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Organizational Support and Contract Fulfillment as Moderators of the Relationship Between Preferred Work Status and Performance

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine organizational context variables as moderators of the relationship between preferred work status and job performance. The moderators were perceived organizational support (POS) and psychological contract fulfillment.

Design/Methodology/Approach

Survey data was collected from 164 participants working in a health and fitness organization. These participants ranged in age from 18 to 79 years old ($M = 40$, $SD = 12.5$) and held various positions including middle managers, clerical workers, maintenance workers, and sports trainers.

Findings

The relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance was negative when POS was higher but not when POS was lower. Also, the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance was positive when contract fulfillment was lower but not when it was higher. No moderating effects were found when examining in-role performance.

Implications

Given the large and growing use of part-time workers it is important to understand differences across various subgroups of them in order to better inform human resource policies and practices. Specifically, the results highlight a key role for the management of reciprocity perceptions.

Originality/Value

The literature on part-time workers suggests there are important differences between employees who work part-time because they prefer it and those who work part-time but prefer to work full-time. Research regarding the relationship between preferred work status and performance has produced mixed results. This study helps reconcile conflicting results regarding the relationship between preferred work status and performance by examining the moderating effects of theoretically relevant variables.

Introduction

In general, research in the organizational sciences has focused on traditional full-time work arrangements (Gallagher 2005). However, due to significant economic and demographic changes in the workplace it is essential to also study alternative employment relationships. One such alternative employment relationship is the growing use of part-time workers. In 2006 the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that some 25 million workers or 17% of the US workforce was employed part-time. This use of part-time work arrangements is largely due to the advantages that part-time employment can have for organizations such as providing a flexible staffing alternative and bringing down labor costs (Conway and Briner 2002). Companies benefiting this way from part-time workers include Wal-Mart and Starbucks. For example, of Wal-Mart's 1.3 million workers, 25–30% are employed part-time, which is up from 20% in 2005 (Greenhouse and Barbaro 2006). Because of the large number of part-time employees and their importance to organizations, it is important to understand this group of workers in order to better inform human resource policies and the practices surrounding them.

Recognizing this, a growing body of research has begun to examine this sector of the workforce. Much of this research has focused on differences between the work-related attitudes of full- and part-time employees. The results, however, have been decidedly mixed. Some have found part-time workers have higher work-related attitudes (Jackofsky and Peters 1987; Sinclair et al. 1999), lower work-related attitudes (Marchese and Ryan 2001; Miller and Terborg 1979; Morrow et al. 1994), and similar work-related attitudes (McGinnis and Morrow 1990) when compared to their full-time counterparts. These contradictory findings have led researchers to begin studying part-time workers in their own right. A key suggestion from this line of inquiry is that there are important differences between various subgroups of part-time workers (Barling and Gallagher 1996; Feldman 1990; Martin and Sinclair 2007). Chief among these differences is the fact that some workers prefer part-time work and engage in it voluntarily, whereas others prefer to be working full-time but are unable to find a full-time position. This inability to find full-time employment may lead them to take part-time positions within

organizations with the hope of obtaining full-time work in those organizations. A number of studies have shown preferred work status is related to employee attitudes (Armstrong-Stassen et al. 1998; Lee and Johnson 1991). Fewer studies, however, have addressed the link between preferred work status and employee behavior, and of those the results have been inconsistent. For instance, research has shown that those not working the hours they prefer engage in less OCBs than those who are working their preferred status (e.g., Holtom et al. 2002; Stamper and Van Dyne 2001) while others have found that preferred work status was not related to performance (Ellingson et al. 1998). As a result, we do not propose hypotheses regarding the direct relationship between preferred work status and performance, but rather, examine whether the relationship is dependent upon other organizationally relevant variables. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify some of the conditions under which preferred work status will be related to performance.

Job Performance

Job performance has been shown to have two broad sets of activities (Borman and Motowidlo 1997; Organ 1988). The first of these, task performance, also referred to as in-role performance, centers on those activities that contribute to the “organization’s technical core” (Borman and Motowidlo 1997, p. 99). The second of these, labeled organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), also referred to as extra-role performance, centers on those activities that contribute to “the social and psychological context that supports task performance” (Organ 1997, p. 91). Gakovic and Tetrick (2003) noted two competing rationales for the predicted performance levels of employees who are not working their preferred work status. Specifically, they note that some researchers suggest that employees *not* working their preferred work status should likely exhibit higher performance, because they are trying to get promoted into that organization (i.e., Van Dyne and Ang 1998); however, others have suggested that employees who *are* working their preferred work status will exhibit higher performance (i.e., Holtom et al. 2002). In his work, Feldman (1990) proposed that organizational context may moderate the relationship between preferred work status and job performance. In the present study, we test this proposition. For the organizational context variables, we chose perceived organizational support and contract fulfillment. As described later, these likely create reciprocal obligations and expectations between employees and employers (Eisenberger et al. 1986) that impact the relationship between preferred work status and performance.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS), defined by Eisenberger et al. (1986), is “the extent to which the organization values {the employees’} contributions and cares about their well-being” (p. 504). Previous findings have shown POS to be positively related to self-report and objective performance measures of in-role (Armeli et al. 1998; Eisenberger et al. 1990) and extra-role performance (Eisenberger et al. 1990; Lynch et al. 1999; Moorman et al. 1998; Shore and Wayne 1993). While this research provides strong evidence for the positive relationship between POS and performance, research has yet to examine the possible moderating effects of POS between the relationship of preferred work status and performance. Theoretically, perceived organizational support increases employees’ perceptions that the greater the effort put toward an organization’s goals the higher the likelihood for rewards (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Additionally, researchers have suggested that POS “may be used by employees as an indicator of the organization’s benevolent or malevolent intent in the expression of exchange of employee effort for reward and recognition” (Lynch et al. 1999, p. 469–470). In other words, employees use POS as an assessment of whether the organization is willing to recompense the efforts made on its behalf (Eisenberger et al. 2001). For employees not working their preferred work status, the expected reward for their increased effort may be an opportunity to work their scheduling preference. Accordingly, it is suggested that part-time employees who are not working their preferred schedules will engage in higher levels of in-role and extra-role performance than those who are working their preferred schedules

under conditions of high support with the expectation of obtaining their preferred work status but that this will not be the case under lower levels of POS because that expectation is weaker. Therefore, the following were hypothesized.

Hypothesis 1

POS will moderate the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance will be negative when POS is higher but not when POS is lower.

Hypothesis 2

POS will moderate the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance will be negative when POS is higher but not when POS is lower.

Psychological Contract Fulfillment

Hui et al. (2004) define the psychological contract as “the employment relationship based on the beliefs employees or employers hold regarding their exchange relationship” (p. 311). When employees believe their organization fails to fulfill the agreements made as part of this psychological contract a breach is said to occur (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Robinson 1996). Turnley et al. (2003), discuss the rationale for possible employee reactions to a psychological contract breach/fulfillment. Specifically, when an employee perceives that a breach has been made feelings of injustice are expected to arise, and due to this perceived inequity it is suggested that employees may take steps to re-establish balance (Robinson 1996; Rousseau 1995). One possible outcome of low contract fulfillment is that an employee may lessen his/her contributions via reduced in-role and extra-role performance (Turnley et al. 2003). For example, in a study using supervisor ratings of performance, a significant negative relationship was found between a lack of psychological contract fulfillment and in-role and two forms of extra-role performance (i.e., OCBs directed toward colleagues and OCBs directed toward the organization) (Turnley et al. 2003). An important expectation for some part-time workers is obtaining their preferred work status. When they perceive low contract fulfillment on the part of their organization, part-time workers who are not working their preferred schedule likely perceive greater inequity than those who are working their preferred status. Based on these, it is expected that part-time workers who are not working their preferred schedules will engage in lower levels of in-role and extra-role performance than those who are working their preferred schedules under conditions of lower contract fulfillment in order to balance out the perceived inequity resulting from contract breach but this will not be the case under higher levels of contract fulfillment because there is less perceived inequity. Therefore the following are hypothesized.

Hypothesis 3

Psychological contract fulfillment will moderate the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance will be positive when contract fulfillment is lower but not when contract fulfillment is higher.

Hypothesis 4

Psychological contract fulfillment will moderate the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance will be positive when contract fulfillment is lower but not when contract fulfillment is higher.

Method

Participants

The research sample consisted of 164 part-time employees working at all four locations of a health and fitness organization in the Midwestern United States. Each of the locations provided similar services such as sports leagues for children and adults, child-care programs, and health and fitness classes. Respondents held various positions including middle managers, clerical workers, maintenance workers, and sports trainers. Ages ranged from 18 to 79 years old ($M = 40$, $SD = 12.5$). Of these, 89% were female and 11% were male. Additionally, 73% reported being married, 24% reported not being married (3% non-response to the item). On average, respondents had been with the organization 4.1 years ($SD = 5.2$). For all four locations, questionnaires were dispersed through regular postal mail and returned to a drop box at the worksite. A total of 1,200 surveys were distributed, with a response rate of 14%.

Measures

Preferred work status was measured by asking respondents to select, from a list of items, their current work status, the list included: year around employee, temporary employee, returning seasonal employee, part-time employee, and full-time employee. They were then asked to identify, from the same list of items, their preferred work status. If the response to the current work status item was different from the preferred work status item, they received a score of zero, indicating their preference was not met. In-role performance was assessed using 5-items developed by Pearce and Porter (1986), as used by Ashford and Black (1996). Extra-role performance was evaluated using 20-items developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989), as used by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). POS was assessed using the shortened version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al. 1997; Lynch et al. 1999). Psychological contract fulfillment was measured using 9 items from Robinson and Morrison (2000). Unless otherwise stated, the items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*) and all items were scored such that a higher value represented higher standing on the measure.

Results

To begin, the data were summarized using descriptive statistics, reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha), and intercorrelations (Table 1). As seen in this table the internal consistency for each measure was above the .80 cut-off suggested by Murphy and Davidshofer (2005). Next, we tested the hypotheses using moderated multiple regression. Because they may affect the variables and relationships of interest, we included length of employment, age, and gender in the analyses as control variables. Following the recommendations of Cohen et al. (2003), we centered the predictors before creating their cross-products and entered the variables hierarchically with direct effects entered before the interaction term. When a significant interaction was found, we followed up by graphing and performing a simple slope test.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Length of employment	4.12	5.22	–							
2. Age	40.13	12.40	.25**	–						
3. Gender	.89	.31	.04	–.11	–					
4. Preferred work status	.83	.38	.01	.20**	.06	–				
5. In-role performance	4.38	.53	.02	.13	–.03	.08	(.88)			
6. Extra-role performance	4.20	.37	.05	.21**	.11	.12	.55**	(.84)		
7. POS	3.91	.67	.02	.12	.06	.17*	.28**	.40**	(.87)	
8. Psych. contract fulfillment	4.35	.65	–.01	.17*	.10	.16*	.20**	.42**	.75**	(.93)

Elements in main diagonal are alphas. Preferred work status 0 = unmet 1 = met. Gender 0 = female 1 = male
 * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Hypothesis 1 stated POS would moderate the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance would be negative when POS is higher but not when POS is lower. As seen in Table 2, this hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 2 stated that POS would moderate the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance would be negative when POS is higher but not when POS is lower. As can be seen in Table 3, the interaction term accounted for an additional 5% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01/\beta = -.51$, $t = -3.23$, $p < .01$). Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the interaction. The test of the simple slope for higher POS ($t = -2.03$, $p < .05$) was significant (the slope for lower POS was not ($t = -.07$, ns)). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2 Regression of in-role performance on preferred work status and POS

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	b	R^2	ΔR^2	b	R^2	ΔR^2
Control variables		.02	.02		.11**	.09**		.13**	.02
Length of employment	.04			.04			.04		
Age	.14			.10			.09		
Gender	.01			-.01			-.04		
Direct effects									
Preferred work status				.01			-.01		
Perceived org. support				.29**			.59**		
Interactive effect									
Preferred work status \times perceived org support							-.33		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 3 Regression of extra-role performance on preferred work status and POS

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Control variables		.07*	.07*		.25**	.18**		.30**	.05**
Length of employment	.06			.06			.06		
Age	.23**			.17*			.16*		
Gender	.12			.10			.06		
Direct effects									
Preferred work status				.03			.01		
Perceived org. support				.42**			.87**		
Interactive effect									
Preferred work status \times perceived org support							-.51**		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

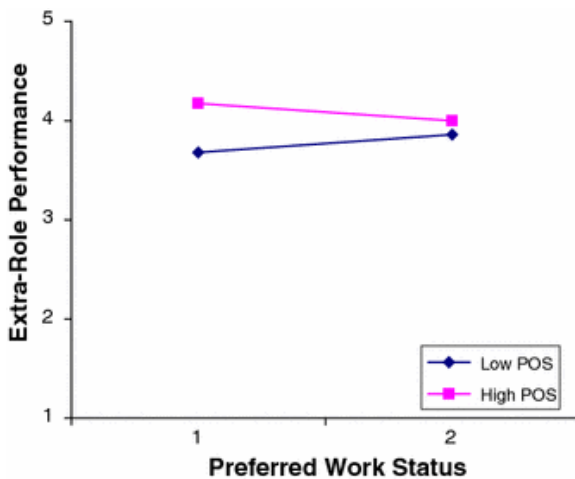


Fig. 1. Preferred work status and extra-role performance by POS. 1 = preferred work status not met, 2 = preferred work status met

Hypothesis 3 stated that contract fulfillment would moderate the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and in-role performance would be positive when contract fulfillment is lower but not when contract fulfillment is higher. The results did not support this hypothesis (see Table 4). Hypothesis 4 stated that psychological contract fulfillment would moderate the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance, such that the relationship between preferred work status and extra-role performance would be positive when contract fulfillment is lower but not when contract fulfillment is higher. As can be seen in Table 5, the interaction term accounted for an additional 5% of the variance in extra-role performance ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -.39$, $t = -3.15$, $p < .01$). Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the interaction. The test of the simple slope for lower contract fulfillment ($t = -2.38$, $p < .05$) was significant (the slope for higher contract fulfillment was not ($t = .46$, ns). Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Table 4 Regression of in-role performance on preferred work status and contract fulfillment

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Control variables		.02	.02		.06	.04		.07	.01
Length of employment	.04			.06			.06		
Age	.13			.09			.09		
Gender	.01			-.02			-.03		
Direct effects									
Preferred work status				.02			.02		
Perceived org. support				.19*			.32*		
Interactive effect									
Preferred work status \times contract fulfillment							-.16		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 5 Regression of extra-role performance on preferred work status and contract fulfillment

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Control variables		.07*	.07*		.24**	.17**		.29**	.05**
Length of employment	.06			.09			.09		

Age	.23**			.13			.13		
Gender	.12			.07			.04		
Direct effects									
Preferred work status				.06			.05		
Perceived org. support				.41**			.73**		
Interactive effect									
Preferred work status × contract fulfillment							-.39**		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

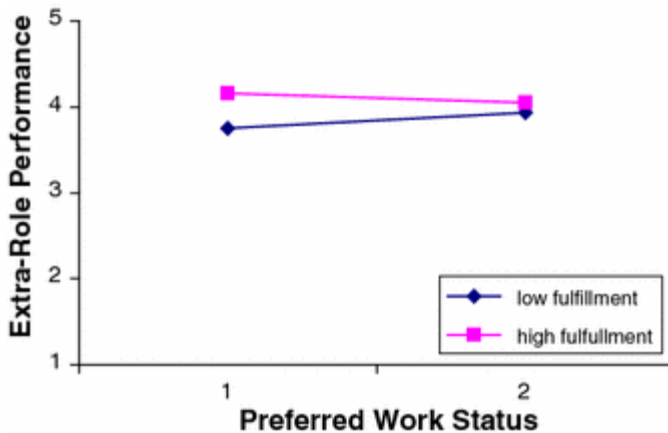


Fig. 2. Preferred work status and extra-role performance by psych contract fulfillment. 1 = preferred work status not met, 2 = preferred work status met

Discussion

Noting the conflicting arguments (Gakovik and Tetrick 2003) and empirical results (cf. Holtom et al. 2002; Ellingson et al. 1998) regarding the relationship between preferred work status and performance, this study tested Feldman's (1990) proposition that contextual variables may moderate this relationship. Based on previous literature it was suggested that the relationship between preferred work status and performance would be negative when POS was higher. The logic for this was that when POS is higher, employees whose preferred work status was not met, would engage in higher levels of performance because they expected the extra effort to lead to their obtaining their preferred schedule. Also based on previous literature it was suggested that the relationship between preferred work status and performance would be positive when contract fulfillment was low. The logic for this was that when contract fulfillment is lower employees who were not working their preferred schedule would perceive even greater inequity and have lower performance. This logic and the hypotheses, were supported when extra-role performance was examined but not in-role performance. One explanation for why the hypotheses were supported for extra-role performance but not in-role performance has to do with the differences between these two constructs. In-role performance is mandated by the organization whereas extra-role performance is not. Because of this, a certain level of in-role performance must be maintained. In the case of POS, employees may believe that a better way to distinguish themselves (and thus be rewarded with their preferred work status) is by engaging in extra-role performance. In the case of contract fulfillment, employees may not reduce their in-role performance for fear of losing their jobs.

Like all studies this one is not without limitations. First, we used all self-reported measures. This may lead to inflated correlations due to common method variance. However, it is unlikely that the interactions found in this study could be due to the common method variance and, as McClelland and Judd (1993) have suggested, moderator effects are difficult to detect in field research. The self-reported nature of the in-role performance

data may also have contributed to a 'ceiling effect' (most respondents rated themselves highly) that could have obscured real differences in performance. While it was not possible in the current study, future research should use non-self report data, especially for performance measures. A second limitation to the study was the low-response rate (14%). There are possible explanations for the cause of the low-response rate. In particular, because the survey was mailed, and the participants were employed part-time it is likely the survey was not a high priority for them. There was also no incentive for participation. It can be speculated that non-responders may have replied differently than the responders. Unfortunately, our access to data on the entire sampling frame was limited by the organization which made it impossible to make even simple comparisons between responders and non-responders.

This study contributes to the literature by empirically testing Feldman's (1990) proposition that work context variables moderate the relationship between part-time work and work-related outcomes. However, Feldman also suggested that there may be important mediators of this relationship. For instance, in the present study the mediating mechanism was the assumption that people not working their preferred status would be seeking to achieve it. It is important to note that the organization used in this study was structured in such a way that individuals who demonstrated good work would have the option to advance upward with the opportunity to gain full-time work status but there was no direct measure of it. Thus, future research could collect this information in order to test it as a potential mediating mechanism. Anecdotally, we know the participants in the present study came from across all levels of the organization and that this organization attracts employees ranging from recent graduates to those seeking supplemental income. However, future research might examine differences between type of organizations and part-time workers. Given the growth of research on the topic of part-time workers, it would also be appropriate for future research to conduct a meta-analytic summary and integration of the literature.

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