

CREDITING THE ORGANIZATION FOR COWORKERS' SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIOR:  
THE ROLES OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND COWORKERS'  
ORGANIZATIONAL EMBODIMENT

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A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department  
of Psychology  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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By

Laura Clark Joiner

May, 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational support theory suggests that favorable treatment from members of the organization contributes to employees' perceived organizational support (POS). However, research on POS has mainly considered the roles managers and supervisors play in its formation, paying less regard to coworkers. The current study tested a model that gives greater consideration to coworkers as contributors to development of POS. A new construct termed coworkers' organizational embodiment (COE) was proposed to describe the extent to which employees believed their coworkers represented the organization and shared its identity. Consistent with organizational support theory and research on organizational embodiment, results indicated that supportive treatment from coworkers influenced employee POS, mostly when COE was high. These effects carried over employees' affective organizational commitment but not their extra-role performance. It was also found that coworkers' informal organizational status and expressed favorable attitudes regarding the organization were positively related to COE.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	
Introduction.....	i
Perceived Organizational Support .....	9
Organizational Support Theory.....	9
Outcomes of POS.....	10
Antecedents of POS.....	11
Coworkers' Organizational Embodiment.....	13
COE as a Moderator.....	17
Antecedents of COE .....	18
Outcomes of COE.....	20
Chapter II	
Method .....	23
Participants.....	23
Measures .....	24
Chapter III	
Results.....	27
Test of Hypotheses.....	29
Chapter IV	
Discussion.....	32
Practical Implications.....	35
Limitations .....	36
Conclusion .....	36
REFERENCES .....	38

TABLES .....	45
FIGURES .....	54
APPENDICES .....	56

## Chapter I

Supportive coworkers are essential to employees and their employing organizations. Coworkers demonstrating supportive behaviors towards employees contribute to their well-being and effectiveness, which can have significant implications for an organization's bottom-line (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). While coworkers' supportive behavior has assumed different names in the literature, including interpersonal citizenship behavior, coworker helping behavior, and interpersonal facilitation, these actions generally describe providing coworkers with instrumental resources to carry out their jobs more effectively and socioemotional support that enhances their psychological well-being (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). Furthermore, although coworker support has often been characterized as citizenship behavior, or behavior that goes beyond the formal requirements of the job, the greater emphasis in contemporary organizations on teamwork and employee interdependence has led many employers to consider supportive behavior as part of an employee's regular job role (Morrison, 1994).

When employees receive repeated support from coworkers they come to expect such help in the future (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). As social exchange theory would suggest, receiving supportive resources from coworkers and anticipating that help will be available from them when needed would encourage employees to invest greater personal resources into developing their relationships with coworkers. This might include demonstrating greater emotional commitment to coworkers (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005) or increasing efforts on their behalf (Deckop, Cirka, & Andersson, 2003; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). Through similar exchange processes, supportive treatment from coworkers may also promote employees' contributions to their organizations since the organization is

responsible for selecting an employee's coworkers and directing their behavior (Levinson, 1965). Indeed, employees receiving supportive resources from coworkers have been found to exhibit greater affective organizational commitment (Rousseau & Aube, 2010; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004) and extra-role performance (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), indicating that employees may credit the organization for their coworkers' supportive behavior.

While supportive coworkers may influence employees' beliefs regarding the organization, a common assumption in the literature is that supportive treatment from one source would mostly influence attitudes and behavior towards that specific source (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). However, research shows that employees attribute favorable or unfavorable treatment from organizational members to the organization, such that employees' beliefs concerning their relationships with organizational members are generalized to their relationships with the organization (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2010; 2014; Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). When employees credit the organization for the supportive resources delivered from its members, this would lead them to expect future help from the organization, contributing to their personal investments into developing their exchange relationship with the organization.

As favorable exchange relationships between employees and their employing organizations are beneficial to both parties involved, it is important to fully examine the factors that promote the development of the employee-organization exchange relationship, including supportive treatment from coworkers. Especially since employee interdependence is becoming more prevalent (Hollenbeck et al., 1995; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Sparrowe,

Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001), where employees may interact with their coworkers more than any other members of the organization, investigating the extent to which employees attribute their coworkers' supportive behavior to the organization may provide critical information to researchers and practitioners. In order to advance theory and application, it will also be important to identify the conditions under which employees credit the organization for their coworkers' supportive behavior.

The notion that supportive treatment from coworkers may be attributed to the organization stems from Levinson's (1965) propositions and was later integrated into Eisenberger's (1986) organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). According to Levinson (1965), organizational members who provide work-related resources are considered agents of the organization, carrying out their roles on the organization's behalf. Employees credit the actions of organizational members to the organization since it is responsible for hiring its members and directing their behavior both directly through its policies and indirectly through its culture (Levinson, 1965). Because employees care about their organization's valuation of them, they look to their interactions with members of the organization as indication of their relationship with the organization itself (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). These arguments which are central to organizational support theory suggest that supportive treatment from organizational members can enhance employees' views of the organization's positive regard towards themselves, or perceived organizational support (POS; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Drawing from Levinson's (1965) arguments, organizational support theory holds that employees personify their organizations, seeing them as humanlike entities with dispositions and motives (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Similar to the perceptions held about individuals in

the social environment, employees form global beliefs concerning the organization's positive or negative orientation towards themselves (Eisenberger et al., 1986). When employees believe that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (POS), they reciprocate the positive feelings with enhanced attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the organization's effectiveness (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Indeed, POS has been positively linked to a number of favorable outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2015), including employees' affective organizational commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001) and extra-role performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Organizational support theory further suggests that POS develops as a result of employees' positive interactions with other members of the organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Particularly, employees sum up their relationships with organizational members in forming perceptions of the organization. In line with Levinson's (1965) arguments, organizational support theory indicates that organizational members can be seen as agents or representatives of the organization, acting on its behalf (Eisenberger et al., 1986; 2002). As a result, employees credit supportive treatment from organizational members to the organization, contributing to their POS and investment of personal resources into the organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Because coworkers are members of the organization, their supportive behavior should influence employees' beliefs regarding the organization's favorable orientation towards themselves. Such attributions would enhance POS, leading employees to demonstrate greater affective commitment and extra-role performance.

Although some evidence provides support for the role coworkers might play in the development of POS (Hayton, Carnabuci, & Eisenberger, 2012; Ng & Sorensen, 2008),

research on this topic has been limited. This may be partially due to the notion that supportive treatment from members positioned higher in the organization's hierarchy would have the greatest impact on POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Organizational support theory holds that higher-status organizational members may more closely represent the organization because of their roles over shaping and implementing its values and objectives (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). When forming beliefs about the organization, employees would mostly draw from their experiences with these high-status, organizational representatives. Thus, research on POS has mainly considered the contributions of managers and supervisors, giving less attention to coworkers (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

In the present research, I propose that coworkers should be given greater consideration as representatives of the organization and contributors to the development of POS. As Levinson (1965) and organizational support theory suggest, favorable treatment from members of the organization can be attributed to the organization as a whole (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Because contemporary organizations place greater emphasis on teamwork and employee interdependence (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003), coworkers may be more essential to POS than previously considered. Many organizations, for instance, view interpersonal skills and teamwork abilities as core competencies deemed necessary for successful employee performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Morgeson, Reider, & Campion, 2005). As a result, they may encourage or even require employees to demonstrate supportive treatment towards each other, leading employees to credit the organization for their coworkers' supportive behavior.

However, the degree to which coworkers' supportive behavior is attributed to the organization may ultimately depend on employees' identification of their coworkers with the organization (coworkers' organizational embodiment, or COE). Recent research suggests that treatment from organizational members is credited to the organization to the extent that they are perceived as sharing the central characteristics of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013). Particularly, supervisor's organizational embodiment (SOE) has been found to influence employees' attributions of their supervisors' actions to the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2010, 2014; Shoss et al., 2013). When SOE is high, employees are more likely to view their interactions with supervisors as indicative of their relationship with the organization. In a similar vein, employees' perceptions of their coworkers' organizational embodiment (COE) may impact the extent to which supportive treatment delivered by coworkers is credited to the organization. Supportive coworkers who are believed to share the organization's identity (COE) would be more likely to contribute to the development of POS and, in turn, employees' investment of personal resources into the organization (e.g., affective organizational commitment and extra-role performance).

If COE plays a significant role in the extent to which the actions of coworkers influence employees' beliefs regarding the organization and their efforts on its behalf, it will be important to identify the factors that contribute to COE. Employees working with high-status coworkers perceived to be essential to the organization's day-to-day decisions and functioning may be more inclined to see their coworkers as embodying the organization (COE). Employees may also believe that their coworkers and the organization share an identity (COE) when coworkers express favorable attitudes about the organization. Coworkers' expressions of approval towards the organization could signal that they and the

organization have similar goals and values, enhancing COE. Conversely, employees who perceive their coworkers demonstrating organization-directed deviant behavior may view their coworkers as independent from the organization. Such behavior from coworkers would likely indicate that their values and objectives differ from the organization's values and objectives, reducing COE.

Theoretically, examining how coworkers' supportive behavior leads to the development of POS would extend the current presuppositions of organizational support theory. Organizational support theory has mostly assumed a top-down approach to understanding the formation of POS, considering supportive treatment from members at the top of the organizational hierarchy to be its main contributors (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). However, coworkers due to their growing influence in an employee's work life should also play a significant role in the development of POS. As employees consider their interactions with managers and supervisors as indication of their relationship with the organization, they would also look to their coworkers for such information. Of course, turning to coworkers for information regarding their relationship with the organization may only occur when employees also perceive that their coworkers share the organization's identity (COE). Accordingly, this research would extend organizational support theory by examining how COE influences the extent to which employees see their coworkers' supportive behavior as indicative of the relationship held between the organization and themselves.

This research would also contribute to the organizational commitment literature by showing that coworkers can play a significant role in promoting employees' affective commitment to the organization. Some scholars suggest that employees' commitment to the

organization stems from the actions of the organization rather than supervisors or coworkers (e.g., Lavelle et al., 2007). However, research indicates that supportive treatment from coworkers can influence employees' commitment (e.g., Rousseau & Aube, 2010; Tepper et al., 2004). COE may help to explain the link between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective organizational commitment. When coworkers are believed to share an identity with the organization (COE), their supportive treatment would be attributed to the organization, contributing to the development of POS and, in turn, affective organizational commitment.

Practically, this research would reflect how supportive treatment from coworkers may be most critical to an organization's bottom-line when COE is high. Organizations wishing to enhance employees' investments into the organization may look for ways to increase their employees' supportive treatment towards each other along with their organizational embodiment (COE). This may be achieved through greater emphasis on teamwork and employee participation in decision-making. When employees benefit from their coworkers' supportive behavior and they perceive them as representative of the organization (COE), they should also perceive the organization's positive orientation towards themselves (POS). Such favorable perceptions of the organization stemming from positive interactions with coworkers would likely promote employees' discretionary contributions to the organization.

Empowering employees to support each other and fostering their organizational embodiment (e.g., COE) may also help to relieve supervisors of their demanding and, at times, conflicting responsibilities. Supervisors are often required to meet the demands of the organization while simultaneously meeting their employees' needs. Of course, the demands of the organization and the needs of employees may be at odds with each other, creating role

conflict and stress for supervisors. However, when employees meet each other's needs through supportive treatment and they perceive each other to be representative of the organization, this alone may lead to the development of POS and employees' investments into their organizations.

Taken together, the purpose of the present research is to examine (1) the moderating effect of COE on the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and POS, (2) the distal outcomes associated with the moderated coworkers' supportive behavior-POS relationship, including employees' affective organizational commitment and extra-role performance, and (3) the factors that contribute to COE.

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

Similar to the social relationships held between individuals, employees form relationships with their employing organizations. Social exchange theory suggests that social relationships are governed by reciprocity and interdependence, developing over time through the mutual exchange of material and socioemotional resources between two parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In the organizational context, employees seek resources from their organizations and invest personal resources into the organization by showing commitment to helping it achieve its objectives (Kurtessis et al., 2015). This reciprocation of resources between employees and their organizations fosters high quality employee-organization social exchange relationships based on trust and mutual obligation. Ultimately, such favorable relationships lead to the development of employees' affective commitment to the organization, which can have significant implications for the organization's bottom-line (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Employees expressing affective commitment to the organization help the organization achieve its goals through increased performance efforts and reduced withdrawal behavior (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

## **Organizational Support Theory**

While initial research on organizational commitment was mainly concerned with employees' dedication to the organization, Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) viewed commitment from a social exchange approach, considering the employee's perspective in their organizational support theory. According to organizational support theory, employees form beliefs about their organization's positive or negative orientation towards themselves as they would about individuals in the social environment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees develop such beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (POS) in order to fulfill their socioemotional needs and determine the organization's readiness to reward increased efforts on its behalf (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Drawing from Levinson's (1965) arguments regarding employees' anthropomorphism of the organization, organizational support theory suggests that employees are able to make inferences about their organizations because they personify them, viewing them as lifelike entities with dispositions and motives (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Organizations that portray sincere and benevolent dispositions as well as meet their employees' socioemotional needs demonstrate their positive regard towards employees, contributing to the development of POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

## **Outcomes of POS**

Recent meta-analytic findings indicate an extensive list of favorable outcomes related to POS, including employees' felt obligation, organizational identification, affective organizational commitment, and extra-role performance (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Organizational support theory holds that POS operates through social exchange processes where the organization's offering of supportive resources to its employees encourages them

to devote personal resources such as commitment and effort to the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Particularly, POS invokes the norm of reciprocity such that favorable treatment from the organization promotes employees' felt obligation to reciprocate positive attitudes and behaviors to the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Through felt obligation, POS enhances employees' care for the organization's well-being (e.g., affective organizational commitment) and behavior that helps the organization achieve its objectives (e.g., extra-role performance) (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Organizational support theory further suggests that POS can lead to positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes for employees and their organizations via self-enhancement processes (Kurtessis et al., 2015). As POS helps to fulfill employees' socioemotional needs, providing them with comfort and a sense of purpose, it should also increase their identification with the organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2015). Furthermore, POS signals that the organization possesses favorable qualities that employees may wish to incorporate into their own self-concepts (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Because organizational identification is characterized by the sharing of values and experiences between employees and their organizations, through organizational identification, POS contributes to employees' psychological attachment to the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Such psychological attachment or affective commitment to the organization promotes behavior that contributes to the organization's effectiveness, including increased extra-role performance and reduced withdrawal behavior (Meyer et al., 2002).

### **Antecedents of POS**

The positive consequences that have been found to result from POS continue to inspire research investigating its antecedents. While several factors may influence

employees' beliefs concerning the organization's favorable orientation towards themselves (POS), research indicates that treatment from members of the organization, including managers, supervisors, and coworkers, plays a significant role in the development of POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). According to Levinson (1965), any organizational members whom employees consider important to them and provide valued resources can contribute to employees' general perceptions of the larger organization. Levinson (1965) suggests that employees ascribe to their organizations humanlike qualities and form generalizations of the organization based on their feelings concerning focal organizational members. Specifically, important organizational members are seen as agents or representatives of the organization, carrying out their roles on the organization's behalf (Levinson, 1965). As a result, the actions of these organizational members reflect the actions of the organization, which employees then attribute to the organization's character (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Levinson, 1965). Levinson (1965) also argues that members of the organization may exemplify the larger organization since it is responsible for hiring them and directing their actions both directly through its policies and indirectly through its culture.

Drawing from Levinson's (1965) propositions, Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) organizational support theory holds that *supportive* treatment from members of the organization can foster the development of POS. Organizational support theory further suggests that supportive treatment from members positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy (e.g., managers or supervisors) would contribute more to POS than supportive treatment from members positioned lower in the hierarchy (e.g., coworkers), as higher-level members have more control over shaping and implementing the organization's values and objectives (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2002). Because managers make policies and procedures

and supervisors direct their implementation, employees are likely to view these higher-level members as the agents of the organization to which Levinson (1965) refers. Consistent with Levinson's (1965) arguments, supportive behavior from such high-status organizational members would then be attributed to the organization at large, contributing to employees' beliefs regarding the organization's positive orientation towards themselves (Eisenberger et al., 2002). When employees believe that their managers and supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being, employees hold similar beliefs regarding the organization (i.e., POS) (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

While research on POS has mainly considered the influence of managers and supervisors (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2015), evidence that has surfaced over the past decade demonstrates support for coworkers as contributors to the development of POS (e.g., Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Hayton et al., 2012; Zagenczyk, Scott, Gibney, Murrell, & Thatcher, 2010). As Levinson (1965) argued, any organizational members providing material or socioemotional resources can affect employees' beliefs concerning the organization. In contemporary organizations where employee interdependence is more prevalent than previously, employees often receive supportive resources from their coworkers (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Furthermore, the actions of coworkers may be credited to the organization because the organization is responsible for hiring them and directing their behavior (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Levinson, 1965). In line with these arguments, Ng and Sorensen (2008) found in their meta-analysis on POS that perceived coworker support was directly and positively related to POS. Similarly, Hayton and colleagues (2012) found that even after controlling for perceived supervisor support, perceived coworker support significantly predicted POS. The authors also found that social

embeddedness, described as the degree to which an employee experienced repeated and reciprocal exchanges of instrumental and socioemotional resources with coworkers, was positively associated with POS (Hayton et al., 2012). The authors suggest that when employees receive supportive resources from coworkers, they credit their coworkers' supportive behavior to the organization (Hayton et al., 2012).

### **Coworkers' Organizational Embodiment**

Supportive treatment from organizational members can contribute to the development of POS; however, only when these members are viewed as representatives of the organization who share its identity would their behavior play a significant role in shaping employees' beliefs regarding the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2002; 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013). Supportive treatment from organizational members seen as independent agents, acting in their own right, would mostly be seen as coming from them rather than the organization. Conversely, the supportive actions of organizational members who are identified with the organization would likely be credited to the organization and influence employees' POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002; 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013).

As organizational support theory argues, members positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy would have the strongest impact on POS since they would be seen as most representative of the organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Because managers are directly responsible for making organizational policies and overseeing their implementation, employees would consistently identify managers with the organization and credit the organization for their behavior (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Supervisors, on the other hand, have been found to vary in the extent to which employees identify them with the organization (supervisor's organizational embodiment, or

SOE; Eisenberger et al., 2010). Compared to managers, supervisors differ more in their roles and influence (Eisenberger et al., 2002; 2010; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Supervisors also have their own values and motives that may not necessarily align with the organization's values and objectives (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Discrepancies between the characteristics of the organization and an employee's supervisor would highlight the distinctiveness of the supervisor from the organization. Depending on the extent to which supervisors are believed to share an identity with the organization (SOE), their supportive behavior may or may not be attributed to the organization at large (Eisenberger et al., 2010). Indeed, several studies indicate that treatment from supervisors is most likely to be attributed to the organization when SOE is high (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2002; 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013).

Although research has investigated employees' identification of their supervisors with the organization (SOE) (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013), to my knowledge, no research has examined the extent to which employees believe their coworkers share the organization's identity (coworkers' organizational embodiment, or COE). Because coworkers' roles and influence in the organization may vary to an even greater degree than supervisors' roles and influence, it would be especially important to examine COE when considering the contributions of coworkers to the development of POS. Just as SOE impacts the extent to which treatment from supervisors is attributed to the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2010; 2014; Shoss et al., 2013), COE should influence the extent to which supportive treatment from coworkers is credited to the organization and contributes to the formation of POS.

When proposing SOE, Eisenberger and colleagues (2010) drew from the concept of organizational identification to better understand the underlying processes that might govern employees' identification of their supervisors with the organization. Organizational identification is defined as the experience of a shared identity between an employee and the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification with the organization occurs when employees compare themselves to representative members of the organization and believe that they share the characteristics of these members (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Organizational identification is further defined by the perception of shared experiences with the organization (Mael & Tetrick, 1992).

Organizational identification stems from social identity theory which suggests that in order to make sense of the social world, individuals classify themselves and others in terms of their social group membership (Turner, 1975). The central characteristics of group members are what define a given social group, and individuals are classified into groups with whom they share its particular qualities (Turner, 1975). While individuals can identify others with various social groups, they may personally identify with certain social groups in order to define themselves within the social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This is referred to as social identification in which a person's self-concept is defined by his or her own group membership. Social identification occurs when individuals live vicariously through the group, personally experiencing its successes and failures (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the workplace, employees' organizational identification is a specific form of social identification where employees define themselves by their membership in the organization and share the organization's experiences (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

In addition to personally identifying and identifying supervisors with the organization (SOE), I suggest that employees may also identify their coworkers with the organization (COE). Just as employees identify with the organization by comparing their own characteristics with those of representative organizational members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), employees may identify their coworkers with the organization using similar comparison processes. COE would be further characterized by the perception of shared actions between coworkers and the organization. Specifically, treatment from coworkers would be perceived as treatment from the organization when coworkers are believed to share the organization's identity (COE).

Because employees are motivated to have their socioemotional needs fulfilled and determine the organization's readiness to reward increased efforts on its behalf (Eisenberger et al., 1986), they turn to their interactions with organizational members for information regarding their exchange relationship with the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). COE would indicate whether coworkers serve as reliable sources for this information. Thus, COE serves an instrumental function as employees can make inferences regarding their relationships with the organization based on their interactions with coworkers believed to share the organization's identity (COE). In deciding whether to invest resources into their organizations, employees could draw from their experiences with coworkers believed to share the organization's identity (COE).

In conjunction with supportive treatment from coworkers, COE would facilitate the fulfillment of employees' socioemotional needs by signaling to employees that they hold a favorable exchange relationship with the organization. When coworkers deliver supportive treatment to employees and they are perceived to share an identity with the organization

(COE), employees would believe that the organization is supportive and holds a positive orientation towards themselves. Such beliefs would fulfill employees' socioemotional needs and promote their positive attitudes regarding the organization and increased efforts on its behalf (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

### **COE as a Moderator**

Employees' favorable interactions with coworkers would most likely be generalized to their relationships with the organization when employees believe their coworkers share the organization's identity (COE). When COE is high, supportive treatment from coworkers would be seen as supportive treatment from the organization. This should contribute to employees' beliefs concerning the organization's valuation of their contributions and care for their well-being, or POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In contrast, employees viewing their coworkers as independent of the organization (low COE) may not ascribe their coworkers' supportive behavior to the organization. In this case, supportive treatment from coworkers would only be seen as coming from coworkers and not the organization. Furthermore, when COE is low, the favorable interactions between employees and their coworkers may be less likely to reflect the favorableness of the employee-organization exchange relationship. Compared to supportive treatment from highly representative coworkers (high COE), supportive treatment from coworkers seen as independent of the organization (low COE) would play a minimal role in the formation of POS. Depending on the degree to which employees identify their coworkers with the organization, they may or may not see their coworkers' supportive behavior as indication of the organization's favorable orientation towards themselves (POS). Thus, as shown in Figure 1, COE should influence the extent to which coworkers' supportive behavior contributes to the development of POS.

*Hypothesis 1. COE will moderate the positive relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employee POS, such that the positive relationship will be stronger when COE is high than low.*

### **Antecedents of COE**

Because employees would hold unique perspectives concerning the supportiveness of their coworkers, they likely hold differing views regarding their coworkers' organizational embodiment (COE). To determine the extent to which coworkers share the organization's identity (COE), employees would compare their coworkers' characteristics with the defining features of the organization. These defining features may include power, values, and motives, the same characteristics employees ascribe to the organization when viewing it as a lifelike entity. Thus, in forming beliefs about COE, employees would compare their coworkers' power, values, and motives with the power, values, and motives of the organization. A high degree of similarity between these characteristics of coworkers and the organization would indicate that coworkers share the organization's identity (COE) and offer reliable insight into the employee's exchange relationship with the organization.

Just as Eisenberger and colleagues (2002) found that supervisors' informal status affected the extent to which they were identified with the organization, coworkers' informal status may influence COE. Eisenberger et al. (2002) defined informal status as the extent to which supervisors were valued by the organization, had influence in organizational decisions, and possessed authority and autonomy in their job roles (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Coworkers' informal status may reflect the degree of power held by coworkers in the organization, and depending on the perceived informal status of coworkers, they may be more or less closely aligned with the organization. Consistent with Eisenberger et al. (2002),

high status coworkers that appear to be valued by the organization and essential to its day-to-day decisions and operations should be highly identified with the organization (COE).

Coworkers' expressed attitudes concerning the organization may also influence COE. In Eisenberger et al. (2010), the authors found that supervisors' expressed favorable attitudes about the organization contributed to subordinates' perceptions of SOE. Similarly, employees may believe that their coworkers and the organization have a shared identity (COE) when coworkers express positive attitudes towards the organization. Coworkers showing approval of the organization could signal that they and the organization share similar values and motives, contributing to employees' perceptions of COE.

While coworkers' informal status and expressed favorable attitudes towards the organization may positively influence COE, there may also be factors that hinder coworkers from being identified with the organization. Coworkers' deviant work behavior, defined as voluntary behaviors that threaten the well-being of the organization and/or its members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), could highlight the distinctiveness of coworkers from the organization. Organizational deviance, in particular, is characterized by acts that violate norms for employee behavior and demonstrate disrespect towards the organization (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999). Employees exhibiting deviant behavior directed towards the organization may intentionally arrive late to work or leave early without permission. When employees perceive their coworkers engaging in such behavior, they may believe that coworkers are not valued by the organization or that they and the organization hold differing values and motives. Coworkers would, in turn, be viewed as independent agents, acting in their own right. Because coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior would highlight the dissimilarity between them and the organization, employees reporting high levels of

coworkers' organizational deviance should also report lowered perceptions of COE (see Figure 1).

*Hypothesis 2a. Coworkers' informal status in the organization will be positively related to COE.*

*Hypothesis 2b. Coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes about the organization will be positively related to COE.*

*Hypothesis 2c. Coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior will be negatively related to COE.*

### **Outcomes of COE**

When employees perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (POS) due to supportive treatment from coworkers believed to share the organization's identity (COE), through social exchange and self-enhancement processes, employees would likely express favorable attitudes regarding the organization and increased efforts on its behalf (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Because POS invokes the norm of reciprocity, supportive treatment from the organization promotes employees' felt obligation to reciprocate positive attitudes and behaviors to the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Furthermore, in meeting employees' socioemotional needs, POS fosters employees' organizational identification which, in turn, contributes to their positive organization-directed attitudes and behavior (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2015).

**Affective Organizational Commitment.** One of the most recognized attitudinal variables found to result from POS via both social exchange and self-enhancement processes is affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Affective organizational commitment is described as an employee's psychological or emotional

attachment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees expressing affective commitment report having a strong sense of belonging, loyalty, and desire to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Invoking the norm of reciprocity, POS encourages employees to reciprocate the organization's favorable orientation towards themselves with affective commitment to the organization (Rhoades et al., 2001). POS also fosters these feelings of attachment to the organization by fulfilling employees' socioemotional needs and promoting their organizational identification (Rhoades et al., 2001).

While supportive treatment from the organization (POS) has been well-established as a driver of employees' affective commitment (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), the role coworkers play in the development of employees' emotional bond to the organization is less understood. As supportive treatment from coworkers is expected to contribute to the formation of POS, coworkers' supportive behavior may ultimately lead to employees' affective commitment through POS. When employees credit the organization for supplying supportive coworkers, favorable treatment from coworkers would indicate the organization's positive regard towards its employees (POS). This would fulfill employees' socioemotional needs and promote their organizational identification, leading them to experience an emotional bond with the organization. Since POS invokes a positive reciprocity norm (Eisenberger et al., 1986), coworkers' supportive behavior that is credited to the organization should also promote employees' felt obligation to express affective commitment to the organization (see Figure 1).

*Hypothesis 3. POS will mediate the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective organizational commitment.*

**Extra-Role Performance.** Just as POS contributes to employees' affective commitment to the organization, POS also encourages employees to express greater commitment to helping the organization achieve its objectives through extra-role performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Extra-role performance is characterized by discretionary behavior that exceeds an employee's formal job requirements and contributes to the organization's effectiveness (George & Brief, 1992). By invoking a positive norm of reciprocity, POS promotes extra-role behavior that is aimed to benefit the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS also enhances employees' extra-role performance by signaling that increased efforts to help the organization would be rewarded (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Supportive treatment from coworkers that contributes to the development of POS may ultimately result in employees' extra-role performance. Following the rules of social exchange and the norm of reciprocity, employees would express greater efforts on the organization's behalf when they credit the organization for their coworkers' supportive behavior. Supportive treatment from coworkers that is attributed to the organization would also signal that the organization holds a favorable orientation towards its employees and would reward their added efforts. These beliefs concerning the organization's supportiveness (POS), developed in part because of coworkers' supportive behavior, would promote employees' extra-role behavior. Similar to the mediating role POS is expected to play in the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective commitment, POS should also facilitate the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' extra-role performance (see Figure 1).

*Hypothesis 4. POS will mediate the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' extra-role performance.*

**Conditional Indirect Effects of COE.** Because COE is expected to influence the degree to which supportive treatment from coworkers contributes to the development of POS, this moderated relationship should extend to influence employees' affective organizational commitment and extra-role performance. When COE is high, supportive treatment from coworkers would be perceived as supportive treatment from the organization (POS), leading employees to express greater affective commitment to the organization and discretionary efforts on its behalf. On the other hand, when COE is low, coworkers' supportive behavior would provide less indication of the organization's positive regard for employees (POS) and would play a reduced role in promoting their affective commitment and extra-role performance. Thus, the indirect effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on employees' affective commitment and extra-role performance through POS should be enhanced when COE is high.

*Hypothesis 5a. The conditional indirect effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on employees' affective organizational commitment via POS will be stronger when COE is high than low.*

*Hypothesis 5b. The conditional indirect effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on employees' extra-role performance via POS will be stronger when COE is high than low.*

## Chapter II

### Method

#### Participants

Surveys were sent out to 280 employees working in a large healthcare organization at two separate time points. Of these employees, 164 (59%) provided responses. Forty-three supervisors provided performance evaluations on their respective subordinates. The average age and tenure of participants in years were 47.5 and 8.21, respectively, and most of the participants in the sample were females (84%).

#### Measures

**Coworkers' Organizational Embodiment (COE).** The COE scale assesses the degree to which employees believe their coworkers and the organization have a shared identity. Employees responded to 9 items that assessed their perceptions of COE. Five items were taken from the SOE scale used by Eisenberger et al. (2014) and adapted to denote "coworkers" rather than "supervisor" as the referent (e.g., "My coworkers are representative of the organization"). Four additional items were added to enhance the scale's reliability. Employees reported their perceptions of COE on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, "strongly disagree" to 7, "strongly agree." This measure is included in Appendix A.

**Coworkers' Supportive Behavior.** Employees reported on their coworkers' supportive behavior using the 14 highest loading items from Settoon and Mossholder's (2002) Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior (ICB) scale. Settoon and Mossholder's (2002) ICB scale captures the degree to which employees engage in discretionary, supportive behaviors directed towards their coworkers. The actions that comprise the ICB scale generally entail providing coworkers with instrumental resources to carry out their jobs more

effectively (e.g., “This employee helps coworkers who are running behind in their work activities”) and socioemotional support that enhances their psychological well-being (e.g., “This employee listens to coworkers when they have to get something off of their chest”) (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). Because employees reported on their coworkers’ supportive treatment towards themselves, the target was changed from “coworkers” to “me” (e.g., “My coworkers help me when I’m running behind in my work activities” and “My coworkers listen to me when I have to get something off of my chest”). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree.” This measure is included in Appendix B.

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS).** Employees’ POS was measured using the 8 highest loading items from Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) POS scale (see Appendix C). The scale assesses employees’ perceptions of the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree.” Sample survey items include, “My organization values my contribution to its well-being” and “My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.”

**Affective Organizational Commitment.** Employees’ affective organizational commitment was measured using the 6 affective commitment items used in Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) and Eisenberger et al. (2010). These items are suggested to best capture an employee’s emotional bond or affective commitment to the organization (Meyer et al., 1993). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree.” This measure is included in Appendix D.

**Extra-Role Performance.** Employees' extra-role performance was assessed using the 6 highest loading extra-role performance items from Eisenberger et al. (2010). These items reflect employees' discretionary behavior that goes beyond their formal role requirements and aims to enhance the organization's effectiveness. Sample items include, "This employee makes suggestions to help the organization" and "This employee keeps well-informed where his/her knowledge might benefit the organization." Supervisors rated their subordinates' extra-role performance on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, "not at all agree" to 7, "completely agree." This measure is included in Appendix E.

**Coworkers' Expressed Favorable Attitudes.** Employees reported on their coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes about the organization using 3 items from Eisenberger et al. (2010). The items were adapted so that the referent was "coworkers" rather than "supervisor." Four additional items were added to the scale to enhance its reliability. The scale examines the extent to which coworkers express a favorable orientation towards the organization. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, "strongly disagree" to 7, "strongly agree." A sample item is, "My coworkers speak highly of the organization." This measure is included in Appendix F.

**Coworkers' Informal Organizational Status.** Employees reported their coworkers' informal status in the organization using the 8 highest loading perceived organizational status items from Eisenberger et al. (2002) (see Appendix G). Since employees were reporting on their coworkers' informal status, the referent was changed from "supervisor" to "coworkers." The scale's items assess the degree to which coworkers are valued by the organization, have influence in organizational decision-making, and demonstrate power and control over their job responsibilities. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-scale from 1, "strongly

disagree” to 7, “strongly agree.” A sample item is, “My coworkers influence decisions made by upper management.”

**Coworkers’ Organization-Directed Deviant Behavior.** Employees reported on their coworkers’ organization-directed deviant behavior using the 6 highest loading organizational deviance items from Aquino et al. (1999). Participants rated how often their coworkers engaged in deviant behavior that violated norms and demonstrated disrespect towards the organization (e.g., “Call in sick when they are not really ill”) using a 7-point scale from 1, “never” to 7, “most of the time.” This measure is included in Appendix H.

**Control Variables.** Age, gender, and tenure have sometimes been found to be related to employee commitment and performance (e.g., Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002). Participants self-reported their gender, and I obtained employee age and tenure information from the organization’s human resources department.

## **Chapter III**

### **Results**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. Before testing my hypotheses, I conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using MPLUS 6 to establish support for examining the main study variables as distinct constructs. Because the number of parameters being estimated was large relative to the sample size, I parceled the data prior to performing the CFAs to maintain a proper sample size to parameter ratio (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013). Parceling is recommended for structural equations modeling procedures when the number of parameters being estimated is large compared to the sample size (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). The technique reduces the number of estimated parameters by combining

items that make up a latent construct into groups or parcels (Little et al., 2002). Following the recommendations of Little et al. (2002), I created three parcels per latent construct using a balancing approach. This approach combines items based on the magnitude of their factor loadings, allowing high and low loading items to be evenly distributed across parcels (Little et al., 2013).

The first series of CFAs examined the discriminant validity of coworkers' supportive behavior, COE, POS, affective organizational commitment, and extra-role performance, since these variables composed the conditional indirect effects model. First, a five-factor model which treated the variables as distinct constructs was compared to a four-factor model which loaded coworkers' supportive behavior and COE onto one latent factor. Then, the four-factor model loading COE and coworkers' supportive behavior onto one factor was compared to a three-factor model which combined POS and affective commitment into one latent factor. Next, the three-factor model was compared to a two factor model which loaded all of the self-reported variables onto one factor and extra-role performance onto its own factor. Finally, the two-factor model was compared to a one-factor model where all of the variables were treated as one latent construct. As shown in Table 2, the five-factor model that considered the study variables as distinct fit the data better than the alternative models ( $\chi^2(80) = 137.29$ , RMSEA = .07, CFI = .98, TLI = .98, SRMR = .03). Accordingly, coworkers' supportive behavior, COE, POS, affective commitment, and extra-role performance were treated as unique constructs for subsequent analyses.

The next series of CFAs examined the discriminant validity of COE with its proposed antecedents (coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes, informal organizational status, and organization-directed deviant behavior). A four factor model which treated the constructs as

distinct was compared to a three-factor model that combined coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes and coworkers' informal status into one construct. Next, the three-factor model combining coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes and informal status into one construct was compared to a two-factor model which loaded coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior onto its own latent factor. The last model which treated COE and its antecedents as one latent construct was then compared to the previous two-factor model. As Table 3 suggests, the four-factor model was the best fitting model to the data ( $\chi^2(48) = 63.17$ , RMSEA = .04, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, SRMR = .05). Thus, COE and its antecedents were treated as distinct variables for future analyses.

### **Test of Hypotheses**

Because the data in this study were obtained from subordinates nested within work units, I first assessed whether it would be necessary to account for subordinates' group membership when testing my hypotheses. If some of the variability in my mediator and outcome variables could be attributed to subordinates' group membership, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) would be the most appropriate method to assess the relationships among the study variables (Hofmann, 1997). Compared to ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, HLM accounts for the structure of the data and provides more accurate estimates when data is nested (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). To determine whether group membership would be important to consider and HLM should be used, I first calculated the intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) for COE, POS, affective commitment, and extra-role performance. The ICCs for COE and POS were .14 and .09, respectively, indicating that 14% of the variability in COE and 9% of the variability in POS could be attributed to an employee's group membership. The ICCs for affective commitment and extra-role performance were .17 and

.64, respectively, suggesting that a proportion of the variability in affective commitment and performance could be explained by the work unit to which an employee belonged. Based on the high ICC values, I used HLM to assess my hypotheses.

All continuous predictors and covariates were grand-mean centered prior to conducting any hypothesis tests to facilitate the interpretation of the analyses (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Hypotheses 1-2c were tested using PROC MIXED in SAS 9.3. Hypothesis 1 predicted that COE would moderate the positive relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and POS, such that the relationship would be stronger for employees reporting high than low levels of COE. To examine the moderating role of COE on the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and POS (Hypothesis 1), I first entered the control variables (age, tenure, and gender) into the regression model, followed by the main effects (coworkers' supportive behavior and COE) and interaction term (coworkers' supportive behavior x COE). Model 3 of Table 4 demonstrates a significant moderating effect of COE on the coworkers' supportive behavior-POS relationship ( $\gamma = .12, t = 2.43, p < .05$ ). Because the interaction term was significant, I plotted the interaction effects at high and low levels of the moderator (COE) (see Figure 2) and performed simple slopes tests. As shown in Table 5, the positive effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on POS was significant at both high ( $b = .58, t = 5.04, p < .001$ ) and low levels of COE ( $b = .24, t = 2.58, p < .05$ ); however, the positive relationship was stronger when COE was high than low, providing support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b predicted that coworkers' informal organizational status and expressed favorable attitudes would be positively related to COE, while Hypothesis 2c proposed that coworkers' organization-directed deviance would be negatively related to COE. In order to assess these hypotheses, I ran a separate regression model that tested the

effects of these variables on COE. Control variables (age, tenure, and gender) were entered into the regression first, followed by employees' perceptions of their coworkers' informal organizational status, expressed favorable attitudes, and organization-directed deviance. As shown in Table 6, coworkers' informal organizational status was a significant predictor of COE ( $\gamma = .38, t = 4.41, p < .001$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 2a. The relationship between coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes regarding the organization and COE was marginally significant ( $\gamma = .17, t = 1.64, p < .10$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2b. Hypothesis 2c was not supported, as coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior was not a significant predictor of COE ( $\gamma = -.04, t = -.39, p > .05$ ).

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, I used the Monte Carlo method of parametric bootstrapping (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010), which has been used to assess mediation in multilevel models (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006). Hypothesis 3 proposed that POS would mediate the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective commitment, while Hypothesis 4 argued that POS would mediate the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' extra-role performance. In order to assess these hypotheses, I first tested the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and POS ( $\gamma = .53, p < .001$ ). Controlling for this relationship, I then tested the effect of POS on affective commitment ( $\gamma = .54, p < .001$ ) and extra-role performance ( $\gamma = .06, p > .05$ ). Entering all of these values into Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo simulation tool, zero failed to fall within the 95% confidence interval when affective commitment was the outcome ( $\gamma = .29, 95\% \text{ CI: } .19, .40$ ); however, when extra-role performance was the outcome variable, zero fell within the 95% confidence interval ( $\gamma = .09, 95\% \text{ CI: } -.03, .10$ ). These results provide support for Hypothesis 3 but not Hypothesis 4.

The conditional mediation hypotheses (Hypotheses 5a and 5b) were also tested using the Monte Carlo method of parametric bootstrapping (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). Hypothesis 5a predicted that the indirect effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on employees' affective organizational commitment via POS would be stronger when COE was high than low. To test Hypothesis 5a, I first assessed the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and POS (see Figure 1) at 1 SD above and below the mean of COE. Two conditional mediation models were then tested for Hypothesis 5a: one examining the mediating role of POS at high levels of COE and another examining the mediating role of POS at low levels of COE. As shown in Table 9, the conditional indirect effect of COE on the relationship between coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective commitment via POS (Hypothesis 5a) was stronger when COE was high ( $\gamma = .31$ ) than low ( $\gamma = .13$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 5a. Hypothesis 5b suggested that the indirect effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on employees' extra-role performance via POS would be stronger when COE was high than low. The method used to test Hypothesis 5a was employed to assess Hypothesis 5b. As shown in Table 9, zero fell within the 95% confidence at both high ( $\gamma = .03$ ) and low levels ( $\gamma = .01$ ) of COE, failing to support Hypothesis 5b. Thus, COE influenced the extent to which supportive treatment from coworkers contributed to employees' POS and, in turn, their affective commitment but not extra-role performance.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Discussion**

The current study investigated the role coworkers play in shaping employees' perceptions of the organization at large (POS). Consistent with prior research (e.g., Ng & Sorensen, 2008), supportive treatment from coworkers was positively related to employees'

POS. The present research adds to this finding by showing that employees' perceptions of their coworkers' organizational embodiment, or COE, moderates the relationship between supportive treatment from coworkers and POS. Further, this moderated relationship carried over to employees' affective organizational commitment but not extra-role performance. Coworkers' informal organizational status and expressed favorable attitudes concerning the organization, although not coworkers' organizational deviance, were found to be positively related to COE.

In line with organizational support theory, the present research indicates that employees sum up their interactions with varied organizational representatives when forming perceptions of the larger organization (POS). However, organizational support theory has primarily taken a top-down approach to understanding the development of such perceptions, or POS, and has given most attention to managers and supervisors when considering agents who represent the organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). As supportive treatment from coworkers contributed to employees' POS, the current research provides support for coworkers as organizational agents who help shape employees' beliefs concerning the organization's valuation of them (POS). While meta-analytic research found a positive association between coworker support and POS (Ng & Sorensen, 2008), this study advances our understanding of the relationship. Consistent with the present findings, employees would be most inclined to credit their coworkers' supportive actions to the organization when believing their coworkers share the organization's identity (COE). Under such conditions (high COE), supportive treatment from coworkers would be viewed as supportive treatment from the organization itself, contributing to the formation of POS.

Because employees are motivated to have their socioemotional needs fulfilled and to determine the organization's readiness to reward increased efforts on its behalf, they are highly attentive to POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). To the extent that COE is high, support from coworkers will signify POS and contribute to employees' need fulfillment and expectations of reward for high effort (Eisenberger et al., 2010). Regarding antecedents of COE, the current findings indicate that employees may be most likely to see their coworkers as agents who represent the organization when their coworkers are perceived as having high status and appear to accept the organization's values through their positive comments. Contrary to prediction, organizational deviance by coworkers was not inversely related to COE. Evidently, employees judge the positive orientation of coworkers towards the organization more than the negative orientation when evaluating COE. Future research could examine other possible drivers of COE, including coworkers' affective commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

This research also extends organizational commitment theory by showing that supportive treatment from coworkers can influence employees' affective commitment to the organization. Some scholars have suggested that commitment to the organization is mostly dependent on the actions of the organization rather than its members (Lavelle et al., 2007). However, I found that the actions of coworkers can impact employees' commitment to the organization indirectly through POS. Of course, supportive treatment from coworkers had the greatest effect on employees' affective commitment via POS at high levels of COE. Support offered from coworkers seen as sharing an identity with the organization (high COE) likely signals that the organization values its employees and cares about their well-being (POS), leading them to express greater affective commitment to the organization.

Although the moderated coworkers' supportive behavior-POS relationship resulted in greater affective organizational commitment, the conditional relationship did not carry over to employees' extra-role performance. This may have been due to the study's small sample size, which resulted in lowered power to detect conditional indirect effects with multi-source data. Another possibility is that affective commitment may serve as an additional mediator between the coworkers' supportive behavior-employee performance relationship. Specifically, the relationship between supportive treatment from coworkers and employees' extra-role performance may be mediated by both POS and affective commitment. In fact, both coworkers' supportive behavior and employees' affective commitment were positively related to extra-role performance ( $r = .47$  and  $r = .43$ , respectively). Future research could assess this dual mediator model to better understand the contributions of coworkers in shaping employees' attitudes towards the organization and, in turn, their efforts on its behalf.

This study was mainly concerned with the positive role COE plays in enhancing employees' attitudes regarding the organization. However, COE may also promote less favorable outcomes when considering coworkers who act discourteously and are believed to share the organization's identity (COE). Negative treatment from coworkers seen as embodying the characteristics of the organization (COE) may indicate an unsupportive organization and an unfavorable employee-organization exchange relationship. As COE was found to strengthen the credit employees gave to the organization for their coworkers' supportive behavior, COE could strengthen the blame placed on the organization for coworkers' less favorable actions. Future research should examine the downside of COE to more fully explain its operations and consequences.

## **Practical Implications**

The present findings provide several practical implications for organizations wishing to enhance their employees' POS and, ultimately, their affective commitment. As contemporary organizations break down their rigid hierarchies and place greater emphasis on employee interdependence, there grows a need to better understand employees' relationships with their coworkers. This study found that coworkers can play a significant role in shaping employees' attitudes concerning the organization. Thus, organizations may wish to consider the ways in which they actively promote employees' favorable interactions with each other. Providing them with opportunities to collaborate while encouraging supportive behavior in the work environment could motivate employees to demonstrate greater support towards coworkers and experience more positive attitudes concerning the organization (e.g., POS and affective organizational commitment).

As COE was found to enhance the positive effects of coworkers' supportive behavior, organizations would also benefit from promoting employees' organizational embodiment. When employees believed their coworkers were autonomous, influential, and valued by the organization (i.e., informal organization status), they were more likely to see their coworkers as sharing the organization's identity (COE). Organizations wishing to enhance their employees' organizational embodiment may achieve this through policies and practices that suggest a positive valuation of employees and offer them influence in their work environments.

## **Limitations**

A modest number of employees participated in the study, most of whom were women. The small sample size and makeup of participants may have contributed to lower

power to detect significant effects and reduced generalizability of the findings. Future research could test the study's proposed relationships with a large sample of more diverse employees.

## **Conclusion**

Just as managers and supervisors help to shape employees' views of the organization, coworkers can also influence such beliefs. Depending on the degree to which employees identify their coworkers with the organization (COE), their coworkers' actions can provide indication of the organization's favorable orientation towards themselves, or POS. Supportive treatment from coworkers believed to share the organization's identity (high COE) is likely perceived as supportive treatment from the organization itself (POS). Thus, COE coupled with coworkers' supportive behavior can help to fulfill employees' socioemotional needs. COE can also guide employees in their decision to invest greater resources into developing the employee-organization exchange relationship, including the decision to affectively commit to the organization. When considering how coworkers influence the development of employee POS and, in turn, affective commitment, it's important to account for COE.

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Table 1.  
*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables*

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.	Age	47.50	11.19	1.00										
2.	Tenure	8.21	7.85	.45***	1.00									
3.	Gender	.84	.37	-.09	-.04	1.00								
4.	CSB	5.21	1.32	.02	.00	.01	(.96)							
5.	COE	4.69	1.41	-.01	-.04	.07	.47***	(.97)						
6.	POS	4.59	1.46	.01	-.08	-.06	.48***	.47***	(.92)					
7.	AOC	5.13	1.36	.04	.17*	.01	.43***	.51***	.66***	(.88)				
8.	Exrole	5.04	1.51	.15*	.18*	-.02	.31***	.10	.14	.21**	(.98)			
9.	Attitudes	4.45	1.32	.07	-.13	-.06	.37***	.40***	.60***	.50***	.08	(.91)		
10.	Status	4.13	1.51	-.02	-.08	-.04	.26**	.49***	.48***	.44***	.14	.57***	(.94)	
11.	Deviance	1.92	1.19	.14	.19*	.10	-.36***	-.18*	-.34***	-.24**	-.18*	-.41***	-.21**	(.92)

*Note.*  $N = 164$ . Cronbach's alphas are reported in parentheses on the diagonal.  $M$  = Mean;  $SD$  = Standard Deviation. Age and Tenure were measured in years. Gender was coded 1 = Female, 0 = Male. CSB = coworkers' supportive behavior, COE = coworkers' organizational embodiment; POS = perceived organizational support; AOC = affective organizational commitment; Exrole = subordinates' extra-role performance; Attitudes = coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes regarding the organization; Status = coworkers' informal organizational status; Deviance = coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 2.  
*Confirmatory Factor Analyses Results for Conditional Indirect Effects Model*

Model	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2$ diff	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Five-Factor	80	137.29		0.07	0.98	0.98	0.03
Four-Factor	84	786.86	649.57***	0.23	0.77	0.72	0.13
Three-Factor	87	931.56	144.70***	0.24	0.73	0.67	0.14
Two-Factor	89	1434.62	503.06***	0.30	0.57	0.49	0.13
One-Factor	90	2143.22	708.60***	0.37	0.34	0.23	0.18

*Note.* N = 164. *df* = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index. Four-factor model = coworkers' supportive behavior and COE are combined; Three-factor model = POS and affective commitment are combined; Two-factor model = coworkers supportive behavior, COE, POS, and affective commitment are combined.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3.  
*Confirmatory Factor Analyses Results for COE Antecedents Model*

Model	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2$ diff	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Four-Factor	48	63.17		0.04	0.99	0.99	0.05
Three-Factor	51	353.01	289.84***	0.19	0.84	0.80	0.10
Two-Factor	53	764.06	411.05***	0.29	0.63	0.54	0.21
One-Factor	54	1086.17	322.11***	0.34	0.46	0.34	0.25

*Note.* N = 164. *df* = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index. Three-factor model = coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes and informal status are combined; Two-factor model = COE, coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes, and coworkers' informal status are combined.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4.  
*Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results for Main Effects and Interaction*

Variables	Dependent Variables														
	POS						Affective Commitment				Extra-Role Performance				
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		
	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	
Intercept	4.80***	0.30	4.88***	0.24	4.85***	0.24	5.00***	0.28	4.92***	0.2	5.01***	0.28	5.03***	0.27	
<i>Controls</i>															
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	
Tenure	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.03*	0.01	0.04***	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	
Gender	-0.25	0.32	-0.36	0.26	-0.43	0.26	0.14	0.30	0.25	0.21	-0.07	0.24	-0.09	0.24	
<i>Predictors</i>															
CSB			0.37***	0.08	0.41***	0.08			0.17**	0.06			0.14*	0.07	
COE			0.31***	0.08	0.29***	0.08									
<i>Interaction</i>															
CSB x COE					0.12*	0.05									
<i>Mediator</i>															
POS									0.54***	0.06			0.06	0.06	
<i>Residual Variance</i>															
$\sigma^2$ (level 1)		1.98		1.50		1.45		1.49		0.79		0.78		0.76	
$\tau_{00}$ (level2)		0.18		0		0		0.35		0.17		1.32		1.18	

Note.  $N = 164$ . Age and Tenure were measured in years. Gender was coded 1 = Female, 0 = Male. CSB = coworkers' supportive behavior; COE = coworkers' organizational embodiment; POS = perceived organizational support.  $\sigma^2$  = Level 1 residual variance;  $\tau_{00}$  = Level 2 residual intercept variance.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 5.  
*Effects of Coworkers' Supportive Behavior  
 on Perceived Organizational Support at High and Low  
 Levels of COE*

Level of COE	Perceived Organizational Support		
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>
+1 SD COE	0.58	0.12	5.04***
-1 SD COE	0.24	0.09	2.58*

*Note.* COE = coworkers' organizational embodiment.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.  
*Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results for Hypotheses 2a-2c*

Variables	Coworkers' Organizational Embodiment			
	Model 1		Model 2	
	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE
Intercept	4.43***	0.29	4.30***	0.28
<i>Controls</i>				
Age	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Tenure	-0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Gender	0.29	0.31	0.51†	0.30
<i>Predictors</i>				
Attitudes			0.17†	0.11
Status			0.38***	0.09
Deviance			-0.04	0.10
<i>Residual Variance</i>				
$\sigma^2$ (level 1)		1.76		1.31
$\tau_{00}$ (level 2)		0.29		0.23

*Note.*  $N = 164$ . Age and Tenure were measured in years. Gender was coded 1 = female, 0 = male. Attitudes = coworkers' expressed favorable attitudes regarding the organization; Status = coworkers' informal organizational status; Deviance = coworkers' organization-directed deviant behavior.  $\sigma^2$  = Level 1 residual variance;  $\tau_{00}$  = Level 2 residual intercept variance.

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 7.

*Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results for Simple Mediation Hypotheses 3 and 4*

Variables	POS		AOC		Extra-Role Performance	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE
Intercept	4.84***	0.26	4.92***	0.20	5.03***	0.27
<i>Controls</i>						
Age	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Tenure	-0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender	-0.30	0.28	0.25	0.21	-0.09	0.24
<i>Predictors</i>						
CSB	0.53***	0.08	0.17**	0.06	0.14*	0.07
<i>Mediator</i>						
POS			0.54***	0.06	0.06	0.06
<i>Residual Variance</i>						
$\sigma^2$ (level 1)		1.57		0.79		0.76
$\tau_{00}$ (level2)		0.08		0.17		1.18

Note.  $N = 164$ . Age and Tenure were measured in years. Gender was coded 1 = Female, 0 = Male. CSB = coworkers' supportive behavior, POS = perceived organizational support; AOC = affective organizational commitment.  $\sigma^2$  = Level 1 residual variance;  $\tau_{00}$  = Level 2 residual intercept variance.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 8.

*Indirect Effects of Coworkers' Supportive Behavior on Affective Organizational Commitment and Extra-Role Performance via Perceived Organizational Support*

Affective Commitment		Extra-Role Performance	
<i>95% CIs for Indirect Effect (ab = .29)</i>		<i>95% CIs for Indirect Effect (ac = .03)</i>	
LL	UL	LL	UL
0.19	0.40	-0.03	0.10

*Note.* CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit. *ab* = effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on POS multiplied by the effect of POS on affective commitment; *ac* = effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on POS multiplied by the effect of POS on extra-role performance.

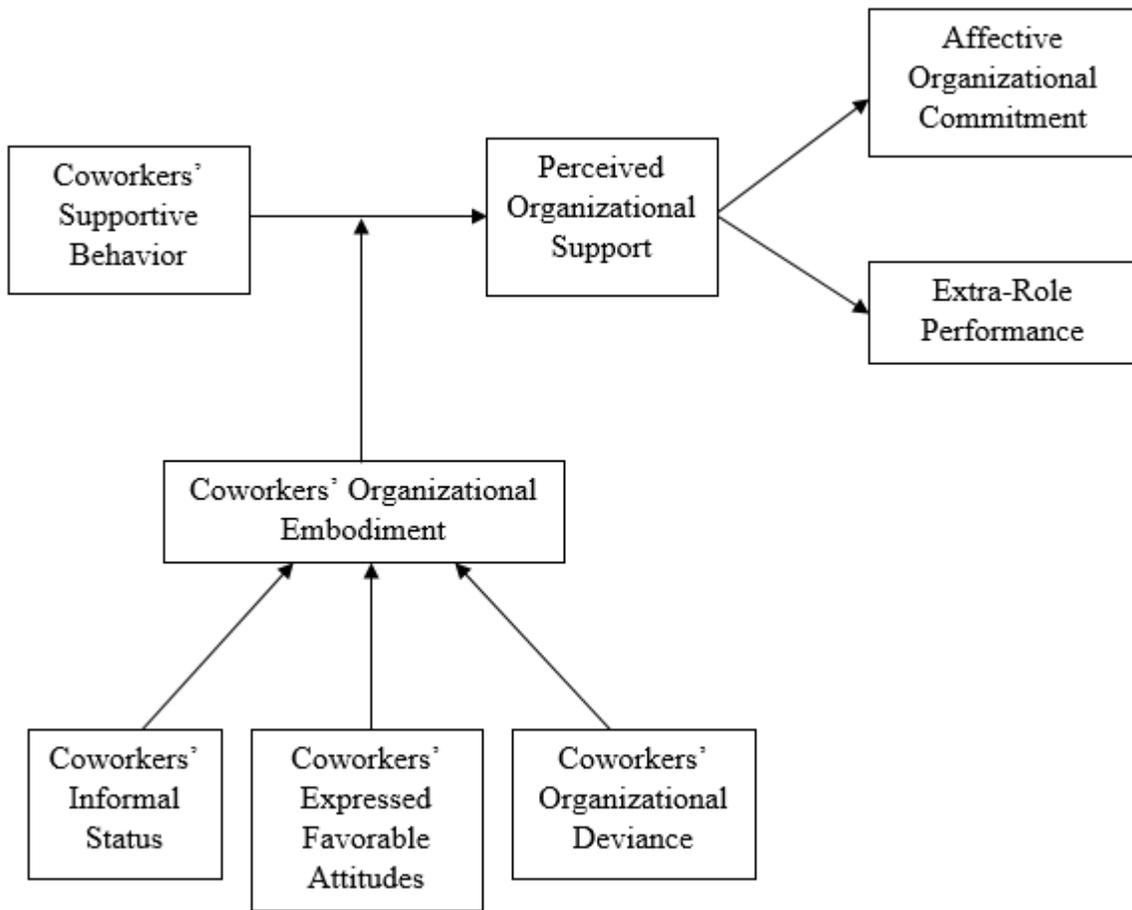
Table 9.

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Coworkers' Supportive Behavior on Outcomes via Perceived Organizational Support at High and Low Levels of COE*

Level of COE	Affective Commitment			Extra-Role Performance		
	<i>95 % CIs for Indirect Effect</i>					
	LL	UL	<i>ab</i> ( $\gamma$ )	LL	UL	<i>ac</i> ( $\gamma$ )
+1 SD COE	0.19	0.45	0.31	-0.04	0.11	0.03
-1 SD COE	0.03	0.24	0.13	-0.02	0.05	0.01

*Note.* CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit; *ab* = effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on POS multiplied by the effect of POS on affective commitment; *ac* = effect of coworkers' supportive behavior on POS multiplied by the effect of POS on extra-role performance.

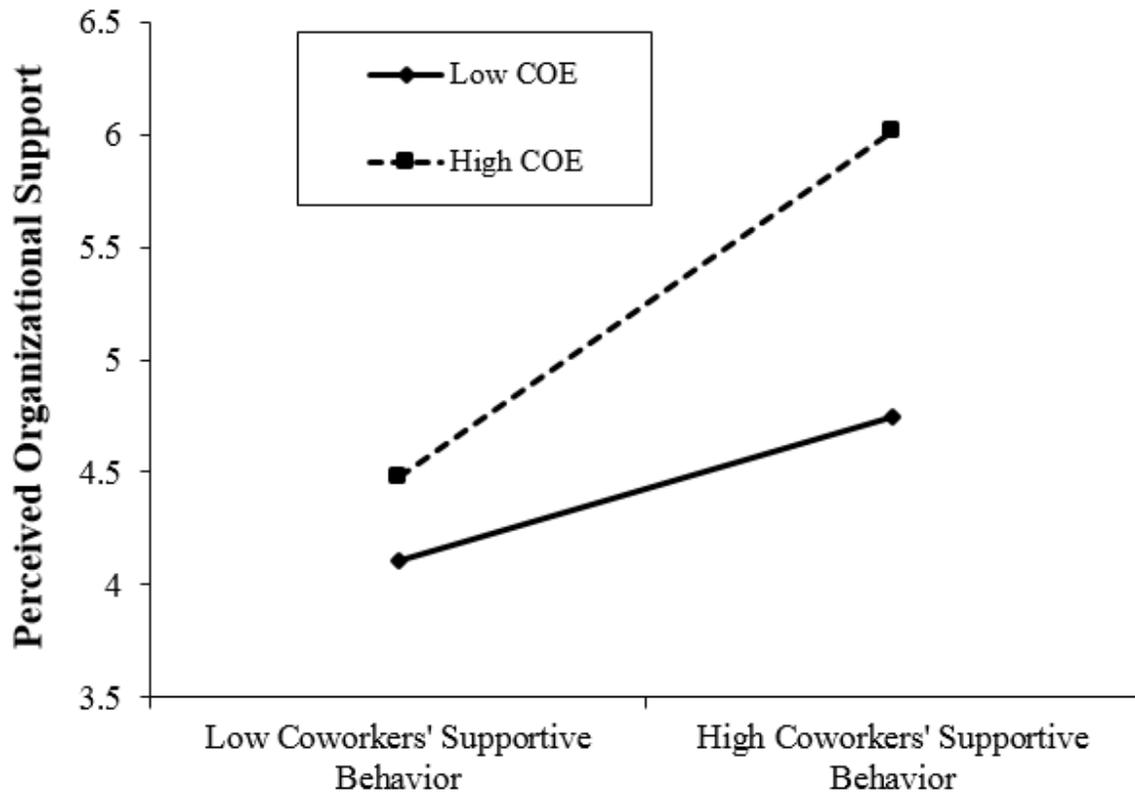
Figure 1.  
*Proposed Conceptual Model*



*Note.* Extra-role performance was rated by supervisors.

Figure 2.

Perceived Organizational Support Regressed on Coworkers' Supportive Behavior and COE



Note. POS as a function of coworkers' supportive behavior at low ( $-1 SD$ ) and high ( $+1 SD$ ) levels of COE. POS = perceived organizational support; COE = coworkers' organizational embodiment;  $SD$  = standard deviation.

Appendix A

**Coworkers' Organizational Embodiment (COE)**

The following items refer to your coworkers by whom we mean the people you work with regularly, NOT INCLUDING YOUR SUPERVISOR. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
			Nor Disagree			

1. My coworkers are typical of (*name of organization*). \*
2. My coworkers are characteristic of (*name of organization*). \*
3. My coworkers and (*name of organization*) have a lot in common. \*
4. My coworkers are representative of (*name of organization*). \*
5. My coworkers and (*name of organization*) are alike. \*
6. My coworkers are much the same as (*name of organization*). \*\*
7. My coworkers resemble (*name of organization*). \*\*
8. My coworkers and (*name of organization*) see things in a similar way. \*\*
9. My coworkers and (*name of organization*) have similar values and goals. \*\*

Note. \* = Items taken from Eisenberger et al. (2014). \*\* = Items added to enhance scale's reliability.

Appendix B

**Coworkers' Supportive Behavior**

*The following items refer to your coworkers by whom we mean the people you work with regularly, NOT INCLUDING YOUR SUPERVISOR. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
			Nor Disagree			

1. My coworkers listen to me when I have to get something off my chest.
2. My coworkers take time to listen to my problems and worries.
3. My coworkers take a personal interest in me.
4. My coworkers show concern and courtesy toward me, even under the most trying business situations.
5. My coworkers make an extra effort to understand the problems I face.
6. My coworkers always make me feel appreciated.
7. My coworkers try to cheer me up when I'm having a bad day.
8. My coworkers compliment me when I succeed at work.
9. My coworkers take on extra responsibilities in order to help me when things get demanding at work.
10. My coworkers help me with difficult assignments, even when assistance is not directly requested.

11. My coworkers assist me with heavy workloads even when it is not part of their job.
12. My coworkers help me when I'm running behind in my work activities.
13. My coworkers help me with work when I have been absent.
14. My coworkers go out of the way to help me with work-related problems.

## Appendix C

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
			Nor Disagree			

1. *(Name of organization)* values my contribution to its well-being.
2. *(Name of organization)* fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (R)
3. *(Name of organization)* would ignore any complaint from me. (R)
4. *(Name of organization)* really cares about my well-being.
5. *(Name of organization)* shows very little concern for me. (R)
6. *(Name of organization)* takes pride in my accomplishments at work.
7. Even if I did the best job possible, *(name of organization)* would fail to notice. (R)
8. *(Name of organization)* cares about my general satisfaction at work.

Appendix D

**Affective Organizational Commitment**

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
			Nor Disagree			

1. *(Name of organization)* has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
2. I do not feel emotionally attached to *(name of organization)*. (R)
3. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working for *(name of organization)*.
4. I do not feel like part of the family at *(name of organization)*. (R)
5. I really feel as if *(name of organization)*'s problems are my own.
6. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to *(name of organization)*. (R)

Appendix E

**Extra-Role Performance (supervisor-rated)**

*Please choose the circle that best describes (name of employee)'s performance, as compared to other employees holding similar jobs that you supervise.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At					Very	
All	Slightly	Somewhat	Mostly	Strongly	Strongly	Completely
Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

1. This employee keeps well-informed where his/her knowledge might benefit the organization.
2. This employee looks for ways to make the organization more successful.
3. This employee makes suggestions to help the organization.
4. This employee takes action to protect the organization from potential problems.
5. This employee encourages coworkers to try new and more effective ways of doing their job.
6. This employee always looks for new ways to improve the effectiveness of his/her work.

Appendix F

**Coworkers' Expressed Favorable Attitudes**

*The following items refer to your coworkers by whom we mean the people you work with regularly, NOT INCLUDING YOUR SUPERVISOR. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

1. My coworkers say achievement goes unnoticed by upper management. (R) \*
2. My coworkers have a favorable impression of *(name of organization)*. \*
3. My coworkers complain about the ways upper management handles things at *(name of organization)*. (R) \*
4. My coworkers say positive things about *(name of organization)*. \*\*
5. My coworkers speak highly of *(name of organization)*. \*\*
6. My coworkers talk about the accomplishments of *(name of organization)*. \*\*
7. My coworkers express pride in *(name of organization)*. \*\*

*Note.* \* = Items taken from Eisenberger et al. (2010). \*\* = Items added to enhance scale's reliability.

## Appendix G

### **Coworkers' Informal Organizational Status**

The following items refer to your coworkers by whom we mean the people you work with regularly, NOT INCLUDING YOUR SUPERVISOR. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the choices below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
			Nor Disagree			

1. *(Name of organization)* holds my coworkers in high regard. (VAL)
2. *(Name of organization)* gives my coworkers the chance to make important decisions. (INF)
3. *(Name of organization)* values my coworkers' contributions. (VAL)
4. *(Name of organization)* gives my coworkers the authority to try new things. (AUT)
5. *(Name of organization)* supports decisions made by my coworkers. (AUT)
6. My coworkers participate in decisions that affect the entire organization. (INF)
7. My coworkers influence decisions made by upper management. (INF)
8. *(Name of organization)* allows my coworkers to run things the way they want. (AUT)

*Note.* VAL = Organization's high valuation and positive regard for coworkers. AUT = Coworkers' authority and autonomy in carrying out job responsibilities. INF = Coworkers' influence in important organizational decisions.

Appendix H

**Coworkers' Organization-Directed Deviant Behavior**

*The following items refer to your coworkers by whom we mean the people you work with regularly, NOT INCLUDING YOUR SUPERVISOR. On average, how often do your coworkers engage in the following behaviors?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Somewhat Often	Often	Most of the Time

1. Intentionally arrive late for work.
2. Call in sick when they are not really ill.
3. Take undeserved breaks to avoid work.
4. Make unauthorized use of organizational property.
5. Leave work early without permission.
6. Exaggerate about the number of hours worked.