion to provide any clear directions regarding OST from these few studies. For example, each of the personality studies involves a different personality variable. As another example, the studies on psychological

Table 2 Studies of perceived organizational support (POS) by secondary theme

Theoretical category	Studies	
Perceived union support	Aryee and Chay (2001) Burke and Greenglass (2001) Fuller and Hester (2001) Goeddeke and Kammeyer-Mueller (2010)	Redman and Snape (2005) Tetrick et al. (2007) Twigg et al. (2008)
POS and expatriates	Kraimer and Wayne (2004) Kraimer et al. (2001) Liu (2009) Liu and Ipe (2010)	Shaffer et al. (2001) Takeuchi et al. (2009) Wang and Takeuchi (2007)
POS and person-job fit	Ballout (2007) Dawley et al. (2010)	Farrell and Oczkowski (2009)
Trust and POS	Albrecht and Travaglione (2003) Alder et al. (2006) DeConinck (2010)	Tan and Tan (2000) Whitener (2001)
Team POS	Bishop et al. (2000, 2005)	Self et al. (2005) Shelton et al. (2010)
Personality and POS	Byrne and Hochwarter (2008) Hochwarter et al. (2006) Lilly and Virick (2006)	Suazo and Turnley (2010) Treadway et al. (2004) Watt and Hargis (2010)
POS and customer service workers	Bell and Menguc (2002) Bell et al. (2004) Piercy et al. (2006)	Susskind et al. (2003) Wang (2009b)
POS and psychological contracts	Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) Bal et al. (2010) Dulac et al. (2008)	Kiewitz et al. (2009) Suazo (2009) Tekleab et al. (2005)

Note: $N = 43$ studies

contracts and POS each integrate POS in a different way (moderator, mediator, etc. of a variety of relationships). We mention these studies as they may represent emerging themes that, by the next review, may be developed enough to be themes that can be explicated.

Limitations

Our approach was to identify the main themes present in the recent POS literature since the seminal Rhoades and Eisenberger review in 2002. By choosing to do a narrative review rather than a meta-analysis we believe we provided a more detailed and nuanced discussion of recent studies and how they have advanced OST. An updated meta-analysis would provide additional evidence regarding antecedents and outcomes of POS but would not provide the same richness with regard to discussion of the studies as relevant to OST. We recognize, however, that a limitation of this approach is that we did not provide as much quantitative data regarding the recent literature as would a meta-analysis.

Concluding Remarks

Within each of the themes discussed in our paper and beyond, many areas are ripe for continued investigation using POS to enhance theory and aid the practicing manager. A strength of POS as a focus of research is that OST serves as a strong theoretical backbone. This robust foundation allows scholars to easily test and build upon the theory if they channel their efforts in a purposeful manner that builds on previous work. We hope that our analysis of recent research and explication of its theoretical themes will serve the scholarly community as a guide, advancing OST into the twenty-first century world of work.

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