

PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A STUDY OF MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study attempts to develop a model for perceived organizational support (POS) in medium enterprises and to empirically examine the antecedents of perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational commitment (OC.) Most POS study had been conducted in a Western setting. The current study is conducted in a non-Western setting, specifically in Malaysia. The research particularly focuses on the antecedents of perceived organizational support (POS) that may influence the perceptions on organizational commitment (OC) held by employees of medium enterprises. The effect of national culture and value congruence on organizational commitment will also be examined. A tentative research model is developed based on an extensive literature review. Qualitative field study was carried out to explore perceived organizational support (POS) in selected medium enterprises in Malaysia. Field interviews were conducted with employees and human resource practitioners of selected medium enterprise in the Malaysia manufacturing sector. The data were analysed via content analysis. The results explained the antecedents of perceived organizational support especially among employees of medium enterprises and its effect on organizational commitment.

Keywords: *perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, value congruence and culture*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The organizational commitment concept has been defined by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982, pp. 27) 'as the relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organization.

A model by Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed that there are three types of organizational commitment, namely affective, continuance and normative. The affective commitment is a desire of the employee to maintain membership in the organization that develops largely as the result of work experiences that create feelings of comfort and personal competence. The second, continuance commitment is a need to remain and results from recognition of the costs associated with leaving the organization such as reduction in pay, pension, benefits or facilities and due to the lack of alternative job opportunities. The third, normative commitment, is a feeling of obligation to remain resulting from internalization of a loyalty norm and/or the receipt of favors that require repayment.

Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynn and Rhoades (2001) viewed OC as a social exchange between employers and employees in which employees draw inferences concerning their organizations' commitment towards them (perceived organizational support), which in turn will contribute to their commitment towards the organization.

This paper attempts to understand how antecedents of POS influence the perception on organizational commitment held among employees of medium enterprise in Malaysia. In addition, GLOBE national culture (power distance and in-group collectivism) and value congruence impacts

upon organizational commitment will also be investigated. The next sections of this paper present the relevant background literature, research method and design, results and conclusions of the study.

2.0 BACKGROUND LITERATURE

2.1 Organizational commitment (OC)

The commitment that an employee has to an organization has consistently been found to be related to workplace behaviour. The nature and direction of relationships within the workplace are complex and depend on the context and variables under consideration (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). For example, organizational commitment acts as a central explanatory variable for understanding individual work behaviours such as job performance and goal attainment (Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe 2004). Meyer and Allen's (1991) model in which there are three aspects of organizational commitment, namely affective, continuance and normative has been outlined above.

Affective and normative commitment have been found to be consistently and positively correlated and both have been shown to be predictors of positive organizational behaviour (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnytsky 2002). In contrast continuance commitment has been found to be unrelated to affective commitment and negatively related or unrelated to positive organizational behaviors. Allen and Meyer (1996) claim that organizational commitment refers to a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization. However, as no psychological bind has been found to be involved in continuance commitment, Brown (1996) questions whether continuance commitment is a form of commitment. Abbott, White & Charles (2005) claimed that continuance commitment was not related to turnover intention. Meyer et al (2002) reported that there is not a strong relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intention. This calls into question whether continuance commitment can be viewed as a form of organizational commitment but a different construct from affective OC.

2.2 Perceived organizational support (POS)

Previous research has viewed OC as a social exchange between employers and employees in which employees draw inferences concerning their organizations commitment towards them (perceived organizational support), which in turn will contribute to their commitment towards the organization (Eisenberger, et al. 2001).

The roots of the employee-organization relationship can be traced back to the theory of social exchange of Gouldner (1960) and Blau (1964). Gouldner referred to social exchange as a pattern of mutually contingent exchanges of gratification between two parties with a belief in reciprocity norm (p.176). Social exchange theory is further discussed by Blau (1964) who suggests that the basis of any exchange relationship can be described in terms of either social or economic principles. The social exchange concept is then expanded to organizational support theory to explain the employee-organization relationship. At the global level, Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) suggested that employees form a global belief concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This belief refers to perceived organizational support (POS).

The development of POS, according to organizational support theory, is fostered by employees' tendency to assign the organization human characteristics for actions taken by agents of the organization. Levinson (1965) stated that employees tend to view actions taken by agents of the organization as indications of the organization's intention as a whole. However, social exchange theorists, for example Blau (1964) and Gouldner (1960), argued that resources received from others are more highly valued if they are based on discretionary choice and voluntary aid is viewed as an indication that the donor genuinely values and respects the recipient.

2.3 Studies on perceived organizational supports factors and organizational commitment

Previous studies conducted on POS and OC have found that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational commitment (OC) (Eisenberger et al 1990; Eisenberger et al 2001; Rhoades et al. 2001; Waynes et al 1997; Whitener 2001; Allen 2001; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann and Birjulin 1999; Bishop, Scott and Burroughs 2002; Setton, Benett and Liden 1996; Loi, Hang-yue and Foley 2006). In addition, researchers have reviewed the relationship between various antecedents of perceived organizational support and organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al 1990, Eisenberger et al 2001; Rhodes et al 2001, Wayne, Shore and Liden 1997; Barlett 2001; Tansky and Cohen 2001; Allen et al 2003; Kim 1999; Allen 2001; Ko, Price and Mueller (1997).

However, from the various studies on POS and organizational commitment, there are contradictory issues that could be argued. For example, studies on training had a contradictory finding; Wayne et al (1997) found employees who had more formal training and development experience reported higher level of POS and thus increased OC. On the other hand, Whitener (2001) found that POS was stronger when organizations offer less comprehensive training opportunities. This reflects a contradictory finding regarding interaction between perceived organization support and training.

In addition, Whitener's (2001) study also indicated that employees with low perceptions of organizational support expressed higher commitment when they worked for organizations with more comprehensive training. However, when they worked for an organization with less comprehensive training, the employees with high perceptions of organizational support expressed high commitment. Thus, it can be argued that perhaps other unmeasured variables that related to employees' perception of special treatment might be interacting with perception of support and training that would affect the commitment.

Another study on POS and OC is a study conducted by Tansky and Cohen (2001). They concluded that employee development activities were positively related to both POS and organizational commitment. However, due to weak justification of the definition of variables, it is difficult to make a concrete judgment related to employee development activities and both POS and organizational commitment. These variables were also not empirically tested in this study. Although Allen et al (2003) found that human resource practices were related to POS, this study could be disputed because not all elements of human resource practices are included. This calls for further empirical study to assess the antecedents of POS and how it will affect commitment. The current study will help fill the empirical research gap in the literature.

2.4 Other Factors

Previous studies had found that national cultures have different impacts on organizational commitment. For example, a study conducted by Gelade, Dobson and Gilbert (2006) found that none of the Hofstede dimensions of culture are significantly related to Affective Commitment (AC). They found that there is lack of connection between AC and high levels of group loyalty characterized by collectivist society. However, Palich, Hom and Griffeth (1995) and Randall (1993) have found a weak and theoretically unexpected relationship between commitment and Hofstede's collective dimension.

It is important to note that all studies mentioned above used dimensions which had been determined by Geert Hofstede. However, the Hofstede dimension had been criticized because it was centered on only one multinational company (Fang, 2003 and Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges and Luque, 2006). The latest approach, which was build on Hofstede's work, was the GLOBE study (Javidan and House, 2001 and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dofman and Gupta, 2004). This study was conducted over 160 scholars from 62 cultures. To the best of our knowledge, no study has attempted

to look at organizational commitment and the GLOBE culture dimension called 'in-group collectivism' - a gap that this paper attempts to address. 'In-group collectivism' refers to the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in organizations and families. In addition, although the GLOBE culture dimension had been studied in Malaysia, it only focused on a specific ethnic group and particularly on the leadership aspect (Kennedy, 2002). The other culture dimension that will be examined is power distance. 'Power distance' refers to the extent to which member of an organization expect and agree that power should be unequally distributed in the organization. Power distance is expected to negatively related to organizational commitment (Rowlinson 2001; Md Zabid, , Murali and Juliana 2003; Foosiri, 2002)

Another factor that is interesting to study is value congruence. A study conducted by Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden (2004) found that work value congruence was positively related to job satisfaction when perceived organizational support (POS) was low and negatively related when POS was high. Value congruence was also found to have a positive relationship with organizational commitment (Chatman, 1991, Meglino, Ravlin and Adkins, 1989, O'Reilly, 1991, Boxx, Odom & Dunn, 1991, and Slocombe and Bluedorn, 1999). Therefore, in order for organizational commitment to be achieved in an organization, it is expected that both value congruence and perceived organizational support is needed.

2.5 Perceived Organizational Support (POS) And Medium Enterprises

Despite the voluminous literature on perceived organizational support little research with respect to POS and OC had been conducted in medium enterprises (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). As medium enterprises face problems such as financial resources to fund production and provide financial incentives, research is needed to understand the conditions affecting medium enterprises' employees' perception about their organization's support towards them and their resulting commitment.

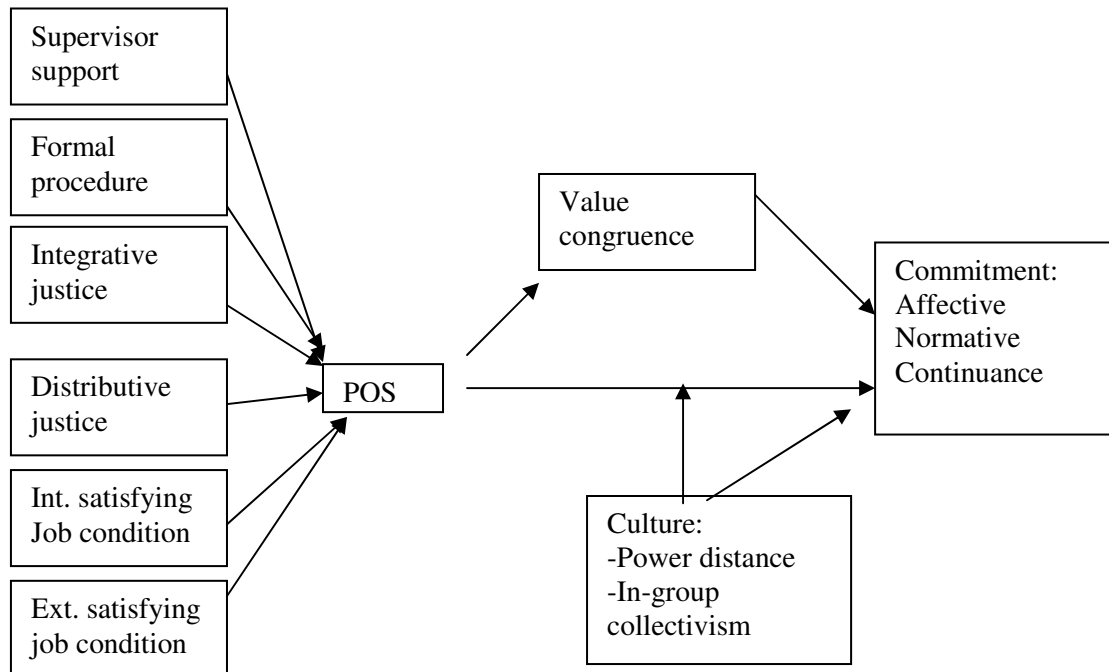
The current research will focus on perceived organizational support (POS) in medium enterprises in Malaysia. The main reason for choosing the Malaysian medium enterprises is because they are confronted with problems such as limited access to finance and capital and thus providing financial incentives to their employees may be difficult. A finding reported by the Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation, (SMIDEC, 2004) indicates that 72% of Malaysian small and medium enterprises utilize internal sources of funds to satisfy up to 40% of their financing requirement.

There has been some research on organizational commitment done in Malaysia but less research on the contribution of perceived organizational support. Samad's (2006) study, which was conducted in Malaysia, indicated that perceptions of both procedural and distributive justice were positively related to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. However, Kwon (2006), who studied the relationship between organizational justice and outcomes (included organizational commitment) with an integrated cultural model, failed to empirically test this relationship. Therefore there is a need for further testing this relationship to fill the empirical research gap in order to extend the generalisability of findings in the Malaysian context.

2.6 Initial model of the study based on literature review.

The conceptual preliminary research was first developed to identify the issues and gaps from the past research. This process is essential because the potential key variables in this area could be explored. Based on this process, the initial model has been developed. This model however is developed based on 'western perspective' (See Figure 1). Therefore to ensure the capability of this model in the Malaysian context, an exploratory study needed to be undertaken.

Figure 1 : Initial model of the study based on literature review.



3.0 METHODS

3.1 Study approach

The present study is the qualitative exploratory phase of a larger quantitative study. A qualitative approach was used to explore and analyze employees' perception of support given to them and how this could make them committed to the organization. The objective of the field study is to search out and identify concepts that might not be recognized within the existing literature review. Another objective was to identify potential key variables.

3.2 Sampling and participants

Random sampling was used to select medium enterprise who could be participating in this study. The list of the medium enterprises in Malaysia, categorized by industry was obtained from the Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC). Medium enterprise in Malaysia is defined as a company that has a number of employees between 51 to 150 people (National SME Development Council, 2005). In order to get representative information from medium companies, the companies selected were identified as follows. The main criteria to select the medium company was to randomly choose a company that had a number of employees towards the bottom and towards the top of the size range. The companies were firstly contacted by telephone to get the permission to conduct an interview and to explain the objective of the study. Then the potential interviewee was selected by randomly interviewing five people from each company. An effort had been made to carefully stratify the organizational area from which to select to ensure diversity and to get contrast in opinions and heterogeneity

3.3 Data collection

Ten respondents from two organizations of medium enterprises in the Malaysian manufacturing sector took part in these interviews. Three people from shop floor or clerical staff, one people with human resource background, and one other managerial responsibilities were interviewed

from each company. Individuals that participated in the field interview were provided with consent forms that clearly outline the purpose of the research. All participants that took part in this interview did so voluntarily.

The semi-structured interview technique was used as the primary tool to collect data. The perspectives on how employees perceived support that company provided to them and how this could make them commit to the organization guided the entire interview process. Questions which intended to explore the antecedents of perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, value congruence and culture issues were asked from the respondents. The questions had been developed based on the initial model. Interview question based on this perspective were first developed and tested on a third person. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The interview took up to 1 hour on average. The transcription was undertaken as soon as the interview was completed to include any possible cues that could influence the interview session.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of data was undertaken using the content analysis approach. The purpose of content analysis is to extract the factors and variables of the study. The analysis of interview scripts which involved content analysis within single interviews followed by content analysis across interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

At this stage, the process was done manually. The process involved reviewing the individual transcript and identifying key words or themes among which the pattern were categorized under diverse codes that reflects the factors and variables of the tentative research model. This is followed by development of individual model. Later the model that combined the answer from all participants were developed. All the factors and variables are compared with those from the literature review.

4.0 RESULT

4.1 Background of company information

The companies that participate in the field study had of 132 employees and 55 employees respectively. It is noted that the size of the company selected is toward the top and toward the bottom of the size range of the medium enterprise in Malaysia. The first company (company A) was involved in manufacturing and assembling low voltage and medium voltage switch gear while the latter company (company B) was involved in manufacturing gelatine and capsule for industrial application.

4.2 Interview sample demographic

Table 1 below provide a brief overview of the participants' demographics. The interviewee's position varies from managers to machine operators. This is to ensure different viewpoints that derived could represent all levels of hierarchy in the company. There were four female and six male participants in the field study. It is noted that the majority of the participants involved in this field interview had at least four years experience working in their current companies. Thus the respondent could give some information on how they perceived support was given to them and thus commit to the organization.

Table 1: Participation demographic information

COMPANY	CODE	POSITION OF INTERVIEWEE	TENURE OF INTERVIEWEE IN CURRENT COMPANY	GENDER OF INTERVIEWEE
Company A	1	Human resource manager	5	Female

Company A	2	Production manager	8	Male
Company A	3	Mechanical Technician	7	Male
Company A	4	Office administrator	12	Female
Company A	5	Production operator	6	Male
Company B	6	General manager	7	Male
Company B	7	Administration /work manager	4	Female
Company B	8	Technician	4	Male
Company B	9	Machine operator	4	Female
Company B	10	Electrician	5	Male

4.3 Antecedents of POS

The responses from the interview participants showed the influence of supervisor support, organizational fairness (formal procedures, interactional justice and distributive justice) and job conditions as antecedents of POS.

It was recognized by most participants that the supervisor support could influence on employees' perceptions of organizational support. Supervisor characteristics explained by the participants included care about their suggestions, care about their well being, giving guidance on how a job was to be done, knowledgeable in their area as well as having human relations skills. As mention by one of the participant“ ... *our supervisor remind us on our role as workers towards the company and monitor the progress of the workers production under his supervision....*” Another participant said “ *..what we really want from the supervisor is the supervisor who can be easily to talk to, giving as much information as possible to those who work under their supervision and the most important thing try their very best to understand our feeling.....*’

The findings from the field study also found that organizational fairness elements such as formal procedures, interactional justice and distributive justice affect employees' perceptions, providing information of organizational support. The interviewees expressed the view that formal procedure characteristics such as documented procedures for determining reward, promotion and training; and designed procedures for providing feedback regarding its services and implementation had a positive influence on how employees perceived support given to them. There is some agreement among interviewees that interactional justice could be positively related to perceived organizational support. The interviewees mentioned that the timely feedback about any decision and its implementation given by the supervisor and consideration of employees' viewpoint by involving employee in their decision making, could affect how they perceived support given by the organization. As mentioned by one of the employees “..... *I feel I have a say in my job....Although I had not been given hundred percent power, but at least the supervisor will ask our opinion before making the decision.....*” Participants of this study also mention that distributive justice characteristic such as rewarding the employees in a fair manner could be related to perceived organizational support.

Another antecedent that was mentioned by the participants during the interview was job conditions. The field study results provided more support for the position that job conditions will positively influence employees in perceiving support given to them. It was recognized by most participants that both intrinsic and extrinsic job conditions would contribute to perceived support. The interviewees expressed the view that intrinsically satisfying job conditions such as opportunities for personal accomplishment, opportunities for personal development, opportunities for challenging task, opportunities to take responsibility, opportunities for task variety, freedom to adopt their own approach to the job, opportunities for social relationships and a favorable climate for workgroups had a positive influence on how they perceive support given to them. One of the employees said “ *..I have been given opportunities to attend related courses. I think it has added value to myself and the*

most important thing is personal satisfaction. I really think that training itself has fulfill my personal satisfaction...”.

Most of the employees also agree that extrinsically satisfying job conditions provided by the company could have a positive influence on perceived organizational support. Participants said that opportunities for pay rise, non-wage benefits such as medical support and opportunities for career advancement could be associated with how they perceived support given to them.

The responses from the interview participants confirmed the antecedent of perceived organizational support namely supervisor support, formal procedures, distributive justice, integrative justice and both intrinsically and extrinsically satisfying job conditions contributed to perceived organizational support.

4.4 POS and organizational commitment

Another issue that was also discussed was how support that employee perceived given to them could make them committed to the organization specifically focusing on the three constructs of organizational commitment namely affective, normative and continuance commitment .

Most of the participants stated that support given by the company such as training, being given opportunities to give ideas and supervisor support could indicate that the company was concerned for employees' welfare. Thus , this will lead them to feel as part of a family member in the organization which reflects the construct of affective commitment. For example one of the participants said” *I think my supervisor is very understanding person. He has the ability to see other point's of view. Although he don't necessary agree with what we had suggested, but at least he showed to us that he appreciate our idea. This made me feel as part of the member in the company.”*

Some of the participants believe that perceived organizational support could influence normative commitment. They agreed that the support given to them by the organization for example benefits and training could make them loyal to the company which indicate normative commitment. Thus perceived organizational support could positively influence normative commitment. Respondent 10 said “*..I think people will look at how much salary and types of benefits that they get. This is especially important for those who had a family. If company can extend the benefit for immediate family this will make them more loyal to the company”*

Similar to the results of both affective and normative commitment , the employees interviewed also agreed that POS will positively influence the continuance commitment. The findings from the field study show that among the reasons why they want to continue giving commitment to the organization is because there are no other alternatives that they can get from outside organization. However, the support given by the organization would be an additional factor to make them feel more willing to continue be in the organization.

4.5 Value congruence and culture

Results from the field study provided some evidence that value congruence could influence employee's commitment. Seven out of ten participants mentioned that value congruence would impact on affective commitment. They expressed the feeling that if similarity existed between the company's value and their values, they will be happy to spend their career in the organization, feel like part of the family in their organization and feel attached to the organization. Therefore, value congruence will be positively related to affective commitment.

Normative commitment also found to be influence by value congruence. However only one of the participants claimed that value congruence would positively influence normative commitment. The interviewee emphasized that if congruence between organization value and his value exist, he feels that he is more obligated to be loyal to the organization. He explained “*...by sharing the same value, each employee will become more close because everybody will understand each other task.*

Furthermore, the value will also play a role as a way to make them more united. Therefore, this will make them more loyal to the company”

The field study result provide some evidence on the relationship between value congruence and continuance commitment. There was support that management felt it could make a difference to the decision to continue all else equal. Two interviewees who were management people in the organization did agree that if employees cannot match the organization value with their value, they will choose to work for another company especially if there are many opportunities available (which represent the component of continuance commitment). Thus value congruence could have a positive influence on continuance commitment.

There was also overwhelming support for the in-group collectivism construct. Most of the participants supported the notion that in-group collectivism will positively lead to organizational commitment. The variable “group members take pride in individual accomplishment of their superior” and “superior take pride in the individual accomplishment of group members” are similar to those identified in related studies on in-group collectivism. Some of the interviewees expressed that they take pride in the individual accomplishment of group members. They mentioned that a sense of belonging make them feel as part of the family in the organization. Thus in group collectivism could create a sense of belonging in the company which reflects affective commitment

The field study result also provided some support for the position that normative commitment was influence by in-group collectivism The interviewees explained that the in-group collectivism characteristics for example ‘take pride in the accomplishment of the group member’, is part of their team culture. They stated that such activities will create a spirit of loyalty towards the organization. Therefore, in-group collectivism could influence the normative commitment in the organization.

There was also a strong support among the participants for power distance construct. Although none of the participant did mention the power distance construct as contributing towards commitment, this construct was itself supported. All participants considered “the influence based on one position” to be practiced in their companies. This suggested the existence of power distance culture in the Malaysian medium companies specifically in the manufacturing companies.

Based on the analysis in the field study, one further factor namely the ‘external factors’ construct was found to contribution to organizational commitment. Findings from the field study emphasized that external factors could negatively influence the decision of the employees to continue giving commitment to the organization. Most of the participants expressed the view that external factors, such as distance from their home to the company, transportation system between their home and their company, and also offers from other companies could influence their decision to continue giving commitment to the organization.

4.6 Final research model

The focus of the field study was to explore the factors and variables that could influence the perceived organizational support towards organizations commitment. Based on the analysis of the field study, a model that combined the answer from all participants was developed (Appendix 1). This is done by combining or joining together the factor that have a same element or have a same meaning. At the same time, the factor that are unique and cannot be combined with other factor must be maintained. In addition, factors based on the literature review were also to be considered in developing the model. The model from each individual interview was first developed, followed by a model that combined the answer from all participants.

Finally, the findings of the field study was thus used to develop the final research model. The final research model combines the findings from the initial model and the field study. This is shown in Appendix 2. This comprehensive model was developed through the process of identifying the

similarities and differences between the factors in the initial research model and those identified in the field study. Relationships between the factors (construct) were developed using previous studies in the area of POS, organizational commitment, national culture and value congruence as a basis.

The final research model in Appendix 2 reflects a set of factors that could influence how employees perceive support given to them and thus, how this could affect their commitment towards the organization in the context of the medium enterprise. In this model, external factors that influence continuous commitment were added compared to the initial model. It should be noted that there was some consensus among respondents in terms of the effect of external factors on continuance commitment. This factor is assumed to negatively influence on continuance commitment. This factor did not surface in initial model, a model based on the literature derived from western societies. One possible reason for this is that factors such as location, and daily transport are accounted for in the initial decision to join the organization and thus do not figure strongly in subsequent decisions to continue with the organization. This may reflect other labour market conditions including the availability of information on the range of potential jobs.

5.0 CONCLUSION

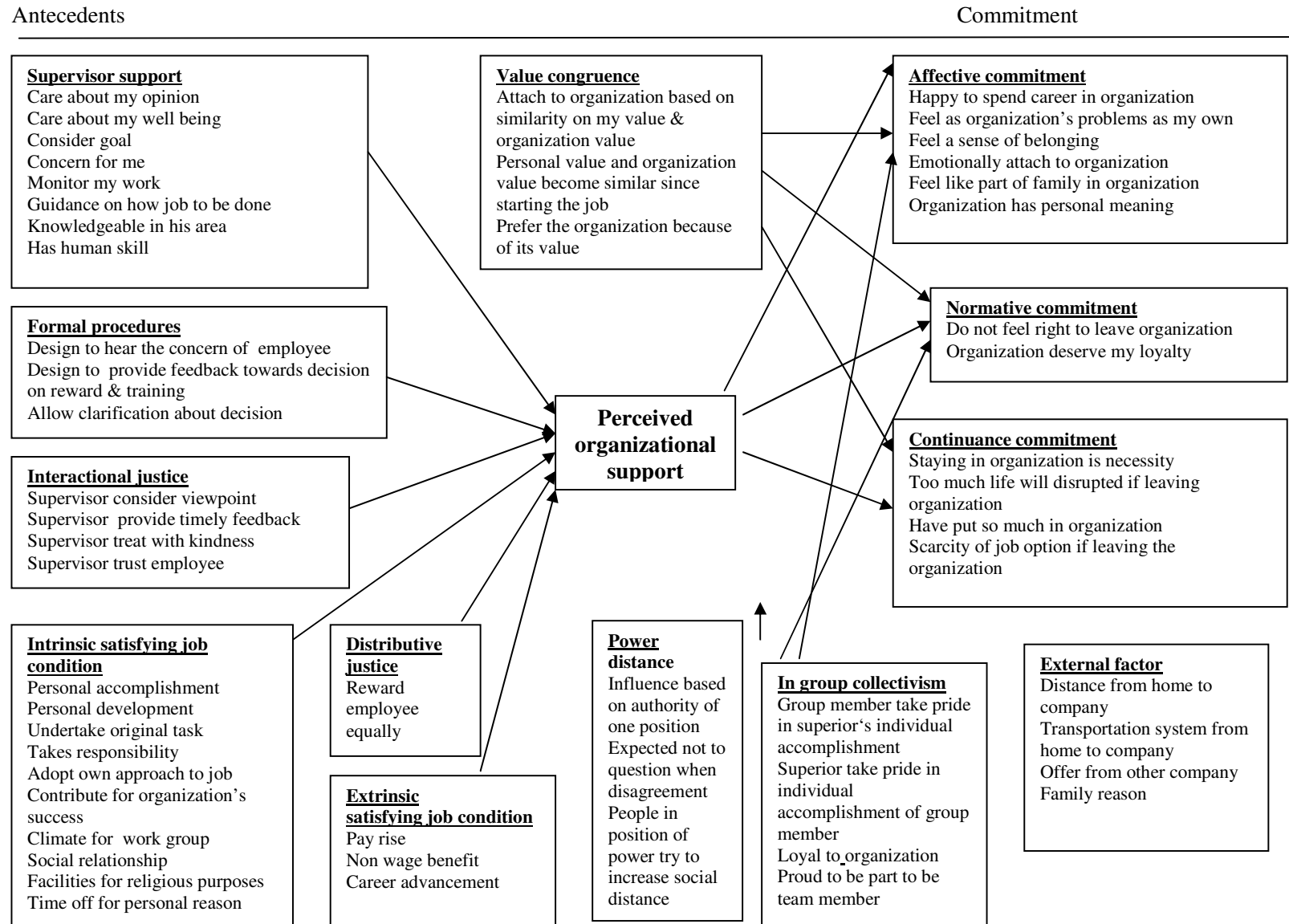
This paper gives some insight into employee awareness and perception of support given to them which could make them committed to the company. It presents the result of the qualitative field study that examined the view of Malaysian medium enterprise employees on organizational support and commitment.

The field study showed that supervisor support, formal procedures, integrative justice, distributive justice and both internal and external job conditions are suggested by employees as antecedents of support. It also appears that perceived organizational support could be positively related to affective, normative and continuance commitment. The interview participants were also keen to relate value congruence to the three types of organizational commitment. With regards to the GLOBE culture dimensions of in-group collectivism and power distance, it appears that both constructs were supported in this study. However, only in-group collectivism was found to be associated with organizational commitment.

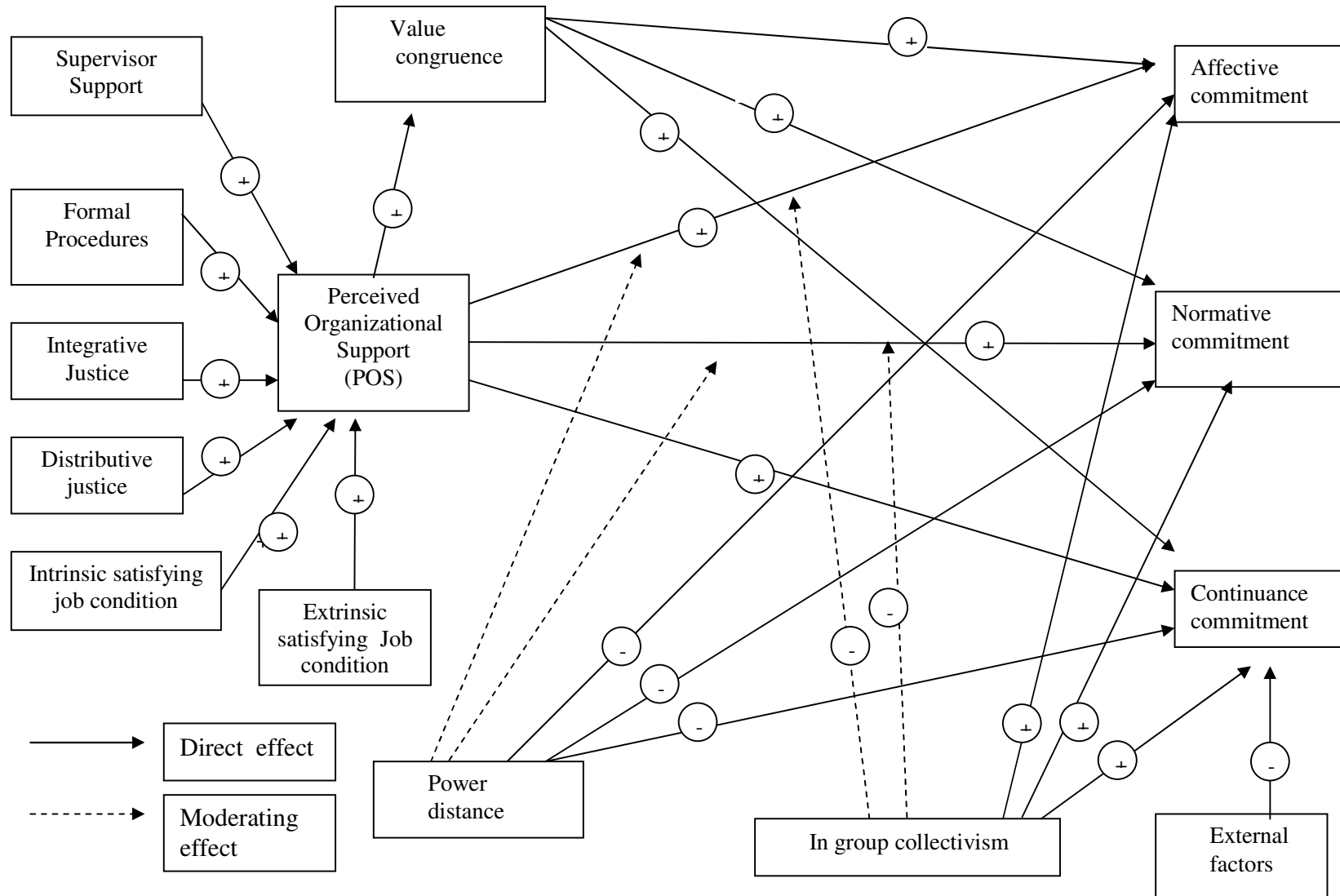
The final research model is presented in Appendix 2. Its contribute a unique contribution on the subject of the factors and variables that influence how employee perceived support given to them and the influence of that on organizational commitment derives from the data from ten interviews within two medium Malaysian enterprises. The impact of external factors on continuance commitment was also added to the final research model. This finding raise some issues about how value congruence and culture could affect on organizational commitment

This study is part of a larger research that examine the antecedents of perceived organizational support (POS), value congruence and national culture towards organizational commitment (OC) in the context of medium enterprises specifically in manufacturing sector in Malaysia. Result from the present study will be used for the development of the second phase of the quantitative study.

Appendix 1: The perceived organizational support and organizational commitment model based on field study



Appendix 2: The Comprehensive Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Commitment Model



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