PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND OUTCOMES: A VIEW THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GROUP ENGAGEMENT MODEL, THE ROLE OF IDENTIFICATION, PRIDE AND RESPECT

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Abstract

According to the group engagement model, identity is a multidimensional concept, which incorporates not only the cognitive component of organizational identification but also the evaluative component of pride and respect (Blader & Tyler, 2009). In this study, we adopt the perspective of the group engagement model and the multidimensional conceptualization of social identity in ord/er to examine the effects of perceived organizational support (POS) and two key employee outcomes, willingness to support the organization and intent to quit. More specifically, we examine whether the three aspects of social identity (identification, pride, and respect) can explain the relationship between POS and its outcomes. By doing so, we gain insight into the unique power of these components to explain the POS-outcome relationship and we contribute to a better understanding of the outcomes of POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Trying to provide generalizable findings with high external validity, we conducted a quantitative field study including a sample of 579 employees. Our findings indicate that identification partially explains the relationship between POS and willingness to support the organization, while identification and pride are able to partially mediate the POS-intent to quit the relationship. These findings have significant practical implications providing managers useful insight into how employees interpret and respond to perceptions of support.

Keywords: POS, Identity, Intentions, Quit, Group Engagement Model

1. INTRODUCTION

Social identity theory has been integrated into organizational research and is considered an influential paradigm for understanding workplace attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It emphasizes the importance of organizational membership for employees' attitudes and behaviors. Incorporating organizational membership into employees' self-concept can

intrinsically motivate them to behave positively towards their organization, as they feel attached to the successes and failures of their organization.

Relatively recent research based on the group engagement model has conceptualized social identity as a multidimensional construct with one cognitive component (identification) and two evaluative components (pride and respect) (Blader & Tyler, 2009). The cognitive component (identification) has to do with whether employees think of themselves as group members. The evaluative components (pride and respect) refer to the value people attach to their organizational membership. More specifically, pride has to do with the evaluation of the group they belong to regarding its general worth and status, while respect is associated with how people evaluate their own standing within the group. Blader and Tyler (2009) used this multidimensional conceptualization of social identity and argue that it can explain why employees express extra-role behavior as a response to procedural justice and favorable economic outcomes.

This study employs the rationale of the group engagement model and examines whether each particular dimension of identification, pride, and respect explains the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and two key employee outcomes, namely willingness to support the organization (WTS) and intent to quit (ITQ). We aim to gain insight into the unique power of each component of social identity to mediate (above and beyond the others) the POS-outcome relationship.

POS could be defined as employees' global belief regarding their valuation of how the organization treats them (Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, & Sucharski, 2004) and has been connected with key employee attitudes and behaviors (Aldabbas, Pinnington, & Lahrech, 2021; Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2021; Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012; Côté, Lauzier, & Stinglhamber, 2021; Dominic, Victor, Nathan, & Loganathan, 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Maden-Eyiusta, Yalabik, & Nakiboglu, 2021; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Sen, Mert, & Abubakar, 2021; Tran, Thi Vinh Hien, & Baker, 2020; Turek, 2021). As it is obvious, POS "filters" many aspects of the organizational treatment and has a great predictive power regarding employees' psychological and behavioral engagement in the workplace. Furthermore, WTS and ITQ can be considered important aspects of employees' engagement. Employees who are willing to support the organization totally or partially, abandon personal interests for the sake of the collective (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999), thus showing their engagement to the company. ITQ is a strong predictor of actual turnover (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004; Mignonac & Richebé, 2013), an indicator of employees' willingness to remain at the organization and thus it can be considered an aspect of employees' engagement towards their organization.

This study extends previous research in two main ways: a) by incorporating the multidimensional conceptualization of social identity in the study of POS-outcomes relationship and b) by investigating the unique explanatory power of these components. Investigating this issue can be of great importance if considering that until now social identity has been treated as a multidimensional construct (Blader &

Tyler, 2009) and there are no studies focusing on the unique predictive or explanatory power of the particular dimensions of social identity.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and the hypotheses. Section 3 presents the methodological choices of this paper including a quantitative field study. Section 4 focuses on the results of the study and discusses the study findings. The contribution of the paper, the limitations, and suggestions for future practice and research are in Section 5.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Perceived organizational support (POS) and outcomes

As mentioned earlier, POS has been connected with key employee attitudes and behaviors (Aldabbas et al., 2021; Arnéguy, Ohana, & Stinglhamber, 2020; Baran et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2021; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Tsachouridi & Nikandou, 2019). This study focuses on the relationship between POS and two attitudes, namely WTS and ITQ. Research findings indicate a positive association between POS and employee supportive behavior towards the organization (e.g., citizenship behavior, organizational spontaneity) (Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2021; Dominic et al., 2021; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwikel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013; Sulea et al., 2012; Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Thus, we argue that employees who feel supported will be more willing to reciprocate the support to the organization. Moreover, based on previous research findings indicating a negative association between POS and ITQ, we expect that employees who feel supported will express reduced ITQ (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Gillet, Gagné, Sauvagère, & Fouquereau, 2013; Huang et al., 2021; Mignonac & Richebé, 2013; Muse & Wadsworth, 2012; Tsachouridi, 2021). As such, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H1: POS is positively related to WTS.
H2: POS is negatively related to ITQ.

2.2. The components of social identity (identification, pride, respect) as mediators

POS-outcome relationship has traditionally been interpreted based on social exchange theory and norm of reciprocity considerations (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2014; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Byrne, Pitts, Chiaburu, & Steiner, 2011). Research findings have indicated that social identity mechanisms can also explain the POS-outcomes relationship, as organizational identification has been found to mediate such a relationship (Marique, Stinglhamber, Desmette, Caesens, & De Zanet, 2013; Ngo, Loi, Foley, Zheng, & Zhang, 2013; Shen et al., 2014). POS suggests that employees believe that their organization cares about them and that they are valued organizational members. Thus, gradually their organizational membership becomes part of their own self-concept. Employees feel respected as members of the collective and express high levels of organizational identification (Edwards, 2009; Ertürk, 2010; Gibney, Zagenczyk, Fuller, Hester, & Caner, 2011).

In addition to identification, POS will increase employees' pride and respect. POS is an indicator of an organization's commitment to its people and indicates whether the organization cares about employees' welfare (Eisenberger et al., 2004). Employees who perceive organizational support are expected to feel proud of their organization, as they think that the organization goes beyond the economic exchange and offers them something more than the traditional expected benefits. Research findings support our argument by indicating that nontraditional benefits (as opposed to traditional financial benefits) and social exchanges (as opposed to economic exchanges) are more highly valued by employees and spark better reactions on their part (Muse & Wadsworth, 2012; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006). Furthermore, POS can affect whether employees will feel respected. POS can contribute to employees' well-being, building psychological resources, and thriving (Bilgetürk & Baykal, 2021; Gillet, Fouquereau, Forest, Brunault, & Colombat, 2012; Kleine, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019) and as such, it can make them feel respected within organizational settings. As such, we suggest that:

H3: POS is positively related to the identification.

H4: POS is positively related to pride.

H5: POS is positively related to respect.

Research findings indicate that employees who feel identified are more committed to the organization and express higher organizational citizenship behaviors and work performance, as well as lower turnover intentions and counterproductive work behaviors (De Clercq, Kundi, Sardar, & Shahid, 2021; Cole & Bruch, 2006; Marique et al., 2013; Ngo et al., 2013; Riketta, 2005; Shen et al., 2014). Furthermore, research has indicated that conceptualizing social identity through identification, pride, and respect is positively associated with employee extra-role behaviors (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016).

Integrating all the above arguments concerning a) the positive relationship between POS and social identity (identification, pride, and respect), b) the relationship between POS and employee reactions, as well as c) the association between social identity with employee attitudes and behaviors, we propose that identification, pride, and respect can partially mediate the proposed relationship between POS and its outcomes (WTS and ITQ). The group engagement model suggesting that social identity can explain the effects of various organizational factors on employee engagement supports our argument. We propose partial instead of full mediation due to the fact that there is already well-established evidence that other mechanisms (e.g., social exchange theory, well-being) explain in part the POS-outcome relationship (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Gillet et al., 2013; Sulea et al., 2012). As such, we suggest that:

H6: Identification partially mediates the relationship between POS and WTS.

H7: Pride partially mediates the relationship between POS and WTS.

H8: Respect partially mediates the relationship between POS and WTS.

H9: Identification partially mediates the relationship between POS and ITQ.

*H10: Pride partially mediates the relationship between POS and ITQ.*

H11: Respect partially mediates the relationship between POS and ITQ.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants and procedure

To test our hypotheses and examine our research model (Figure 1), we conducted a quantitative cross-sectional field study. Field studies provide more generalizable findings with higher external validity, in contrast to other methodological choices, such as experimental and qualitative research (Christensen, 2007; Crano & Brewer, 2002). Our sample consisted of 579 employees working in various organizations in Greece. We gained access to our sample through undergraduate students of our University. Two hundred and thirteen (213) students provided 797 names and contact details of employees to participate in our survey. After contacting these employees, 587 of them were willing to participate (participation rate of about 74%). Five hundred and seventy-nine (579) questionnaires of the 587 returned questionnaires were usable. This sample size was appropriate for our analyses, given that we exceeded the number of 200 cases, which is the threshold for multivariate analyses (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Two hundred and eighty-nine (289) (49.9%) of the participants were men, 285 (49.2%) were women and 5 (0.9%) did not specify their gender. Participants had a mean age of 40.39 years ($SD = 10.93$), a mean total work experience of 16.33 years ($SD = 10.40$), and a mean organizational tenure of 10.85 ($SD = 9.47$). Seventy-two (72) of our participants (12.4%) work in upper management positions, 167 (28.8%) work as managers at the middle organizational level, 66 (11.4%) work as line managers, 272 (47%) work in non-managerial positions, and 2 (0.3%) did not specify their position.

Figure 1. Conceptual model
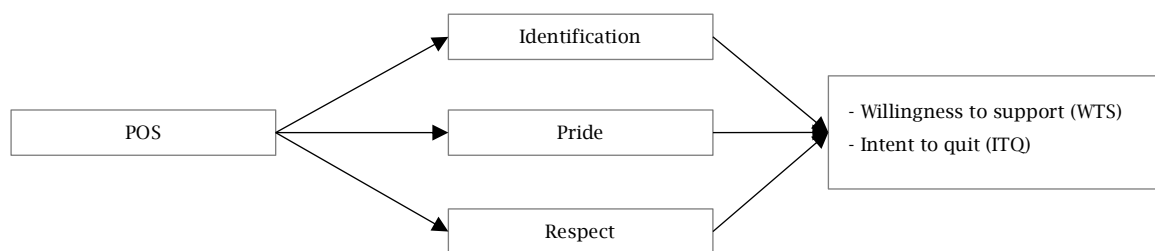
3.2. Measures

Perceived organizational support (*POS*): POS was measured with five items from the scale of Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). The sample item is: *"The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor"* (Cronbach's α = 0.83).

Identification: We measured identification with five items adapted from the scale of Mael and Ashforth (1992). The sample item is: *"When somebody criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult"* (Cronbach's α = 0.80).

Pride: Pride was measured with four items used by Blader and Tyler (2009). The sample item is: *"I am proud to tell others where I work"* (Cronbach's α = 0.83).

Respect: Respect was measured with four items adapted from the scale of Blader and Tyler (2009).

The sample item is: *"The organization thinks it would be difficult to replace me"* (Cronbach's α = 0.83).

Willingness to support the organization (*WTS*): We used four items adapted from the scale used by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) in order to measure employees' willingness to reciprocate the treatment received by a self-sacrificial leader. The sample item is: *"If asked to do something to help the company, I would do this even if it might involve extra responsibility"* (Cronbach's α = 0.81).

Intent to quit (*ITQ*): A three-item scale by Michaels and Spector (1982) indicating how often respondents think to quit, how much they like to quit, and how likely it is to quit within the next year, was used (Cronbach's α = 0.81).

For all the above measures a five-point scale was used.

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables of our model

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. POS	3.33	0.76	(0.83)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Identification	3.62	0.76	0.42**	(0.80)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Pride	3.6	0.73	0.47**	0.53**	(0.83)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Respect	3.34	0.78	0.61**	0.37**	0.39**	(0.83)	–	–	–	–	–	–
5. WTS	3.37	0.79	0.37**	0.44**	0.33**	0.36**	(0.81)	–	–	–	–	–
6. ITQ	1.95	0.92	-0.40**	-0.41**	-0.41**	-0.34**	-0.30**	(0.81)	–	–	–	–
7. Gender	–	–	-0.02	-0.03	-0.07	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	–	–	–	–
8. Age	40.39	10.93	-0.10*	0.15**	0.06	0.00	0.12**	-0.16**	-0.09*	–	–	–
9. Hierarchical position	–	–	-0.08	-0.17**	-0.12**	-0.21**	-0.24**	0.15**	0.16**	-0.36**	–	–
10. Total work experience	16.33	10.40	-0.11*	0.13*	0.02	0.00	0.13**	-0.13**	-0.11**	0.84**	-0.33**	–
11. Tenure in the company	10.85	9.47	-0.02	0.18**	0.09*	0.00	0.08	-0.18**	-0.07	0.64**	-0.22**	0.72**

*Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, values in parentheses represent Cronbach's α. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Hierarchical position: 1 = upper management, 2 = middle management, 3 = lower management, 4 = non-management.*

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL and maximum likelihood estimation. Our model had acceptable fit (Chi-square = 1186.05, df = 260, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.95, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.95, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.96, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.057, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.078). Moreover, each construct has acceptable convergent and discriminant validity, given that the average variance extracted for each construct surpassed 0.5 and was larger than the squared correlation between the construct and any others. The fit of one factor measurement model (Harman's single factor test) was unacceptable (Chi-square = 5878.41, df = 275, NFI = 0.81, NNFI = 0.80, CFI = 0.82, IFI = 0.82, RMSEA = 0.19, SRMR = 0.11). This alleviates concerns regarding common method variance.

4. RESULTS

We tested our hypotheses using the bootstrapping technique proposed by Hayes (2013). We employed model 4 of process macro to test our multiple-mediators model. *POS* was the independent variable in our analyses. *WTS* and *ITQ* were the dependent variables. Identification, pride, and respect were the mediators. Gender, age, hierarchical position, total work experience, and organizational tenure were used as control variables.

POS and *WTS* relationship: *POS* has a positive significant association with *WTS* (b = 0.39, t = 9.73, $p < 0.001$) (*H1* is supported) (Table 2). Furthermore, *POS* has a significant positive relationship with all mediators (identification: b = 0.43, t = 11.16, $p < 0.001$; pride: b = 0.45, t = 12.36, $p < 0.001$; respect: b = 0.62, t = 18.08, $p < 0.001$) (*H3, H4,* and *H5* are supported). Furthermore, identification and respect are positively related to *WTS*, while pride is not significantly related (identification: b = 0.30, t = 6.56, $p < 0.001$; pride: b = 0.06, t = 1.21, $p > 0.10$; respect: b = 0.11, t = 2.31, $p < 0.05$). After controlling for mediators, the magnitude of the relationship between *POS* and *WTS* decreased but remained statistically significant, indicating partial mediation (b = 0.17, t = 3.31, $p < 0.01$). This total indirect effect is statistically significant as 99% bias-corrected confidence intervals do not include zero. An examination of the specific indirect effect of each mediator indicates that only identification contributes to the indirect effect. Pride and respect fail to contribute to this indirect effect above and beyond identification as the confidence intervals of their specific indirect effects include zero (Table 2). Thus, *H6* is supported; *H7* and *H8* failed to receive support.

Table 2. Mediator analysis with bootstrap resampling (based on 5000 bootstrap resamples)

Variable	WTS		ITQ	
	Beta coefficient (unstandardized)	T-value	Beta coefficient (unstandardized)	T-value
POS on dependent	0.39***	9.73	-0.49***	-10.53
POS on identification	0.43***	11.16	0.42***	11.13
POS on pride	0.45***	12.36	0.45***	12.33
POS on respect	0.62***	18.08	0.62***	18.05
Identification on dependent	0.30***	6.56	-0.19***	-3.62
Pride on dependent	0.06	1.21	-0.23***	-4.13
Respect on dependent	0.11*	2.31	-0.10	-1.72
POS on dependent controlling for mediators	0.17**	3.31	-0.24***	-4.07
Total indirect effect	0.22		-0.25	
Lower 99% CI	0.11		-0.37	
Upper 99% CI	0.33		-0.13	
Indirect effect through identification only	0.13		-0.08	
Lower 99% CI	0.07		-0.16	
Upper 99% CI	0.19		-0.03	
Indirect effect through pride only	0.03		-0.10	
Lower 99% CI	-0.04		-0.20	
Upper 99% CI	0.09		-0.03	
Indirect effect through respect only	0.07		-0.06	
Lower 99% CI	-0.03		-0.16	
Upper 99% CI	0.16		0.03	

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. CI is for confidence intervals.

POS and *ITQ* relationship: *POS* has a significant negative association with *ITQ* (b = -0.49, t = -10.53, $p < 0.001$) (*H2* is supported) (Table 2). Furthermore, *POS* is positively related to all mediators (Table 2). Identification and pride have a significant negative relationship with *ITQ*, while respect is not significantly related with the dependent variable (identification: b = -0.19, t = -3.62, $p < 0.001$; pride: b = -0.23, t = -4.13, $p < 0.001$; respect: b = -0.10, t = -1.72, $p > 0.05$). After controlling for mediators, the effect of *POS* on *ITQ* decreased but remained statistically significant indicating partial mediation (b = -0.24, t = -4.07, $p < 0.001$). This indirect effect is statistically significant as 99% bias-corrected confidence intervals do not include zero. An examination of the specific indirect effect indicates that identification and pride contribute to this indirect effect. Respect fails to contribute to this indirect effect above and beyond the other two mediators (Table 2). Thus, *H9* and *H10* are supported; *H11* failed to receive support.

5. CONCLUSION

The group engagement model proposes that social identity can explain employees' levels of engagement as a consequence of their organizational treatment (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Our study examined the POS-outcomes relationship through the perspective of the group engagement model and generally indicated the importance of social identity for explaining the effects of POS on employee outcomes, namely WTS and ITQ. At the same time, our study focused on the unique explanatory power of the dimensions of social identity theory (identification, pride, respect) and provided a more detailed view of how employees who perceive their organization as supportive shape their organizational identity and form their subsequent reactions. Until now research has mainly viewed social identity as a whole and few of them have paid separate attention to the unique explanatory power of its components (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016). Our contribution lies in the fact that these components have a differential ability to explain the POS-outcome

relationship. More specifically, identification explains the relationship between POS and WTS, while pride and respect fail to do so. Furthermore, identification and pride mediate the POS–ITQ relationship, while respect cannot do so.

The above findings indicate the importance of identification for explaining the employees' intention to support the organization. Probably, employees' decision to go beyond self-interested benefit and make personal sacrifices for the sake of the organization seems to be the result of "perceived oneness" and not the result of respect and pride. Despite the fact that POS seems to have a great effect on pride and respect (an evaluative aspect of social identity), these components do not seem to be able to explain why employees are more willing to express supportive behavior towards their organization. Probably, in order to express WTS, employees need to think of themselves as identified organizational members. Only then, they seem to want to support their organization considering organizational acts and actions as their own. These findings support previous research indicating that organizational identification mediates employees' beneficial behaviors expressed as a response to POS (Shen et al., 2014).

Moreover, our study indicates that both identification and pride can have a unique power in explaining why employees express lower ITQ as a consequence of POS. Probably, employees combine cognitive and evaluative components of social identity to decide whether they intend to leave the organization. POS, contributing to employees' sense of oneness and feelings of pride in the organization, makes them more willing to stay at the organization. So, employees express lower ITQ both because they feel attached to the organizational actions and they evaluate highly their organization's general worth and status.

From the above, it becomes obvious that identification and pride seem to be important components of social identity as they can explain unique variance in the examined relationships. On the contrary, respect — despite having the strongest association with POS — does not seem to be able to contribute to the mediating effect above

and beyond identification and pride. This probably means that feeling respected is not adequate to justify employees' intentions as a consequence of POS and employees need to feel integrated into the organization and proud of it in order to stay and express beneficial behaviors.

The aforementioned findings suggest that we must focus on the unique explanatory power of the three aspects of social identity, given that they seem to predict distinctively employee responses to POS. Future studies could further examine the aforementioned issue and focus on the ability of each particular component to explain other behavioral responses to POS not included in the current study (e.g., absenteeism or counterproductive work behaviors). Doing so, we could gain a better insight into the explanatory power of social identity in employees' attitudinal and behavioral responses.

Furthermore, our paper employing a cross-sectional field study, cannot claim causality. The implied directionality was based on existing theory and previous research findings and was supported by our statistical analyses. Future experimental and longitudinal designs could triangulate and extend our findings enabling us to better understand the relationships among the constructs.

In addition to its theoretical implications, our findings can provide useful practical implications by indicating the importance of social identity for employee attitudes and behavioral intentions. Given the relationships between the components of social identity and employee outcomes, managers should pay attention to whether employees think of themselves as group members and attach high value to their group membership. To enhance such a sense of belonging on the part of the employees the organizations should pay emphasis on the support they provide to employees. Organizations would greatly benefit from enhancing employees' levels of perceived support, as POS was found to transmit identity-relevant information to employees. Thus, optimizing human resource management systems and practices can be beneficial for the organizations as they will increase employees' perceptions of support. Doing so will lead to more engaged employees through the integration of organizational membership into their own identity.

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