



A multifoci approach to study social support and job performance: A target similarity consideration of development-enhancing practices, leadership, and structure

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes an integrative similarity target model which tests the central role of social support as an exchange mechanism in relationships between development-enhancing practices, transformational leadership behavior, organizational structure, and job performance outcomes at team level. Using data from 1200 full-time employees in 120 teams in a large Canadian financial institution and a structural equation modeling analysis, results indicate that development-enhancing practices primarily foster perceived organizational support and citizenship behavior directed toward the organization, transformational leadership behavior primarily favors perceived support from supervisor and task performance, and organic structure primarily fosters perceived support from colleagues and OCB directed toward teammates. The target similarity model was not found to be the optimal model. A cross-path relationship analysis provided evidence for the agent-dominance model because of the central role played by perceived coworker support in job performance dimensions. Implications, limitations, and future research avenues are discussed.

Over the past 30 years, > 2100 articles have been published on the determinants and effects of task performance and targeted citizenship behavior (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Maynes, & Spoelma, 2014). However, the research on their determinants is fragmented and has generally focused either on leadership behaviors (e.g., Cho & Dansereau, 2010; Pillai, Schriesheim, & William, 1999; Walumbwa, Wu, & Orwa, 2008), on human resource practices (e.g., Gavino, Wayne, & Erdogan, 2012), or on organizational structure (e.g., Bachrach, Powell, Collins, & Richey, 2006; DeGroot & Brownlee, 2006). Prior research has rarely considered the influence of these three emergent contextual factors simultaneously. This is problematic because these drivers are generally implemented and used together across groups and organizations, so the piecemeal approach prevents us from developing a more comprehensive understanding of factors affecting collective climates and behaviors (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016). Second, researchers have relied heavily on social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) to explain why organizational features influence task performance and OCB (e.g., Ng, 2017). A common assumption of SET is that employees form distinguishable exchange relationships with different parties or foci, including the organization, the direct superiors, and coworkers (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). The multifoci perspective (e.g.,

Lavelle, McMahan, & Harris, 2009; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002) suggests that when individuals and teams associate positive experiences with a specific source, they are more likely to perceive a social exchange relationship with this particular party, and to direct their performance toward this party. Furthermore, according to the target similarity framework (Lavelle et al., 2007), the relationship between constructs is stronger when the constructs refer to the same target than when they refer to different targets. Thus, when the source of workplace experience, the exchange relationship party, and the performance or behavior beneficiary are perfectly aligned, the relationships are much stronger.

Although the multifoci perspective made important contributions, this effort has largely focused on experience of organizational justice and affective commitment (e.g., Lavelle et al., 2007; Lavelle et al., 2009; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Rupp, Shao, Jones, & Liao, 2014). The focus on social exchange mechanisms, rather than on organizational drivers or emergent factors, prevents us from acquiring a more comprehensive picture of what motivates team members to perform multifoci behaviors. In this respect, some unanswered questions remain. First, what party is the stronger beneficiary of investments in developmental human resource practices, of organizational structures, or of transformational leader behavior? Does the party attribution of workplace

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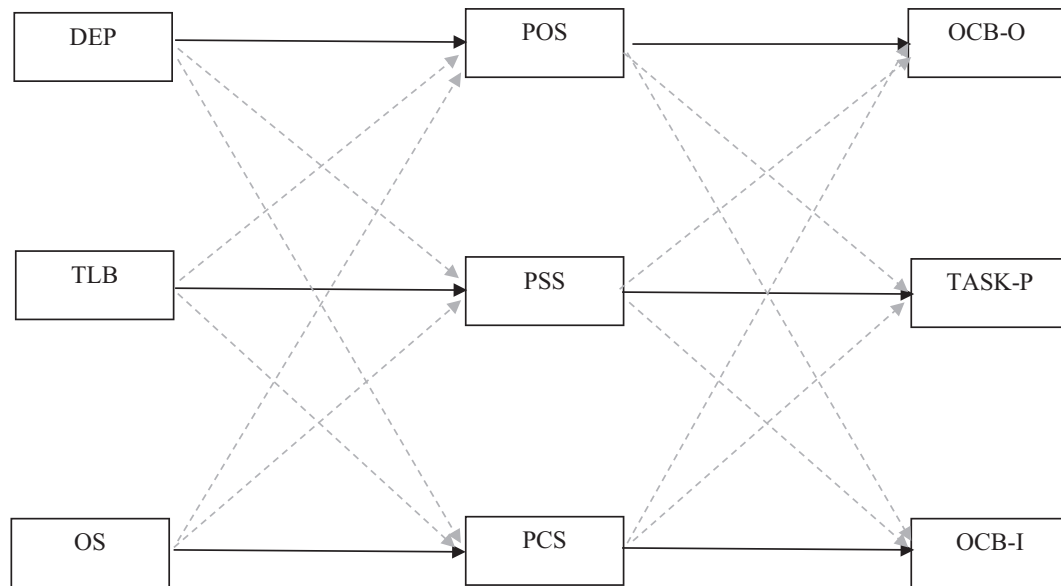


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

experience (e.g., with transformational leader behaviors) foster a stronger exchange relationship with this entity (e.g., by a higher supervisor support) than with another entity (e.g., colleagues or organization)? Does a high social exchange with a specific entity (e.g., coworkers' support) elicit higher positive behavior toward this target (e.g., OCB-directed toward colleagues)? Based on the multifoci approach, the current study tests an integrative target similarity model, and extends the work of Lavelle, Brockner, et al. (2009). Our model is presented in Fig. 1.

This study has the potential to make some interesting contributions. First, we expand the multifoci literature by integrating perceptions of human resource practices, of leadership behaviors, and of structures at team level. Second, we incorporate three different sources of social support by considering how these contextual drivers elicit positive attribution and social exchange with the organization, the immediate superior, and team members. Third, we incorporate three different performance beneficiaries, and we test the alignment of three foci paths by differentiating the sources of inducements, support, and beneficiaries of performance. Fourth, whereas previous multifoci performance studies have examined either a single path three constructs at time, or multiple paths two constructs at time, the present study examines a multifoci model with three paths nine constructs at time. In the following sections, we first outline our theoretical framework and hypotheses, and then report the results of the empirical study. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings as well as the limitations and future research directions.

1. Theoretical framework

The multifoci perspective states that employees work within various social networks, and thus they are called upon to evaluate multiple parties and react to various workplace inducements or events. The multifoci perspective posits that team members make moral judgments and attribute responsibility to the actions of others, and these judgments drive subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Park et al., 2017). According to this approach, multiple parties or foci are involved, including the organization as a whole, supervisors, coworkers, and customers (Rupp et al., 2014). Perceptions made about a particular workplace inducement are expected to be most strongly related to attitudinal and behavioral reactions directed to the party responsible for the positive or negative experience. The alignment of source of inducement and response to the target has been referred to as “target

similarity” by Lavelle et al. (2007). Aligning the perceptions of source of inducement with the target of attitudes and behavioral reactions is more likely to improve predictions between constructs. Unlike the agent system model, which dictates that constructs referring to the same target will be uniquely related (e.g., POS is uniquely related to OCB-O), and the agent-dominance model, which proposes that a specific construct should be the stronger predictor of other referenced outcomes (Fassima, Jones, & Uggerslev, 2008, e.g., POS is the stronger predictor of both OCB-O and OCB-I), the target similarity model states that the relationship between constructs should be stronger when the constructs refer to the same target than when they refer to different targets (Lavelle, McMahan, & Harris, 2009, e.g., POS is more strongly related to OCB-O than to OCB-I).

The conceptual foundation of the target similarity effects is built, for the most part, on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). According to this theory, optimal prediction occurs when the perception of actions corresponds to attitudes toward the party responsible, or when attitudes toward foci match the recipient's behavior (Lavelle, McMahan, & Harris, 2009). There is empirical evidence to support the multifoci models. Lavelle, Brockner, et al. (2009) showed that organizational-focused procedural justice predicted organization-directed citizenship behavior via the effect of organizational commitment, whereas workgroup-focused procedural justice predicted individual-directed citizenship behavior through influence of workgroup commitment. A meta-analytic study (Rupp et al., 2014) has revealed that organizational-focused justice treatment was a stronger predictor of target organizational outcomes than supervisor-focused justice perceptions, and vice versa, and that for outcomes targeting the supervisor, the supervisor-focused justice perception was a stronger predictor than organizational-focused justice. Recent research by Park et al. (2017) showed that abusive supervision was more likely related to supervisor-focused justice, compared to organizationally-focused justice perceptions, and both types of justice perceptions were related to target-similar deviance. The above studies supported the prediction that social exchange with a party explains the association between perceptions of justice about the source and outcomes directed by the source.

The multifoci research is mainly grounded in social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory has also served as the principal theoretical framework of the citizenship behavior literature (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Researchers argue that social exchange relationships are likely to motivate employees to engage in citizenship behaviors because they feel a relational obligation to engage

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