

Perceived organisational support and commitment among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree *Magister Commercii* in Human Resource Management
at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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May 2014



FOR THE READER'S ATTENTION

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- The dissertation is submitted in the form of two research articles. The editorial style specified by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used, while the APA guidelines were followed in constructing tables.
- Each chapter of this dissertation has its own reference list.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following people for their assistance in this research project:

- Firstly, my God and Father, for giving me the insight, motivation, patience, perseverance, mental health, and the opportunity. I would never have been able to complete this project without His support and guidance.
- My parents, Johan and Herma. I am grateful for all your support, love and encouragement. I do not know where to begin to describe how blessed and thankful I am to have you both as parents, friends and mentors. You are truly wonderful role-models.
- Christo, for believing in me. Thank you for your motivation, patience, support and understanding.
- My family and friends, who have supported, motivated and loved me through all the trying times. This project would not have been a success without such amazing people in my life.
- My supervisor (Mrs Jeanine Pires-Putter) for her assistance, guidance, insight, and encouragement.
- Dr. Alewyn Nel and Mrs Jeanine Pires-Putter for the statistical analysis.
- Mr. Dries Sonnekus, for the professional manner in which he conducted the language editing, as well as his patience and understanding throughout the whole process.
- All the research participants without whom this study would not have been possible.

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SUMMARY

Title: Perceived organisational support and commitment among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa

Keywords: Perceived organisational support, organisational commitment, higher education

Higher education in a democratic South Africa faces huge challenges – primarily the need to achieve greater equity, efficiency and effectiveness in institutions and across the system. Universities had to open their doors to students of all races, transform curricula to become more locally relevant, and produce scholars able to address South Africa's problems. When organisations face these changes, they still need to support their employees. They need to ensure that the employees feel secure in their employment to improve their commitment to the organisation.

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceived organisational support and organisational commitment of academics in South Africa. A cross-sectional survey design was used. A non-probability convenience sample was taken from a higher education institution in South Africa ($N=388$). The Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) and Allen and Meyer's Organisational Commitment Scale were administered. Cronbach alpha coefficients, Spearman product correlation coefficients, MANOVAs (to determine differences in demographic groups) and multiple regression analyses were used to analyse the data.

Principal component analysis resulted in a two-factor model for perceived organisational support, namely positive support and negative support. Regarding organisational commitment, a two-factor model was also extracted, namely affective commitment and continuance commitment.

The results attained from the product-moment correlations indicated that *positive support* has a negative relationship with *negative support*. Positive support is also practically significantly related to affective commitment and continuance commitment.

A MANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the differences in levels of POS experienced with regard to staff, ethnicity, language, faculty and gender. The results indicated that no significant differences were found in the levels of POS experienced with regard to staff and gender.

Statistically significant differences were found between levels of negative support with regard to ethnicity, language and faculties. Statistically significant differences were found between levels of positive support of staff in different faculties.

MANOVA was also used to determine differences between staff with regard to commitment levels. Statistically significant differences were found between levels of continuance commitment. Support staff experience higher levels of continuance commitment than academic staff do.

Multiple regression analyses indicated that positive support predicted 9% of the variance in affective organisational commitment and 18% of the variance in continuance commitment.

Recommendations were made for future research.

OPSOMMING

Titel: Waargenome organisasie-ondersteuning en -verbintenis onder werknemers by 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika

Sleutelwoorde: Waargenome organisasie-ondersteuning, organisasieverbintenis, hoër onderwys

Hoër onderwys in 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika staar geweldige uitdagings in die gesig – primêr die behoefte daaraan om groter gelykheid, doeltreffendheid en effektiwiteit in instellings en regoor die stelsel te bewerkstellig. Universiteite moes hulle deure oopmaak vir studente van alle rasse, kurrikula moes getransformeer word om meer plaaslik relevant te word, en graduandi moet gelewer word wat Suid-Afrika se probleme kan aanspreek. Wanneer organisasies hierdie veranderinge in die gesig staar, moet hulle steeds hul werknemers ondersteun. Hulle moet verseker dat die werknemers gerus in hul poste voel om hul verbintenis tot die organisasie te verbeter.

Die doelwit van die hierdie studie was om die ervaaarde/waargenome organisasie-ondersteuning en organisasieverbintenis van akademiici in Suid-Afrika te ondersoek. 'n Deursnee-opname-ontwerp is gebruik. 'n Nie-waarskynlikheidsgerieflikheidssteekproef is geneem vanuit 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika ($N=388$). Die Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) en Allen and Meyer's Organisational Commitment-skaal is gebruik. Cronbach alfa-koëffisiënte, Spearman produk-korrelasie-koëffisiënte, MANOVA's (om die verskille in demografiese groepe te bepaal) en meervoudige regressies-analises is gebruik om die data te analiseer.

Hoofkomponentanalise het gelei tot 'n tweefaktormodel vir waargenome/ervaaarde organisasie-ondersteuning, naamlik positiewe ondersteuning en negatiewe ondersteuning. Ten opsigte van organisasieverbintenis is 'n tweefaktormodel ook geëkstraheer, naamlik affektiewe verbintenis en voortsettingsverbintenis.

Die resultate wat uit die produk-momentkorrelasies verkry het, het getoon dat *positiewe ondersteuning* 'n negatiewe verhouding met *negatiewe ondersteuning* het. Positiewe

ondersteuning is ook prakties beduidend verbind aan affektiewe verbintenis en voortsettingsverbintenis.

'n MANOVA-analise is uitgevoer om die verskille in vlakke van POS wat ten opsigte van personeel, etnisiteit, taal, fakulteit en geslag ervaar word, te bepaal. Die resultate het getoon dat geen beduidende verskille gevind is in die vlakke van POS wat ervaar is ten opsigte van personeel en geslag nie.

Statisties beduidende verskille is gevind tussen vlakke van negatiewe ondersteuning ten opsigte van etnisiteit, taal en fakulteite. Statisties beduidende verskille is gevind tussen vlakke van ondersteuning van personeel in verskillende fakulteite.

MANOVA is ook gebruik om te bepaal of verskille bestaan tussen personeel ten opsigte van verbintenisvlakke. Statistiese beduidende verskille is gevind tussen vlakke van voortsettingsverbintenis. Ondersteuningspersoneel ervaar hoër vlakke van voortsettingsverbintenis as akademiese personeel.

Meervoudige regressie-analises het getoon dat positiewe ondersteuning 9% van die variansie in affektiewe organisasieverbintenis, en 18% van die variansie in voortsettingsverbintenis voorspel.

Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing is gemaak.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation deals with the perceived organisational support and organisational commitment of higher education employees. In this chapter the motivation for the research is discussed in terms of the problem statement and the aims of the research. Thereafter the research method and division of chapters are discussed.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A country's international competitiveness and growth of the knowledge community is determined by its trained population having a higher educational background. Higher education institutions specifically have a vital role to play in a nation's prosperity with its hard-edged ability to develop intellectual assets, economic growth, and encourage growth and innovation in a knowledge economy (Robertson, 1998). According to the International Education Association of South Africa (2009):

“Higher education in a democratic South Africa faces huge challenges – primarily the need to achieve greater equity, efficiency and effectiveness within institutions and across the system. Universities had to open their doors to students of all races, transform curricula to become more locally relevant and also geared to a knowledge-driven world, train growing numbers of different disciplines of graduates essential to economic growth and development, and to produce scholars able to tackle South Africa’s problems through research responsive to all of society’s needs “(p.101).

Du Toit (1996) pointed out that any efforts to change education by means of finding a better match between the opportunities and pressures posed by a changing environment and institutional strategies were certain to be difficult. The environment in which higher education employees in South Africa function, now demands more of them than it did in any other era (Fourie & Alt, 2000). Employees are required to make paradigm changes, adopt new policies and practices, and approach their endeavours in new and innovative ways (Fisher, 1994; Fourie, 1999; Fourie & Alt, 2000). In addition, general academic terms such as lecturers, learners and subjects have been replaced by business terms such as supervisors and clients (Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000). As a result employees, aside from fulfilling traditional roles such as teaching and research, are also expected to “act” as marketers, entrepreneurs, facilitators and managers. Although such supplementary tasks may be

considered a healthy diversification of a person's job description, the persistent demands coupled with these roles could almost inevitably lead to adverse consequences for higher education employees (Singh & Bush, 1998).

The structural changes that emanate from the changing environment in a University can be characterised by mainly two departments – academic staff and support (administrative) staff (Kushman, 1992). Academic staff can be defined by the principal duties which are research and development, teaching and curriculum development, publication of research results, participation in academic conferences, participation in expert evaluation teams, membership of academic bodies and related organisational activities and taking steps to secure research and development funding from third parties (Kiewitz, Hochwarter, Ferris & Castro, 2002).

Support personnel can be defined but is not limited to their inherent duties, roles and responsibilities of the occupation which are simultaneously administering, supervising instruction, being accessible, supporting academic staff, delegating and accepting responsibility, preparing and editing reports, attending meetings to take notes, maintenance, repair and ordering of office supplies or equipment, and keeping track of the annual or project budgets (Dekker & Barling, 1995).

Although the work of academic and support staff is closely linked in terms of strategic objectives and delivery of products and services, the nature of work is totally different. This indicates that these two groups almost never have the same managerial structures. Consequently, different employee problems and concerns are experienced by these two groups (Franzsen, 2003). Support staff tend to be employed within a reasonably clear organisational structure and has a clear understanding of what is expected of them (Davis, 1996).

According to Davis (1990):

“Academic staff represent a very different organisational group than those that can be found in the industry. Traditionally the academic role was defined by two fundamental considerations: academic freedom and tenure, and providing the security necessary for an academic to think and speak freely on controversial issues at the boundaries of his or her discipline. Although this situation has changed somewhat over the years, academic staff generally has two working hours and schedules of output which are largely an individual option. Successful

academics are expected to be self-motivating, to be able to maintain an undistracted focus on a single research interest, and to set exacting standards for their own level of expertise and performance in their chosen focus. Universities choose to value and promote their academic staff members for individual performance. Indeed, the rewards of an academic career are largely intrinsic” (p.8).

Studies, such as Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006), indicated the important role higher education staff play in creating educational settings and building reputations for themselves in both the local and international academic and professional communities. To achieve this, the employees of these institutions should experience extremely high levels of Perceived Organisational Support (POS). The concept of POS has awakened enormous interest among researchers for more than 23 years (Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, & Sucharski, 2004). “POS refers to the degree to which employees perceive their employer to be concerned with their well-being and value their contributions to the organisation” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p.500).

Research shows that employees have a tendency to evaluate the organisational support received from their organisation based on the conduct of their managers and supervisors. POS can therefore be linked to the degree to which employees believe that their organisation fairly reimburses them for their contributions, is willing to assist them in times of need (personal or professional), provide them with exciting and motivating work, and ensure that their working environment is safe and sufficient (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

Research has shown that organisations care for the well-being of their employees by providing them with long term employment valuing their contributions and offering emotional support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As such employees personify and ascribe human-like characteristics to the organisation and form a generalised belief that the organisation cares about their personal welfare and values their contribution to the organisation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Employees will value resources received from their employers if they are based on discretionary actions instead of being compelled by external constraints such as union contracts, company policy, or government regulations (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees reciprocate a high level of POS in a variety of ways. Research findings indicate that employees reciprocate POS directly through greater commitment to the organisation (Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2000). At other times,

POS exerts indirect influence through employees' perceived obligation to care about the organisation's well-being, which in turn increases job performance, fosters organisational commitment and reduces withdrawal behaviours (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997). Further, lack of perceived support from the organisation could motivate employees to consider leaving the organisation (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003).

The support received by the organisation may be seen as an expression of commitment towards the employees (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995), which may lead to an increased commitment towards the organisation. The relationship that exists between POS and organisational commitment was investigated and confirmed by a number of studies, including, Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro 1990; Guzzo, Noonan and Elron, 1994; Hutchison, 1997; Hutchison and Garstka, 1996; Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Shore and Wayne, 1993. Employees notice the organisation's commitment toward them and in return show their own commitment toward the organisation. POS originated from the theory of social exchange and the norm of reciprocity developed by Blau (1964). Keeping in mind that POS is a distinctive construct which is associated with vital outcomes, such as organisational commitment and employee turnover (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), researchers have explored the factors that lead to the experience of POS by employees.

Research completed by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) indicated three important factors that could lead to the experience of POS, namely: Organisational rewards, working conditions, support received from supervisors and procedural justice. Research done recognised a diversity of rewards and favourable working conditions positively related to POS, such as growth opportunities permitting employees to develop their skills (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Growth opportunities, training and feedback (investing in employees that express to them that the organisation sees them as important), are positively related to POS (Hutchison, 1997). Providing employees with the opportunity to do their work on their own is a gesture from the organisation showing employees that they are trusted, that their contributions are recognised and that it will benefit the organisation (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002).

Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) hypothesised that rewardsgiven to individual employees would be more strongly related to POS than rewards given to the entire organisation, because individual rewards make employees feel valued. Perceived supervisor support is another

significant antecedent of POS and refers to the employees' believing that their supervisors show concern for them and value their inputs (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Supervisors are seen as important because they are accountable for directing and assessing their subordinates' performance, and informing top-management about these assessments (Eisenberger, Stinglehauser, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002).

The third antecedent, procedural justice, entails the fairness of prescribed organisational policies and procedures for allocating resources (Greenberg, 1990). Fair treatment leads to more intimate, undefined social exchange relationships that generate commitment from the employee towards the organisation (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001).

The recent increase in the interest shown in the concept of POS could be due to the restructuring that has taken place in many organisations over the last couple of years (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005). POS may be particularly important in maintaining or increasing organisational and individual outcomes during difficult times (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As suggested by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1990), POS may be fundamental in determining if any attitude or behaviours benefiting the organisation emerge from the employment relationship. POS is of interest to organisations and managers because of its close association with greater levels of employee commitment in the form of increased effort, attendance, and identification with the organisation goals (Johlke, Stamper, & Shoemaker, 2002).

A key factor towards successful higher education institutions in South Africa is committed employees. Organisational commitment can be defined as the psychological state characterising an individual's relationship with the organisation by accepting the goals of the organisation and his/her willingness to exert considerable effort to achieve its goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991). According to some authors, the term organisational commitment refers to the identification with an organisation and the taking of its objectives and values and making them your own (Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990). Few empirical studies have thus far been conducted to examine the role of perceived organisational support (POS) to enhance the level of commitment of employees utilising employees working in the higher education institutions in South Africa (Capelleras, 2005; Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Rowley, 1996.).

Researchers have tried to understand both the factors leading to and consequences of organisational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Factors that lead to organisational commitment include employee characteristics (Aven, Parker, & McEvoy, 1993; Kushman,

1992; Morris & Sherman, 1981; Nikolau & Tsaousis, 2002; Reichers, 1986), work experience (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Dunham, Grube, & Castaneda, 1994; Kiewietz, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Castro, 2002; Lok, Westwood, & Crawford, 2005; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and organisational factors (Agarwala, 2003; Bishop, Scott & Burroughs, 2000; Brown, 1996; Tansky & Cohen, 2002).

Myer and Allen (1991) defined organisational commitment according to the following three concepts. Firstly, affective commitment refers to employees' emotional connection to, recognition with, and participation in the activities of the organisation. Secondly, when employees calculate that the cost of leaving is estimated greater than the cost of staying, employees stay on because they have to. This is labelled continuance commitment. The third concept is labelled normative commitment, which refers to employees feeling obliged to stay on grounds such as thinking the organisation has invested a lot of time, money and effort in them.

According to Meyer and Allen (1997):

“Affective commitment has been found to be favourable for employees and organisational outcomes in terms of satisfaction, well-being, turnover, and higher productivity. Normative commitment appears to be positively associated with organisational outcomes but to a much lesser extent than affective commitment. Continuance commitment, however, is generally perceived as unfavourable” (p.102).

Commitment in higher education institutions have been studied by a few researchers. Borchers and Teahen (2001) established that commitment did not differ considerably between faculties. Chieffo (1991) established that administrators were committed to their organisations because of the nature of their work and the independence they have at their organisation. Wolverton, Montez, Guillory and Gmelch (2001) found that age, tenure in the position and job satisfaction resulted in higher organisational commitment of deans. Four predictors of faculty commitment were identified by Billingsley and Cross (1992): leadership support, role conflict, role ambiguity and stress. Thornhill, Lewis and Saunders (1996) found that the upward flow of communication and management style notably affects employee commitment.

Although organisational commitment and POS conceptually and empirically differ from one another (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005), these two notions are somewhat related. All three forms of organisational commitment are expected to be influenced by POS. In research carried out by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) it was evident that POS is positively related to affective commitment. To explain this relationship, Fuller, Barnett, Hester and Relyea (2003) referred to Tyler's (1999) social identity theory, which stated that employees feel important in an organisation when their employer values the contributions they make to the performance of the organisation. The acknowledgment of their effort and their position in the organisation helps meet the employees' needs for respect, appreciation and association (Shore & Shore, 1995). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), satisfying these needs add to building the employees' social identity, which is expected to increase their belief of fitting in with and satisfaction in the organisation.

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory can be seen as another explanation for the relationship that exists between POS and affective commitment. This theory states that the growth and preservation of all relationships between individuals are based on an exchange of resources which are treasured by the interacting individuals. It is clear that mainly the socio-emotional and symbolic characteristics of this relationship are taken into account (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006). Behaviour related to organisational support appears to be assumed as indicators of value and concern on the part of the employer who appears to increase their trust in their employees (Cheung, 2000; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001).

According to Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986), Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity can effectively be used to describe the relationship between POS and normative commitment. This norm states that, when an individual or a unit does someone a favour, the recipient of the favour feels obliged to return the favour. Accordingly, when employees perceive that their organisation shows concern for their welfare and takes their needs into consideration, they are more likely to feel obliged to the organisation and show loyalty (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003). As a result, POS is likely to enhance the level of normative commitment; it appears that the link between POS and normative commitment can be explained through a more fiscal aspect of the exchange between employees and the organisation (Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

The main difference between continuance commitment and affective and normative commitment respectively is the fact that employees continue to work for the organisation by

obligation (continuance commitment) rather than by choice (affective and normative commitment). In addition, several studies showed that continuance commitment is not affected by the different antecedents of organisational commitment in the same way as affective and normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer, Stanley, Hersovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

The negative relationship that exists between POS and continuance commitment has not been closely examined by many researchers. A possible reason for this negative relationship could be that POS decreases the feelings of entrapment that increase when employees feel obliged to carry on with their employment in the organisation because of the high cost connected with leaving it (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A high level of POS may help to repair the stability between the benefits awarded by the organisation and the inputs of the individual. When individuals observe a high level of organisational support, the costs associated with leaving their organisation will be perceived as being lower than if they thought that they had put in a great deal of effort in their work without having received any compensation for these efforts.

University employees and their level of commitment determine the overall performance of the university. In general these employees feel a sense of calling and responsibility to their work. Commitment to the profession may be negatively influenced by increased student affairs pressures and work/non-work interactions. Rowley (1996), Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006) suggested that more studies need to be carried out to determine the role POS plays in enhancing the level of commitment of higher education employees.

Hence, this study will also set the research agenda towards understanding the process of creating a pool of committed employees of universities in South Africa who will contribute towards developing the human capital needed by the nation.

1.2 Research questions

Article 1

A psychometric evaluation of a perceived organisational support survey among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa

- How is POS conceptualised according to literature?
- Is the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support a valid and reliable measure of POS in a sample of employees at a higher education institution?
- Are there differences in the level of POS regarding demographic groups at a higher education institution?
- What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

Article 2

The relationship between perceived organisational support and organisational commitment among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa

- How is organisational commitment conceptualised according to literature?
- What is the relationship between POS and organisational commitment?
- Will the experience of organisational support lead to organisational commitment?
- What is the difference in organisational commitment between academic staff and support staff?
- What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.

2.1 General objective

The general objective of this research is to investigate the perceived organisational support and organisational commitment of academics in South Africa.

2.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:

Article 1

- To conceptualise POS according to literature;
- To determine if the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support is a valid and reliable measure of POS in a sample of employees at a Higher Education Institution;
- To determine if there are differences in the level of POS regarding demographic groups at a Higher Education Institution; and
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

Article 2

- To conceptualise organisational commitment according to literature;
- To determine the relationship between POS and organisational commitment;
- To determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment;
- To determine the difference in organisational commitment between academic staff and support staff; and
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Approach

The study is quantitative. According to Struwig and Stead (2001) quantitative research involves large representative samples and structured data collection procedures. A cross-sectional research approach is used to collect the data and to attain the research objectives. Cross-sectional designs are used to observe a group of people at a particular point in time, for a short period, such as a day or a few weeks (Du Plooy, 2002). A cross-sectional design entails the gathering of data on more than one case and at a single point in time to collect a body of quantitative data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The design is also used to assess

interrelationships among variables within a population and will thus help to achieve the various specific objectives of this research (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

3.2 Research design

The research method consists of a literature review, and an empirical study. The results are presented in the form of two research articles.

3.2.1 Literature review

A complete review regarding POS and commitment are done. Articles relevant to the study are obtained by doing computer searches via databases such as Academic Search Premier; Business Source Premier; PsycArticles; PsycInfo; EbscoHost; Emerald; ProQuest; SACat; SAePublications; Science Direct; and Nexus. The main journals to be consulted due to their relevance to the topic of interest are: *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*; *Journal of Managerial Psychology*; *Journal of Educational Psychology*; *South African Journal of Psychology*; *Review of General Psychology*; *Work & Stress*; *Journal of Applied Psychology*; *Journal of Organizational Behavior*; *Management Dynamics and South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*; *Educational Theory*; *Change*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; *Group and Organization Management*; *Higher Education Quarterly*; *Quality in Higher Education*; *Gender*; *Work and Organizations*; *South African Journal Of Higher Education*; *Human Relations*; *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*; *Academy of Management Journal*; *American Sociological Review*; *Mid-American Journal of Business*; *Administrative Science Quarterly* and *Studies in Higher Education*.

3.2.2 Research participants

A combined convenience and quota non-probability sample ($N= 388$; $n=180$ Academic staff, $n = 205$ Support staff) of employees from a higher education institution in South Africa is used to reach the objective of this study. A convenience sample is used when the members of the population are convenient to sample. This method of sampling is convenient and inexpensive (Salkind, 2009).

3.2.3 Measuring instruments

Perceived organisational support: One of the short versions of the scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) is used to measure POS. This measure includes 17 items from the original Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) (e.g.,

help is available from the organisation when I have a problem; my organisation strongly considers my goals and values; my organisation cares about my opinion; my organisation is willing to help me if I need a special favour). Prior studies surveying many occupations and organisations provided evidence for the high internal reliability and uni-dimensionality of the SPOS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). A reliability and item analysis of the scores found in the original study indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.95 with item-total correlations ranging from 0.50 to 0.86. The mean and median item-total correlations were 0.71 and 0.70 respectively. Participants are asked to rate on a seven-point Likert response scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" (0) to "Strongly agree" (7).

Organisational Commitment: Allen and Meyers's (1996) Organisational Commitment scale is used for this study. Only the measures for affective and continuance commitment is incorporated in the questionnaire; measures for normative commitment are not included for testing and validation purposes.

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the measures of affective and continuance commitment are 0.81 and 0.78 respectively (Karim & Noor, 2006). Altogether eighteen (18) items comprising the measures for both affective (items number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) and continuance commitment (items number 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18) are incorporated in the questionnaire (e.g. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation; I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving the organisation; I am proud to tell others I work at my organisation; working at my organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me). All items are measured on a 5 point scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" (Karim & Noor, 2006).

3.2.4 Research procedure

The measuring battery is compiled and a letter requesting permission is given to the university prior to the administration of the measuring battery. A letter requesting motivation and participation is also included in the booklets and explains the objectives and importance of the study. After the specified time frame the data collection process is ended and data analysis will commence. Participation in the study is voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality is ensured.

3.2.5 Statistical analysis

Article 1

The statistical analysis of this study is carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics programme (IBM Corp., 2011). Factor analyses and Cronbach alpha coefficients is used to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs that will be measured in this study. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics is used to analyse the data. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is used to determine the significance of differences in the levels POS of demographic groups at a higher educational institution. The general use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is to establish whether multiple levels of independent variables have an effect on the dependent variables. Wilk's Lambda is used to test the significance of the effects. When an effect is significant in MANOVA, ANOVA is used to discover which dependent variables are affected (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2001).

Article 2

The statistical analysis of this study is carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics program (IBM Corp., 2011). The data is analysed by using descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics. Cronbach alpha coefficients are used to determine the reliability of the constructs that is measured. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients are used to specify the relationships between the constructs. Effect sizes are also used to determine the practical significance of the results (Steyn & Swanepoel, 2008). A cut-off point of 0.30 (medium effect) and 0.50 (large effect) are set for the practical significance of the correlation coefficients (Cohen, 1988). The confidence interval level for statistical significance is set at a value of 95% ($p \leq 0.05$).

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is used to determine the significance of differences in the levels POS of demographic groups at a higher educational institution. The general use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is to establish whether multiple levels of independent variables have an effect on the dependent variables. Wilk's Lambda is used to test the significance of the effects. When an effect is significant in MANOVA, ANOVA is used to discover which dependent variables are affected (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2001).

Standard multiple regression analysis is used to test whether the regression coefficient of one independent variable varies over the range of another independent variable. If so, the one independent variable moderates the relationship between the other independent variable and the dependent variable.

3.2.6 Ethical considerations

It is essential for the success of this project to conduct research that is fair and ethical. Issues such as voluntary participation, informed consent, protection from harm, confidentiality and the maintenance of privacy is taken into account (Salkind, 2009). This research project is submitted to the North-West University's ethical committee.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE 1

A PSYCHOMETRIC EVALUATION OF A PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT SURVEY AMONG EMPLOYEES AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to determine the psychometric properties of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) in a sample of staff at a higher education institution in South Africa. A cross-sectional survey design with convenience quota non-probability sample ($N = 388$) was used. Exploratory factor analyses, Cronbach alpha coefficients, Product correlation coefficients and MANOVAS were used to analyse the data. The results showed a two-factor solution for the SPOS. The two scales showed satisfactory internal consistency. Recommendations are made for future research and practise.

OPSOMMING

Die doelstelling van hierdie studie is om die psigometriese eienskappe van die Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) van 'n steekproef van personeel by 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika te bepaal. 'n Deursnee-opname-ontwerp met kwota ($N = 388$) is gebruik. Verkennende faktoranalises, Cronbach alfa-koëffisiënte, produk-korrelasiekoëffisiënte en MANOVA's is gebruik om die data te analiseer. Die resultate het 'n tweefaktor-oplossing vir die SPOS getoon. Die twee skale het bevredigende interne konsekwentheid getoon. Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing en praktyk is gemaak.

Introduction

Higher education is important for economic growth (Skolnik, 2002) and becoming more important for the country's economy than factories, mines and other manufacturing institutions (Florida, 2002). A country's international competitiveness and growth of the knowledge community is determined by its trained population having a higher educational background (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2006). Higher educational institutions, in specific, have a vital role to play in a nation's prosperity with its hard-edged ability to develop intellectual assets, economic growth, and encourage growth and innovation in a knowledge economy (Robertson, 1998).

It is therefore important for institutes of higher education to keep up with change, to drive change in society and to subject themselves to the forces of change in the community and the world (Egroun-Polak, 2002; Schutte & Steyn, 2002). The staff of higher education institutions can be seen as the central part of these institutions and their performance will directly influence the quality of the student's higher education experience and the important role that these institutions play in our society (Capellaras, 2005).

The higher education environment in South Africa now demands more of its employees than it did in any other era. Employees are required to make paradigm changes and adopt new policies and practices, (Fisher, 1994; Fourie, 1999; Fourie & Alt, 2000).

A university can be characterised by mainly two components namely academic staff and support (administrative) staff (Kushman, 1992). Academic staff can be defined but not limited by the principal duties which are research and development; teaching and curriculum development; publication of research results in print or their presentation in academic form; participation in academic conferences; participation in expert evaluation teams; membership of academic bodies and related organisational activities (participation in the work of research organisations, editing research journals and collections of articles, organising conferences) and taking steps to secure research and development funding (targeted research grants, research and development support, contracts) from third parties (Kiewitz, Hochwarter, Ferris & Castro 2002).

Support personnel can be defined but is not limited to their inherent duties, roles and responsibilities of the occupation, which are simultaneously administering, supervising instruction, being accessible, support academic staff, delegating and accepting responsibility,

prepare and edit reports, attend meetings to take notes, maintenance, repair, the ordering of office supplies or equipment, and to keep track of the annual or a project budget (Dekker & Barling, 1995).

Studies such as Capelleras (2005), and Joiner and Bakalis (2006), indicate the important role that the staff of higher educational institutions plays in creating learning experience and building national and international reputations for themselves. However, this also depends on exceptionally high levels of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) experienced by employees of these institutions. POS is seen as one of the most significant organisational behaviour theories responsible for keeping employees in organisations, seeing as organisational support is recognised as an important aspect in increasing job satisfaction and the organisational commitment of employees (Colakoglu, Culha & Atay, 2010).

The significance of demographic variables has long been acknowledged in organisational studies (Gyekye & Salminen, 2009). The extensive research on demographic characteristics and organisational behaviour indicates that demographic variables are significantly associated with characteristic perceptions, attitudes, or work outcomes and, therefore, could be considered as possible explanations for the relationship between antecedents and supportive perceptions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Very little attention has been paid to examining the relationship between worker demographic characteristics and POS. Past research has also not examined whether race or ethnic groups differ in levels of perceived organisational support.

The aim of the study was to investigate the psychometric properties of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support among staff working at a higher educational institution in South Africa.

Perceived Organisational Support

Employees are viewed as one of the most important assets for most organisations (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse 2003) and employees and their employers exist in a system of mutual dependence (Gouldner, 1960). Employees provide specific workplace services and in return expect rewards from the employer (e.g., remuneration, recognition). Likewise, organisations provide a reward structure and expect employees to be loyal and productive.

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) introduced a set of beliefs called Perceived Organisational Support (POS). They stated that employees form an overall belief regarding the degree to which an organisation values their inputs and shows concern for their welfare. Shore and Tetrick (1991) believed that POS can be used as an indication of an organisation's commitment towards its employees. Eisenberger, Fasolo and Davis La-Mastro (1990), suggested that employees would consider positive actions by the organisation as confirmation that the organisation showed concern for their welfare.

Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) argued that the process of becoming committed to an organisation could be understood by using a social exchange approach that emphasises employee beliefs about the organisation's commitment to them, suggesting that employees give special attention to the effort of the organisation to recognise and reward their workplace behaviour. According to Blau (1964) social exchange theory proposes that the exchange relationship that exists between two parties regularly consists of social as well as financial exchange. Organisational researchers believe that the employer and employee not only exchange monetary resources, but also socio-emotional resources such as support, value, appreciation and approval (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). This points towards the likelihood of two tentatively distinctive components of POS existing. Firstly, organisational support can be seen as an overall belief that the organisation identifies and highly regards employee inputs as revealed in material resources such as reimbursements, position, job enhancement, and other types of rewards and reimbursements (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Levinson, 1965; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997)

According to George, Reed, Ballard, Colin and Fielding, (1993):

“This notion of organisational support suggests that perceived support would raise an employee's expectancy that the organisation would reward greater effort toward meeting organisational goals. Secondly, organisational support is the belief that the organisation is concerned about the socio-emotional well-being of employees. This aspect of organisational support reflects employee perceptions with regard to organisational policies and practices pertaining to time away from work for personal circumstances or family care. POS is also valued as assurance that aid will be available from the organisation when it is needed to carry out one's job and to deal with stressful situations” (p. 99).

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), POS is an assessment of status within the organisation and the status is the degree to which the organisation holds the employee in high regard. To the degree that status fulfils socio-emotional needs (the need for respect, membership, and support), “employees should not only feel an obligation to the organisation, but also develop a sense of unity with the organisation involving the incorporation of organisational membership into their social identity” (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p.698). Based on the norm of reciprocity developed by Gouldner, (1960), it is believed that employees who observe elevated levels of POS, are expected to respond to the organisation with an optimistic mind-set such as elevated levels of affective commitment and constructive actions such as dedication and loyalty to organisational objectives and lower intention to leave (Eisenberger, *et al.*, 1986; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli & Lynch, 1997).

Gouldner (1960) believed that favourable actions would communicate a positive regard to the degree to which the employee receiving these actions regards them as intended. Employees will hold higher regard for positive treatment if the treatment appeared planned, rather than the consequence of peripheral constraints such as laws enforced by the government, collective agreements or employment conditions as implemented by other organisations

There has been research done focusing on demographic characteristics and organisational behaviour and this research indicated that demographic variables are significantly associated with characteristic perceptions, attitudes or work outcomes and, therefore, could be considered as possible explanations for the relationship between antecedents and supportive perceptions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A review of the literature by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) indicated that demographic variables such as age, education, gender, and tenure showed very little relationship with POS. According to research done there are indications of a positive association between job satisfaction, organisational tenure, and POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Research suggests that gender is related to perceived organisational support (Yoshimura, 2003). Research done by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found a significant negative relationship between gender and perceived organisational support. Research by Amason and Allen (1997), however, suggests that there is no difference between men and women in perceptions of organisational support. The sample was drawn from a university and two engineering firms. The study provided evidence that gender differences in levels of perceived

organisational support do not exist. Research conducted by Mor Barak, Cherin, and Berkman (1998) found race differences in perceptions of organisational variables such as fairness and inclusion.

Survey of Perceived Organisational Support

Keeping in mind that employees form a general belief regarding the organisation's commitment to them, Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) stated that employees will show a constant pattern of agreement with statements concerning whether the organisation valued their inputs and efforts and would treat them favourably or unfavourably in different situations. It can be concluded that employees believe that the organisation has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that include both acknowledgment of their work performance and concern for their well-being.

To test employees' beliefs concerning support by the organisation Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) constructed 36 statements representing a range of possible assessments of the employee towards the organisation and actions the organisation might take in different situations to the advantage or disadvantage of the employee. Evidence that employees form global beliefs concerning commitment by the organisation would be indicated by the employee's perception that the organisation's various evaluative judgements of him or her are constantly favourable or unfavourable to a high or low degree, and the expectancy that the organisation would treat the employee beneficially or harmfully in a variety of situations (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). The commitment statements were incorporated into the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support for which employees used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to indicate the extent of their agreement with each item. Half of the statements were positively worded and half were negatively worded in order to control for an agreement response bias (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Keeping in mind that organisations can greatly benefit from research done on POS, it can be recommended that researchers use fewer items of the SPOS. A variety of shorter versions exist that can be used (17-items, 8-items and 3-items).

It is presumed that the numerous number of items used to measure POS are randomly drawn from the same universe of item correlations (Hellman, Fuqua, & Worley, 2006.) When sampling from a universe with higher inter-item correlations (more homogeneous content), fewer items are needed to maximize alpha. If the universe is more heterogeneous in nature, more items are needed to sufficiently represent POS (Hellman *et al.*, 2006). The results of the

PAF factor analysis done by Worley, Hellman and Fuqua (2009) provided clear support for the uni-dimensionality of the 36-item SPOS. The result of a single-factor is significant seeing that it came about constantly, even when oblique rotation was applied. These results validate and broaden prior research that also indicated a one-factor solution for the instrument (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Shore & Tetrick, 1991). However a study done by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) revealed that a possible second factor could be accounted for.

A study done by Worley *et al.* (2009) revealed remarkable results with regards to the evaluation of the 36-item, 17-item, eight-item and three-item versions of the SPOS. Cronbach's alpha's obtained for these four versions were: $\alpha = .96$, $\alpha = .95$, $\alpha = .93$, and $\alpha = .81$ respectively. This decrease in the estimate of internal consistency reliability has implications for validity. The internal consistency for the 36-item scale found by Worley *et al.*, (2009) is exceptionally similar to the reliability estimate initially reported by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986).

The 17-item and 8-item versions of the instrument produce related levels of internal consistency reliability. Results obtained by Worley *et al.*, (2009) indicated that:

“Although there were small differences between the four versions of POS evaluated, the observed differences were most likely a function of the number of items. The weakest reliability coefficient was associated with the 3-item measure. However, the scores on the 3-item version of POS produced a reliability coefficient well within the generally accepted range ($\alpha = .81$). The difference between the reliability coefficient for the 3-item measure and the coefficient for the 36-item measure ($\alpha = .96$) will not likely raise many concerns for research practitioners interested in using a shortened version of the instrument” (p.114).

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) “the use of shorter versions does not appear problematic” (p.698). The 17-item duplicates the 36-item version particularly well with a strong positive correlation ($r = .97$) (Worley *et al.*, 2009). Based on these results it can be concluded that the 17-item version can be used just as effectively as the 36-item version. Most of the studies on POS use a short form of the SPOS developed from the 17 highest loading items (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Results from the analysis done by Worley *et al.* (2009) supported the viewpoint that the SPOS is a uni-dimensional measure and the 36-item version of the SPOS can efficiently be replaced by the 17-item version.

The original scale development study of the SPOS was conducted by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) across nine organisations, and consisted of a sample of ($n = 361$) employees. A principal components analysis (PCA) indicated a single factor accounting for 48.3% of the total variance with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .97$. The results of a second study done by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) using the 17 SPOS items with the highest structure coefficients, indicated that, the principal factor for the 17 SPOS items accounted for 50% of the total variance.

In exploring the factor structure of the SPOS, numerous studies have used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a maximum number of items. The only CFA that was carried out using the 17-items Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) suggested as a shorter version of the SPOS was that of Shore and Tetrick (1991). The recommendation was to use the items with the highest loadings. Most studies used less than 17 of the original SPOS items and did not specify precisely which of the original items were used to develop the three shorter forms of the SPOS. The belief is that the items with the highest loadings were selected from the original SPOS developed by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986). Results from all of the studies constantly indicated a uni-dimensional POS construct.

The SPOS has been shown to be different from a wide range of concepts such as: affective and continuance commitment (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Hutchison, 1997; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993), effort-reward expectancies (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990), perceived supervisory support (Hutchison, 1997; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), perceived team support (Bishop, Scott & Burroughs, 2000). Support for the uni-dimensional nature of the SPOS allows organisational support to benefit from an emergent place in organisational research.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to assess the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support among employees in a higher educational institution in South Africa.

The above mentioned aim leads to the following objectives:

- To conceptualise POS according to literature.
- To determine if the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support is a valid and reliable measure of POS in a sample of employees at a Higher Educational Institution.

- To determine if there are differences in the level of POS regarding demographic groups at a Higher Educational Institution.
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

METHOD

Research design

The study was quantitative. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), research that is quantitative in nature is a form of conclusive research involving large representative samples and data collection procedures that are structured. A cross-sectional research approach was utilised. A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather the data and to reach the research objectives. Cross-sectional designs are used to study a group of people at a particular point in time, for a short period (Du Plooy, 2002). A cross-sectional design involves the gathering of data on more than one case and at a particular point in time in order to collect quantitative data in association with two or more variables, which are examined to identify patterns of association (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The design is also used to assess interrelationships among variables in a population and will thus help to achieve the various specific objectives of this research (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

Participants

A combined convenience and quota non-probability sample ($N= 388$; $n=180$ Academic staff, $n = 205$ Support staff) of employees from a higher educational institution in South Africa was used to reach the objective of this study.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants (N = 388)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	39.9%
	Female	232	59.8%
Ethnicity	White	221	57.0%
	African	117	30.2%
	Coloured	40	10.3%
	Indian	8	2.1%
Age	26-30	36	9.3%
	31-39	99	25.5%

	40-49	85	21.9%
	50-59	84	21.6%
Language	Afrikaans	220	56.7%
	English	54	13.9%
	Sotho	104	26.8%
	Nguni	7	1.8%
	Qualifications	Lower than Grade 10 (Std 8)	1
	Grade 10 (Std 8)	7	1.8%
	Grade 11 (Std 9)	3	0.08%
	Grade 12 (Std 10)	54	13.9%
	Technicon diploma	28	7.2%
	Technical College diploma	34	8.8%
	University degree	63	16.2%
	Postgraduate degree	190	49.0%
Faculty	Other	7	1.8%
	Arts	28	7.2%
	Natural Sciences	40	10.3%
	Theology	11	2.8%
	Education Sciences	60	15.5%
	Economic and Management Sciences	51	13.1%
	Law	15	3.9%
	Engineering	14	3.6%
	Health Sciences	39	10.1%
	Other	118	30.4%
	Staff	Support	205
Academic		180	46.4%

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the participants (59.8%) were female and Afrikaans speaking (56.7%). The population (all the available participants) included white (57.0%) that were the majority, African (30.2%), Coloured (10.3%) and Indian (2.1%) individuals. In total 99 (25.5%) of the participants were between ages 31 and 39, 85 (21.9%) were between ages 40 and 49, 84(21.6%) between ages 50 and 59 and only 36 (9.3%) between ages 26 and 30. The population consisted of 205 (52.8%) support staff and 180 (46.4%) academic staff.

Measuring instrument

Perceived organisational support. One of the short versions of the scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) was used to measure POS. This one factor measure included 17 items from the original Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) (e.g., Help is available from the organisation when I have a problem; my organisation strongly considers my goals and values; my organisation cares about my opinion; my organisation is willing to help me if I need a special favour). Prior studies

surveying many occupations and organisations provided evidence for the high internal reliability and uni-dimensionality of the SPOS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). A reliability and item analysis of the scores obtained in the original study indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .95 with item-total correlations ranging from .50 to .86. The mean and median item-total correlations were .71 and .70 respectively. Participants was asked to rate on a seven-point Likert response scale ranging from Strongly disagree (0) to Strongly agree (7).

Statistical analysis

The general objective of this study was to assess the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support among employees in higher educational institutions in South Africa. The statistical analysis was carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics program (IBM Corp., 2011). Before any statistical analysis was done, the data were inspected for missing and/or unexpected values. The reliability and validity of the SPOS were determined by means of Cronbach alpha coefficients. Descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations) were used to analyse the data.

A principal components analysis was conducted to determine the number of factors of the SPOS in the total sample. A direct oblimin rotation was used. Factors obtained in each group were compared (after target rotation). The agreement was evaluated by a factor congruence coefficient, Tucker's phi (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Communalities ($r > 0.20$) were evaluated to determine the amount of variance each item explained in terms of the other items.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the significance of differences in the levels POS of demographic groups at a higher educational institution. The general use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is to establish whether multiple levels of independent variables have an effect on the dependent variables. Wilk's Lambda is used to test the significance of the effects. When an effect is significant in MANOVA, ANOVA is used to discover which dependent variables are affected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

RESULTS

Exploratory Factor Analysis

After the initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis was done, it was established that the South African context are not similar to Eisenberger's theory, the decision to use Exploratory Factor Analysis was justified. The first factor extracted accounted for 40.66% of the variance, whereas the second factor accounted for 13.64% of the variance. This evidence supports a decision to retain a two factor solution and define Perceived Organisational Support according to the two factors, Positive Support and Negative Support. The eigenvalues and variance accounted for by the two factors are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2
Factor loadings, Communalities, Percentage Variance for Principle factor Extraction and Oblique rotation on the SPOS

Item	Description	Factor 1	Factor 2	h ²
SUP-11	My organisation cares about my general satisfaction at work.	0.82	0.00	0.64
SUP-16	My organisation tries to make my job as interesting as possible.	0.78	0.00	0.61
SUP-7	Help is available from my organisation when I have a problem.	0.75	0.00	0.51
SUP-14	My organisation cares about my opinions.	0.72	0.00	0.50
SUP-8	My organisation really cares about my well-being.	0.71	0.00	0.52
SUP-15	My organisation takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	0.71	0.00	0.52
SUP-10	My organisation is willing to help me when I need a special favour.	0.69	0.00	0.44
SUP-17	My organisation is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.	0.66	0.00	0.51

SUP-4	My organisation strongly considers my goals and values.	0.58	0.00	0.41
SUP-1	My organisation values my contribution to its well-being.	0.47	0.00	0.36
SUP-9	Even if I did the best job possible, my organisation would fail to notice.	0.00	0.734	0.56
SUP-13	My organisation shows very little concern for me.	0.00	0.726	0.55
SUP-3	My organisation fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.	0.00	0.678	0.49
SUP-6	My organisation disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me.	0.00	0.66	0.45
SUP-12	If given the opportunity my organisation would take advantage of me.	0.00	0.64	0.37
SUP-2	If my organisation could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so.	0.00	0.54	0.40
SUP-5	My organisation would ignore any complaint from me.	40.66%	13.64%	

Variance Explained

Factor 1: Positive Support; Factor 2: Negative Support

A principal axis factor (PAF) analysis was carried out on the individual POS items, followed by oblique rotation. The reason for using principal components factor analysis is to decrease the number of variables in the analysis by using a single factor to represent a number of variables, while retaining the variance that was present in the original variables. Kaiser's rule of retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 was used for determining the number of factors to retain. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted by performing the PAF analysis on the correlations of the 17 items. Items 1,4,7,8,10,11,14,15,16,17 loaded on Factor 1 which can be labelled Positive Support. Items 2,3,5,6,9,12,13 loaded on Factor 2

which can be labelled Negative Support. These 17 items together explained 54.31% of the total variance.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Alpha Coefficients and Correlations of the SPOS

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	1	2
Positive Support	3.55	1.29	-0.34	-0.20	0.90	1.00	-0.47*+
Negative Support	2.95	1.38	-0.57	-0.57	0.85	-0.47*+	1.00

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

+ Correlation is practically significant $r > 0.30$ (medium effect).

++Correlation is practically significant $r > 0.50$ (large effect).

Table 3 indicates acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients for the two factors of Perceived Organisational Support namely Positive Support ($\alpha = .90$) and Negative Support ($\alpha = .85$). This demonstrated that a large proportion of the variance is explained by the two (2) factors (internal consistency) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The scores on the SPOS are normally distributed. For that reason it can be assumed that the measuring instrument has acceptable levels of internal consistency.

Negative support is significantly related to positive support. Positive Support has a negative and practically significant relationship with Negative Support with a medium effect.

MANOVA analyses were used to determine the differences in the levels of perceived organisational support experienced in demographic groups, namely staff, ethnicity, language, faculty and gender. Demographic characteristics were first analysed for statistical significance using Wilk's Lambda statistics. The results of the comparisons are given in Table 4.

Table 4

MANOVA- Differences in demographics

Variable	Value	F	df	p	Partial Eta Squared
Staff	0.99	1.47	2	0.23	0.00
Ethnicity	0.89	7.63	6	0.00*	0.06
Language	0.92	4.52	6	0.00*	0.03
Faculty	0.88	3.12	16	0.00*	0.06
Gender	0.99	0.94	6	0.39	0.00

* $p \leq 0.05$ = statistically significant

In an analysis of Wilk's Lambda values statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) regarding POS levels was found between ethnicity, language and faculty, and was further analysed using ANOVA.

Table 5

ANOVA- Differences in POS levels based on Ethnicity

Item	White	African	Coloured	Indian	p	Partial Eta Squared
Positive Support	3.45	3.67	3.86	3.28	0.17	0.01
Negative Support	2.77	2.99	3.81	3.32	0.00*	0.05

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

Table 5 shows statistically significant differences between levels of Negative Support. Coloured and Indian participants experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared to White and African participants.

Table 6

ANOVA- Differences in POS levels based on Language

Item	Afrikaans	English	Sotho	Nguni	p	Partial Eta Squared
Positive Support	3.49	3.59	3.65	4.50	0.17	0.01
Negative Support	2.75	3.29	3.24	2.53	0.00*	0.03

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

Table 6 shows statistically significant differences between levels of Negative Support. English and Sotho speaking participants experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared to Nguni and Afrikaans speaking participants.

Table 7

ANOVA- Differences in POS levels based on Faculty

Item	Arts	NS	Theology	Education	EMS	Law	Engineering	Health	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Positive Support	3.52	3.46	3.82	3.02	3.70	3.00	4.11	3.47	0.00*	0.06
Negative Support	2.68	2.94	3.72	3.38	2.40	3.27	3.44	3.31	0.00*	0.07

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

Table 7 shows statistically significant differences between levels of Positive Support and Negative Support. Staff in the Engineering, Theology, Economic and Management Sciences and Arts faculties experienced higher levels of Positive Support compared to staff in the Law, Education, Natural Sciences and Health faculties. Staff in the faculties of Theology, Education, Health and Engineering also experience higher levels of Negative Support than staff in the Economic and Management Sciences, Natural Sciences, Law and Arts faculties did.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to assess the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support among employees in a higher educational institution in South Africa. To achieve the general objective, specific objectives were determined and analysed through statistical properties of the measuring instruments, namely to determine the validity and reliability of the Perceived Organisational Support measuring instrument and to determine the differences between support staff and academic staff in their experience of POS.

To answer the first objective of the study regarding the conceptualisation of POS from the literature review, it came out that POS is essentially an evaluation of status within the organisation. POS is the assessment of the degree to which organisation's value their employees and care about their welfare. According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), "employees should not only feel an obligation to the organisation, but also develop a sense of

unity with the organisation, involving the incorporation of organisational membership into their social identity” (p.689).

To answer the second objective exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the SPOS and the results revealed that the questionnaire has a two-factor structure, being *Positive Support* (labelled Factor 1) and *Negative Support* (labelled Factor 2). The two factors identified in this study explained 54.31% of total variance. According to Costello and Osborne (2005) a minimum of three items should be retained per factor in order to form adequate interpretations, which fortunately happened in this case. The results of the PAF factor analysis done by Worley *et al.*, (2009) provided clear support for the uni-dimensionality of the 36-item SPOS.

The two factors in this study, namely, Positive Support and Negative Support, corresponded with the positively and negatively worded statements as conceptualised by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) in the SPOS. Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) stated that employees will show a constant pattern of agreement with statements concerning whether the organisation valued their inputs and would treat them favourably or unfavourably in different situations. It can be concluded that employees believe that the organisation has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that include both acknowledgment of their work performance and concern for their welfare. A reason for the difference in factors (finding a two factor and not a one factor model) that was found could be due to the sample that was used.

In terms of the construct validity and internal consistency the two-factor solution identified in this study included Positive Support (items 1,4,7,8,10,11,14,15,16 $\alpha = .90$) and Negative Support (items 2,3,6,9,12,13 $\alpha = .85$). These alpha coefficients compared reasonably well with the guideline of $\alpha > .70$, demonstrating that a large portion of the variance is explained by the dimensions, thus indicating the internal validity of the dimensions (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The results attained from the product-moment correlations indicated that Positive Support has a negative and practically significant relationship with Negative Support with a medium effect. Higher levels of Positive Support may lead to lower levels of Negative Support experienced. This may be an indication that employees may see the support provided by their employer as a demonstration of commitment towards them, which in turn may increase their commitment to the organisation. A lack of perceived support from the organisation could motivate employees to consider leaving the organisation (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

A MANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the differences in levels of POS experienced with regards to staff, ethnicity, language, faculty and gender. The results indicated that no significant differences were found in the levels of POS experienced with regards to staff and gender.

No research could be found comparing the levels of POS experienced between different demographic groups.

Statistically significant differences were found between levels of Negative Support with regards to ethnicity. Coloured and Indian participants experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared to White and African participants. This could suggest that the organisation's policies and practices are not consistently applied across all ethnic groups. This can be explained as follows. It may mean that all cultural groups do not have the same needs regarding support from their organisations. If it is true that different cultural groups require different types of organisational support, it may indicate that the implemented organisational policies and procedures do not satisfy all employees' needs (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

Statistically significant differences were found between levels of Negative Support with regards to language. English and Sotho speaking participants experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared to Nguni and Afrikaans speaking participants. A possible explanation for Nguni speaking participants experiencing lower levels of Negative Support than Sotho speaking participants could be that the organisation is situated in the geographical area the Nguni language is spoken. These language barriers could result in the experience of higher levels of Negative Support by English and Sotho speaking groups in comparison to Afrikaans and Nguni speaking groups.

Statistically significant differences were found between levels of Positive Support and Negative Support of staff in different faculties. Staff in the Engineering, Theology, Economic and Management Sciences and Arts faculties experienced higher levels of Positive Support compared to staff in the Law, Education, Natural Sciences and Health faculties. Staff in the faculties of Theology, Education, Health and Engineering also experience higher levels of Negative Support than staff in the Economic and Management Sciences, Natural Sciences, Law and Arts faculties did.

Employees who feel that they receive support from their respective faculties may have a more positive frame of mind at work, as well as a lessened tendency to experience negative feelings such as pressure or anxiety. Employees who feel appreciated by their faculties, and who feel that they can rely on their faculty for support are more energised and passionate than those who do not experience such support. It seems likely that faculties providing enough support to their staff are compensated with employees that have positive mind-sets. This is very important if one keeps in mind the emotional, academic, disciplinary and social demands faced in the higher education sector. It seems likely that high levels of POS could help these employees to deal with these pressures more effectively.

The research population was representative of the multicultural and multilingual country since 43% of the population spoke an African language. Females dominated the study population by 5.8% and 52.8% of the population were support staff. Future studies could benefit from a stratified random-sample design, which would ensure adequate representation of the different groups making up the total population of higher education employees in South Africa.

This study showed that the use of the SPOS is acceptable for measuring POS of employees in a higher educational institution because of its construct validity and high level of reliability.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All of these results must be understood in the context of some limitations of the sample used here. Reliability is significantly affected by the sample characteristics. The sample involved in this study was from a particular organisation (a higher education institution in South Africa). The researcher included support staff in the present sample because inclusion would allow the researcher to assess all members of the organisation. Regarding future research, the present work needs to be replicated with other occupational groups. All participants in this study were randomly selected from the organisation. A considerable non-response rate was noted, with the implication that the differences between respondents and non-respondents are unknown.

The use of cross-sectional design, as opposed to longitudinal design, could have influenced the outcome. It could be recommended that future research make use of a longitudinal design to determine if changes have occurred. A self-report questionnaire was used (SPOS) which

was completed by participants in their own time and availability, which could have led to participants not understanding some of the items, or the inability of the researcher to identify transient factors. This could have distorted the results of this study.

The purpose of this study was to assess the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support among employees in higher education institutions in South Africa. There have been a number of criticisms on the use of the SPOS, for example prior studies surveying many occupations and organisations provided evidence for the high internal reliability and uni-dimensionality of the SPOS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). A reliability and item analysis of the scores obtained in the original study indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .95 with item-total correlations ranging from .50 to .86. The mean and median item-total correlations were .71 and .70 respectively. This criticism made the investigation of its psychometric properties a very relevant and important research area.

It might be necessary for future research to focus on the reliability and validity of the SPOS for other occupational settings and determine norm levels for other occupations in South Africa, also determining the antecedents of POS. Future research could focus on identifying the specific factors which attribute to differences in the experience in the levels POS in different demographic groups. Since no research could be found comparing the levels of POS experienced between different demographic groups it should be explored to ascertain if the results obtained in this study were methodology based or practically substantiated.

Future research regarding the SPOS will help organisations to obtain a better understanding of POS and help to determine whether or not the employees feel that they are receiving the necessary support through the process of identification, development and use. By having a better understanding of POS, the organisation can work in collaboration with its employees to improve their POS. A happy worker is a productive worker. POS may lead to higher levels of commitment in reaching organisational goals. This could lead to employees performing duties falling outside the scope of their job descriptions and a decline in feelings of anxiety.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ARTICLE 2

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Organisational Commitment among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa. A cross-sectional survey design was used. A quota non-probability convenience sample was used. The sample consisted of ($N= 388$) employees at a higher education institution in South Africa. The Survey of Perceived Organisational Support, and Allen and Meyer's Organisational Commitment Scale, were administered. Results of the Spearman correlations indicated a relationship between positive support and affective commitment as well as continuance commitment. Multiple regression analyses showed that positive support predicted the variance explained in the affective commitment and continuance commitment of employees at a higher education institution.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die verhouding tussen Waargenome/ervaarde Organisasie-ondersteuning en Organisasieverbintenis tussen werknemers by 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika te bepaal. 'n Deursnee-opname-ontwerp is gebruik. 'n Nie-waarskynlikheidsgerieflikheidsteekproef is gebruik. Die steekproef het bestaan uit 388 werknemers aan 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika. Die Survey of Perceived Organisational Support, en Allen and Meyer's Organisational Commitment Scale is toegedien. Resultate van die Spearman-korrelasies het 'n verhouding tussen positiewe ondersteuning en affektiewe verbintenis, sowel voortsettingsverbintenis getoon. Meervoudige regressie-analises het getoon dat positiewe ondersteuning die variansie verduidelik in die affektiewe verbintenis en voortsettingsverbintenis van werknemers aan 'n hoër onderwysinstelling voorspel.

Introduction

Higher education employees can be seen as the most important aspect in the educational system, with a variety of important roles and responsibilities (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2012). Higher education employees are seen as the central part of higher education institutions and their performance determines the value of the student's higher education experience (Capellaras, 2005); therefore the overall performance of higher education institutions depends upon their employees' level of commitment. Higher education employees, who are committed to their institution, can build reputations for themselves and their institution in both the local and international academic and professional communities (Lew, 2009). Brantley (1993) has suggested that organisational commitment is a valuable component in educational institutions. The organisational commitment of higher education staff can be viewed as "his or her firm belief in and acceptance of the university goals and values; readiness to exert dedicated efforts on behalf of the university, and a strong desire to sustain his or her university membership" (p.3).

Meyer and Allen (1997) suggested that employees can become committed to their organisations as a result of various reasons. These reasons may include the following: Firstly an emotional attachment to the organisation and a belief in its values. Secondly a realisation of the costs associated with leaving one's organisation. And thirdly, employees feel obliged to remain with the organisation for moral or ethical reasons. However, over the past decades, higher education institutions continue to face the problem of employee turnover (Lew, 2009). This employee turnover negatively impacts the institution both in replacement costs and work disruption, and also risks the nation's aim to produce human capital of value. High-quality academics can be attracted and retained if organisations have an understanding of the factors that lead to organisational commitment. This can ensure that improved administrative decisions are taken for the financial support programme of employees (Lew, 2009).

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment can be defined as the employee's emotional affection to, recognition with, and participation in the activities of the organisation (Boehman, 2006; Greenberg, 2005; Karrasch, 2003; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974) defined it as "strong belief in and acceptance of the organisational goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a definite desire to maintain organisational membership" (p.603). Furthermore Tella, Ayeni, and

Popoola (2007) defined organisational commitment as a need to stay a member of an organisation, an eagerness to exercise high levels of effort on behalf of the organisation and; a belief in and acceptance of the objectives and aims of the organisation. “Employees become committed to their organisation when they (a) believe in the mission and values of the their organisation and make it their own; (b) are mutually ready to exert their dedicated efforts in the achievement of their organisational goals, and (c) have a strong desire to continue serving in their organisations” (Robbins & Coulter, 2003, p.70).

Commitment in academic institutions has been studied by a number of researchers. Some of the findings included that commitment of deans increased with age, job tenure and job satisfaction. They also showed higher commitment if they believed that their organisation shows high academic quality (Wolverton, Montez, Guillory & Gmelch, 2001). Colbert and Kwon (2000) found that organisational dependability, support and communication have a considerable impact on organisational commitment. Jacobs, Tytherleigh, Webb and Cooper (2010) found no significant differences in commitment levels to the organisation between women (irrespective of work role group) and men working in congruent roles. Jacobs *et al.*, (2010) suggested that women in academic roles face a stressful environment where they feel unvalued by their organisation. Kipkebut (2010) found that demographic characteristics were significant predictors of organisational commitment.

According to Gamble and Huang (2008) organisational commitment is believed to be critical to organisational effectiveness and has been studied extensively in Western management research. Researchers have sought to understand both the factors leading to and consequences of organisational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Predictors or antecedents of commitment include organisational climate (Thomas, 2008), job satisfaction (Brown & Sargeant, 2007), human resource management practices (Kipkebut, 2010), work autonomy (Aubè, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007), leadership justice (Duan, Lam, Chen, & Zhong, 2010), knowledge sharing (Mogotsi, Boon, & Fletcher, 2011), organisational culture (Mathew & Ogbonna, 2009), work environment conditions (Vanaki & Vagharseyyedin, 2011), workplace outcomes (Graham & Nafukho, 2010), and organisational factors (Giffords, 2009).

According to Kipkebut (2010) committed employees who perform rewarding and meaningful jobs are less likely to leave their jobs than employees with low commitment levels, and who are dissatisfied with their jobs.

Committed employees represent a key factor towards successful higher education institutions in South Africa. Employees who are committed to their organisations may acknowledge the organisational objectives and goals without doubt (Valentine, Godkin, & Lucero, 2002). It is argued that individuals who are committed to the organisation are less likely to leave their jobs than those who are uncommitted. Individuals who are committed to the organisation are reported to perform at a higher level and also tend to stay with the organisation, thus decreasing staff turnover and increasing organisational effectiveness (Porter *et al.*, 1974).

According to Robbins, Judge, Odendaal and Roodt (2009) there are three separate dimensions to organisational commitment.

Firstly affective commitment is an emotional attachment to the organisation and a belief in its values. The Business Dictionary (2013) defined affective commitment as “the tendency of an employee to stay with a company based on an emotional attachment” (p.1). Employees who display affective commitment to their organisation will often identify strongly with the organisation and its goals and might turn down offers to move to a new organisation, even if they seem more beneficial financially. According to Johnson and Chang (2008) affective commitment can be defined as the acceptance and internalisation of organisational objectives and aims, and an eagerness to exercise effort on the organisation’s behalf. The motivation that underlies affective commitment involves an intrinsic personal desire to remain with one’s organisation, likely owing to its identification and internalisation bases (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004).

Secondly continuance commitment is derived from the costs associated with leaving one’s organisation (e.g., loss of personal investments and limited employment alternatives (Johnson & Chang, 2008). Employees who have continuance commitment stay with their organisation because it offers them attractive personal rewards and benefits that they do not want to sacrifice. The motivation that underlies continuance commitment has an economic and instrumental basis; that is, people remain committed in order to receive specific rewards or to avoid specific punishments (Johnson & Chang, 2008). Continuance commitment is the perceived economic value of remaining with an organisation compared to leaving it (Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

Thirdly, according to Williams (2004), normative commitment refers to employees’ perceptions of their obligations to their organisation. A normative commitment is an obligation to remain with the organisation for moral or ethical reasons (Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

In general affective commitment seems more strongly related to organisational outcomes such as performance and turnover than to the other two commitment dimensions (Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) stated that:

“Although all three components of organisational commitment reduce the likelihood that employees will leave the organisation, perhaps the most important reason for distinguishing among them is that they can have quite different implications for on-the-job behaviour” (p.477).

Meyer and Allen (1991) argue that employees who show affective commitment are likely to have low absenteeism levels, do their job to the best of their ability, and perform tasks that do not necessarily fall within their job scope. Employees who show normative commitment may do likewise if they see it as a part of their responsibilities, or as a means of reciprocation for benefits received. Employees who remain primarily to avoid costs (continuance commitment) may not do more than is required to continue the employment relationship (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Although Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and organisational commitment differ from one another in theory (Bishop, Scott & Burroughs, 2005) these two notions are somewhat similar. POS concerns the commitment support of the organisation to employees, and organisational commitment refers to the degree to which employees are committed to the organisation that employs them (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Researchers have consistently found POS to be positively related to organisational commitment (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996).

Organisational commitment and Perceived Organisational Support

The concept of POS has caused enormous interest among researchers for more than 23 years now (Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, & Sucharski, 2004). “POS refers to the degree to which employees perceive their employer to be concerned with their well-being and value their contributions to the organisation” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p.500). For example, an employee believes his/her organisation would accommodate him/her if he/she had a child-care problem, or would forgive an honest mistake on his/her part.

According to Robbins *et al.*, (2009), employees perceive their organisations as supportive when remuneration received is believed to be fair, when employees are involved in decision making processes and management are seen as supportive, when they are provided with long term employment, when their contributions are valued and when they are given emotional support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The support provided by the organisation may be seen as an expression of commitment towards the employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which is likely to enhance organisational commitment. POS may be vital for determining if any attitudes or behaviours benefiting the organisation emerge from the employment relationship. POS is of interest to organisations and managers because of its close association with greater levels of employee commitment in the form of increased effort, improved attendance, and identification with the organisation goals (Johlke, Stamper, & Shoemaker, 2002).

Social identity theory can be used to clarify the relationship that exists between POS and affective commitment. The social identity theory suggests that employees remain dedicated when they feel that their organisation values and appreciates them (Tyler, 1999). According to Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010): “If the organisational support met the employees’ needs for praise and approval the employees will incorporate organisational membership into self-identity and thereby develop a positive emotional bond (affective commitment) to the organisation.” Kim, Leong and Lee (2005) stated that if employees see their organisation as supportive, it is likely that they will remain in the organisation. Blau’s (1964) social exchange theory can also be used to explain the relationship that exists between affective commitment and POS. Social exchange theory stated that an exchange of valued resources will lead to the development and continuation of all human interaction. Training, growth opportunities, salary increases and employee assistance programmes may be seen as indications that organisations values their employees and that they are concerned about their welfare. This may increase their confidence in and the quality of their relationship with their organisation (Cheung, 2000). It is believed that POS may increase levels of affective commitment shown by employees.

According to LaMastro (2008) a positive relationship exists between POS and normative commitment. Employees will feel more obliged to remain with their organisation, if they see their organisation as being supportive (Orpen, 1994). The foundation of normative commitment is based upon a mutual commitment that exists between organisations and their employees (McDonald & Makin, 2000). Employees are more likely to show loyalty to their

organisation, if they view the organisation as supportive and caring for their welfare (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003). It is believed that POS may lead to higher levels of normative commitment shown by employees.

Several studies revealed that there is either a negative or an insignificant relationship between organisational support and continuous commitment (Aube *et al.*, 2007; LaMastro, 2008; O’Driscoll & Randall, 1999; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A number of researchers tried to determine why POS is negatively related to continuance commitment. O’Driscoll and Randall (1999) suggested that “POS may decrease feelings of entrapment that increase when employees are forced to stay with their organisation because of the high costs associated with leaving” (p.197).

Therefore, it appears that POS leads to an increase in affective and normative commitment while lowering continuance commitment.

Objective of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate organisational commitment among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa.

The above mentioned aim leads to the following objectives:

- To conceptualise organisational commitment according to literature.
- To determine the relationship between POS and organisational commitment.
- To determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment.
- To determine the difference in organisational commitment between academic staff and support staff.
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

METHOD

Research Design

The study was quantitative. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), research that is quantitative in nature is a form of research involving large representative samples and data collection procedures that are structured. A cross-sectional research approach was utilised. A

cross-sectional survey design was used to gather the data and to reach the research objectives. Cross-sectional designs are used to study a group of people at a particular point in time, for a short period (Du Plooy, 2002). A cross-sectional design involves the gathering of data on more than one case and at a particular point in time in order to collect quantitative data in association with two or more variables, which are examined to identify patterns of association (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The design is also used to assess interrelationships among variables in a population and will thus help to achieve the various specific objectives of this research (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

Participants

A combined convenience and quota non-probability sample ($N= 388$; $n=188$ Academic staff, $n = 205$ Support staff) of employees from a higher education institution in South Africa were used to reach the objective of this study.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants (N = 388)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	39.9%
	Female	232	59.8%
Ethnicity	White	221	57.0%
	African	117	30.2%
	Coloured	40	10.3%
	Indian	8	2.1%
Age	26-30	36	9.3%
	31-39	99	25.5%
	40-49	85	21.9%
	50-59	84	21.6%
Language	Afrikaans	220	56.7%
	English	54	13.9%
	Sotho	104	26.8%
	Nguni	7	1.8%
Qualifications	Lower than Grade 10 (Std 8)	1	0.03%
	Grade 10 (Std 8)	7	1.8%
	Grade 11 (Std 9)	3	0.08%
	Grade 12 (Std 10)	54	13.9%
	Technicon diploma	28	7.2%
	Technical College diploma	34	8.8%
	University degree	63	16.2%
Postgraduate degree	190	49.0%	
Faculty	Other	7	1.8%
	Arts	28	7.2%

	Natural Sciences	40	10.3%
	Theology	11	2.8%
	Education Sciences	60	15.5%
	Economic and Management Sciences	51	13.1%
	Law	15	3.9%
	Engineering	14	3.6%
	Health Sciences	39	10.1%
Staff	Other	118	30.4%
	Support	205	52.8%
	Academic	180	46.4%

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the participants (59.8%) were female and Afrikaans speaking (56.7%). The population (all the available participants) included white (57.0%) (the majority), African (30.2%), Coloured (10.3%) and Indian (2.1%) individuals. In total 99 (25.5%) of the participants were between ages 31 and 39; 85 (21.9%) were between ages 40 and 49; 84(21.6%) between ages 50 and 59, and only 36 (9.3%) were between ages 26 and 30. The population consisted of 205 (52.8%) support staff and 180 (46.4%) academic staff.

Measuring instruments

Perceived organisational support. The short version of the scale developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, (1986) was used to measure POS. This measure included 17 items from the original Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) (e.g., Help is available from the organisation when I have a problem; My organisation strongly considers my goals and values; My organisation cares about my opinion; My organisation is willing to help me if I need a special favour). Prior studies surveying many occupations and organisations provided evidence for the high internal reliability and uni-dimensionality of the SPOS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, 1990; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). A reliability and item analysis of the scores obtained in the original study indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.95 with item-total correlations ranging from 0.50 to 0.86 (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). The mean and median item-total correlations were 0.71 and 0.70 respectively.

Organisational Commitment. Allen and Meyers's (1996) Organisational Commitment scale was employed for this study. Only the measures for affective and continuance commitment was incorporated in the questionnaire; measures for normative commitment were not included for testing and validation purposes. Altogether eighteen (18) items comprising the measures for both affective (items number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) and continuance

commitment (items number 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18) was incorporated in the questionnaire (e.g., I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation; I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving the organisation; I am proud to tell others I work at my organisation; Working at my organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me). All items will be measured on a 5 point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree (Karim & Noor, 2006).

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis of this study was carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics program (IBM Corp., 2011). The data was analysed by using descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics. Cronbach alpha coefficients were used in determining the reliability of the constructs that were measured. Spearman product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationships between the constructs. Effect sizes were used to determine the practical significance of the results (Steyn & Swanepoel, 2008). A cut-off point of 0.30 (medium effect) and 0.50 (large effect) was set for the practical significance of the correlation coefficients (Cohen, 1988). The confidence interval level for statistical significance was set at a value of 95% ($p \leq 0.05$).

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used to determine the significance of differences between the POS and commitment of academic staff and support staff. The general use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is to establish whether multiple levels of independent variables on their own or in combination with one another have an effect on the dependent variables. Wilk's Lambda is used to test the significance of the effects. When an effect is significant in MANOVA, ANOVA is used to discover which dependent variables are affected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Standard multiple regression analysis was used to test whether the regression coefficient of one independent variable varies over the range of another independent variable. If so, the one independent variable moderates the relationship between the other independent variable and the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Firstly, a simple principal components analysis was conducted on the 18 items of the Organisational Commitment scale on the total sample of academic and support staff members. Two factors that were extracted explained 55.6% of the total variance.

Items 12,13,18 loaded on Factor 1, which can be labelled Affective commitment, and items 1,2,6,9,11,14,15,16 and was labelled continuance commitment. With a cut-off of 0.30 for inclusion of a variable in the interpretation of a factor, items 4, 8 and 17 had low inter-item correlations and were excluded. With items 5, 7 and 10 there were double loadings and they were also excluded.

A principal axis factor (PAF) analysis was carried out on the individual POS items, followed by oblique rotation. The reason for using principal components factor analysis is to decrease the number of variables in the analysis by using a single factor to represent a number of variables, while retaining the variance that was present in the original variables. Kaiser's rule of retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 was used for determining the number of factors to retain. Four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted by performing the PAF analysis on the correlations of the 14 items. Items 1,4,7,8,10,11,14,15,16,17 loaded on Factor 1 which can be labelled Positive Support. Items 2,3,5,6,9,12,13 loaded on Factor 2 which can be labelled Negative Support. These 17-items together explained 54.31% of the total variance.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics, Alpha Coefficients and Spearman correlation coefficients

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Affective Commitment	3.40	0.89	-0.29	-0.24	0.69
Continuance Commitment	3.23	0.63	-0.22	0.93	0.64
Positive Support	3.55	1.29	-0.34	-0.20	0.54
Negative Support	2.95	1.38	-0.01	-0.57	0.62

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Inspection of Table 2 shows that low Cronbach alpha coefficients were obtained for all the scales. All the alpha coefficients were lower than the guideline of $\alpha > 0.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, according to Black and Porter (1996) an alpha coefficient of 0.60 and higher is considered adequate in exploratory research. Nunnally (1967) also indicated

that an alpha coefficient of between 0.50 and 0.60 is still acceptable for preliminary results provided that further analysis of the instrument be conducted in the future. The scores on the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire and Survey of Perceived Organisational Support are normally distributed (skewness and kurtosis varying from -0.01 and -0.20). It therefore appears that all the measuring instruments have acceptable levels of internal consistency

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment, Positive Support and Negative Support

	1	2	3	4
1. Affective Commitment	1.00	-	-	-
2. Continuance Commitment	0.46 ^{*+}	1.00	-	-
3. Positive Support	0.30 ^{*+}	0.41 ^{*+}	1.00	-
4. Negative Support	-0.22	-0.12	-0.47	1.00

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

+ Correlation is practically significant $r > 0.30$ (medium effect)

++Correlation is practically significant $r > 0.50$ (large effect).

As can be seen in Table 3, Positive Support is practically significantly related to Affective Commitment and Continuance Commitment. Continuance Commitment is practically significantly related to Affective Commitment.

To determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment, a standard multiple regression analyses, by means of the enter method, was carried out. The results are reported in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analysis with Affective Commitment as Dependent Variable

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	
	B	SE	Beta							
1	(Constant)	2.96	0.21		14.09	0.00	20.80	0.31	0.09	0.22
	Positive Support	0.18	0.04	0.26	4.66	0.00*				
	Negative Support	-0.06	0.04	-0.09	-1.77	0.08				

Table 4 summarises the regression analyses with Positive and Negative Support as predictors of Affective Commitment. Entry of Positive and Negative Support produced a statistically model ($F_{(2,384)} = 20.80$; $p = 0.00$), accounting for approximately 9% of the variance. More specifically, it seems that Positive Support ($\beta = 0.26$; $t = 4.66$; $p \leq 0.05$) predicts Affective Commitment.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis with Continuance Commitment as Dependent Variable

Model		Non-standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
		B	SE	Beta						
1	(Constant)	2.33	0.14		16.52	0.00	40.62	0.42	0.18	0.24
	Positive Support	0.22	0.03	0.45	8.61	0.00*				
	Negative Support	0.04	0.02	0.09	1.66	0.09				

Table 5 summarises the regression analyses with Positive and Negative Support as predictors of Continuance Commitment. Entry of Positive and Negative Support produced a statistically model ($F_{(2,385)} = 40.62$; $p = 0.00$), accounting for approximately 18% of the variance. More specifically, it seems that Positive Support ($\beta = 0.45$; $t = 8.61$; $p \leq 0.05$) predicts Continuance Commitment.

MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was used to determine differences between staff with regard to Commitment levels. Results were first analysed for statistical significance using Wilk's Lambda statistics. ANOVA was used to determine specific differences if a statistical difference was found. The results of the MANOVA analyses are given below.

Table 6

MANOVA – Differences in Commitment Levels of Staff

Variable	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Staff	0.98	3.70	2	0.02*	0.01

* $p \leq 0.05$ = statistically significant

In an analysis of Wilk's Lambda values, a statistically significant difference ($p \leq 0.05$) regarding Organisational Support levels was found and was further analysed using ANOVA. The results of the ANOVA based on Staff are given below in Table 7.

Table 7

ANOVA - Differences in Organisational Commitment Levels Based on Staff

Item	Support Staff	Academic Staff	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Affective Commitment	3.45	3.34	0.20	0.00
Continuance Commitment	3.31	3.14	0.01*	0.02

Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$.

Table 7 showed statistically significant differences between levels of Continuance Commitment. Support staff experience higher levels of Continuance Commitment than Academic Staff.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between organisational commitment and perceived organisational support among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa. To achieve the general objective, specific objectives were determined and analysed through statistical properties of the measuring instruments, namely to determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment and to determine the differences between support staff and academic staff in their experience of organisational commitment.

To answer the first objective of the study with regard to the conceptualisation of organisational commitment, the three separate dimensions to organisational commitment can be discussed as follows:

Affective commitment is an emotional affection to the organisation and a belief in its values (Robbins, Judge, Odendaal & Roodt, 2009). The Business Dictionary (2013) defines affective commitment as “the tendency of an employee to stay with a company based on an emotional attachment” (p.1). Employees who display affective commitment to their organisation will

often identify strongly with the organisation and its goals, and might turn down opportunities to move to a new organisation.

Continuance commitment is the perceived economic value of remaining with an organisation compared to leaving it (Robbins *et al.*, 2009). According to Williams (2004) normative commitment refers to employees' perceptions of their obligations to their organisation. An employee may be committed to the organisation because he/she is paid well and feels it would hurt his/her family to quit. A normative commitment is an obligation to remain with the organisation for moral or ethical reasons (Robbins *et al.*, 2009). In general affective commitment seems more strongly related to organisational outcomes such as performance and turnover than the other two commitment dimensions (Robbins, *et al.*, 2009).

In this research only the measures for affective and continuance commitment was incorporated in the questionnaire; measures for normative commitment were not included for testing and validation purposes.

To answer the second objective, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the organisation commitment scale. Two factors that were extracted explained 55.6% of the total variance. Items 12,13,18 loaded on Factor 1, which can be labelled affective commitment, and items 1,2,6,9,11,14,15,16 and were labelled continuance commitment.

In terms of the construct validity and internal consistency low Cronbach alpha coefficients were obtained for all the scales. All the alpha coefficients were lower than the guideline of $\alpha > 0.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, according to Black and Porter (1996) an alpha coefficient of 0.60 and higher is considered adequate in exploratory research. Nunnally (1967) also indicated that an alpha coefficient of between 0.50 and 0.60 is still acceptable for preliminary results, provided that further analysis of the instrument is conducted in the future. The scores on the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire and Survey of Perceived Organisational Support are normally distributed (skewness and kurtosis varying from -0.01 and -0.20). It therefore appears that all the measuring instruments have acceptable levels of internal consistency.

The results attained from the product-moment correlations indicate that high levels of Positive Support may lead to high levels of Organisational Commitment. Positive Support is practically significantly related to Affective Commitment and Continuance Commitment. This may be a sign that employees interpret the support provided by their employer as an

expression of commitment towards them, which may increase their commitment to the organisation. Perceived organisational support may lead to the experience of an optimistic mood at work, as well as a lessened likeliness to experience negative feelings such as anxiety or pressure on a daily basis.

This suggests that staff members who feel appreciated by their organisation, and who feel that they can depend upon the organisation for support, are more energised and eager on a daily basis than those who do not experience such support. If people experience support from the organisation they will remain committed to the organisation out of the fear that they will not find the same type of support from another organisation.

Furthermore the employee who feels the organisation supports him/her, will be emotionally attached to the organisation, identifies with the organisation and has a feeling of wanting to belong to the organisation. These committed employees will have improved performance, motivation, will have better relationships with peers and superiors, and there will be less absenteeism and tardiness (Suliman & Iles, 2000). This is very important if one keeps in mind the emotional, academic, disciplinary and social demands faced in the higher education sector. It seems likely that high levels of POS could help these employees to deal with these pressures more effectively.

To determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment, a standard multiple regression analyses, by means of the enter method, was carried out. It seems that Positive Support ($\beta = 0.26$; $t = 4.66$; $p \leq 0.05$) predicts Affective Commitment. POS is likely to lead employees to feel as if they fit in with the organisation and its members and thus show pride in their organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991). To show their appreciation to their employer, employees show a positive attitude towards the organisation, increasing their level of affective commitment. It seems that Positive Support ($\beta = 0.45$; $t = 8.61$; $p \leq 0.05$) predicts Continuance Commitment. Increased levels of POS may assist in restoring the balance between rewards given by the organisation and the contributions made by the individual. When individuals perceive high levels of organisational support the costs associated with leaving their organisation is seen as less significant than if they believed that they had put in a great deal of effort without receiving anything in return.

MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was used to determine differences between staff with regard to Commitment levels. Statistically significant differences were found between levels of Continuance Commitment. Support staff experience higher levels of Continuance Commitment than Academic Staff. This could be because, unlike academics that earn higher salaries and also get additional income from other professional activities, most administrative employees depend solely on their salaries and are, therefore, not likely to quit their jobs (Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

Another factor that could play a role is the South African labour legislation. South African organisations have affirmative action policies and due to these policies the organisations are required to hire within the designated groups, leaving the people that are not in the designated groups unsure of finding another job if they leave their current organisation.

The research population was representative of the multicultural and multilingual country, since 43% of the population spoke an African language. Females dominated the study population by 59.8% and 52.8% of the population were support staff. Future studies could benefit in terms of a stratified random-sample design, which would ensure sufficient representation of the different groups making up the total population of higher education employees in South Africa.

This study has showed that a relationship exists between organisational commitment and perceived organisational support among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the results must be understood in the context of some limitations of the sample used here. Reliability is greatly affected by the sample characteristics. The sample involved in this study was from an organisation of a particular kind (a higher education institution in South Africa). The researcher included support staff in the present sample because inclusion would allow assessing all members of the organisation.

Regarding future research, the present work needs to be replicated with other occupational groups. All participants in this study were randomly selected from the organisation. A considerable non-response rate was noted, with the implication that the differences between respondents and non-respondents are not known.

The use of cross-sectional design as opposed to longitudinal design could have influenced the outcome. It could be recommended that future research make use of a longitudinal design to determine if changes have occurred. A self-report questionnaire was used (Organisational Commitment scale) which was completed by participants in their own time and availability. This could have led to participants not understanding some of the items, or the inability of the researcher to identify transient factors. This could have distorted the results of the study.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between organisational commitment and perceived organisational support among employees at a higher education institution in South Africa.

It might be necessary that future research will focus on the relationship between organisational commitment and perceived organisational support for other occupational settings and determine norm levels for other occupations in South Africa. As Meyer and Allen (1991) point out, researchers need to examine employees' commitment profiles and determine what needs or values are relevant for the development of commitment. It is also suggested that further analysis of the measuring instrument is conducted in the future.

Higher education institutions are not resistant to the issue of employees experiencing low levels of organisational commitment which may possibly have unfavourable outcomes such as high employee turnover, decreased value of teaching experiences and academic development of the students. Higher education institutions should take the required steps for the best provision of job rewards to ensure that their workforce are highly committed in order to obtain the benefits of enhanced enthusiasm and performance (Malik, Nawab, Naeem, & Danish, 2010).

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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In this chapter, conclusions regarding the study are provided according to the general and specific objectives. The limitations of the research are discussed, followed by recommendations for the organisational and future research.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

- *To conceptualise POS and Organisational Commitment at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa according to literature.*

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) introduced a set of beliefs called Perceived Organisational Support (POS). They stated that employees form an overall belief regarding the degree to which an organisation values their inputs and shows concern for their welfare. Shore and Tetrick (1991) believed that POS can be used as an indication of an organisation's commitment towards its employees. Eisenberger, Fasolo and Davis La-Mastro (1990), suggested that employees would consider positive actions by the organisation that are to their advantage as evidence that the organisation is concerned about their welfare.

Eisenberger *et al.*, (1986) argued that the process of becoming committed to an organisation could be understood by using a social exchange approach that emphasises employee beliefs about the organisation's commitment to them, suggesting that employees give special attention to the effort of the organisation to recognise and reward their workplace behaviour. According to Blau (1964) social exchange theory proposes that the exchange relationship that exists between two parties regularly consists of social as well as financial exchange. Organisational researchers believe that the employer and employee not only exchange monetary resources, but also socio-emotional resources such as support, value, appreciation and approval (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). This points towards the likelihood of two tentatively distinctive components of POS existing. Firstly, organisational support can be seen as an overall belief that the organisation identifies and highly regards employee inputs as revealed in material resources such as reimbursements, position, job enhancement, and other types of rewards and reimbursements (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Levinson, 1965; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997).

According to George, Reed, Ballard, Colin and Fielding, (1993):

“This notion of organisational support suggests that perceived support would raise an employee’s expectancy that the organisation would reward greater effort toward meeting organisational goals. Secondly, organisational support is the belief that the organisation is concerned about the socio-emotional well-being of employees. This aspect of organisational support reflects employee perceptions with regard to organisational policies and practices pertaining to time away from work for personal circumstances or family care. POS is also valued as assurance that aid will be available from the organisation when it is needed to carry out one’s job and to deal with stressful situations” (p. 99).

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), POS is an assessment of status within the organisation and the status is the degree to which the organisation holds the employee in high regard. To the degree that status fulfils socio-emotional needs (the need for respect, membership, and support), “employees should not only feel an obligation to the organisation, but also develop a sense of unity with the organisation involving the incorporation of organisational membership into their social identity” (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p.698). Based on the norm of reciprocity developed by Gouldner, (1960), it is believed that employees who observe elevated levels of POS, are expected to respond to the organisation with an optimistic mind-set such as elevated levels of affective commitment and constructive actions such as dedication and loyalty to organisational objectives and lower intention to leave (Eisenberger, *et al.*, 1986; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli & Lynch, 1997).

Although POS and organisational commitment differ from one another in theory (Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2005), these two notions are somewhat similar. POS refers to the support of the organisation towards its employees, and organisational commitment refers to the degree to which employees are committed to the organisation that employs them (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Researchers have consistently found Perceived Organisational Support (POS) to be positively related to organisational commitment (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996).

Organisational commitment can be defined as the employee’s emotional affection to, recognition with, and participation in the activities of the organisation (Boehman, 2006; Greenberg, 2005; Karrasch, 2003 & Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian (1974) defined it as “strong belief in and acceptance of the organisational goals and

values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a definite desire to maintain organisational membership” (p.603). Furthermore Tella, Ayeni, and Popoola (2007) defined organisational commitment as a need to stay a member of an organisation, an eagerness to exercise high levels of effort on behalf of the organisation and; a belief in and acceptance of the objectives and aims of the organisation. “Employees become committed to their organisation when they (a) believe in the mission and values of the their organisation and make it their own; (b) are mutually ready to exert their dedicated efforts in the achievement of their organisational goals, and (c) have a strong desire to continue serving in their organisations” (Robbins & Coulter, 2003, p.70).

According to Kipkebut (2010) committed employees who perform rewarding and meaningful jobs, are less likely to leave their jobs than employees with low commitment levels and who are dissatisfied with their jobs. Employees who are committed to their organisations may easily accept the organisational objectives and goals (Valentine, Godkin,& Lucero, 2002). It is argued that individuals who are committed to the organisation are less likely to leave their jobs than those who are uncommitted. Individuals who are committed to the organisation are reported to perform at a higher level and also tend to stay with the organisation, thus decreasing turnover and increasing organisational effectiveness (Porter *et al.*, 1974).

According to Robbins, Judge, Odendaal and Roodt (2009) there are three separate dimensions to organisational commitment. Firstly affective commitment is an emotional attachment to the organisation and a belief in its values. The Business Dictionary (2013) defines affective commitment as “the tendency of an employee to stay with a company based on an emotional attachment. Employees who display affective commitment to their organisation will often identify strongly with the organisation and its objectives and might turn down offers to move to a new organisation, even if they seem more attractive financially” (p.1). According to Johnson and Chang (2008) affective commitment can be defined as the acceptance and internalisation of organisational goals and values, and a willingness to exert effort on the organisation’s behalf. The motivation that underlies affective commitment involves an intrinsic personal desire to remain with one’s organisation, likely owing to its identification and internalisation bases (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). Secondly continuance commitment is derived from the costs associated with leaving one’s organisation (e.g., loss of personal investments, limited employment alternatives (Johnson & Chang, 2008). Employees

who have continuance commitment stay with their organisation because it provides them with desirable personal outcomes and benefits that they are not willing to sacrifice.

The motivation that underlies continuance commitment has an economic and instrumental basis; that is, people remain committed in order to obtain specific rewards or to avoid specific punishments (Johnson & Chang, 2008). Continuance commitment is the perceived economic value of remaining with an organisation compared to leaving it (Robbins *et al.*, 2009), and thirdly, according to Williams (2004), normative commitment refers to employees' perceptions of their obligations to their organisation. A normative commitment is an obligation to remain with the organisation for moral or ethical reasons (Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) stated that:

“Although all three components of organisational commitment reduce the likelihood that employees will leave the organisation, perhaps the most important reason for distinguishing among them is that they can have quite different implications for on-the-job behaviour” (p.477).

Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that employees who show affective commitment are likely to show low absenteeism levels, do their job to the best of their ability, and perform tasks that do not necessarily fall within their job scope. Employees who show normative commitment may do likewise if they see it as a part of their responsibilities, or as a means of reciprocation for benefits received. Employees who remain primarily to avoid costs (continuance commitment) may not do more than is required to continue the employment relationship (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

- *To determine if the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support is a valid and reliable measure of POS in a sample of employees at a Higher Education Institution.*

According to the descriptive statistics the scores on the SPOS were normally distributed.

The Cronbach alpha coefficients of all measuring instruments are considered to be acceptable compared to the guidelines of $\alpha > 0.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Two factors were extracted for POS (SPOS): Positive Support and Negative Support.

- *To determine if there are differences in the level of POS regarding demographic groups at a Higher Education Institution.*

The results of the study indicated that no significant differences were found between POS, gender and staff.

However, significant differences were found between levels of Negative Support. Coloured and Indian participants experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared with White and African participants. English and Sotho speaking participants also experienced higher levels of Negative Support compared to Nguni and Afrikaans speaking participants. These observations might be understood if it is taken into account that, although the official language in the organisation is English, it is still a predominantly Afrikaans institution. A possible explanation for Nguni speaking participants experiencing lower levels of Negative Support than Sotho speaking participants could be that the organisation is situated in the geographical area where the Nguni language is spoken. These language barriers could result in the experience of higher levels of Negative Support by English and Sotho speaking groups in comparison to Afrikaans and Nguni speaking groups (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

Furthermore it appeared that staff in the Engineering, Theology, Economic and Management Sciences, and Arts faculties experienced higher levels of Positive Support compared with staff in the Law, Education, Natural Sciences and Health faculties. Staff in the faculties of Theology, Education, Health and Engineering also experienced higher levels of Negative Support than staff in the Economic and Management Sciences, Natural Sciences, Law and Arts faculties did.

- *To determine the relationship between POS and organisational commitment.*

The results attained from the product-moment correlations indicate that high levels of Positive Support may lead to high levels of Organisational Commitment. Practically Positive Support is significantly related to Affective Commitment and Continuance Commitment. This may be a sign that employees may interpret the support offered by their employer as an expression of commitment towards them which may increase their commitment to the organisation. Perceived organisational support may lead to the experience of a positive daily mood at work, as well as a lessened tendency to experience negative feelings on a daily basis,

such as tension or stress. This suggests that staff members who feel valued by their organisation, and who feel that they can depend on the organisation for support, are more energised and passionate on a daily basis than those who do not experience such support. If people experience support from the organisation, they will remain committed to the organisation out of fear that they would not find the same type of support from other organisations (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Robbins *et al.*, 2009).

High levels of Positive Support may lead to high levels of Organisational Commitment. This may be a sign that employees see the support offered by their employer as a demonstration of commitment towards them which may increase their commitment to the organisation (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Employees who feel that they receive support from their respective faculties may have a more positive frame of mind at work, as well as a lessened tendency to experience negative feelings such as pressure or anxiety. Employees who feel appreciated by their faculties, and who feel that they can rely on their faculty for support are more energised and passionate than those who do not experience such support. It seems likely that faculties providing enough support to their staff are compensated with employees that have positive mind-sets. This is very important if one keeps in mind the emotional, academic, disciplinary and social demands faced in the higher education sector. It seems likely that high levels of POS could help these employees to deal with these pressures more effectively (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

- *To determine if the experience of organisational support will lead to organisational commitment.*

The results showed that Positive Support predicts Affective Commitment; thus POS is likely to direct employees to develop a sense of pride in their organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). In order to show their appreciation to their employer, employees exhibit a positive attitude towards the organisation, which increases their level of affective commitment. The results also showed that Positive Support predicts Continuance Commitment. Increased levels of POS may assist in restoring the balance between rewards given by the organisation and the contributions made by the individual. When individuals perceive high levels of organisational support the costs associated with leaving their organisation is seen as less significant than if they believed that they had put in a great deal of effort without receiving anything in return.

- *To determine the difference in organisational commitment between academic staff and support staff.*

Statistically significant differences were found between levels of Continuance Commitment. Support staff experienced higher levels of Continuance Commitment than Academic Staff. This could be because, unlike academics that earn higher salaries, and also gain additional income from other professional activities, most administrative employees depend solely on their salaries and are, therefore, not likely to quit their jobs. Another factor that could play a role is South African labour legislation. South African organisations have affirmative action policies, and due to these policies the organisations are required to hire within the designated groups, leaving the people that are not in the designated groups unsure of finding another job if they leave their current organisation.

- *To make recommendations for future research and practice.*

It is recommended that the present work should be replicated within other occupational groups. It could be recommended that future research make use of a longitudinal design to determine if changes have occurred. It might be necessary for future research to focus on the reliability and validity of the SPOS for other occupational settings and determine norm levels for other occupations in South Africa, also determining the antecedents of POS. Future research could focus on identifying the specific factors which attribute to differences in the experience in the levels POS in different demographic groups. Since no research could be found comparing the levels of POS experienced between different demographic groups, it should be explored to ascertain if the results obtained in this study were methodology based or practically substantiated.

It might be necessary that future research focus on the relationship between organisational commitment and Perceived Organisational Support for other occupational settings, and determine norm levels for other occupations in South Africa. As Meyer and Allen (1991) point out, researchers need to examine employees' commitment profiles and determine what

needs or values are relevant for the development of commitment. It is also suggested that further analysis of the measuring instrument should be conducted in the future.

4.2 LIMITATIONS

It is necessary to note some limitations of the current study. Reliability is certainly greatly affected by the sample characteristics. The sample involved in this study was from a single organisation of a particular kind (a higher education institution in South Africa). The researcher included support staff in the present sample because inclusion would allow assessing all members of the organisation. Regarding future research, the present work needs to be replicated with other occupational groups. All participants in this study were randomly selected from the organisation. A considerable non-response rate was noted, with the implication that the differences between respondents and non-respondents are unknown.

The use of cross-sectional design as opposed to longitudinal design could have influenced the outcome. It could be recommended that future research make use of a longitudinal design, to determine if changes have occurred. A self-report questionnaire was used (Survey of Perceived Organisational Support and the Organisational Commitment scale), which was completed by participants in their own time and availability. This could have led to participants not understanding some of the items, or the inability of the researcher to identify transient factors. This could have distorted the results of this study.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding these limitations the current study has important implications for organisations and future research.

4.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation

The current study adds to the researcher's efforts to understand the relationship between Organisational Commitment and Perceived Organisational Support. Organisations that require their employees to develop organisational commitment should provide a supportive work environment which creates a mutually beneficial atmosphere. It is recommended that team building and team strengthening interventions be implemented that will focus on

practices to enhance organisational support and affective organisational commitment of employees.

During the phase of organisational changes management should strive to create an open communication environment to allow the employees to go through the changes in a less stressful way, thereby increasing the commitment of employees because they will realise that the change is for the better. Management must ensure that there are support systems for employees. Getting to know the employees better will ensure that management provides the necessary support that employees need.

This has practical implications for employees. Organisations should demonstrate their commitment to the employees by delegating authority, providing comprehensive training, sharing information; provide for the development and growth of employees in the organisation, and offer more than market related incentives.

Managers interested in developing commitment among their employees can gain by seeking guidance from the growing literature on high commitment Human Resource Management. They should adopt human resource practices that would contribute to the perceptions of the organisation's commitment to its employees, and the development of affective commitment.

It is recommended that the implementation of any intervention should focus on the individual, managerial and organisational practices to enhance affective organisational commitment. The understanding of affective organisational commitment should be clear to all. Academic and support staff should become aware of the factors that decrease the levels of organisational commitment, and work towards a motivated and positive perception of the organisation. This could help them to become aware of the symptoms of low organisational commitment in the work environment and enable them to intervene before the effects become too serious.

4.3.2 Recommendations for future research

Present findings have important implications for future research and practice despite the above limitations of this study.

It is suggested that more research be conducted in future on Perceived Organisational Support and Organisational Commitment in South African industries. Future research should also focus on the reliability and validity of the SPOS for other industries and occupational settings. It is also important to determine norm levels for other industries and occupations in South Africa.

More longitudinal studies should be conducted on Perceived Organisational Support and Organisational Commitment in other organisations in South Africa to compare the results and findings from a South African perspective.

The use of adequate statistical methods, such as structural equation modelling, equivalence and bias analysis, is recommended.

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