



The Moderating Effect of the Boundary Spanning Role on Perceived Supervisory Support: A Meta-Analytic Review

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ABSTRACT

This article is a meta-analytic study examining the moderating effect the boundary spanning role has on the relationship between perceived supervisory support (PSS) and other important constructs within the marketing domain, including: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and turnover intentions. There was a positive relationship between PSS and every construct except turnover intentions, which was negative. Along with this, three out of the four relationships were stronger for boundary spanners as compared to non-boundary spanners. Overall, managers aimed at meeting organizational objectives (e.g. performance; turnover) should provide supervisory support to boundary spanning employees.

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It has long been recognized that employees tend to value feedback most from those closest to them (Greller & Herold, 1975). When employees receive feedback from and interact with their supervisor, they form perceptions of how the supervisor supports them (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). This may manifest itself based on how employees feel the supervisor helps them in times of need, praises them for a job well done or recognizes them for extra effort. This is known as perceived supervisory support (PSS) which is defined as employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the supervisor values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Research shows that the perceptions employees have of the supervisors' support for them impacts organizational objectives such as performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (e.g. Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage, & Rohdieck, 2004; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Lambert, 2000).

Boundary spanning employees play an essential role in the organization (Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Jolson, Dubinsky, Yammarino, & Comer, 1993; Singh, 1993). A boundary spanning employee is any organizational employee who "engages in job-related interactions with a person who is considered part of the environment, who is not a

member of the organization" (Robertson, 1995, p. 75). Boundary spanning employees not only include salespeople but also include any frontline or customer-contact employee such as customer service representatives, service technicians, retail employees, delivery personnel, nurses, and professional buyers (e.g. McNeilly & Russ, 1992; Russ, McNeilly, Comer, & Light, 1998; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoades, 1996). These employees work under the constraints of both the internal organizational environment and the external environment. They have two unique roles that set them apart from other organizational members who work only within the internal organizational environment. Boundary spanners represent the organization to the outside world (Schneider & Brown, 1984) and are responsible for disseminating information from the environment back to the organization (Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001; Schneider & Brown, 1984). In essence, these employees are directly responsible for service quality and customer satisfaction as well as the overall performance of the firm (Bitner, 1990; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996).

Understanding boundary spanners has received much research attention, especially relating to role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g. Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Boles & Babin, 1996; Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1976; Harris, Artis, Walters, & Licata, 2006; Kim, Knight, & Crutsinger, 2009; Singh, 1993), relationship marketing (e.g. Sharma, Tzokas, Saren, & Kyziridis, 1999), job satisfaction (e.g. Bagozzi, 1978, 1980; Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1976; Harris et al., 2006; Jaramillo, Mulki, & Marshall, 2005; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991; Kim et al., 2009; Kohli, 1985; Paulin, Ferguson, & Bergeron, 2006; Schwepker, 2001), performance (e.g. Churchill et al., 1976; Jaramillo et al., 2005), self

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efficacy (e.g. Barling & Beattie, 1983; Lee & Gillen, 1989), organizational commitment (e.g. Paulin et al., 2006; Schwepker, 2001; Werbel, Landau, & DeCarlo, 1996), support (e.g. Boyer & Edmondson, 2006; Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009), trust (e.g. Pappas & Flaherty, 2008), stress (e.g. Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004), turnover (e.g. Schwepker, 2001), and burnout (e.g. Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

However, despite the two unique roles boundary spanners play, limited to no research exists that has empirically examined the extent to which boundary spanning employees and non boundary spanning employees vary. Researchers however have been examining the role of perceived supervisory support on important organizational outcomes using different samples, including boundary spanners, non boundary spanners and a mixture of both. It appears to be assumed that the relationship between perceived supervisory support and these constructs are equivalent, given the deficit of evidence outlining the differences. This fundamental assumption requires investigation because it bears large consequences on practitioners and researchers. For example, if the relationship between perceived supervisory support and performance is low in studies examining non boundary spanners (e.g. Lambert, 2000; Sargent & Terry, 2000), and it is accepted that this is the relationship for all employees, then managers of boundary spanning employees may believe that perceived supervisory support is not a major contributor to performance. This would lead to fewer resources allocated to establish higher levels of support for boundary spanning employees. However, if it is determined that the relationship between perceived supervisory support and performance is stronger for boundary spanners, then more organizational resources should be invested in this area. Therefore, if research continues to commingle findings on boundary spanners and non boundary spanners, we may essentially miss an important opportunity that may improve boundary spanning functions and the organization as a whole.

The above discussion outlines several goals for this manuscript that are critical for researchers and practitioners concerned with the influence of perceived supervisory support on organizational objectives and the unique differences the boundary spanning role presents. Specifically, this study examines the moderating role of the boundary spanning position through a meta-analytic investigation of perceived supervisory support. In this meta-analytic investigation, the relationship between perceived supervisory support and four key organizational objectives (performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intentions) are examined.

1. Perceived Supervisory Support and Social Exchange Theory

The notion of perceived supervisory support stems from social exchanges between the individual and the supervisor and is based on social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity. Social exchange theory, a motivational theory, explains that a basic form of human interaction occurs during exchanges of resources between individuals (Emerson & Cook, 1978). It posits that all relationships between individuals and supervisors are formed based upon a subjective cost-benefit analysis. If the benefits received from the relationship exceed the costs incurred, then the employee will opt to remain in the relationship.

Furthermore, the norm of reciprocity states that employees will feel obligated to repay favorable treatment (Eisenberger et al., 2004; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Rousseau, 1990). In other words, if a supervisor treats his or her employees well, then the employees will feel obligated to act in ways that are of value (i.e. meeting the supervisor's goals and objectives) to the supervisor and the organization as a whole (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). An employee may evaluate the level of support the supervisor provides through compensation and promotions, frequency and sincerity of praise and approval, and amount of job autonomy (Hutchison & Garstka, 1996; Shore, Barksdale, & Shore, 1995).

Research shows that employees develop exchange relationships with their supervisor based on the employees' perceptions of how the supervisor supports employees' work efforts (e.g. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Employees seek a balance in their exchange relationships with supervisors by having attitudes and behaviors commensurate with the degree of supervisor commitment to them as individuals.

2. Hypothesis Development

In order to get a clear understanding of the perceived supervisory support literature, all constructs investigated with PSS were included in this study. After determining all of the applicable constructs, the list of constructs was then reduced as there were many important constructs in which there was an insufficient number of studies available that examined the PSS-construct relationship (e.g. trust, role ambiguity, etc.). Because of this, only the relationships between PSS and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and turnover intentions are included in this study. A brief discussion of each of these constructs is below.

2.1. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). It is an overall assessment of the extent to which employees find the job rewarding, fulfilling, and satisfying, as opposed to frustrating and unsatisfying (Churchill et al., 1974). This type of satisfaction typically comes through an assessment of variables such as pay, benefits, supervisor style, and management communication, to name a few (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Research has found that PSS is positively related to an employees' job satisfaction (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen, Cameron, Mantler, & Horsburgh, 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Paulin et al., 2006; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2004). Based on social exchange theory and the existing literature, the perception of supervisory support should contribute to employees' positive emotional state and thus increase the level of satisfaction from the job, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). PSS is positively related to Job Satisfaction.

However the magnitude of the positive relationship between perceived supervisory support and job satisfaction varies greatly in the literature. In fact, the range of correlations varies from .12 (Sargent & Terry, 2000) to .66 (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007), leading one to question how strong this positive relationship truly is. Furthermore this causes one to question why this discrepancy exists in the literature in the first place. We hypothesize that this discrepancy may be due to the boundary spanning role.

There is little previous empirical research examining the differences between boundary spanning and non-boundary spanning employees. According to Robertson (1995), the behavior exhibited by an employee is contingent upon the setting in which that employee works. Because of the two unique roles of boundary spanning employees, it is hypothesized that there will be differences between boundary spanners and non-boundary spanners. Perceived supervisory support will have a greater impact on job satisfaction for boundary spanning employees as these employees must not only cope with internal organizational influences, but they must interact with individuals from the outside environment, interpret the environment, seek information and resources from this environment and mold external opinions (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Bales, 1958; Philip & Dunphy, 1959). With such vast responsibilities of performing internal organizational tasks and external organizational tasks, boundary spanners need more support because they are faced with greater pressures. Therefore, the support from supervisors will be more influential for boundary spanners than non boundary spanners when

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