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Linking perceived corporate environmental policies and employees eco-initiatives: The influence of perceived organizational support and psychological contract breach

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ABSTRACT

In this study we examine the linkages between perceived corporate environmental policies, organizational support, perceived psychological breach, and employees' eco-initiatives. We test (1) the indirect effect of organizational support on the relationship between perceived corporate environmental policies and eco-initiatives, and (2) the moderating effect of perceived psychological breach on the relationship between organizational support and eco-initiatives. Using a convenience sample (N = 651), our study supports our hypotheses. More precisely, there was little effect of perceived PC-breach on eco-initiatives among employees who perceived high support from their organization. However, among those who perceived low organizational support, there was a negative effect of breach on their willingness to perform eco-initiatives. In comparison with employees who feel supported by their employer, employees who are not convinced by the supportive actions of their organization are less likely to perform eco-initiatives on the job if they consider a breach to have occurred. Practical implications are discussed and suggestions for future research are proposed.

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1. Introduction

In the last ten years, the topic of environmental sustainability has attracted considerable attention. Scholars have studied determinants of consumers' pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., Kalamas, Cleveland, & Laroche, 2014), drivers of corporate environmental market responsiveness (Rivera-Camino, 2012), among other issues. Despite this growing body of research, in comparison, very little research has focused on what drives employees to engage in pro-environmental behaviors in organizational settings (Lo, Peters, & Kok, 2012). Current research reported human resource practices (Paillé, Chen, Boiral, & Jin, 2014), corporate environmental policies (Ramus & Steger, 2000), job attitudes (Temminck, Mearns, & Fruhen, 2013), leadership experiences (Robertson & Barling, 2013), environmental stressors (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006), moral obligation (Zhang, Wang, & Zhou, 2013), and environmental values (Norton, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2014) as relevant drivers leading individuals to perform eco-friendly behaviors in the workplace. Despite these previous efforts, additional research is needed to gain an understanding of employees' decisions to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors. The hypothesized relationships that need to be tested are depicted in Fig. 1.

Paillé and Mejía Morelos (2014) contend that “if employees are aware that becoming greener is an important objective of their

employer, and the employer demonstrates its interest in creating, developing and maintaining high-quality relationships in the long term, individuals might be more prone to reciprocate by performing pro-environmental behaviors on the job” (p. 126). In accordance with this proposition, the current research is based on social exchange theory (SET), which “asserts that individuals often enter into social exchanges because they perceive that the other party in the relationship has something to contribute” (Tekleab & Chiaburu, 2011, p. 461). Well established in human resource management (HRM) literature (for literature review see, among others, Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007), social exchange seems to be a theoretical framework of interest for environmental literature (Craddock, Huffman, & Henning, 2012), especially when a responsible behavior toward the environment is not designed as a required task of the job for those individuals working in non-green industries (Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Paillé & Mejía Morelos, 2014).

Therefore, by drawing on a SET framework, the aim of this investigation is to extend previous research undertaken in a sustainability context in two ways. First, we examine the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between perceived corporate environmental policies (PCEPs) and employees' eco-initiatives (ECOIs). In the relevant environmental literature, significant positive relationships have been found between PCEPs and POS (Ramus & Steger, 2000) and between POS and ECOIs (Cantor, Morrow, & Montabon, 2012). While these findings suggest an indirect effect of PCEPs on ECOIs through POS, that possible effect remains to be tested. Thus, by examining the mediating role of POS on the relationship between PCEPs and ECOIs, the present research contributes to advancing knowledge. Second, we address the moderating role of psychological contract breach (PC-breach) on the

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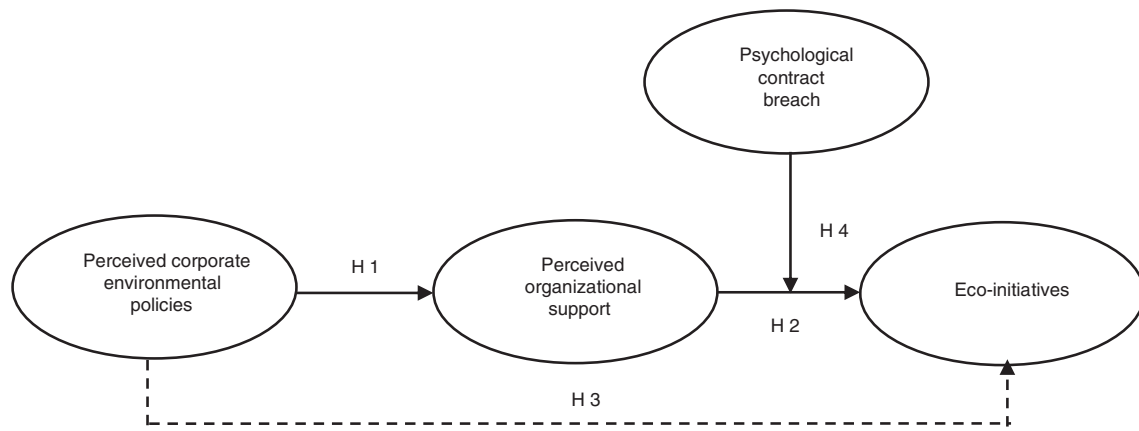


Fig. 1. Theoretical model. Solid arrows represent direct relationships; dashed arrow is used to depict indirect relationship.

relationship between POS and ECOs. Although the possible role of PC-breach has been empirically tested by Paillé and Mejía Morelos (2014) in the context of sustainability, their study showed only that PC-breach has moderated the effect of POS on job attitudes. Thus, the extent to which PC-breach interacts with POS in the prediction of eco-friendly behavior on the job remains an overlooked topic that needs to be tested. In so doing, this study adds to relevant literature by examining PC-breach as an internal barrier that may impede employees' willingness to perform ECOs. The paper is structured as follows. We first present the literature review and the research hypotheses. The research method and results are then defined. Finally, the findings are discussed in light of the literature review.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. The indirect effect of POS between PCEPs and ECOI

In this section, we propose to discuss the link between PCEPs, POS, and ECOs by shedding light on the role of the exchange process that entails reciprocity between the organization and its members in the context of environmental sustainability.

Research undertaken in sustainability contexts shows that organizational support fosters employees' willingness to adopt responsible behaviors that favor the natural environment. Support given by management is a recurring topic in the literature on environment (e.g., Cantor et al., 2012; Daily & Huang, 2001; Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Paillé, Chen, Boiral, 2013; Ramus & Steger, 2000; Temminck et al., 2013), and it appears as a key variable leading individuals to engage in pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace. While organizational support increases the employees' tendency to act on the job in favor of the natural environment, lack of organizational support impedes employees' ability to perform eco-friendly behavior (Plank, 2011). Employees may be concerned by environmental issues and convinced of the necessity to harm the environment as little as possible while on the job but may receive no organizational support to act in favor of the environment. For example, if an organization or its representatives provide(s) few or no material resources for selectively sorting waste, it may be difficult for an individual to engage in eco-friendly behaviors at work. Mac Donald (2011) reported findings that support this possibility and concluded that "by noting that no facilities were available to them at their workplace, respondents may be seeking to absolve themselves from the responsibility of their non-recycling behavior" (p. 63). Organizational support is often identified as a key factor of the achievement of environmental sustainability.

However, for the sake of clarity, it is important to highlight that current relevant literature has addressed organizational support from two different perspectives. The first perspective is rooted in environmental literature and typically is associated with the works by Ramus and

Steger (2000). In this case, organizational support refers to the employees' feeling of being supported and is triggered by the degree to which the organization communicates an environmental corporate vision and by the engagement of managers (Ramus & Steger, 2000). Ramus (2002) indicated that employees feel supported by their organization when (a) they are encouraged to propose new ideas and communicate suggestions, (b) they are recognized for having done so and for achieving environmental goals, and (c) they perceive that the organization seeks to share key information about environmental topics. Ramus and Steger (2000) found that this form of organizational support encourages employees to develop creative ideas in their job and become willing to take initiative in favor of the environment. According to Ramus and colleagues (Ramus & Killmer, 2007; Ramus & Steger, 2000), ECOs are a proxy for eco-innovation that contributes to corporate greening in three main ways: decreasing the environmental impact of the company, solving environmental problems, and creating more eco-efficient products or services. The second perspective, on which the current investigation is based, is rooted in HRM literature. In this case, coined by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986), POS captures the degree to which an enterprise is committed to its employees and, more precisely, is concerned about their well-being and values and recognizes their individual efforts at work. Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro (1990) reported that high POS fosters employee willingness to propose creative suggestions that contribute to the enhancement of productivity. Thus, the employee's perception of being supported by his or her organization contributes to the shaping of high-quality relationships over time (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). HRM literature reports that POS increases job performance and extra-role behavior (Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009) and decreases employee turnover and absenteeism (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Ramus and Killmer (2007) argued that ECOs are extra-role behaviors that contribute to achieving corporate greening. Ones and Dilchert (2012) proposed taking into account the ability of employees to initiate policies, to put environmental topics first, and to be activist toward sustainability. In this respect, individual eco-initiatives have generally been viewed as one of the success factors underlying various goals, such as pollution prevention, reducing energy use, industrial ecology, waste reduction, and the protection of biodiversity (Boiral & Paillé, 2012; Ones & Dilchert, 2012). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, employees' eco-initiatives are discrete behaviors performed on a voluntarily basis (Paillé et al., 2014). Such discrete behaviors in the particular context of environmental sustainability are vital. To contribute effectively to environmental actions, it has been suggested that employees must be able to operate freely (Daily, Bishop, & Steiner, 2007) and without suffering undue influence from management (Daily & Huang, 2001).

Recent research in environmental sustainability has used the underpinnings of social exchange framework, whether implicitly (Cantor

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