



## The impact of perceived organizational support on trust. A case study of a state university

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### ABSTRACT

The underlying paper's objective is to analyse the relationship between perceived organizational support and trust across two dimensions: a vertical and a horizontal one. The authors of this article undertook a field-based questionnaire survey ( $N = 80$ ). The participants were part-time students of the undergraduate and postgraduate studies of the Department of Management of a Cracow state university in Poland. In the discussion part the authors draw conclusions from the research findings. Overall, the results of the conducted research revealed that perceived organizational support, vertical and institutional trust in the academic context were positively correlated.

**Keywords:** perceived organizational support, trust, vertical trust, horizontal trust, state university

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging tasks of running a successful organization is to meet social and emotional expectations of its members. Since organizations are formed by people and they are their biggest asset, there is a great interest in studying human resources. Understanding sophisticated and complex nature of managing people and great number of tools and skills is a key to gain a competitive advantage in today's rapidly changing business environment. In the era of increased competition on the market, managers started to recognize

the importance of providing employees with a variety of organizational inputs, including both tangible and intangible assets. The literature review shows that one of the intangible goods is perceived organizational support, which is of great value in developing attitudes of members in an organization [1]. For that reason, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the relationship of perceived organizational support (POS) with two of three dimensions of organizational trust: a vertical and horizontal one in the context of a Polish state university. Research is aimed at verifying the theoretical model presenting the influence of the perceived organizational trust on the vertical and institutional trust among students. The theoretical part of this paper is focused on the literature review, where the practical one is an analysis and discussion of the findings. The research is based on quantitative research technique.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2. 1. Perceived organizational support**

In 1986 Eisenberger and his team developed the concept of perceived organizational support: POS [2]. According to their findings POS is defined as person's global belief that the organization values his/her contribution, respects him/her and cares about his/her well-being. The organizational support in this matter is manifested, among other things, by using clear ways of working and providing ways for developing skills [3]. However, the degree to which a member of an organization views such support as discretionary is vital [4]. According to the social exchange theory a member of an organization feels obliged to be loyal and dedicated to his/her organization and reciprocate tangible assets (such as pay rise, promotion) and intangible goods (such as approval, respect, favorable treatment, job conditions) [5]. High level of perceived organizational is an antecedent of sense of safety, organizational commitment, supervisory support and satisfaction in performing activities in the organization [6] [7]. Another positive outcome of POS, beside the above mentioned, is a member's obligation to pursue organizational goals [8]. The research has shown a positive correlation between a high level of POS and reduced absenteeism, redundancy, and heightened performance [9] [10], but also between POS and fairness perception in the organization [11]. On the other hand, POS is negatively related to stress and other workplace associated concerns [12]. Therefore POS is used as a tool to motivate members of an organization [13]. A person who feels supported identifies him/herself with the organization, trusts it and understands the changes taking place at his/her workplace [14]. Although complex and sophisticated the benefits of POS are undeniable, therefore the concept has received extensive attention in the literature of organizational psychology [15]. Furthermore, organizations start to attach more importance to maintaining it at its satisfactory level.

### **2. 2. Organizational trust**

Research on perceived organizational support (POS) has highlighted its positive impact on organizational trust [16], subsequently trust will be stronger when POS is high than when it is low [17]. Multidisciplinary studies prove beneficial effect of trust on organizations [18]. With this respect, it is important to keep POS on a desirable level. Mayer et al., [19] distinguish between three intra-organizational dimensions of trust: person's trust to other colleagues, trust to the management and to the institution. Combined together are fundamental in helping organization reach its objectives. The first one – trust to other colleagues – is a

horizontal dimension of trust and is crucial in team work. The second dimension of trust – a vertical one – is a trust towards the supervisor [20]. Vertical trust is composed among other things of accurate and open communication, trust in the professional competencies of the members of the organization and their good will. [21]. Formal regulations, on the other side, are essential in the institutional trust. Clear rules of cooperation, division of tasks and responsibilities [22] and comprehensible policy [23] are important factors in building trust towards the entire organization.

**2. 3. State university as an example of an organization**

Organization is a system formed and developed by people and its primary purpose is to achieve a set of goals, perform tasks and functions [24]. Griffin [25] presents the simplest and the most synthetic definition of an organization, which is a group of people cooperating in a structured way in order to achieve a set of objectives. Each organization can be characterized in one of the following ways [26,27]: it is formed by people (members of an organization); it is a system with clear objectives; it is an open system that exchanges information with the environment; it has a formal and hierarchical structure; it has its own facilities and resources and it is autonomous and has its own authority.

**Table 1.** Elements of a state university.

<b>Organizational features</b>	<b>State university as an organization</b>
formed by people	e.g. students, academic staff
a system with clear objectives	e.g. institutionalization of education and science
an open system that exchanges information with the environment	e.g. academic business incubators, student research groups
has a formal and hierarchical structure	e.g. departments, faculties, sections
owns facilities and resources	e.g. labs, library
is autonomous and has its own authority	e.g. dean, research assistant, chancellor

*Source:* Authors' own research

As presented in the table above, a state university is a form of an organization. As the result the authors of this paper attempt to analyze it from the point of view of POS and organizational trust, therefore both components have been modified and accustomed.

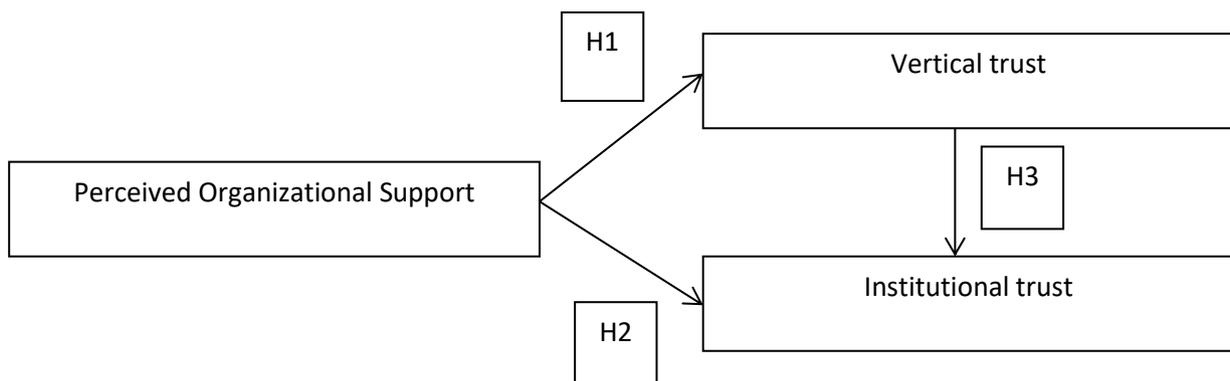
**3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

**3. 1. Hypothesis**

The purpose of this research is to verify a theoretical model presenting the influence of perceived organizational support (POS) on the vertical and institutional trust in the academic

environment, which are two of three components building the organizational trust [28]. In the underlying research authors take two assumptions about the tested components. First of all, it is necessary to note that POS is a construct associated with companies and their employees [29]. For the purposes of this paper, authors focus on a state university, therefore the employees have been substituted by students and a company is replaced by a specific public organization – a state university. Secondly, the theoretical model does not include the horizontal trust. It is apparent from the definition of horizontal trust, which qualifies it as trust towards members of an organization but not towards superiors or institution [30]. The lecturers of a university, as members of an organization, create its brand image, what leads to efficiencies. They participate in passing on the basics of social and ethical values of an organization. Furthermore, the lecturers are responsible for conveying ideas and objectives of the university. Their contribution to molding a certain attitudes of students is priceless and of great value. Therefore, the authors of this paper decided to exclude the horizontal trust dimension (trust to colleagues) from their research and focus on the two remaining dimensions (vertical and institutional trust).

Based on the literature review the conceptual framework is as follows:



Source: Authors' own research

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model of perceived organizational support – vertical and institutional trust relationship.

The correlation between the components allowed the authors to formulate the following hypothesis:

**H1:** *The perceived organizational support has a positive and indirect influence on vertical trust.*

**H2:** *The perceived organizational support has a positive and indirect influence on institutional trust.*

**H3:** *The vertical trust has a positive and indirect influence on institutional trust.*

All three proposed hypothesis are diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

### **3. 2. Research methodology**

#### **3. 2. 1. Questionnaire**

This research is based on quantitative research technique. The instrument used in this study to gather the data was questionnaire. The questionnaire items were prepared by the authors on the basis of their theoretical studies. All three components were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. At the end of the questionnaire authors placed item seeking demographic data such as age, gender and type of studies. To measure perceived organizational support authors based their questionnaire statements on the eight-item scale developed by Eisenberger et al. [31] and adjusted it to the requirements of this paper.

#### **3. 2. 2. Population and sample design**

The population of this study consists of students of a large state university located in Cracow in Poland. The population includes both females and males. The study has been conducted in the Department of Management. Total population consisted of 80 students that have taken part in the underlying survey study, where 46 are women and 34 are men.

The authors distributed the total of 80 questionnaires among both undergraduate and postgraduate students of part-time studies at the Department of Management in a state university in Cracow, Poland. The study was conducted after prior permission from the head of the department. The authors of the study briefed the students about the study and ensured them about confidentiality. The questionnaires were administered by the authors to four different groups during their lectures and collected after all were filled in. All the questionnaires were returned, what gives a response rate of 100%. Respondents ranged in age from their early 20s to over 26.

The authors analyzed the collected data and obtained the following demographic variables using descriptive statistics from the questionnaires:

- Gender: woman – 57,5%; man – 42,5%,
- Type of studies: 46,25% – BA; 53,75% – MA,
- Age: 71,25% – under 26 years; 28,75% – over 26 years.

#### **3. 2. 3. Measures**

In this paragraph the authors outline in a few words the scales that were used in the underlying study. Each component is verified in the questionnaire by at least 4 statements. Examples of statements to measure the particular components are presented in table below.

**Table 2.** Examples of research components and statements in the questionnaire.

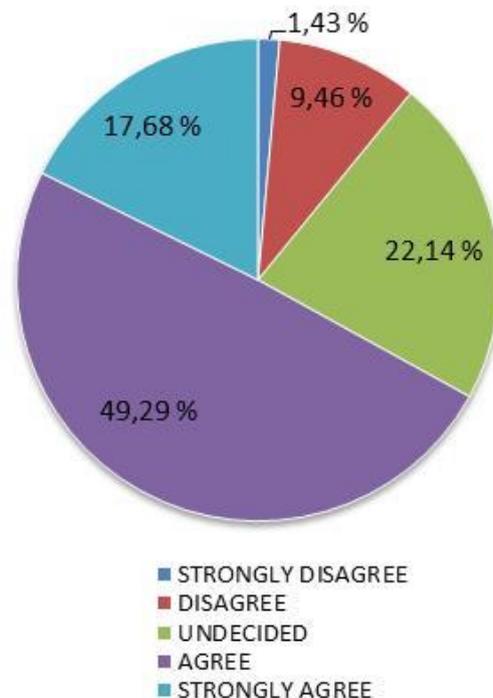
Component	The number of items in the questionnaire	Examples of statements
Vertical trust	7	My lecturers recognizes my efforts/work during classes.
		My lecturers always keep their word.

		My university lecturers are understanding towards the students.
Institutional trust	4	I trust the authorities of my university.
		I am being informed of all relevant issues at my university.
		I can count on the authorities of my university if I have a problem.
Perceived organizational support	6	My university gives me the opportunity to develop professional competences.
		My university supports me in achieving better results.

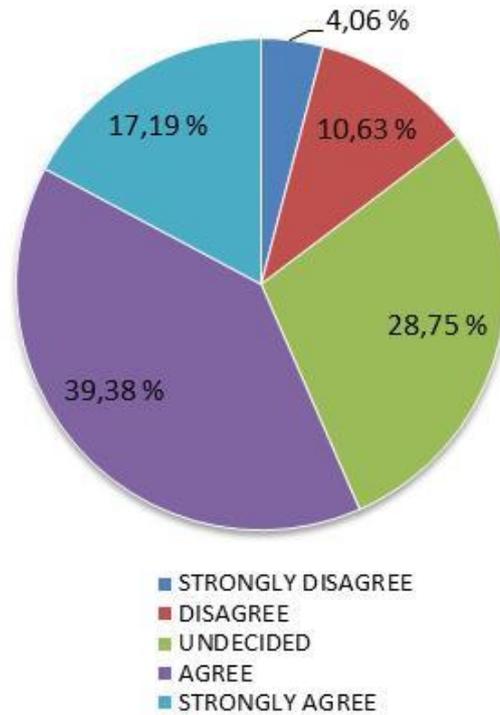
Source: Authors' own research.

#### 4. RESULTS

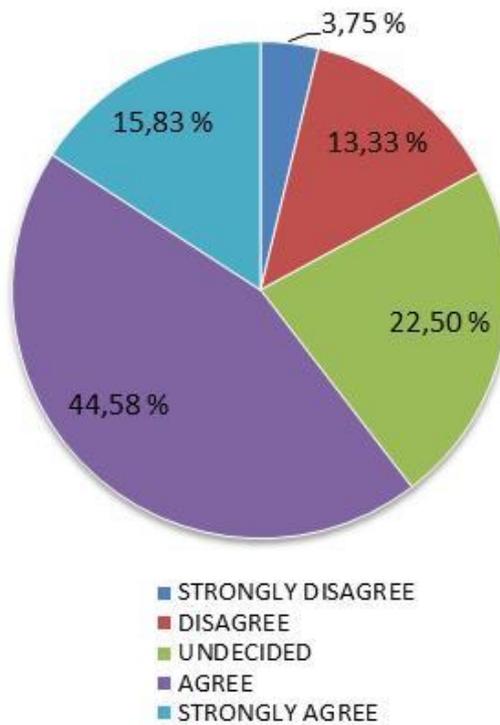
This study examines the relationship of perceived organizational support, vertical trust and institutional trust. The authors used Statistica 2012 to analyze the collected data. Correlation between dependent and independent variables was calculated using Spearman product moment correlation coefficient.



**Figure 2.** Vertical trust. The ratio of responses based on the Likert scale (n = 80; 7 statements in the questionnaire).



**Figure 3.** Institutional trust. The ratio of responses based on the Likert scale (n = 80; 4 statements in the questionnaire).



**Figure 4.** Perceived organizational support. The ratio of responses based on the Likert scale (n = 80; 6 statements in the questionnaire).

After statistical analysis it can be stated as follows:

- Hypothesis *H1* regarding the influence of perceived organizational support on vertical trust was confirmed ( $r = 0,673$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ).
- Hypothesis *H2* is statistically positive relationship between perceived organizational support and institutional trust ( $r = 0,558$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ).
- Data analysis also confirmed *H3* – a positive relationship between the vertical and institutional trust ( $r = 0,586$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ).
- All model paths are statistically important.

To sum up, the results of this research allow the authors to positively verify the theoretical model presenting relationships between perceived organizational support, vertical and institutional trust. In addition, the obtained results confirmed dependence between the vertical and institutional trust. This is an evidence of the perceived organizational support creating a positive atmosphere in an organization. Positive atmosphere is connected with trust and another social components such as citizenship behaviors or students well-being. These components create a high quality of study environment, which allows members of the organization to be creative and geared to the innovation. Without pro-innovative attitudes during the studying process it is not possible to development modern economy. It is vital to support the students, and create conditions for an open communication. The lecturers are representatives of an organization. The way the students perceive the lecturers is the way they perceive the whole organization. As the research findings show, perceived organizational support improves vertical and institutional trust in a Polish state university. Therefore, the employees of an organization should show increased support to other members, such as students. Increased POS has indisputable impact on students.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Perceived organizational support positively correlate with many variables, such us supervisor's support, organizational commitment, fairness in organization, satisfaction and many others. Members of an organization who perceive the organizational support on high level, feel obliged to reciprocate the received tangible or intangible goods in the long term. If their social and emotional needs are fulfilled, they become dedicated, emotionally committed and loyal to the organization and contribute to a greater efficiency. Member of each organization that cares about their well-being show reduced absenteeism and are less likely to quit their jobs. Feeling supported and appreciated by the organization is a key to success and supervisors should pay more attention to POS as it has undeniable and long-term benefits and can contribute to more efficient realizing the objectives of an organization. POS is also an important concept in such organizations as universities. It is crucial for lecturers to show support to their students, put emphasize on an open communication, pass on the basics of social and ethical values of an organization, and convey ideas and objectives of the university. Lecturers and authorities of each university are responsible for creating a favorable atmosphere and create attitudes of young people. Students and other member of an organization personify the organization and perceive the action of its agents (supervisors, lecturers, etc.) as actions of the whole company. Students trusting their lecturers results in trust towards an organization.

Therefore authors propose that the area for future research is, an in-depth analysis of more state universities using bigger and more diversified samples and a comparison of the findings. Moreover there are few processes at the state university which when improved may result in an increase in perceived organizational support. Authors indicate supporting students in development of their professional skills, communication between organization and students and better material support for research projects.

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