

Perceived Supervisor Support, Work Engagement and Career-Related Self-Efficacy: An Empirical Study

Emre Burak EKMEKCIOGLU
Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating effect of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between the perceived supervisor support and work engagement. A cross-sectional research design was performed in the present study. Data were collected from a total of 184 participants employed full time in the manufacturing sector in Ankara. Structural equation modeling approach was used to estimate direct and indirect effects between variables. The results indicated that employees' perception of supervisor support is a positive predictor of their work engagement. Moreover, career-related self-efficacy was found to have a mediating role in the relationship between perception of supervisor support and work engagement. This study revealed that the perception of supervisor support is an important predictor in increasing employees' work engagement and the key importance of career-related self-efficacy in this relationship. In addition, the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, its limitations and implications for future research on the perception of supervisor support and work engagement were discussed.

Keywords: Perceived supervisor support, Work engagement, Career-related Self-efficacy

Introduction

Work engagement has drawn a lot of attention from scholars and practitioners because it is positively correlated with job performance (Yalabik et al., 2013), organizational citizenship behaviour (Runhaar et al., 2013; Babcock-Roberson and Strickland, 2010), job satisfaction (Lu et al., 2016), career satisfaction (Joo and Lee, 2017). Studies show an evidence that highly engaged employees are more positive about their jobs and organizations, treat their colleagues more respectfully, and continuously improve their job-related skills (Bakker and Demerouti, 2009). Considering these positive contributions of work engagement to the organization, organizations take action to support policies and practices that encourage employees' work engagement (Lu et al., 2016). Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor (elevated levels of energy and resilience at work), dedication (deep involvement in one's work as well as a sense of significance and enthusiasm), and absorption (feeling of being completely concentrated and comfortably engrossed on one's work)" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74; Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Empirical studies indicated that perceived supervisor support was a significant predictor of work engagement (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Pattnaik and Panda, 2020; Swanberg et al., 2011). Perceived supervisor support is defined as employees' general views about the degree to which their supervisors value their contribution and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Perceived supervisor support can be explained in the perspective of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). In the line with the social exchange theory, employees who are treated well by their supervisors are able to respond with more positive attitudes towards their supervisors. As supervisors are agents of the organization, employees' perception of high levels of supervisor support will return to their organizations with positive attitude and behavior (Pattnaik and Panda, 2020). Empirical studies had an evidence that employees with a high perception of supervisor support are more motivated and engaged in their work (Swanberg et al., 2011; Suan and Nasurdin, 2016, Ibrahim et al., 2019).

The present study investigated work engagement by adopting a conceptual framework that focuses on the role of perceived supervisor support and the employees' career-related efficacy belief in work engagement. Career-related self-efficacy can be described as the personal belief that career aspirations can be effectively followed
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(Lent and Hackett, 1987). Previous studies paid little attention to the mediating role of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. The underlying mechanisms that could explain the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the mediating role of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.

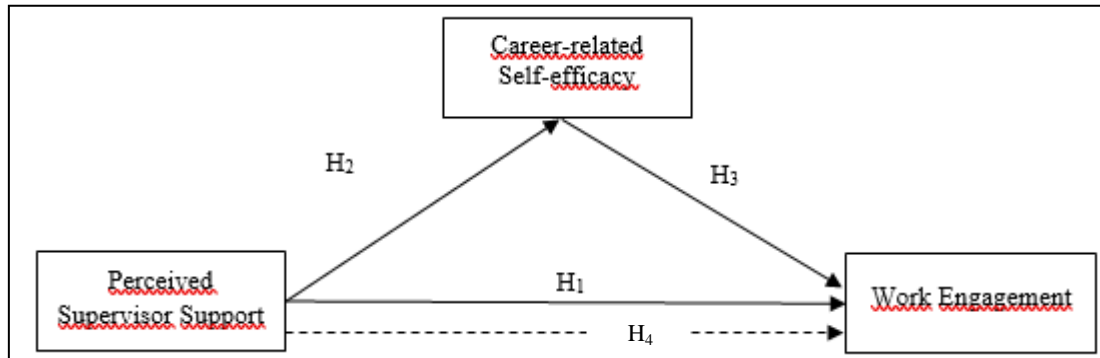


Figure 1. Research model

- H₁=Perceived supervisor support relates significantly and positively to work engagement.
- H₂=Perceived supervisor support relates significantly and positively to career-related self-efficacy.
- H₃=Career-related self-efficacy relates significantly and positively to work engagement.
- H₄=Career-related self-efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.

Research Method

A cross-sectional research design was performed in the present study. This study was also carried out on employees in manufacturing enterprises between October 2019 and December 2019. A total of 250 questionnaires were submitted to the full-time employees working in ten different companies in manufacturing sector. The employees were invited to rate their level of agreement involving perceived supervisor support, work engagement, and career-related self-efficacy, and additionally provide their demographic information. The anonymity and privacy of the participants were stated to be ensured. Moreover, a paper-and-pencil survey was administered. Data collection was carried out with the aid of the human resources department of the manufacturing enterprises during daily operating hours. 198 questionnaires were returned. However, incomplete information led to the elimination of 14 questionnaires. Consequently, 184 usable questionnaires were obtained. First, descriptive statistics, validity and reliability analyzes were conducted in the study. Then, structural equation modeling approach was used to test the hypotheses in line with the research model.

To measure *perceived supervisor support*, an eight-item perceived organizational support scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) was used. Perceived supervisor support scale was modified by replacing the word “organization” with “supervisor”, as has been done in many other studies (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Maertz et al., 2007; DeConinck, 2010). The mediating variable “*career-related self-efficacy*” was assessed with the five-item scale developed by Higgins et al. (2008). The dependent variable “*work engagement*” was operationalized by the shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale given by Schaufeli et al. (2006), consisting of nine items. Since this scale is a student version of work engagement scale, it was modified for organizational analysis. The scale for perceived supervisor support and career-related self-efficacy each had a range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). However, work engagement scale was coded from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Table 1 below contains information about the scales used in the research.

Table 1. Scales used in the study

| Scale | Researchers | Number of Items |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Perceived Supervisor Support | Eisenberger et al. (1986) | 8-item scale |
| Career-related Self-efficacy | Higgins et al. (2008) | 5-item scale |
| Work Engagement | Schaufeli et al. (2006) | 9-item scale |

Research Findings

Frequency Analysis

As can be seen in Table 2 below, the sample for the study had 147 male (79.9%) respondents and 37 female (20.1%) respondents. Age-wise, 64 (34.8%) were 23 to 27 years and 45 (24.4%) were in the age bracket of 18 to 22 years. In terms of education level, 135 have bachelor's degree (73.4%). Of the respondents, 78 had tenures between 6 and 10 years (42.4%).

Table 2. Frequency analysis

| | | n | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 37 | 20.1 |
| | Male | 147 | 79.9 |
| Age | 18-22 | 45 | 24.4 |
| | 23-27 | 64 | 34.8 |
| | 28-33 | 38 | 20.7 |
| | 34-39 | 37 | 20.1 |
| Education Level | High school degree | 32 | 17.4 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 135 | 73.4 |
| | Master's degree | 17 | 9.2 |
| Tenure | 1-5 years | 65 | 35.3 |
| | 6-10 years | 78 | 42.4 |
| | 11-15 years | 41 | 22.3 |
| Total | | 184 | 100 |

Common Method Variance

Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) was utilized to control common method variance. In order for the common method variance to emerge, a single factor structure should emerge or the first factor obtained should constitute a significant part of the total variance (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986: 536; Podsakoff et al., 2003: 889). Unrotated exploratory factor analysis revealed that the first factor explained 39.3 percent of the total variance. The first factor explained less than 50 percent of the total variance. Accordingly, common method variance did not appear to pose an issue.

Measurement Model

To test the validity of all constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. According to the results, it was determined that the measurement model has acceptable fit values and the standardized regression coefficients of each of the observed variables are greater than 0.50 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988: 82). The fit indices that were used to demonstrate model adequacy were CMIN/df, comparative fit index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Table 3. Measurement model- factor loadings

| Variables | Range of Factor Loadings |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Perceived Supervisor Support | 0.60-0.88 |
| Career-related Self-efficacy | 0.70-0.89 |
| Work Engagement | 0.77-0.95 |

Note: $CMIN/df = 488,219 / 199 = 2,453$, $p = 0,000$, $IFI=0,94$; $TLI=0,93$; $CFI=0,94$; $RMSEA = 0,08$; $SRMR=0,06$

In line with the data obtained as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, there are composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted value (AVE) as seen in Table 4. Accordingly, both reliability and validity tests of the study were conducted. Cronbach alphas, means, standard deviations among all variables are also reported in Table 4. Moreover, as seen in Table 4, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between research variables.

According to Hair et al. (2010), an acceptable fit should have CFI, IFI and TLI values >0.90, RMSEA <0.08 and SRMR <0.09. The three-factor model of measurement model of the study (perceived supervisor support, career-related self-efficacy, and work engagement) indicated a good fit with the data: CMIN/df = 488,219 /199 = 2.453, $p < 0.001$, CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94, TLI=0.93, RMSEA=0.08 and SRMR=0.06. Factor loadings of the perceived supervisor support were between 0.60-0.88; The factor loadings of career-related self-efficacy were between 0.70-0.89; The factor loadings of the work engagement were values between 0.77-0.95. Moreover, t values were greater than 1.96 ($p < 0.001$) (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Value ranges and goodness of fit indices of factor loadings are given in Table 3 below.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations, CR, AVE and correlations among study variables

| Variables | M | SD. | Cronbach's α | CR | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. CSE | 3.76 | 0.91 | 0.87 | 0.88 | 0.61 | (0.78) | | |
| 2. PSS | 2.71 | 0.80 | 0.88 | 0.89 | 0.52 | 0.30* | (0.72) | |
| 3. WE | 2.63 | 1.45 | 0.96 | 0.96 | 0.75 | 0.23* | 0.34* | (0.87) |

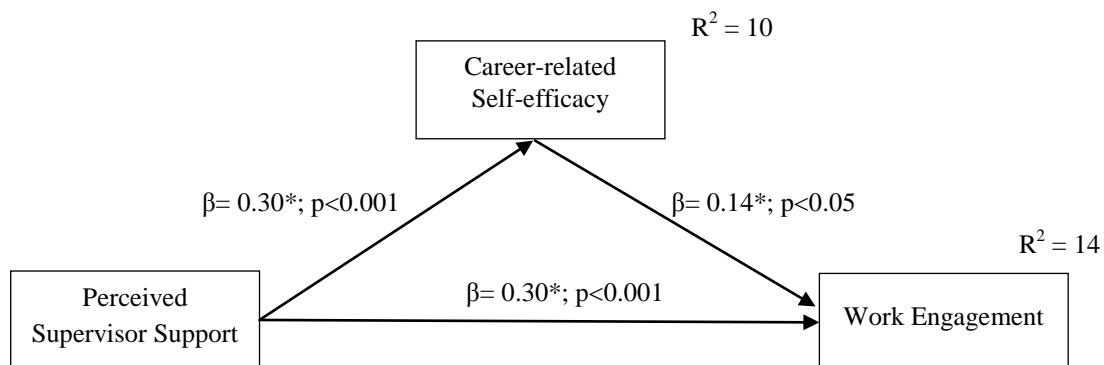
Note = $n = 184$, * $p < 0.01$, CSE = Career-related Self-efficacy, PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support, WE = Work Engagement, M= Mean, SD. = Standard Deviations; CR= Composite Reliability AVE: Average Variance Extracted, values in parentheses on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE of each scale.

Results reported in Table 4 indicated that work engagement was significantly and positively correlated with both career-related self-efficacy ($r = 0.23$, $p = 0.01$), and perceived supervisor support ($r = 0.34$, $p = 0.01$). Furthermore, it was found that perceived supervisor support was positively associated with career-related self-efficacy ($r = 0.30$, $p = 0.01$). On the other hand, career-related self-efficacy has the highest mean ($M = 3.76$, $SD. = 0.91$), while the employees' work engagement is the least ($M = 2.63$, $SD.=1.45$).

The critical value for the composite reliability value is 0.70 and above (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, composite reliability values are between 0.88 and 0.96 and are greater than 0.70 critical value. For convergent validity, average variance value (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 and CR should be greater than AVE; For discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE value calculated for each structure should be greater than the correlation of each other variable (Hair et al., 2010). AVE values in the present study are between 0.52 - 0.75, and all values are higher than 0.50, and the square root of the AVE value of each structure is greater than its correlation with other structures. As stated in Table 4, correlations between latent variables are less than 0.85 (Kline, 2011). These results obtained as a result of the measurement model made show that this study is a reliable and valid study.

Hypotheses testing

Structural equation modeling was performed in order to examine the direct and indirect effects between variables. Accordingly, the mediating effect of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between the perceived supervisor support and work engagement was examined. As seen in Figure 2, the research model showed acceptable fit indices (CMIN / df = 488.219 / 199 = 2.453, $p = 0.000$, IFI=0.94, TLI=0.93, CFI=0.94, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR=0.06).



Note: $n = 184$, *Standardized Beta Coefficients, CMIN / df = 488.219 / 199 = 2.453, $p = 0.000$, IFI=0.94, TLI=0.93, CFI=0.94, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR=0.06.

Figure 2. Direct and indirect effects

According to the model, it was found that perceived supervisor support had a significant and positive effect on work engagement (standardized $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). Accordingly, the hypothesis (H_1) that “perceived supervisor support relates significantly and positively to work engagement” was accepted. Similarly, the model established showed that perceived supervisor support had a significant and positive effect on career-related self-efficacy (standardized $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). This result was evidence that the hypothesis (H_2) that “perceived supervisor support relates significantly and positively to career-related self-efficacy” was accepted. It was also found that career-related self-efficacy affects work engagement significantly and positively (standardized $\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). According to this result, the hypothesis (H_3) that “Career-related self-efficacy relates significantly and positively to work engagement” was accepted.

Tablo 5. Direct, indirect and total effects

| | Standardized Total Effects | Standardized Direct Effects | Standardized Indirect Effects |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| PSS→CSE | 0,30** | 0,30** | - |
| PSS→WE | 0,34** | 0,30** | 0,04* |
| CSE→WE | 0,14* | 0,14* | - |

Note = n = 184, ** $p < 0,001$, * $p < 0,05$, PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support, CSE = Career-related Self-efficacy, WE =Work Engagement; In order to test the indirect effect of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement, (n=2000) bias-corrected bootstrapping - 95% confidence interval method was used (Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Mallinckrodt et al., 2006).

To examine the indirect effect of perceived supervisor support on work engagement through career-related self-efficacy, bias-corrected bootstrapping method was used. Accordingly, indirect effect values were calculated by resampling (n = 2000). The indirect effect of perceived supervisor support on work engagement through career-related self-efficacy at 95% confidence interval was found to be significant (standardized $\beta = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$). Accordingly, the total effect of perceived supervisor support on work engagement was $(0.30 + 0.04) 0.34$. The results showed that the mediating role of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. Accordingly, the hypothesis (H_4) that “career-related self-efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement” was accepted.

Results and Discussion

In this study, the mediating role of career-related self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement was investigated. The empirical data support the hypothesized relationships. This study is significant in the context of career research as it is based on the career-related self efficacy of employees. Because many studies on career have been carried out on university students.

Both perceived supervisor support and career-related self-efficacy increase work engagement of employees. Such adequate support from supervisors helps employees feel effective (Nisula, 2015). Accordingly, self-sufficient employees who receive adequate support from their supervisors exhibit high levels of work engagement.

In line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), when there is adequate supportive supervision, employees pay back to the organization via high work engagement. In addition to consistent with social exchange theory, the finding regarding the effect of perceived supervisor support on work engagement through the partial mediating role of career-related self-efficacy in this study also supports also Naeem et al. (2018)'s the empirical study. Moreover, it should be noted that the direct effect of perceived supervisor support (0.30) on work engagement was greater than that of career-related self-efficacy (0.14). Accordingly, employees' perception of supervisor support may have a stronger effect on work engagement than that of career-related self-efficacy.

According to the results obtained in this study, the perception of supervisor support enhances career-related self-efficacy of employees, which in turn increase their work engagement. In other words, employees's feelings of supported and appreciation to supervisors in their career aspirations are composing a high degree of career-related self-efficacy that increases work engagement. The partial mediation finding in the study also supports the previous empirical studies (Caesens and Stinglhamber, 2014). Self-efficacy enables a belief to employees to carry out on difficult tasks when faced with challenges (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Accordingly, an increase in individuals 'perception of career-related self-efficacy means an increase in individuals' personal beliefs about reaching their career goals. This can further motivate the employee and increase work engagement.

In the perspective of social exchange theory, career-related self-efficacy was included as a mediating variable in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement. Then, path analysis and bias-corrected bootstrapping was performed and the effect of the mediating variable between these two constructs was evaluated. As a result, it was confirmed that although career-related self-efficacy is a partial mediating variable, it serves as a considerable variable in this relationship. In other words, as the employees' perception of supervisor support increases, the belief to accomplish career-related goals and tasks will be increase and the expectation and belief that they will achieve positive results related to their work engagement will be increase.

Work engagement is an important variable in terms of individual and organizational results. Work engagement aids in increasing performance (Kim et al., 2012), career satisfaction (Joo and Lee, 2017; Karatepe, 2012), innovative work behavior (De Spiegelaere et al., 2016), and in decreasing intention to quit (Yalabik et al., 2013). This study thus has a several of a practical implications. Organizations need to bring in motion the kind of organizational strategies that allow employees to maximize their work engagement (Naeem et al., 2018). Thus, organizations needs to coordinate on-going training activities to ensure that each supervisor is supportive and can serve as advisors throughout the operation (Ibrahim et al., 2019). For these purposes, organizations can facilitate for supervisors to support their employees, and as a result, employees can enhance their belief in their ability to fulfill their career goals and objectives, increasing their work engagement.

Limitations and future directions

The data were obtained from a single source and by the participants' self-reports. This may lead to a possible common method variance problem. Although Harman single factor test was performed in this study, it is not sufficient by itself (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A marker variable can be used in future studies (Simmering et al., 2015).

This research is also the first study conducted on employees in Ankara, Turkey. And a cross-sectional research design was established and carried out. Consequently, such a research design cannot determine causality. Longitudinal studies are needed to extend and validate the results of the study and for determining causality.

The study used only data from the manufacturing industry. Future researchers should replicate the results for other industries to boost generalizability. In this study, perceived supervisor support was only used to predict work engagement. Other dimensions of social support can also be assessed by scholars. This study used career-related self-efficacy as a mediator variable in the relationship between perceived career support and work engagement. In a way to support career studies, other variables that can be tested as mediators such as career optimism can be used.

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Author Information

Emre Burak EKMEKÇİOĞLU
Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University
Business School, Ankara, Turkey
Contact e-mail: ebekmekcioglu@ybu.edu.tr
