

A Conceptual Framework of Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Motivation in the Retail Sector: The Mediating Roles of Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment and the Moderating Role of Leadership Support

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Abstract: *Frontline personnel shape customer experience and public perception in the retail industry, making their motivation vital for organizational success. However, retail work environments are typically characterized by high workloads, emotional labour, long and unpredictable hours, and continuous customer interaction—conditions that erode employees' dedication and enthusiasm. Perceived Organizational Support (POS), defined as employees' belief that the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being, has emerged as a crucial motivational resource. Yet prior research often treats the POS–motivation relationship too simplistically, overlooking the psychological mechanisms and contextual factors that strengthen or weaken this association. This conceptual paper addresses these gaps by presenting an integrated framework in which job satisfaction functions as a cognitive mediator, affective commitment as an emotional mediator, and leadership support as a contextual moderator. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, the framework explains how organizational support fulfils intrinsic and extrinsic needs, enhances employee resources, and stimulates reciprocal motivation. The study advances theoretical understanding of employee motivation in demanding retail environments and offers practical insights for managers seeking to develop a committed and resilient retail workforce.*

Keywords: Affective commitment, employee motivation, job satisfaction, Perceived Organizational Support (POS), retail industry

1. Introduction

In today's service-oriented economy, the retail industry represents one of the most customer-facing sectors due to continuous worker–client interaction and the central role frontline employees play in service delivery. These employees are essential contributors to service performance and significantly influence customers' willingness to return (Baker et al., 2020). However, retail work environments are commonly characterised by demanding conditions, including long working hours, emotional labour, high workloads, and frequent customer encounters. Over time, these job demands can erode employee morale and diminish motivation (Grace & Van Nguyen, 2022). As such, strengthening employee motivation has become an organisational priority to maintain competitive advantage in this highly demanding sector.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is a crucial construct for understanding employee behaviour and performance. POS refers to employees' beliefs that the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Research indicates that higher POS is associated with enhanced motivation, stronger performance, and more positive workplace attitudes (Kurtessis et al., 2017). However, most POS studies in retail contexts have focused primarily on its direct effects, offering limited insight into the underlying psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions that shape how POS influences employee motivation.

Scholars have emphasised the need to investigate theoretical explanations beyond direct associations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Two constructs that warrant further exploration are job satisfaction and affective commitment. Job satisfaction reflects employees' cognitive evaluations of their work environment, whereas affective commitment reflects their emotional attachment to the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Although both constructs are conceptually linked to motivation, their mediating roles in the POS–motivation relationship remain under-explored within the retail sector.

In addition to psychological mechanisms, contextual factors—particularly leadership support—may strengthen or weaken the effects of POS on motivation. Supportive leadership practices, such as guidance, recognition, and transparent communication, have been shown to enhance the perceived authenticity of organisational support (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). This suggests that leadership support may serve as an important moderating variable in frontline retail settings.

Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this conceptual paper proposes a framework in which job satisfaction and affective commitment act as mediators, while leadership support serves as a moderator in the relationship between POS and employee motivation. The framework contributes to motivation literature by integrating cognitive, emotional, and contextual mechanisms and offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners aiming to cultivate a motivated, adaptable, and high-performing retail workforce.

2. Literature Review

This literature review discusses how the most essential variables constructing the suggested conceptual framework (Perceived Organizational Support (POS), employee motivation, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and leadership support) interconnect and integrate the theoretical, empirically grounded, and contextual facets of how POS affects motivation on a cognitive and emotional level, and how leadership support affects the moderation of that relationship. The review focuses on Social Exchange Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources Model to explain and potentially predict employee behavioural and attitudinal outcomes within the context of the retail sector.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) concerns the general feeling employees have about how the organization recognizes their efforts, and how the organization is concerned about their and wholistic well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Empirical investigations have shown that POS, as part of Organizational Support Theory, is POS determined by how employees interpret the organization's supportive and benevolent behaviours as an indication of the

organization's commitment to them. Employee support and POS have a reciprocal relationship, and as POS supportive behaviours, employees develop POS supportive beliefs and attitudes; POS supportive behaviours by employees are a result of POS supportive beliefs. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) posit that POS support positive perceptions, implying that employees feel supported and that POS support positive workplace behaviours.

POS develops through an organization's policies such as equity policies, supervisory backing, and recognition, resources availability, and promotion (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Employees regard fairness and policies as concerns demonstrates support and concern for them (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Timely feedback, skill development, and recognition strengthen employees' perception the organization cares about their effort and encouraged participation at the highest level, POS system both heightened.

POS the most employees in the in the retail as they are in the constant contact with customers, experience emotional strain, and have little control over encounters as they are random and unpredictable (Grace & Van Nguyen, 2022). Employees are especially vulnerable in such situations as they have to manage the stress and emotions attached to customers complaints to long overdue and are stressed as under pressure to meet various targets. POS acts to buffer the situation countering the emotional exhaustion by sense of being valued and emotional support (Baker et al., 2020). POS enables employees to meet the expectations and demands of their enhanced.

Support from supervisors leads to enhanced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, and motivation. Furthermore, research shows that support from supervisors contributes to lesser turnover intentions, and enhanced psychological well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Moreover, employees noticing organizational support and care from employees provide stronger motivation to perform well and exhibit organizational loyalty (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Consequently, retail companies with large front-line employees, provision of support from management is crucial to fostering efficient and positive employee behaviours.

Employee Motivation

Motivation is what energizes and guides one's actions and behaviours within a workplace, and consists of many internal psychological processes (Pinder, 2014). Motivation is what determines how much effort one exerts, how persistent one is, and how responsive one is to challenges and setbacks. Self-Determination Theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which comes from within a person, and is driven by personal interest and enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, which is externally driven by rewards or external pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Employee motivation is crucial in determining how one performs or behaviours, which is especially true in-service industries.

Motivation in the retail sector is particularly important as the nature of the job in question is as frontline workers. As grandy explains, employees work long hours, handle customer complaints, deal with multiple tasks simultaneously, and have to deal with emotional work. They manage their emotions while providing service. With the help of motivation, retail employees will not suffer fatigue, disengagement, and withdrawal. The interactions between employees and customers, and therefore customer satisfaction, depend on the motivation of the frontline employees.

Motivation is affected by various factors in the retail sector to include: managerial support, perceived equity, emotional climate, structure of rewards, and organizational resources. As

Breevaart and Bakker explains, extrinsic motivation is influenced by fair and meaningful rewards. Intrinsic motivation is supported by supervision that facilitates feelings of competence and psychological safety. It is the work environment, and the support systems, that enable retail employees to cope with the high job demands of the work, and to have a positive work orientation.

Considering the tough nature of work in the retail industry, the only motivational factor is the perception of the organization's concern for the employees' well-being. In such cases, employees feel more psychological, emotional, and trust stability, and psychological closure (Blau, 1964). Further, there is a large volume of evidence indicating that such perception positively affects employees' disengagement and motivation within the service sector (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Thus, in the context of retail, the perception of organizational support by employees is a major factor that facilitates employees' ability to perform at a high level.

Job Satisfaction as a Mediator

Job satisfaction is the employees' cognitive and emotional assessment of the degree to which a job fulfils their needs and expectations (Judge & Klinger, 2001). It is an assessment about the level of satisfaction derived from a job, considering the nature of work, organizational climate, salary, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and the prospects for advancement. It is well accepted that job satisfaction shapes the level of motivation, performance, and commitment to the organization in the long run (Judge et al., 2001). With regard to retail, satisfaction is of utmost importance, particularly when the employees in the front line have to cope with monotonous, high workload, and high emotional demand tasks. The construct of job satisfaction is intimately connected with POS. Employees' overall assessment of their work environment improves when organizations endorse supportive policies.

Employees perceive organizational regard when they feel respected, recognized, and treated with fairness. POS has been framed within the context of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959). According to this theory, job satisfaction can be attributed to hygiene factors, such as working conditions and fairness, as well as to motivator factors, like recognition and achievement. POS enhances both: it reinforces fair treatment and comfortable working conditions (hygiene). And, at the same time, it provides recognition and appreciation (motivators). Hence, job satisfaction is a positive consequence of POS.

There is a positive correlation POS and job satisfaction. Also, job satisfaction is the main influencer of motivation, as it affects employees' attitudes and emotional reactions to their work. Quoting Herzberg, it is more likely that satisfied employees show more effort, creativity, and overall involvement. The correlation is well-established: the more satisfied the employees are with their job, the greater levels of motivation and performance are achieved (Judge et al., 2001). In the context of retail, satisfied employees are able to perform customer-related tasks more effectively, and remain calm and stress-tolerant, which is a great asset for the organization.

Thus, job satisfaction mediates the relationship between POS and motivation. POS enhances employees' cognitive evaluative appraisals of the work environment, in turn, leading to greater satisfaction and motivation. Research on the outcomes of performance, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behaviour has verified satisfaction as a mediating variable in the relationship of POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Thus, job satisfaction constitutes a relevant cognitive pathway whereby POS increases motivation of employees in frontline retail positions.

Affective Commitment as a Mediator

Affective commitment pertains to the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement of the employees with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Employees who exhibit strong affective commitment take pride in being a part of the organization and show a willingness to work towards its goals. In the service sector, affective commitment becomes increasingly relevant, as the emotional involvement of employees in the customer interaction has a direct bearing on the outcomes for the organization (Meyer et al., 2002).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) serves as a strong precursor to affective commitment. Employees feel attached to their organizations emotionally when they feel supported, leading them to trust and become even more emotionally attached (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that an employee will display commitment and involvement in their employer's activities when they are given positive treatment. Employees form a strong sense of belonging in an organization when they receive both emotional as well as financial support, thus increasing their ability to withstand job-related stress.

Affective commitment has a positive impact on work-related behaviour. Employees are more inclined to go the extra mile (workwise), and display high levels of persistence and effort in their activities when they are emotionally attached to the organization (Meyer et al., 2002). In the retail sector, emotionally attached employees display high levels of organizational commitment, which is directly related to outstanding performance and customer satisfaction. In this case, willingness and motivation to work is affected on the basis of the POS. From POS, affective attachment and motivated behaviours start to work. There is sufficient evidence in research showing that affective commitment is the mediating factor of the POS and many other outcomes like engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, and performance (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Therefore, because of the affective commitment, emotional mechanism is in place that strengthens the impact of POS in motivating individuals.

Leadership Support as a Moderator

Leadership support is defined as the level of supervisor's empathy, guidance, recognition, communication, and help in resolving work problems (Liden et al., 2000). Supervisors are incredibly important in determining the employee's experience, particularly in retail contexts, where employee's leaders are the only ones they can turn to for guidance, scheduling, conflict resolution, and emotional support. In the JD-R Model, leadership support is also considered to be a significant job resource that increases motivation while also decreasing strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Support from leadership strengthens the impacts of POS, as subordinates tend to view the behaviours of their supervisors as manifestations of the behaviours of the entire organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Support from leaders, along with recognition, and constructive assistance, lead employees to view organizational support as sufficiently authentic, and genuine, as such alignment strengthens the prominence of POS, and consequently, the positive benefits it has on employee attitudes. On the other hand, if employees perceive that there is little to no support from leadership, they may doubt the authenticity of organizational support, subsequently weakening the motivational effects of organizational support.

Motivation is fostered by Supportive Leadership through the enhancement of a positive psychological climate as employees feel appreciated, their worth is recognized, and they are safe from psychological threats (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). When leaders within an organization implement supportive behaviours such as coaching, encouragement, and

recognition, they foster a climate where employees are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. This is particularly salient within the retail industry, as frontline employees, are frequently exposed to difficult and unpredictable customer scenarios.

It can be concluded that Support from Leadership is the moderator of the relationship of POS and Motivation. High Support from Leadership enhances the positive effects of POS on Motivation, whereas lower Support from Leadership decreases these effects. Therefore, Support from Leadership represents a significant contextual variable that determines the extent to which organizational support can be transformed to employee motivation.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The current study employs the Social Exchange Theory, Herzberg Two Factor Theory, and Job Demands-Resources model to understand the psychological and contextual mechanisms that link perceived organizational support to employee motivation in the retail industry. Regardless of the difference a particular theory may pose, each theory reflects a unique approach regarding the ways in which employees assess organizational behaviour and subsequently develop organizational attitudes which are then transformed into actions of motivation. The employee satisfaction and emotional inclination, and organizational support, can be considered as intervening and destabilizing variables in the explained process by these theories. The overall model encompasses the emotional-cognitive interplay and the resource mechanisms that constitute motivation in the highly demanding front-line retail work.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory, in particular, provides an adequate explanation for the positive effects of perceived organizational support on motivation. Social Exchange Theory explains that the relationships that are developed in a workplace are based on the exchange of rewards and punishments, and that employees will develop a positive attitude towards the organization and improve their behaviour if the organization treats them well in a positive manner (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In today's workplaces, the organization's positive treatment can be reciprocated in the form of increased motivation to work, willingness to stay with the organization for a longer period of time, and to put in extra work efforts because of the perceived organizational support. If the organization's employees feel that the organization is concerned about their well-being, then the employees are likely to exert increased organizational commitment and efforts as a psychological means of reciprocation.

Supporting the applicability of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) within the context of POS (Perceived Organizational Support) outcomes Kurtessis et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis which revealed that POS is related to the feeling of obligation, trust, and reciprocity which subsequently leads to increased motivation and performance. The dependence is greater in the service sector as employees need more organizational support to deal with emotional labour and demanding customers. Retail employees with high perceived organizational support tend to feel more appreciation and react with increased motivation, less withdrawal behaviours, and higher service orientation (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

Frontline retail employees deal with customer dissatisfaction, emotional pressure as well as role ambiguity. POS offers the emotional and psychological capital to employees to deal with these issues. When employees feel they have been treated fairly, acknowledged, and have received support from leaders, they feel these to be organizational investments in them which

leads to enhanced motivation, commitment, and performance (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Thus, SET provides a sound theory to explain the relationship.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory continues to dominate motivation research and continues to receive positive attention from research across various fields. The theory explains the differences between hygiene and motivation factors. Hygiene factors, including salaries, policies, and working conditions, only work to keep employees from being dissatisfied, whereas motivator factors, including recognition, attainment, and advancement, work to evoke motivation and satisfaction (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Although the theory has existed for some time, new studies validate employees being able to make the distinction between conditions that work to reduce dissatisfaction from those that promote true motivation (Bari et al., 2013; Sanjeev & Surya, 2016).

POS fits within both frameworks of Herzberg's theory. Regarding hygiene factors, POS demonstrates fairness, job security, supportive policies, and acceptable working conditions all of which work to eliminate dissatisfaction. Employees feeling strong feelings of support and safety also feel less anxious in retail situations that tend to involve clashes with customers and high workloads. As for motivation factors, POS recognition, praise, and support that employee tend to need for achievement purposes work to increase satisfaction and motivation.

The dual role of POS is also validated by empirical studies. In a study by Yousaf et al. (2015), it was indicated that intrinsic rewards and recognition increase effort and satisfaction; however, hygiene-related factors decrease negative affective states that undermine motivation. In customer-facing jobs, employees who feel appreciation and support are more tenacious, enthusiastic, and motivated to offer more services and high-quality services. Therefore, based on the theory of Herzberg, the role of satisfaction as a mediator in the POS – motivation relationship is strengthened: employees who feel high POS also feel higher satisfaction, which increases motivation even in demanding retail jobs.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model is amongst the most popular theory used to explain motivation and employee well-being. The model states that all jobs include job demands. These include emotional labour, workload, and conflicts; as well as job resources such as support from superiors, organizational feedback, and support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands drain employees' physical and mental stamina, while job resources increase motivation, positivity, and ongoing efforts. The balance that each individual employee achieves between the two determines individual employee performance and well-being.

In this model, perceived organizational support (POS) is regarded as an essential job resource that enhances motivation by offering emotional support, instrumental help, and a feeling of safety. Positively evaluated support from an organization helps employees cope with job-related strain, especially from demanding and emotionally taxing customer interactions, at a higher level. It is established that levels of support and recognition, as job assets, are among the strongest predictors of engagement and motivation, even in high-pressure circumstances (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Another of the most important job resources in the JD-R model is leadership support. Supportive, effective, coaching, and empathetic leaders who recognize their employees help them feel more respected and competent. Daily leadership support is positively associated with

motivation and engagement as it builds psychological resources (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Leadership support enhances POS by demonstrating consistency between organizational support and supervisory support. High leadership support strengthens the effect of POS on motivation (Tuckey et al., 2012).

Within the JD-R framework, POS and leadership support can be considered as complementary job resources that foster motivation and mitigate the negative effect of job demands. In service environments characterized by emotional exhaustion, customer incivility, and workload pressure, POS and leadership support create a resource-rich environment that enhances motivation, lowers burnout, and bolsters performance. This explains the rationale of leadership support moderation on the POS–motivation relationship.

4. Proposed Conceptual Framework

This particular framework outlines the manner in which the POS motivates workers in the retail industry in both direct ways and indirect ways. Retail employment has particular job characteristics, which makes retail worker motivation a major issue, including great emotional labor, customer interaction, and job difficulty. POS operationalizes a role resource that increases the employee's value and resilience and is amplified via the work context through the support of leadership, and job satisfaction and affective commitment are psychological mechanisms that mediate the POS and motivated action relationship. POS has motivated behaviour. In retail POS has motivated behaviour, her is a retailing framework that integrates social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017), Herzberg's two-factor theory (Alshmemri et al 2017), and the JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti 2017) model. This provides a complete framework to consider how motivation forms in retail settings.

Direct Effect of POS on Employee Motivation

The framework suggests that POS has a positive impact on employee motivation. POS explains employee beliefs that the organization appreciates and attends to their participation and well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). When employees feel they are treated equitably and recognized and cared for, they feel psychologically safe and valued. These perceptions increase their willingness to make an effort and participate more fully in their work. In line with Social Exchange Theory, support provided by the organization fosters the norm of reciprocity; employees will, in return, be more motivated and demonstrate positive behaviors at work (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Colquitt et al., 2013).

There is a substantial and compelling empirical evidential support for this direct link. POS motivates employees by raising psychological energy and self-efficacy and by developing a positive perception of the organization that cares about them (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014). When the sector is retail, POS motivates employees by lowering emotional exhaustion and enhancing the employees' engagement and persistence in difficult interactions (Grandey, 2003; Grace & Van Nguyen, 2022). High POS uplifts motivational levels of employees and helps them to maintain their motivation even when they are working under pressure (Gilboa et al., 2008; Caesens, Stinglhamber & Ohana, 2016).

P1: *Perceived Organizational Support is positively related to employee motivation in the retail sector.*

Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

One of the fundamental assumptions made within the existing research involves the position of POS in motivational frameworks where job satisfaction serves as the primary mediator explaining the relationship between the POS construct as evaluated in the organizational context. This is defined as the extent to which a job is able to meet an employee's needs, expectations, and values as a result of cognitive reflection (Yousaf et al., 2015). POS fosters a sense of satisfaction within one's position as a result of perceived fairness, recognition, and emotional support—even more so for the employees in question. Such support leads employees to have a more positive outlook on their circumstances, as well as the status of their rewards and relationships within the confines of their job.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory serves as an ideal explanatory framework for this phenomenon. POS modifies the existing hygiene factors (e.g., fair policies, supportive working conditions) and motivator factors (e.g., recognition, appreciation) that contribute to a system that functions to create satisfaction and reinforce further effort (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Recently, it has continued to be the case that organizational support has been shown to satisfy needs on the satisfaction continuum both extrinsically and intrinsically (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). This is especially the case within retail as employees are often faced with repetitive tasks and emotional labor as a result of hostility and complaints from customers.

Consequently, motivation is promoted through job satisfaction. Employees who are content are more excited and continue working in a devoted capacity to help achieve organizational objectives (Yousaf et al., 2015). Satisfaction levels increase mental preparedness and willingness to engage and go the extra mile. Employees in the retail sector are more equipped to manage and defuse customer resolution conflicts and better able to cope with stressful situations. Hence, employee job satisfaction is the explanation for the cognitive component through which motivation is increased by POS.

***P2:** Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and employee motivation in the retail sector.*

Mediating Role of Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is proposed as a second mediator linking POS to motivation. It reflects employees' emotional attachment and identification with their organization (Meyer et al., 2002). POS augments affective commitment by instilling a sense of belonging, loyalty, and trust. Employees who perceive organizational concern for their well-being are more inclined to adopt the organizational objectives as their own and to form a stronger emotional attachment. The literature established that the most important predictor of affective commitment is POS because of the role of gratitude and psychological ownership (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Employees with high levels of perceived organizational support are less likely to think of withdrawal, therefore being more motivated to put effort on the task of their role. This is even more relevant in the case of retail considering the emotional strain employees have to deal with on a daily basis, POS helps employees obtain the emotional resources to make strong affective attachments.

The emotional commitment will, in turn, enhance the motivation. Emotionally attached employees are more likely to put in the effort, go through sufferings, and to perform extra-role behaviours (Meyer et al., 2002). They become more engaged with the organizational success and see it as a personal success, therefore embarking on a more active role to facilitate success. There is more than enough evidence to firmly establish that affective commitment predicts hard

work, quality of work, and effort. This indicates that it is affective commitment that provides the motivation as a pathway through which POS works.

P3: *In the retail industry, Affective Commitment is the most important factor in explaining the influence of Perceived Organizational Support on employee motivation.*

Moderating Role of Leadership Support

The JD-R Model considers leadership support as a moderator of the POS–motivation link. Within the JD-R Model, leadership support is a central job resource that contributes to enhancement of well-being, mitigates strain, and bolster engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Leaders’ assistance in the form of guidance, empathy, feedback and recognition strengthens the supported and competent feelings of employees.

Leadership support amplifies the impact of POS as employees obtain organizational support through their immediate supervisors. Supportive leaders’ behavior—mentoring, fair treatment and provision of emotional support—leads employees to view organizational support as authentic and reliable (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). This consistency of organizational support and supervisory behavior fosters credibility and enhances motivation.

In the absence of stronger leadership support, employees may sense a gap between the formal organizational support system and their day-to-day realities. Such a gap may erode perception of credibility of POS and its motivational impact. In the retail sector, leadership support is imperative as supervisors are heavily involved in scheduling, conflict management, and daily orchestration.

P4: *Leadership support positively moderates the relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and employee motivation, such that the relationship is stronger when leadership support is high.*

Integrated Summary of the Framework

This framework describes employee motivation as the outcome of direct effects (POS → Motivation), cognitive (POS → Job Satisfaction → Motivation), emotional (POS → Affective Commitment → Motivation), and contextual amplification (Leadership Support × POS → Motivation) mechanisms. POS provokes motivation by psychological bolstering and assurance of care. Job satisfaction and affective commitment mediate the POS relationship as cognitive and emotional mechanisms to exert effort. Leadership support amplifies or dampens the strength of those relationships. All these factors explain the motivation of retail employees in adverse working conditions in a fashion that is both integrated and theoretically sound.

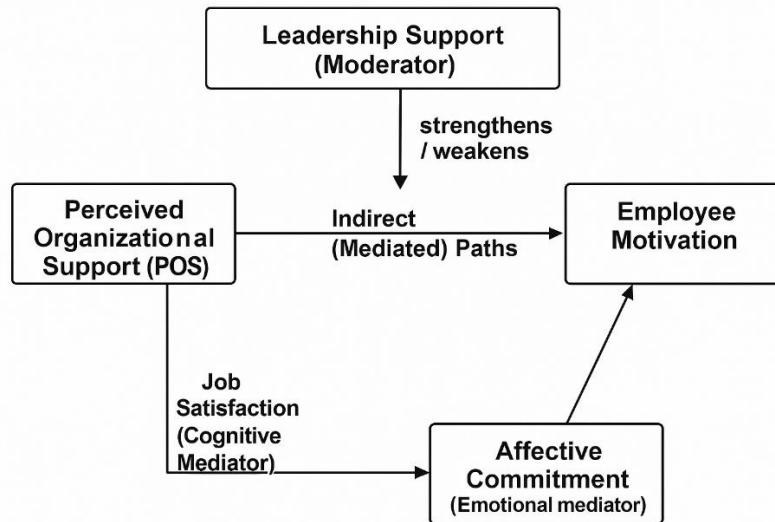


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

The framework shows the direct relationship of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and motivation of employees; the mediation of this relationship by Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment; and the moderating effect of Leadership Support.

5. Theoretical Propositions

Building on the conceptual framework, this study articulates four theoretical propositions that clarify how POS influences employee motivation in the retail sector, informed by Social Exchange Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the JD-R Model. Retail workplaces often involve high emotional demands, customer pressure, physical fatigue, and irregular schedules, making organizational support and leadership quality critical for sustaining motivation. The propositions highlight cognitive, emotional, and contextual routes through which POS affects motivation and specify the roles of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and leadership support.

Proposition 1: POS and Employee Motivation (P1: POS → Motivation)

Based on our first POS hypothesis, we assume that POS is linked to employee motivation in the retail sector as a direct contributor. The workplace motivation employee is a key factor in driving positive behaviors and organizational POS. Employees' motivation is amplified driven in POS by employees receiving visibility and recognition in the workplace (Kurtessis et al., 2017) as motivation is POS through Social Exchange Theory. Employees engage in higher motivation, loyalty and organizational support through their perceived willingness to invest in employees.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) also serves as an essential job resource that alleviates emotional exhaustion and nurtures psychological safety. Retail workers constantly face the emotional challenges of customer interactions, extended shifts, and variable workloads. These job requirements are resource depleting and can cause strain and disengagement. POS helps employees feel that the organization is aware of their challenges and is willing to provide help (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This helps to alleviate the strain as employees feel more supported by their organization, develop stronger self-belief, and feel that their work is more meaningful, and experience enhanced motivation.

Also, POS improves intrinsic motivation through the development of a greater sense of mattering and connection for employees at work. Employees who feel that the organization values their contributions and support them, are more likely to regard their work as meaningful and to expend greater effort toward completing their tasks. This is highly relevant in service contexts since employees' emotions are pivotal to the quality of service delivery and customer satisfaction.

***P1:** Perceived Organizational Support in the retailing sector positively influence employee motivation.*

Proposition 2: Job Satisfaction as a Mediator (P2: POS → Job Satisfaction → Motivation)

The second proposition claims that there is mediation by job satisfaction on the relationship between POS and motivation. Employees perceive job satisfaction as positive and stable equitability and supportive organizational climate (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). Emotions, fairness, and recognition relief form positive evaluations by employees which shape job satisfaction. Employees, when experiencing strong support from the organization, are inclined to conceptualize their work surroundings as positive and supportive of their organizational well-being.

Hygiene and motivator factors as per Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory accounts for also outlining why, to some degree, POS is also a satisfying factor. POS improves the hygiene factors by promoting fairness and decreases inequities of policies and improves the working conditions. Supportive scheduling, empathetic supervision, and equitable treatment suffice to the decreased dissatisfaction. Simultaneously POS is also aligned to strengthening the motivator factors in that recognition, appreciation, and a sense of achievement improves the satisfaction and the efforts (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

In motivation, the final outcome is to be positively determined by job satisfaction. Employees, on the very first hand, are the enthusiastic, persistent, and willing ones to go on and add for the organizational goals. There is motive and performance that is direct outcome to satisfaction which is also well proven for engagement (Yousaf et al., 2015). The nature of work in retail emphasizes satisfaction as that work is to aid employees in managing the customer service-related stress and emotional demands of service work.

***P2:** Job satisfaction is a mediating factor on the relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and employee motivation within the retail industry.*

Proposition 3: Affective Commitment as a Mediator (P3: POS → Affective Commitment → Motivation)

The third proposition states that POS affective commitment and motivation to work. POS support affective commitment by fostering a work setting where employees feel appreciated, trusted, and respected. Employees develop positive emotional attachment towards the organizational structure and begin to assimilate the objectives of the organization (Meyer et al., 2002).

Social Exchange Theory implies that POS engenders allegiance and psychological indebtedness. Employees subjected to supportive organizational treatment feel entitled to a reciprocal interdependence in the form of committed, emotionally engaged, and prolonged organizational participation (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This commitment is particularly

essential in retail and service industries where employees have to rely on the organization to fulfill their client demands and emotional support.

Then, affective commitment results in motivation. Employees with high affective commitment draw personal importance to the success of the organization and are therefore willing to make extra efforts to ensure organizational success by participating in the organization, and undertaking informal leadership. Affective commitment has been shown to have a positive impact on motivation, organizational citizenship behaviors, and sustained organizational effort (Meyer et al., 2002).

***P3:** The positive effect of Perceived Organizational Support on motivation is partially explained by affective commitment in the retail sector.*

Proposition 4: Leadership Support as a Moderator (P4: Leadership Support Moderates POS → Motivation)

The fourth proposition suggests that the influence of leadership support on the relationship between POS and motivation is one of moderation. Leadership Support is a Job Resource that is a reflection of how much a supervisor does facilitative guiding, empathy, acknowledgement, and support. According to the JD-R Model, such leadership positively influences psychological resources, and consequently, motivation, by fostering a climate of support and resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Because employees tend to experience organizational support through their line managers, leadership support strengthens POS. When employees perceive supportive organizational behaviors such as coaching, no-bleeding cuts, and emotional support, they regard organizational support as real and in-keeping with supportive behaviors (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Ensuring this alignment between organizational support and supervisory behavior enhances faith and, therefore, motivation.

Lower impact of POS may occur due to the absence of leadership support. Employees may view organizational support as inadequate or contradictory if supervisors act in ways that are unsupportive or inconsistent as they lose motivation. Hence, in retail, where supervisors are crucial for daily operations, including planning, leading, and resolving conflicts, the absence of leadership support must be seen as a boundary condition.

***P4:** Perceived Organizational Support and employee motivation correlate in differing strengths across varying levels of leadership support, ultimately showing stronger motivation when leaders have high supportive involvement.*

Theoretical Implications

The proposed framework makes several theoretical contributions to the organizational behaviour literature, particularly regarding how POS influences employee motivation. Although prior research has shown that POS improves employee attitudes and performance, many studies treat the POS–motivation link as a straightforward direct effect, paying less attention to underlying processes (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This model advances theory by specifying two distinct psychological pathways through which POS fosters motivation: a cognitive route via job satisfaction and an emotional route via affective commitment. This dual-pathway perspective extends foundational work such as Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), which primarily examined broad attitudinal outcomes.

The framework clarifies that job satisfaction functions as a cognitive mediator, demonstrating that POS enhances employees' evaluations of fairness, recognition, and job meaningfulness, which in turn stimulate motivation (Judge & Klinger, 2001). At the same time, affective commitment acts as an emotional mediator, illustrating that POS strengthens employees' sense of attachment, loyalty, and identification with the organization, thereby sustaining motivation (Meyer et al., 2002; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). These dual mechanisms address gaps in the literature concerning how POS is psychologically translated into motivated behaviour.

The model also refines Social Exchange Theory by differentiating between cognitive reciprocity (through satisfaction), emotional reciprocity (through affective commitment), and behavioural reciprocity (through motivation). This enhances the explanatory depth of SET by articulating the internal processes that connect perceptions of support to behavioural outcomes (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Furthermore, the framework extends Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory by demonstrating that POS simultaneously strengthens hygiene factors (e.g., fairness, supportive conditions) and motivator factors (e.g., recognition, growth opportunities), which jointly enhance satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

Incorporating leadership support as a moderator also contributes to the JD-R literature. The model suggests that the effectiveness of POS as a job resource depends on the level of leadership support. High leadership support amplifies the impact of POS, whereas low leadership support weakens it. This contextualised view enriches motivation theory by showing that job resources do not operate in isolation; their utility is shaped by the quality of supervisory relationships (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Overall, the framework integrates cognitive, emotional, and leadership dimensions into a holistic explanation of motivation in retail, an area that has often been overshadowed by research in other sectors.

Managerial Implications

The proposed framework also has important managerial implications for practitioners seeking to improve motivation in the retail sector. First, because POS is fundamental to job satisfaction, affective commitment, and motivation, managers should prioritise creating a work climate in which employees genuinely feel valued and supported. This requires organizational practices that emphasise fairness, transparent communication, recognition, and adequate resourcing (Kurtessis et al., 2017). For retail employees who face emotional labour, customer pressure, and fluctuating workloads, such support is especially critical. High POS encourages more positive job evaluations and, in turn, greater motivation. Managers can strengthen POS through fair scheduling, equitable rewards, recognition schemes, and clear communication channels.

Second, enhancing job satisfaction is a key practical lever because satisfaction is an important cognitive pathway from POS to motivation. Managers can improve satisfaction by offering skill-development opportunities, ensuring fair workload distribution, upgrading working conditions, and designing jobs with autonomy, task significance, and growth potential (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). In retail, where employees must maintain positive customer relationships, satisfied employees are more emotionally stable and better able to sustain motivation under pressure.

Third, the framework suggests that organizations should seek to build affective commitment as an emotional driver of motivation. Managers can foster affective commitment by cultivating a culture of trust, collaboration, and inclusion. Initiatives such as employee empowerment, participative decision-making, shared values, and supportive interpersonal relationships strengthen employees' emotional ties to the organization (Meyer et al., 2002). Employees with

high affective commitment are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, discretionary effort, and service-oriented behaviour—qualities that are vital in retail.

Finally, the framework underscores the crucial role of leadership support in enhancing the effectiveness of POS. Supervisors and team leaders shape employees' daily experiences and are often the primary conduit of organizational support. Leaders who display empathy, provide constructive feedback, communicate clearly, and recognise employee contributions reinforce a sense of being understood and valued (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Supportive leadership enhances the credibility of organizational support, thereby boosting motivation; in contrast, unsupportive leadership can undermine POS (Tuckey et al., 2012). Retail organizations should therefore invest in leadership development programmes that equip supervisors with supportive, empowering, and relationship-focused skills. When combined with supportive policies, healthy work environments, and strong cultural alignment, effective leadership can significantly enhance employee motivation, performance, and retention.

6. Future Research

This proposed framework does indeed form the basis for understanding how perceived organizational support might influence employee motivation, but this model also forms the basis for additional avenues of inquiry. First, there is a need for empirical research to examine this proposed dual-mediating model of job satisfaction and affective commitment, using more sophisticated forms of analysis, such as structural equation modeling, or partial least squares structural equation modeling. While there have been some studies that have examined the relationships among perceived organizational support, satisfaction, and commitment (Kurtessis et al., 2017), significantly fewer studies have examined the relationships among these variables and their combined, sequential or parallel, mediating effects, all within the one model, and especially within the context of retail. Future studies might examine and compare the extent of influence of the cognitive (satisfaction), and the emotional (commitment), mediators with respect to motivation.

Second, future studies should examine more boundary conditions than just leadership support. The other factors that might strengthen or weaken the relationship between POS and motivation include, but are not limited to, psychological safety, emotional intelligence, organizational justice, burnout, personality traits, and digital leadership behaviours. These factors are especially relevant given that retail work is highly dynamic and emotionally intense. The effectiveness of POS is likely a function of these individual and contextual factors (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). These are the factors that are likely to enhance the explanation of the JD-R model, and the application of this particular model.

Third, examining the framework in varying sectors and cultural settings would be beneficial. In the sphere of POS and commitment, cultures that are more individualist are different from those that are collectivist (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), and findings from the retail industry of Malaysia are unlikely to be applicable in other countries. Cross-cultural studies could determine whether employees in Asian countries are more responsive to supportive relationships, whereas employees in Western countries are more inclined to appreciate recognition or have their autonomy sustained.

Fourth, to capture possible changes in POS, satisfaction, commitment, and motivation across different time frames, longitudinal studies would be more appropriate. It is plausible that employee attitudes and motivation are not constant and could change, for example, due to

seasonal changes in workload, leadership changes, or organizational restructuring (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). More complex causal relationships would be understood from the collection of multi-wave data.

Lastly, research that incorporates new elements in the workplace, including technological support systems, AI scheduling, digital communication, gamified feedback systems, and hybrid work arrangements is encouraged. Understanding if digitalized retailing enhances or diminishes POS is critical in determining the effect of POS on motivation and motivation in the context of an increasingly digitalized retailing. In general, more research would be necessary to provide evidence on the proposed model, more context on the proposed model, and more evidence on employee motivation within the context of retail.

7. Conclusion

This conceptual analysis provides a detailed account of how Perceived Organizational Support (POS) encourages employee motivation through a set of interrelated cognitive-emotional-contextual factors. Supported by Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017), the model asserts that employees who perceive the organization as supportive will develop feelings of gratitude, obligation, and reciprocity that will be directed toward the enhancement of their efforts and will help maintain their motivation.

The main contribution of the framework is its consideration of possible dual variables, namely, job satisfaction and affective commitment. These variables help elucidate the motivational and cognitive mechanisms that transform motivation into action. Job satisfaction as a cognitive mediator in the model implies that the POS enables employees to review their work environment through a lens of fairness, and equality, and encourages a willing performance (Judge & Klinger, 2001). Affective commitment as an emotional mediator implies that POS promotes employees' sense of being part of the organization, their loyalty, and their identification with the organization, thereby enabling persistent motivation, and a positive performance in tasks beyond the prescribed role (Meyer et al., 2002).

The leadership advocacy model also suggests that leadership advocacy can strengthen or weaken the effect of POS on motivation. Leader's actions affect how employees feel about the organization. Employees feel organizational care when leaders offer support through empathy, direction, and feedback (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Employees interpret POS as valuable when leaders' advocacy is high. On the other hand, when employees perceive that leader do not care advocacy, then POS, as the employees interpret organizational support as unmotivating, the paradox of support model comes to play, illustrating the importance of the support paradox model for employer-employee relationships.

The model is a previous framework for employee motivation, especially for the retail industry. The model advances understanding from an organization perspective as the framework incorporates cognitions, emotions, and situational factors to develop motivation theories. Enhanced motivation can be achieved through the paradox of support by retail managers focusing on the development of POS, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and coaching. The model presented can be the basis for other studies to acquire and develop on the relationship of the model in various organizations and cultural settings.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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