



Article

Exploring the Direct and Indirect Influence of Perceived Organizational Support on Affective Organizational Commitment

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Abstract: As a result of the pandemic and the consequent changes in labor market patterns, firms are facing a difficult moment in attracting and retaining talented employees. In these new patterns, remuneration factors are increasingly a necessary but not sufficient condition to address this challenge. Given this background, this study seeks to identify the role of perceived organizational support in affective organizational commitment. In order to achieve this objective, structural equation models were used based on survey data from a sample of 333 respondents. The findings of this study reveal that perceived organizational support positively influences affective organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, job involvement and job satisfaction were found to play a mediating effect in the relation between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment.

Keywords: affective organizational commitment; job satisfaction; job Involvement; perceived organizational support

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1. Introduction

The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 made 2020 a unique year in recent history. Cooke et al. (2020) state that the economic crisis resulting from this pandemic caused heavy losses in companies and in the labor market, with millions of employees losing their jobs. Consequently, the pandemic affected the relationship between employees and their employers. In addition to the global uncertainty due to the pandemic, several disruptions can be observed in various manufacturing industries (e.g., computer chips, electronics) and services (e.g., hospitality, air transport) that are still a reflection of this same disruption. Put another way, the pandemic has had an impact on a planetary scale, causing enormous changes in a short period of time, the effects of which may prove to be lasting both on the global economy and on everyone (Bajrami et al. 2021).

The relationship or connection of employees to their organizations has been studied for decades in a situation of regularity and should now be investigated to understand whether the pandemic has (not) produced changes. It is very relevant to understand how this crisis has affected employees' perceptions of their organizations. Many companies were able to provide support and alternative conditions for the maintenance of labor ties, but many others had huge difficulties. The changes were global, and the previous forms of work no longer respond positively to current needs. New work practices with a more

technological nature have been shown to have significant consequences on employees' well-being (Manuti et al. 2020).

This study aimed to analyze concepts and their relationships already widely stated before the pandemic (e.g., Suzuki and Hur 2020; Wang et al. 2021). The novelty of the research is the exploration of the factors influencing job satisfaction in a pandemic and disruptive context. For this purpose, the constructs of affective organizational commitment, job involvement, job satisfaction, and perceived organizational support were selected due to their relevance in the organizational context. A total of 333 questionnaires were collected and completed between December 2020 and March 2021, coinciding with one year of this pandemic.

This study's contribution is threefold. First, it reinforces previous research results within a pandemic context, especially in the relationships between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction. Second, recognizes the importance of the leveraging effect of job involvement in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment. Third, the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment is also identified.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. *Affective Organizational Commitment*

The concept of organizational commitment, like many other concepts, has been conquering its space and has reached a remarkable relevance both in the academic world and in the business context. Becker's (1960) work is pointed out as an initial milestone in the study of this concept. He left a legacy that has endured over time by stating that employees are committed and remain in current organizations because they have hidden personal interests or partially hidden "side-bets" (Cohen 2007).

There were significant developments in the study of organizational commitment in the following decades, where scholarly research emerged at an interesting pace and, even today, relevant; for example, the work of Mowday et al. (1979). After 30 years, that is, in the 1990s, organizational commitment still received great interest and became a preferred target of research in this area (Meyer et al. 2010).

The concept of organizational commitment has always been rich in perspectives throughout its history. We adopted the proposal of Mowday et al. (1979) that considers that organizational commitment is based on three relevant factors: (i) strong desire, acceptance, and involvement in the organization's goals and values, (ii) willingness to "sacrifice" and make individual efforts towards the overall and common benefits of the organization, and (iii) desire to remain as a member of the organization. Crewson (1997), on the other hand, considers that a distinct analysis of the three dimensions that make up the construct is important: (i) a strong belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization; (ii) a strong willingness to work hard for their organization; and (iii) a desire to remain a member of the organization.

Organizational commitment should not be understood only as a psychological attachment felt by the employee to his or her organization (Agarwala et al. 2014) or even by a strong sense of loyalty of employees to organizations, experienced in a passive and static way. Organizational commitment should be seen from a dynamic and active perspective, in permanent adjustment, by employees who want to follow and contribute to the evolution of their organization, so organizational commitment incorporates the positive feelings of employees towards the organization (Ifie 2014). In short, organizational commitment can be understood as the predisposition of employees to commit themselves to contributing to helping the organization achieve its goals (Cherif 2020). Organizational commitment reflects employees' positive feelings toward the organization and its values and is characterized by their willingness to contribute to

organizational goals (Boles et al. 2007). Furthermore, organizational commitment has been widely used as a very significant indicator of employee attitude (Suzuki and Hur 2020).

With all the attention it has obtained, it is natural that some authors have followed different paths, reaching alternative definitions and different ways of measuring it (Allen and Meyer 1990). Notwithstanding the richness and diversity of definitions of organizational commitment, most existing research has adopted the concept put forward by Meyer and Allen in their 1991 study (Singh and Gupta 2015).

Meyer and Allen (1991) presented one of the best-known views of the concept that became known as the “Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment”. Their model resulted from an analysis of previous research, grouping it into three main sets: (i) affective attachment, (ii) perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and (iii) obligation to remain with the organization. Each set corresponded to a component of their model, which was characterized by Chordiya et al. (2017) as follows: (i) affective—emotional involvement of the employee leading to identification and engagement with the organization. Employees with a strong presence of affective commitment stay in organizations because they want to; (ii) continuance—the perception that employees have of the costs associated with the decision to leave the organization. Employees with a strong instrumental component supporting their attachment to the organization remain in it because they need it and because it is the most advantageous situation for them; (iii) normative—feeling of obligation to stay in the organization. Employees whose normative bond is the main attachment to the organization do not leave it because they feel an obligation and a duty to stay there.

The existing literature has highlighted affective organizational commitment as having several practical and theoretical implications, in particular, due to its direct and pivotal relationship with employees’ performance (Wang et al. 2021). This difference with the other two components (continuance and normative) lies in the fact that affective organizational commitment has a more direct relationship with the relevant results for both the organization and the employees since it is closely associated with employees’ intrinsic motivation, while the other components establish a connection based on feelings of obligation or pressure (Kim and Beehr 2018).

The differences between the three components of organizational commitment are then clear. It is unquestionable that affective organizational commitment refers to the positive emotional attachment to the work and, as it could not be otherwise, to the organization itself. On the other hand, normative organizational commitment originates and is sustained by a feeling of responsibility, whereas continuance organizational commitment originates from the employee’s perception of the costs of leaving the organization and everything he/she has already achieved (Moulik and Giri 2022).

2.2. Job Involvement

Job involvement can be understood as the degree to which an employee psychologically identifies with his or her work or even by the importance that this work has in his or her overall self-image (Lodahl and Kejnar 1965).

Although the construct of Job involvement is considered somewhat similar to organizational commitment since both are associated with an employee’s identification with his or her experience at work, on the other hand, it is also accepted that they present differences between them (Singh and Gupta 2015), as highlighted by Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) stating that work engagement, work involvement, and organizational commitment are markedly different concepts. Thus, Singh and Gupta (2015) highlight the significant impact on organizational issues important to firms that work engagement represents.

Still, in the attention devoted to defining the concept, Wiener and Gechman (1977) summarize that job involvement has been defined in terms of (a) the degree to which a person is psychologically identified with work, (b) the effect of work on each employee’s self-concept, and (c) a guiding norm for work that is learned from the socialization

process. This is the adopted definition for this study. However, only a year earlier, also in a literature review of the concept, Saleh and Hosek (1976) identified four different definitions. For the authors, a person is engaged (a) when working for him is a central life interest; (b) when he actively participates in his work; (c) when he perceives performance as central to his self-esteem; (d) when he perceives performance as consistent with his self-concept.

At an earlier stage, the question of the definition of the concept has already raised the interest of researchers, and it is quite natural that with the passage of time dedicated to the construct, the debate in academia has been fed with new perspectives, so Lambert et al. (2020) summarize that job involvement has been presented as the psychological identification with work and the importance that work plays in people's lives

Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) highlight two distinct approaches in academic work on Job involvement: (a) the Lodahl and Kejner stream focusing on the influence of work on employees' self-esteem and (b) the Lawler and Hall stream focusing on the contribution of work in defining employees' identity. For Lodahl and Kejner (1965) Job involvement is the internalization of values about the goodness of work or the importance of work in the values of employees, which involves the assessment of the ease of reinforcement of the socialization of employees by the organizations. For Lawler and Hall (1970) work involvement was defined as the extent to which a person perceives his or her overall work situation to be an important part of his or her life and central to his or her identity by allowing him or her to satisfy his or her most important needs.

In turn, Kanungo (1982) brings to the discussion the dichotomy between specific job involvement, the employee's current one, and general involvement with work. He states that specific involvement with a job tends to result from the satisfaction that the employee derives from his/her current job, while general involvement with work is the way a person values work in his/her way of seeing life. Work thus assumes a central position in people's lives with reinforcement in their culture. Kanungo (1982) also left his mark in the study of this concept with a simpler definition of the concept by stating that work involvement consists of the individual's psychological identification with work. Almost by way of summary, quite simply and directly, we resort to the striking and well-known phrase 'I live, eat, and breathe my job' will be an excellent way to describe an employee with high job involvement (Lambert et al. 2021). Thus:

H1. *Job involvement positively influences affective organizational commitment.*

2.3. Job Satisfaction

The concept of job satisfaction has for many decades been one of the concepts that deserve a lot of attention from both academics and practitioners. Bowling et al. (2018) advance that very few organizational researchers would question the importance of job satisfaction. For many of those who have studied the concept in both academic and business contexts, this interest in job satisfaction is due to its relationship with employee behavior in an organizational context (Kosteas 2011), as it is commonly accepted that an organization with more satisfied employees tends to be more effective and productive (Eliyana et al. 2019).

Knowing that job satisfaction is related to social interactions in an organizational context, this concept, like many others, has recently received considerable attention. For Niebuhr et al. (2022), the rules imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, namely working from home, which resulted in greater isolation, may have a negative impact on employees' job satisfaction.

For over a century, this construct has been making its mark either in isolation or related to other constructs. The study of job satisfaction began in the late 1920s and 1930s and was greatly impacted by the crisis known as the great depression (Judge et al. 2020). For Locke (1969), one of the most referenced authors on job satisfaction, this can be characterized as the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the assessment of the work

itself as fulfilling or facilitating the achievement of the individual's professional values. This is the adopted definition for this study. In an analysis of this author's definition, Saari and Judge (2004) refer that Locke's notion implies the importance of both affect or feelings and cognition or thinking.

For Lu et al. (2005), the most traditional way of analyzing the concept of job satisfaction focuses on the feelings that an employee has about his/her work. Li et al. (2017) also agree with this idea, which is more detached from material issues such as money or job satisfaction, stating that when employees cannot satisfy these desires through their work, they are likely to be dissatisfied with their job. However, it is known that for the work to be understood as satisfactory or unsatisfactory, it is not enough to analyze only the nature of the work.

Tett and Meyer (1993) indicate two different ways of analyzing the concept. On the one hand, through a more comprehensive perspective of the construct by stating that job satisfaction was understood as the attachment or affective bond of a given individual to his/her work understood in a global way, i.e., overall satisfaction, and, on the other hand, through a more particular perspective related to more specific and characteristic aspects such as the satisfaction in relation to the relationship with managers and colleagues, as well as with the tasks performed. Notwithstanding being a topic with much-written work and with an undeniable weight in the organizational context, it is still a concept that can be understood in a simple way by any citizen. For example, Brayfield and Rothe (1951), in their research, assumed that job satisfaction could be inferred from the individual's attitude towards his/her work. Employees' feelings towards various intrinsic and extrinsic elements related to their work context contribute to job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is usually measured in levels and can be analyzed from various perspectives using its relationship with various other constructs, which means that an employee may be satisfied with certain aspects of his/her job, feel neutral towards some, and feel dissatisfied towards others (Schmidt 2007).

It is thus quite understandable that employees who are not satisfied with their work tend to behave inappropriately, do not make an effort or try to do things in the best possible way, and rarely invest their available time or make an extra effort to do their tasks properly (Indarti et al. 2017). For Valaei and Rezaei (2016), job satisfaction along with retention of the best employees and their organizational commitment are especially critical issues for all organizations, especially in the current era of knowledge employees. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H2. *Job Satisfaction positively influences affective organizational commitment.*

2.4. Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support can be understood as the view that the employee has about the way his/her employer treats him/her; in other words, it is the employee's own assessment of the consideration that the organization has towards him/her (Fuller et al. 2006). In this way, and as Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) reinforce, perceived organizational support is one-sided since it is the support perceived by employees regarding the employer's contribution and effort in a constant exchange. Following the line of analysis of exchanges in organizational contexts, Wayne et al. (1997) point out two predominant typologies of social exchanges already studied in the literature, which are: (a) the exchanges between the employer and its employees—perceived organizational support; (b) the more direct exchanges between the leader and the subordinates—leader-member exchange (LMX).

Focusing on perceived organizational support, the focus of our study, Farh et al. (2007), attribute an even stronger meaning to the employee's perception when they refer to it as a general belief that the employee has about the way their employer values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This greater depth in the analysis of the

concept led Eisenberger et al. (2001) to assume a causal relationship with the feeling of obligation, although they emphasize that conceptually they are distinct.

Also, in a line of analysis of comparison with other constructs, Shore and Tetrick (1991) understand that, like organizational commitment, perceived organizational support represents an attitudinal response of the employee to the organization. Therefore, when employees are aware of organizational support, they are more satisfied and are predisposed to reciprocate the organization's favorable environment, rewards, and the way they are treated (Oubibi et al. 2022). Furthermore, Eisenberger et al. (1986) refer to the relationship of this concept with the affective attachment to the employer, indicating that perceived organizational support increases the affective commitment of the employee to the organization. The authors go further when they point out that employees have a strong expectation that greater effort to achieve organizational goals will be rewarded by their organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity to strengthen the study of crisis management and, in particular, the way organizations seek to highlight and support their employees in this context. This was a significant gap in the study of the concept of perceived organizational support, i.e., its study in periods of organizational change (Daniels et al. 2022).

In this sense, it makes perfect sense for organizations to aim at maximizing and leveraging all their efforts in human resources policies and practices, making their employees aware of this investment and having a very favorable opinion about the support the organization is providing them (Zagenczyk et al. 2020). This perception of support is built on the frequency, intensity, and sincerity of organizational expressions of approval, praise, and material and social rewards as a counterpart or result of employees' efforts (Mascarenhas et al. 2022). In a different way, Lynch et al. (1999) point out that employees can perceive the efforts made by their organization and how available they are to reward their efforts. In this way, and from both a materialistic and emotional perspective of the concept, the perceived organizational support has the effect of increasing the employees' expectations of receiving compensation for their dedication and recurring effort towards the organization's goals.

In this relationship between expectations and return, organizations expect that their employees with higher levels of perceived organizational support do not engage in behaviors detrimental to their interests, such as voluntary leaving, absenteeism, tardiness, involvement in non-organizational matters during working hours, or having personal needs or goals which are not aligned with those of the organization (Eder and Eisenberger 2008). Based on these assumptions, the following hypotheses can be raised:

H3a. *Perceived organizational support positively influences affective organizational commitment.*

H3b. *Perceived organizational support positively influences job involvement.*

H3c. *Perceived organizational support positively influences job satisfaction.*

H3d. *Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment.*

H3e. *Job involvement mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and Procedures

The target population was Portuguese employees in any economic sector, consisting of 5151 million employees in 2021 (PORDATA 2022). Given the large number that comprises the population, purposive sampling was adopted. An internet-based questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was initially developed through a review of the literature and revised following a two-step approach. First, we consulted two human resources academics to assess the content validity of the scales. After that, the

questionnaire was pilot tested by using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six employees to validate the wording and the survey design. The final internet-based questionnaire was disseminated through social media and email from December 2020 to March 2021. Since no information about the entire population was available, we used a purposive sampling approach, combined with the snowball technique, by asking respondents to further disseminate the questionnaire link. This purposive sampling approach allowed receiving a total of 333 complete questionnaires, an adequate sample to test the research hypothesis using PLS-SEM (Hair et al. 2017).

Of these 333 respondents, 44% of the respondents were male and 56% female. The age mean was 40.5 years, with 12% aged between 18 and 29 years old, 30% aged between 30 and 39 years old, 32% aged between 40 and 49 years old, 18% aged between 50 and 59 years old, and 8% had more than 60 years old. In relation to working experience, respondents revealed a mean of 9.7 years in the last job and 19.4 years of working experience on average.

3.2. Measures

In order to measure the constructs, a questionnaire was developed using preexisting scales. For all the following measures, a five-point Likert-type scale was applied, where 1 equals 'Totally disagree' and 5 equals 'Totally agree'. The scales used were:

Affective organizational commitment was measured using a measure with six items (three of them were reverse coded $-r$) adopted from Meyer and Allen (1997). The items were:

- I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization
- I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own
- I do not feel like 'part of my family' at this organization (r)
- I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization (r)
- This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me
- I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization (r)

Job involvement three-item measure was adopted from Lambert et al. (2020). The items were as follows:

- I live, eat, and breathe my job
- The major satisfaction in my life comes from work
- The most important thing that happen to me in my life occur at work

To measure job satisfaction, we used the four-item measure from Churchill et al. (1974). The items were:

- My work is challenging
- My job is often dull and monotonous
- My work gives me a sense of accomplishment
- My job is exciting

The measure of perceived organizational support was composed of four items and was taken from Cheng et al. (2003) with the following items:

- The organization strongly considers my goals and values
- The organization really cares about my well-being
- If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me
- The organization shows great concern for me.

4. Results and Discussion

To test the hypotheses and the conceptual model, we used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle et al. 2015). To test the reliability and validity of the measurement model, we adopted the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017). The first test refers to the outcome indicators, verifying that the standardized factor loadings of all items were significant and exceeded the minimum threshold

of 0.6, with the lowest factor showing a value of 0.71. These values are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. A second reliability test consisted in calculating the Cronbach alphas and composite reliability (CR) values. In both indicators, the values obtained were greater than 0.7 (Hair et al. 2017), verifying the reliability of the internal consistency in all variables.

Table 1. Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations, and discriminant validity checks.

| Latent Variables | α | CR | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| (1) Affective org. commitment | 0.922 | 0.939 | 0.722 | 0.849 | 0.838 | 0.883 | 0.877 |
| (2) Job involvement | 0.824 | 0.883 | 0.655 | 0.809 | 0.809 | 0.833 | 0.786 |
| (3) Job Satisfaction | 0.716 | 0.814 | 0.594 | 0.686 | 0.774 | 0.771 | 0.755 |
| (4) Perceived organizational support | 0.910 | 0.943 | 0.847 | 0.808 | 0.687 | 0.584 | 0.921 |

Note: α —Cronbach Alpha; CR—Composite reliability; AVE—Average variance extracted. Bolded numbers are the square roots of AVE. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT ratios.

Third, we analyzed convergent validity, verifying that all construct items had positive and significant values, thus supporting this test. Additionally, convergent validity was also tested through the CR and average variance extracted (AVE) values of each construct, which were higher than 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Fourth, we tested discriminant validity by adopting the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which considers that the square root of the AVE of each construct should exceed the correlation values between the constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). These values are shown on the diagonal of Table 1. It was also verified that the HTMT (heterotrait–monotrait ratio) values do not exceed the threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al. 2015), verifying that there is discriminant validity.

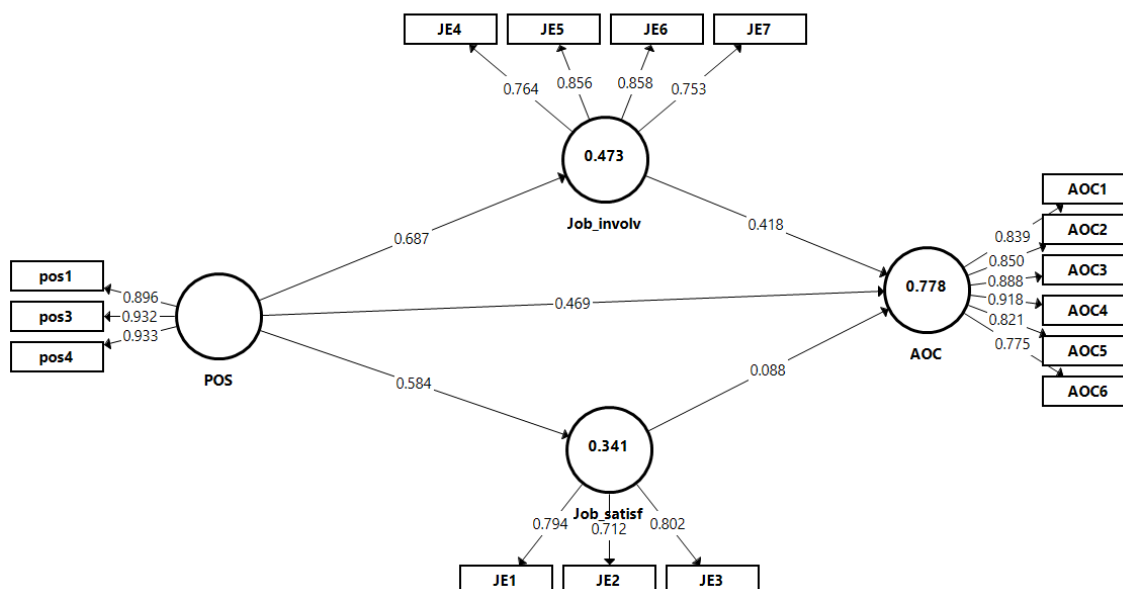


Figure 1. Structural model.

Fifth, following the approach of Hair et al. (2017), we conducted a collinearity test by determining the VIF values, finding that they range between 1.18 and 4.45, being below the threshold of 5, which reveals that there is no collinearity. To evaluate the quality of the model, we determined the coefficient of determination (R2) for the two endogenous variables of job satisfaction; job involvement and affective organizational commitment,

which were 34.1%, 47.3%, and 77.8%, respectively, and higher than the 10% threshold recommended by Falk and Miller (1992). Regarding the Q2 values of job satisfaction, job involvement and affective organizational commitment (0.198, 0.303 and 0.552, respectively), the values obtained are greater than zero providing an additional indicator of model quality.

The results presented in Table 2 are the result of a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 subsamples and show that job involvement positively influences affective organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.418$, $p < 0.001$). This result provides support for H1, respectively. Job satisfaction has a significant and positive relationship with affective organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.088$, $p < 0.05$), which supports H2.

Perceived organizational support positively influences affective organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.469$, $\beta = 0.687$, and $\beta = 0.584$, respectively $p < 0.001$ for all the relationships). The results not only confirm previous research but also provides the reinforcement of existing knowledge in the pandemic context. For example, Zagenczyk et al. (2020) studied the relationship between organizational support and affective organizational commitment. In the same vein, our results provide support for this relationship within a pandemic context. Mascarenhas et al. (2022) showed that job involvement was also dependent on the employee's perceived organizational support, especially through expressions of approval and material and social rewards as recognition for employee involvement. Our results align with this study and provide confirmation in pandemic contexts.

Table 2. Structural model assessment.

| Path | Path Coefficient | Standard Errors | t Statistics | p Values |
|--|------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| Job involvement → Affective org. commitment | 0.418 | 0.049 | 8614 | 0.000 |
| Job Satisfaction → Affective org. commitment | 0.088 | 0.043 | 2030 | 0.043 |
| Perceived organizational support → Affective org. commitment | 0.469 | 0.041 | 11,385 | 0.000 |
| Perceived organizational support → Job involvement | 0.687 | 0.030 | 22,839 | 0.000 |
| Perceived organizational support → Job Satisfaction | 0.584 | 0.041 | 14,272 | 0.000 |

The mediation hypotheses (H3d and H3e) were tested by following the suggestions of Hair et al. (2017, p. 232). Thus, we also conducted a bootstrapping analysis to test the significance of the indirect effects (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The results of the mediation effects are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Bootstrap results for indirect effects.

| Indirect Effect | Estimate | Standard Errors | t Statistics | p Value |
|---|----------|-----------------|--------------|---------|
| Perceived organizational support → Job Satisfaction → Affective org. commitment | 0.051 | 0.025 | 2018 | 0.044 |
| Perceived organizational support → Job involvement → Affective org. commitment | 0.288 | 0.036 | 8067 | 0.000 |

The indirect effect between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment via the mediator of job satisfaction is significant ($\beta = 0.051$; $p < 0.05$), proving support for H3d. This result extends existing knowledge since previous research identified the direct relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment and employee performance (cf. Wang et al. 2021). Our results show that this effect can be enhanced through job satisfaction, which, in disruptive contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, should attract the attention of human resources managers.

The mediating effect of job involvement in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment was also significant ($\beta = 0.288$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H3e. This result also extends existing knowledge. In fact, recent research identified the role of organizational support on job involvement (Lambert et al. 2021). Our results extend their findings by prolonging this relationship to affective organizational commitment.

The reinforcement of the research on the constructs involved as well as on their relationships is a salient contribution of this work. With the validation of all the hypotheses initially launched, apart from contributing to the state of the art of concepts, which accompanies most of the previous works, it has the merit of doing so in a particularly relevant period where relationships between employees and organizations were subject to vicissitudes never experienced before. Aware that this is only one study of the concepts and their relationships, which have been the focus of much attention in recent years, developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we do not intend to present it as the final work with unquestionable conclusions. On the contrary, we intended to fill a small step in the long path of investigation of these concepts, and this small step or contribution is to make the continuous connection between the analysis of these constructs before COVID-19 and post COVID-19, not missing the opportunity to record the results in the acute phase of this pandemic.

5. Conclusions

Inevitably, research of this nature has practical and managerial implications, and these implications have an immediate practical effect since the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are present in the organizations, and it will not be contested that they will still manifest after its end. The present results, although supporting the positive relationship between the constructs, suggest a less intense relationship compared to pre-pandemic work. This means that, apart from all the concerns, managers should bet on their employees as valuable resources for the success of their companies so that they feel supported by the management. This support, fundamental for the employees, apart from being effective, should also be perceived, i.e., apart from unconditional support of the management to its employees, an effort should be made so that this support is visible, known, and clearly perceived by the employees. In a time of uncertainty, it is crucial to have the workforce comfortable and secure, and dedicated as far as possible. Their perception of management support is an important catalyst for their involvement, satisfaction, and commitment to the organization.

These results provide important theoretical contributions. First, our study reinforces previous research with additional confirmation in a pandemic context of the relationships between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction. These relationships were known but not in a disruptive context as the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the leveraging effect of job involvement in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment also constitutes another important contribution, alerting managers and scholars about the importance of involving employees in their work activities and daily organizational activity, especially within pandemic context, where remote work and lock down has shown to have negative effects. Third, our study also highlights the key role of job satisfaction in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment. As such, human resource management should pay particular attention to the degree of satisfaction of their employees within the context generated by the pandemic, with less conviviality and closeness among colleagues.

The current global situation presents unique characteristics in recent decades for the study of the relationship between employees and companies, so these results obtained entirely in a pandemic must be read with this premise. In order to validate whether these results constitute a trend that the studied relationships of perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, job involvement, and effective organizational commitment are less

intense in a situation of global crisis, it is essential that the research be replicated in other countries during the pandemic. Only in this way will we know if these results are specific or if, effectively, the pandemic has a dampening effect on the relationships between the constructs.

This study makes important contributions. However, given the exceptionality of COVID-19 and its impact on the world, it has several limitations that should be considered in future research. The first limitation is the wideness of the field of observation. With the input of workers from a variety of backgrounds, namely, industries, it is not possible to draw sectorial conclusions. Future studies should collect sectorial data to see the impact differences. Knowing that COVID-19 did not affect all workers equally and that some did not have the opportunity to telework (for example, nurses, doctors, cleaning workers, or private security guards), it would be important to analyze these differences. Another considerable limitation results from the cross-sectional data collection. Given the characteristics and the novelty of this pandemic, a longitudinal study would certainly bring more richness and robustness to the study. The limitation of collecting data only from Portuguese workers should also be considered since the replication of this research in other countries, from different parts of the world, would allow us to understand if there is or is not uniformity in the conclusions. Finally, future research should take into consideration that the pandemic situation changes with great dynamics. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022 are very different.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, since written informed consent was obtained for the in-depth interviews before each session. In the survey, a link to the online survey platform was sent by social media and partners' social media, and at no time was contact established between researchers and participants. Moreover, the interview script and the personal questionnaire did not include any information and on histories. As such, all data accessible to the researchers were stripped of respondents' names, addresses, or birth dates and cannot be linked back to them.

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