

**PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AS SOCIAL VALIDATION:
CONCEPT CLARITY AND CONTENT VALIDATION**

by

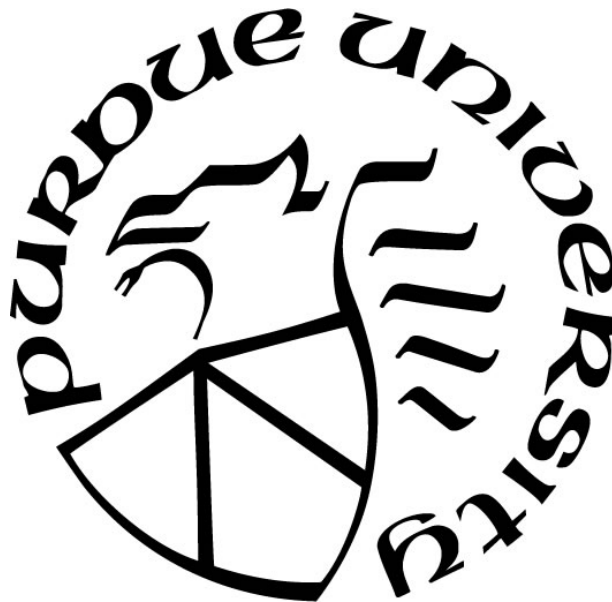
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This dissertation is dedicated to the two people in my life who been with me through many trials.

It is also dedicated to a third, One to whom I never thought it would be dedicated.

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ABSTRACT

Perceived organizational support (POS) is an important construct in organizational science that describes employees' degree of perceived support from their organization. However, in the academic literature, no paper has openly consulted real employees for how they understand and experience organizational support. The goal of the present dissertation was to conduct a qualitative, person-centric study to from the employee's perspective investigate the meaning of POS. To do this, techniques based on current best-practice recommendations were used, including examining incidents of the phenomenon and collecting lay definitions from key informants. It was found that a wide range of organizational behaviors can count as support; in the data, 25 distinct support forms were identified along with 27 lack of support forms. Through thematic analysis, these forms were aggregated into six themes of organizational support (e.g., "Organization helps the employee perform their job effectively") and ultimately formed a single higher-order theme that represented the meaning of POS. That is POS is the holistic perception of whether or not an employee is valued by their organization. This aligns with the classical academic definition of POS (perceptions of how much the organization values one's well-being and work contributions) but also suggests the construct should be considered more broadly.

Because how a construct is conceptualized determines its essential content, the second half of this dissertation performed a systematic content validation of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) and its short forms. Little formal content validation had been done for this scale, but it was found that all four aspects of content validity examined (content deficiency, relevance, distinctiveness, and balance) were satisfactory in the SPOS and of its short forms. Thus, researchers using these scales can be confident of content validity, although there is a need to improve content validation processes and reduce the number of SPOS short forms in current use.

INTRODUCTION

Support from other individuals and social groups figures very strongly in our daily lives; we praise those who display it (e.g., “She is a very supportive partner”), and we react with resentment and sadness when it is absent (e.g., “Why can’t you just support me?”). Due to their importance, support constructs have become prominent in the social sciences (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010) and also within the organizational sciences. At work, employees form many relationships, with co-workers, supervisors, and teams, and each of these entities can be a source of support. One of the most prominent sources of support is related to the highest organizational level, support from the organization itself, or *organizational support* (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Employees are not employed by supervisors or co-workers; they work for *organizations*, and its actions are especially prominent in how employees perceive they are supported. The concept had been discussed for some time (e.g., Levinson, 1965) but was formally introduced to the literature by Eisenberger et al. (1986). In their paper, the authors provided a conceptual definition of the construct and developed a scale for it. By adding the word “perceived” to the construct (i.e., “perceived organizational support; hereafter, POS), the authors emphasized that their focus was on the *psychological perceptions* of employees rather than the objective workplace events themselves.

Since then, POS has become a venerable construct in industrial-organizational psychology, blooming into a large and active body of research (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012; Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020; Eisenberger, Rockstuhl, Shoss, Wen, & Dulebohn, 2019; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Although much has been learned about POS, like other organizational topics, there are areas where its theory can be refined and further topics explored. One area of extension is to further clarify what this construct means from the employee’s perspective. Second, with regard to measurement, POS scales have not yet received a systematic content validation. These two issues are elaborated sequentially in the following two sections.

Exploring the Meaning of POS

POS was first defined by Eisenberger et al. (1986) as employees' perceptions of how much their organization values two things, their *personal well-being* and *work contributions*. Intuitively, this definition largely seems to capture the essence of POS and has remained constant, almost to the word, to the present day (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2020). However, despite being a construct about employee "perceptions," no published academic study has actually examined the meaning of organizational support from the employee's perspective. Studies on POS that have collected qualitative data are rare, with a literature search only returning two such studies that had used non-Western samples (Dhar, 2012, Zhang, Farh, & Wang, 2012).

This is in part because the organizational sciences are dominated by quantitative methods (Molina-Azorin, 2012; Murphy, Klotz, & Kreiner, 2017), which makes research trend away from the perspectives of employee. However, Weiss and Rupp (2011) wrote about the importance of investigating work phenomena from the employee's point of view and that, "the search for useful abstractions turns attention away from the people themselves...It constrains the research that is conducted and stimulates research that is disconnected from what really matters" (p. 84).¹ Currently, it is not fully known how employees themselves understand and conceive organizational support and how much the classical academic definition of POS aligns with their experiences. Therefore, several important research questions that should be posed and examined are: "What does POS actually mean from the employee's perspective?", "What do they experience as organizational support?", and "How does their perspective align or diverge from the classical academic definition that has been a consistent part of POS scholarship?"

The Content Validity of POS Measurement

A second issue in POS scholarship is the content validity of its measures. Currently, the main instrument for measuring POS is the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (hereafter, SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986). This scale has been used countless times, but it has not yet undergone any formal content validation. Unfortunately, this is not outside the norm in industrial-organizational psychology. A recent survey by Colquitt, Sabey, Rodell, and Hill (2019) examined

¹ W. James (1890) also described this as the "psychologist's fallacy," the assumption that one's theorizing about another's experiences is accurate.

practices in four major journals (e.g., *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*) from 2010-2016 and found that the majority of scale development papers “reported no content validation of any kind” (p. 1249).² Thus, the lack of systematic content validation for the SPOS is not abnormal. However, it is not acceptable psychometric practice (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014) and stands in contrasts to the great degree of psychometric evidence that has accumulated on other aspects of the SPOS (e.g., its reliability and factor structure; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Worley, Fuqua, & Hellman, 2009). This issue is especially salient because the full 36-item version of the SPOS seems to be rarely used in favor of one of its many shorter forms, such as 9-, 6-, and even 3-item versions (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). However, because a short form is, by definition, a version with reduced content, it is particularly important to conduct content validation in these cases because they are the most susceptible to content deficits.

The Present Dissertation

The goals of the present dissertation are to contribute to POS scholarship by (a) investigating the conceptual meaning of POS from the perspectives of employees and then (b) performing content validation of the SPOS and its short forms as exhaustively as extant methodology permits.

Contribution #1: Employee Perspectives of POS

With regard to the meaning of POS, a *qualitative*, person-centric approach is needed to understand POS with regard to the individuals whom the construct is about. A qualitative approach can provide the kind of deep psychological data that is beneficial for exploring conceptual meanings of constructs (Vogt, King, & King, 2004), something that is harder using quantitative measures, like scale scores. Qualitative approaches for understanding constructs have been strongly encouraged by a variety of scholars (Podsakoff et al., 2016; Welch et al., 2016). Of particular significance is Podsakoff et al. (2016), who provided a detailed overview of clarifying

² Though, it is possible that this is an overstatement, as (a) sometimes authors do not sufficiently report content validation and that (b) Colquitt et al. (2019) may not have counted the general item-writing principle to broadly sample the domain of the construct as content validation (e.g., Clark & Watson, 1995).

constructs and prescribed a number of qualitative methods, several of which were used in the present dissertation.

First, real employees in a range of occupations were consulted for how they define and conceptualize organizational support. In this case, employees can be considered key informants of the phenomenon and are vital sources of information (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Because POS is defined as an employee perception, consulting employees directly is important in understanding its meaning. Second, *incidents* of support were gathered, in which employees provided a concrete example of a time when they experienced organizational support. Incidents are a particularly good way to understand a construct because they ground it in concrete examples (Locke, 2012). Recently, this method for developing construct clarity has been used with success in scale development papers for constructs like workplace gossip and the need for drama (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017; Frankowski et al., 2016). Finally, incidents of the *opposite* phenomenon were gathered, i.e., when employees experienced their organization *failed* to support them. As described by Podsakoff et al. (2016), examining a construct's opposite or lower pole can clarify its nature, and for every construct, "one needs to think seriously about the 'positive' and 'negative' poles" (J. P. Klein, Goertz, & Diehl, 2008, p. 68). Put simply, better understanding what something is *not* illuminates what it *is*.

By using this research approach, the present dissertation seeks to understand the meaning of POS from the perspective of real employees in line with current best-practice recommendations. This is important because understanding the conceptual meanings of phenomena is the basis of clear theorizing about constructs (Mackenzie, 2003) and for understanding how it may be embedded in a causal network with other constructs.

Contribution #2: Content Validation

When a construct is clarified, one is also in a better position to evaluate how well it is being measured. Therefore, after exploring POS's meaning, the present dissertation seeks to perform a comprehensive content validation of the SPOS and its short forms. This is important because, to date, neither the SPOS nor any of its short forms have received a systematic content validation. This is in contrast to many other aspects of validity that have been systematically examined (e.g., reliability; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Worley et al., 2009). This is problematic because content validity is vital to construct validity (AERA et al., 2014; Messick, 1995). The content of a scale

stems directly from the construct's definition (Clark & Watson, 2019), and every other psychometric property depends on it (e.g., factor structure). The content validation taken in the present dissertation was designed to be as comprehensive as extant methodology allowed and comprised four aspects: content deficiency, relevance, distinctiveness, and balance. The information gained from this investigation will allow researchers to know how confident they can be that the item content of the SPOS and its short forms is sufficient.

Structure of the Dissertation

The remaining sections are organized as follows. First, a general overview of organizational support theory is provided. Second, Study 1 is introduced with a discussion on recent work on construct clarity in the social sciences. After this introduction, Study 1 is conducted and its results presented. Finally, Study 2 is introduced as a content validation effort for the SPOS and its short forms based on shifts in the conceptual definition of POS. This is concluded by a general discussion.

A Review of Organizational Support Theory

Although POS was introduced into the literature by Eisenberger et al. (1986), like most psychological constructs, it has existed for a long time. In the academic literature, Levinson (1965) alluded to organizational support in decades prior, writing, "If technical change eliminates a man's job, the company will often retrain him, thereby helping him to cope with the change...Organizations recognize some obligation to help their employees" (p. 374). However, since 1986, organizational support theory has been more substantially fleshed out, a review of which was very recently given by Eisenberger et al. (2020). In the following subsections, the theory, as understood from my point of view, is described and organized into several major tenets.

The Employee-Organization Relationship

Aside from support itself, the most fundamental concept in organizational support theory is the *employee-organization relationship*. The theory holds that, although employees and organizations are distinct, they do not operate in isolation. Instead, they are always embedded within an overarching relationship that endures and evolves throughout time. Although observable

work events, like meetings, the performance of tasks, and citizenship behaviors, take much of the focus in the organizational sciences, it is within the context of the employee-organization relationship that these events take place. For example, employees do not just “quit” they “quit their organization.” The same is true for many other organizational phenomena (e.g., experiencing fit, being committed, performing deviant acts). Thus, what is equally important to these work “observables” is the *unobservable* relationship in which they exist. This can be considered the first major tenet of organizational support theory:

Tenet 1: *Employees and organizations are embedded within an overarching relationship that evolves over time and is in which work events occur.*

Actions and Values

Organizations are made up of collections of human beings, and because of this, an organization’s behaviors are always *volitional*; that is, the organization is free to act in certain ways versus others. In this way, in the minds of employees, the organization comes to be perceived like a real person, complete with various personality traits based on the actions it has displayed (e.g., “greedy,” “generous;” Levinson, 1965). These key components of organizational support theory were expressed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) and explored further in subsequent research. Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997) found that when the organization’s actions were perceived as more volitional, positive treatment to employees was associated with stronger perceptions of organizational support (and vice versa). This leads to a second major tenet of the organizational support theory:

Tenet 2: *Organizational behaviors are volitional, and because of this, employees anthropomorphize the organization, drawing inferences about its character and “psychology” from its behavior.*

Social-Exchange Processes

In addition to the two previous tenets, a third major piece of organizational support theory is the presence of *social exchange processes* (Blau, 1964), specifically, the norm of *reciprocity*

(Gouldner, 1960). Because organizational support represents positive treatment, employees feel indebted to their organizations and naturally develop a desire to reciprocate. This reciprocation takes the form of greater effort, performance, loyalty, or other behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). It also means that employees develop beliefs about the extent to which their future work is likely to be rewarded. This affects future work effort and can be considered another aspect of this exchange (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Tenet 3: Due to the existence of social exchange norms, when employees are supported, they seek to reciprocate this treatment and also develop beliefs about how their future work will be rewarded.

The Importance of Psychological Needs

Finally, the last major piece of organizational support theory is focused on the *psychological needs of employees*. Principally, employees take jobs for economic reasons (i.e., financial compensation). However, when entering the workplace, their psychological needs are not just “left at the door” but are operating at all times. Organizational support theory describes these needs as “self-enhancement processes” (Eisenberger et al., 2020, p. 103), which include the needs for “approval, esteem, affiliation, and emotional support” (Kurtessis et al., 2017, p. 1856). When organizational support occurs, these socioemotional needs of employees become met, which produces outcomes like organizational commitment and identification (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This leads to the fourth tenet of the theory:

Tenet 4: Employees enter the workplace with different socioemotional needs (e.g., approval, esteem, affiliation, and emotional support) and these needs are fulfilled when organizational support occurs.

Final Comments on the Theory

In sum, organizational support theory is a sophisticated set of ideas that have been refined over the past several decades. Despite its intricacy, it can be boiled down to several key ideas, such as the existence of a personal relationship between employee and organization, the employee’s

personification of the organization, norms of reciprocity, and the psychological needs of employees. Depending on how the organization “decides” to act, employees develop corresponding beliefs about support. This, in a nutshell, is POS.

STUDY 1

The Importance and State of Construct Clarity in Social Science

Social science deals almost exclusively in abstract concepts; a “construct” is simply a type of abstract concept (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000; Nunnally, 1978). Moreover, defining concepts is arguably social science’s most important task because of how it logically precedes all empirical activities. With regard to measurement, “How can we know if we are measuring something well if we do not yet know what it is?” With regard to analysis, “How can any statistic be interpreted if we do not even know what the variable itself is?” Construct definitions are so important because they specify the essence of the concept (Locke, 2012), which clarifies ambiguity and improves the individual’s personal understanding so that proper theorizing can be done. Therefore, investigations into the meanings of constructs are scientifically important, and in psychology, this often applies when the construct is about the experiences of specific individuals (e.g., POS).

Challenges With Construct Definitions

Within the past decade, social science scholars have reiterated the importance of construct definitions and have also pointed out that they are not always satisfactory (H. J. Klein & Delery, 2012; Locke, 2005, 2012; Mackenzie, 2003; Molloy & Ployhart, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2016; Suddaby, 2010; Wacker, 2004; Welch et al., 2016). For instance, Locke (2012) wrote, “[a]s someone who has been reviewing journal articles for more than 30 years, I estimate that about 90% of the submissions I get suffer from problems of conceptual clarity” (p. 146). Similar experiences have been expressed by others (e.g., Mackenzie, 2003; Suddaby, 2010).

Part of the challenge is that developing truly clear and accurate definitions takes a considerable amount of time and effort. What a phenomenon “is,” is deeply philosophical, and evaluating whether a definition is sufficient is an inherently ambiguous task (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). There might also be different perspectives on the essence of the phenomenon that are hard to reconcile. Therefore, the process of articulating what complex concepts “are” (e.g., “justice,” “entitlement”) typically need to take place over iterations where degrees of imprecision or error are reduced over time (Podsakoff et al. 2016).

However, clear definitions have also not always been given the attention they deserve. In many fields, proposing a new construct is usually accompanied by creating a scale for it, and when this happens, the empirical portions of science may take center stage because they are more “concrete,” pushing the theoretical aspects into the background (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). The results of certain statistics, such as attaining a sufficiently high reliability or validity coefficient, can take more than their share of the focus. However, this is misguided; reliability coefficients can be very high with no validity whatsoever (Clark & Watson, 1995), and the same is true for validity coefficients (e.g., if the scale measures a different construct than intended).

Developments in Best-Practice Recommendations

Recently, Podsakoff et al. (2016) provided a long discussion on improving construct definitions. Even though other authors in the organizational sciences literature had discussed the topic before (e.g., Locke, 2012; Mackenzie, 2003; Suddaby, 2010), the treatment by Podsakoff et al. (2016) was the most comprehensive. In the paper, the authors discussed (a) what concepts are, (b) their role in the sciences, and (c) the ill-effects of deficits in concept clarity. They also provided a broad review of methods for clarifying constructs and formulated new best-practice recommendations for social scientists. The specific methods included the following: consulting dictionaries; surveying academic literatures; consulting subject-matter experts, colleagues, practitioners, and focus groups; making structured observations of the phenomenon; analyzing case studies; examining how the concept has been operationalized empirically; and comparing the concept to its opposite. These techniques are all strategies for identifying the construct’s essence so that it can be articulated in a construct definition. Importantly, it is not necessary to use every technique. Instead, because research contexts vary, a researcher simply needs to adhere to the principle of using “as many of the techniques...as is necessary to develop clear and concise definitions of their theoretical concepts” (p. 169). Therefore, for certain constructs, some techniques will be more relevant over others, but in every case attention and effort must be placed on definition development.

Study 1 Overview

In Study 1, the theoretical meaning of POS was examined from the perspective of real employees in line with these current best-practice recommendations of Podsakoff et al., (2016). The goal was to answer the questions raised in the introduction, namely, “What does organizational support mean to employees?”, “How do they interpret it, and what does it consist of?”, and “How do their conceptions align with POS’s classical academic definition?”

As described earlier, these questions were examined using a qualitative research approach. First, key informants/subject matter experts were directly consulted for how they conceptualize POS. Specifically, real employees in a range of occupations were asked for their personal definitions of organizational support. Second, *incidents* were gathered from these employees, in which they provided a concrete example of when they experienced organizational support. Finally, incidents of the *opposite* phenomenon were gathered, i.e., when employees experienced their organization *failed* to support them.

Method

Sample. The data were recruited through the online survey company, Qualtrics, and consisted of 101 employed English-speaking adults living in the United States. Seventy-two percent were full-time employees, and 28% were part-time with 21 median years in the workforce and six median years at their current organization. The median age was 46, and 47% were male (53% female). The racial distribution was: White (76%), Black or African American (12%), Asian (8%), Hispanic (0%), and Other (4%). The highest completed education levels were: Some high school (1%), high school diploma (11%), some college (22%), technical school degree (8%), Associate’s degree (12%), Bachelor’s Degree (26%), graduate or professional degree (21%).

To assess whether our sample of workers had enough occupational diversity, the top nine most prevalent occupational groups in the United States reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018) were taken, and each respondent was asked which group they belonged to. These nine groups make up over 70% of all employment in the United States, and an open-ended “Other – please specify” option was added for participants employed outside of these groups. The sample percentages versus the national percentages, respectively, were: office and administrative support (15% vs. 15%); sales and related (9% vs 10%); food preparation and

serving related (3% vs. 9%); transportation and material moving (2% vs. 7%); production (11% vs. 6%); education, training, and library (13% vs. 6%); healthcare practitioners and technical (13% vs. 6%); business and financial operations (3% vs. 6%), management (3% vs. 6%), and other (29% vs. 29%). These percentages were an unexpectedly good match, but more importantly, the sample had enough occupational breadth to make generalizable conclusions to a variety of occupations.

Procedure. After recruitment, participants completed an online survey consisting of five open-ended questions that asked about organizational support. The first two questions were designed to gather incidents as per Podsakoff et al. (2016). In the first, participants were asked to describe a time when they felt supported and what made them feel that way. The second question asked participants to do same but for a time when they felt unsupported. For both questions, participants were instructed to think for 1-2 minutes before providing their answer, to write at least several complete sentences, and to provide as much detail as possible. A third question asked for their lay definition of organizational support. A fourth question asked whether organizational support was important and why, and a fifth asked if there was anything else about organizational support they thought was important and would like us to know. The survey questions are provided in the Appendix. The median survey completion time was 12.03 minutes.

Collecting qualitative data using open-ended survey questions has been done with success in industrial-organizational psychology before (Brady et al., 2017; Frankowski et al., 2016), but it comes with challenges. The primary challenge is having participants provide high-quality answers because more effort is required compared to filling out the typical quantitative scale survey, and insufficient effort is known to impair validity (Huang, Liu, & Bowling, 2015). To ensure the quality of the collected data, a variety of strategies were used.

The first strategy was to clearly articulate the requirements and expectations of the project to study participants. In the opening instructions, it was stated how numerical rating scales are not well-suited to capture many aspects of psychology and that this requires using open-ended questions. Participants were told that this would require significantly more effort on their part but that it was necessary to understand their experiences. Participants were also told that if they could not, or did not want to, devote sufficient effort to this task, then they should not go on to complete the rest of the survey.

The second strategy was to put in a minimum response length for the questions. For questions 1-2, the minimum length was set at 80 characters, and for questions 3-4 the minimum was 60 characters. None was set for the fifth question. Respondents were not allowed to move to the next page of the survey if their response did not meet these criteria. Third, data was collected only from respondents who used a computer, not a cell phone. This was done because it is much harder to write a high-quality response on a cell phone than a computer with a keyboard. Fourth, a validation item was included after the open-response questions that asked if the answers were provided honestly and with the kind of effort the researchers requested. Any participants who did not reply “yes” were excluded (after viewing their data and confirming it was low-quality). Importantly, participants were told that whatever answer they gave would in no way affect their financial compensation.

Fifth, data collection started with a “soft launch” in which data was gathered from an initial ten respondents to see if this method would generate viable data. The majority of responses were of good quality and use of this approach continued. After the soft launch, a data filter based on survey completion length was added. The median completion time was computed for these first ten respondents (11 minutes), and any respondents below half of this mark for the rest of the study were removed and replaced. Finally, and most importantly, data collected occurred in several rounds, and immediately after each round, all responses were examined and any participants that had provided nonsense answers or failed to answer questions were flagged and removed. These unusable responses were replaced by Qualtrics in a subsequent round of data collection. Thirty-five respondents were removed in this way, and for transparency, their full data are provided at <https://osf.io/x3mtc/>.

Analysis. The collected data consisted of five open-ended responses from 101 participants, totaling 505 open-responses. To manage this large amount of information, analysis proceeded in several stages, beginning with simpler categorizations and then moving to more complex analyses. First, responses were content analyzed. For the positive and negative incidents, each response was analyzed into (a) the source of organizational support (superiors, coworkers, or the “organization” when it was named explicitly or no other source was stated) and (b) the specific support behavior being described. The categories of support behaviors were developed iteratively. In the beginning,

initial categories were developed, which were overly specific so as to preserve as much information about the case as possible. Over time, similar categories were created, and these were carefully aggregated into broader categories (e.g., the initial category “Organization rewards increased performance with increased pay” ended up being broadened to “Organization rewards good performance,” which included pay but also other rewards like promotions). These categories were ultimately called “support forms.”

After this content analysis, the full dataset was analyzed using *thematic analysis*, a method that seeks to identify *themes* in the data. It is considered the most straightforward qualitative analytic technique and can be used without commitment to a particular philosophical perspective (King & Brooks, 2018). All of the participant responses were described with codes and analytic notes that detailed the rationale for the codes. Where possible, the support forms were grouped into clusters, and these eventually became six themes. Based on their shared content, these six themes were then aggregated into one higher-order theme which represented the essence of POS.

Like the support forms, the lower- and higher-order themes were developed over much deliberation and iterations of refinement. For instance, it was obvious that a major theme of organizational support was the organization aiding or understanding the non-work issues of the employee. However, what to call this theme was unclear. Much of this theme involved employee health issues (or their family members’ health), but it also had to include things like other personal emergencies (e.g., an employee’s car breaks down) or being able to select when to use their personal vacation time. This theme could not have just been labeled “personal health,” as it was too narrow. The phrase, “personal issues” was a possibility, but the phrasing, “personal well-being” was ultimately chosen because of its breadth and connection to Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) definition. Many of these decisions were also recorded in analytic notes.

Trustworthiness. In qualitative research, researchers must ensure that their research is “trustworthy,” analogous to the concept of “validity” in quantitative research. Many different strategies can be used to increase the trustworthiness of a study. For the present dissertation, four strategies were used: (a) obtaining peer feedback, (b) member-checking, (c) negative case analysis, and (d) keeping of an audit trail. Peer feedback refers to providing one’s materials and analytic

interpretations to scientific peers for critical feedback. Because thematic analysis involves interpreting text, feedback from others is necessary to confirm one's interpretations and identify areas where alternative interpretations can be made. Prior to data collection, two academic peers (and several non-academic peers) were given the full survey and provided feedback. Feedback on the analysis was also obtained. Feedback was gathered from two scientific peers, both of whom had their doctorates in psychology, and one of whom had substantial expertise in qualitative methods. Each peer examined the analyzed data from ten participants as well as the descriptions of all the themes. Further discussions were had for clarification and to come to a consensual agreement about interpretation. The written comments are provided in the Appendix along with the resulting analytic changes that were made based on these discussions.

The second strategy for trustworthiness was *member-checking*, which is similar to peer feedback. It is the act of checking with informants to ask whether their responses have been interpreted fairly and accurately. At the end of the survey, the concept of member-checking was explained, and participants could voluntarily enter their emails if they were open to reviewing the interpretations of their data. After the data were analyzed, 15 participants were sent an email containing (a) their responses, (b) the analytic interpretations, and (c) a request to make sure they were fair and accurate. Four participants replied back, all of whom stated that the analyses of their data was fair and accurate. The communication with participants is also reported in the Appendix.

The third strategy for trustworthiness used was *negative case analysis*. This refers to the process of gathering observations that contradict the current narrative, understanding, or theoretical model and attempting to reconcile them. Sometimes a negative case cannot be reconciled, and this should be communicated to readers. The negative cases from the data are reported in the Appendix with a discussion. Finally, the fourth strategy was to keep an audit trail, a written account of all the materials, procedures, and decisions that occurred during the study so that another researcher could easily replicate the study. An audit trail was kept and is reported in the Appendix.

Results

Content analyses of the incidents produced 25 distinct forms of support and 27 forms of lack of support, shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Some support forms and lack of support

forms could be considered mirror images of each other (e.g., “Organization provides on-the-job help” vs. “Failure to provide on-the-job help”). These forms were aggregated into six lower-order themes and one higher-order theme, which are described in the following sections. Table 3 names each theme, lists the support forms that manifest each theme, and provides direct supporting quotes from the data.

In the incidents, the *sources* of organizational support were also content-analyzed. Fifty-three percent of positive incidents mentioned superiors (i.e., supervisors, management, executives), 19% cited coworkers (including teams), and 36% either mentioned the organization directly or did not mention any specific targets. For negative incidents, these percentages were 44%, 9%, and 51%, respectively. Multiple sources could be present in a single response. This shows the salience of superiors in perceptions of organizational support, which has been well-documented in organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Finally, when asked if organizational support was important, every respondent with a valid response reported that it was. Interestingly, roughly 40% of respondents spontaneously added a modifier that emphasized its importance, using words like “extremely,” “very,” or “critically.”

Theme 1: Organization Helps Employee Perform Their Job Effectively

One group of support forms consisted of the organization aiding the practical tasks of their employees. This included “Organization provides resources to do job,” “Organization provides training and instruction,” “Organization provides feedback and supervision,” and “Organization provides on-the-job help.” A job consists of tasks needing to be performed, and employees require a variety of things to do them effectively. When an organization provides these things, employees perceive this as support. This theme was present in roughly one-third of all positive incidents and was also common in employees’ lay definitions, e.g., “When a company supplies their employees with adequate information and resources to complete their job[,] this is support” (Participant #5).

Table 1. Twenty-Five Forms of Organizational Support from Incidents Data

Form of Support	Counts
Organization provides on-the-job help	11
Organization provides resources to do job	8
Organization provides mentoring	8
Organization listens to employee recommendations	8
Organization values employee health	7
Organization understands family issues	7
Organization rewards good performance	7
Organization encourages professional development	7
Organization provides feedback and supervision	6
Organization supports career advancement	6
Organization grants work autonomy	6
Organization trusts employee decision-making	5
Organization expresses praise or gratitude	5
Organization provides job security	5
Organization assigns important tasks to employee	4
Organization understands employee mistakes	4
Organization provides perks	4
Organization listens to employee complaints	4
Organization provides training and instruction	3
Organization accommodates employee lifestyle	3
Organization provides benefits	3
Organization tries to retain employee	3
Organization defends employee	3

Table 1 continued

Form of Support	Counts
Organization engages in team-building	1
Organization communicates with employees	1

Note. This list should not be taken as exhaustive. A single incident could contain multiple forms.

Table 2. Twenty-Seven Forms of Lack of Support from Incidents Data

Lack of Support	Counts
Interpersonal mistreatment from superiors	20
Failure to provide proper resources	9
Failure to provide feedback or supervision	8
Ignores employee input	8
Failure to fairly reward performance	8
Unfairly punishes employee	7
Failure to provide on-the-job help	7
Assigns unreasonable job demands	7
Failure to give proper recognition/credit	6
Failure to provide training or instruction	6
Engages in employee favoritism	6
Treats employee with suspicion	6
Failure to understand employee health issues	5
Distrusts employee decision-making	4
Reduces benefits	3
Failure to understand employee family or personal issues	3
Does not accommodate employee lifestyle	3
Forces employee to use ineffective methods	2
Restricts work autonomy	2
Meager base pay	2
Failure to stop personal mistreatment of employee	2
Provides few or no benefits	1
Gives unfair performance review	1
Inhibits career development	1
Prohibits socializing	1

Table 2 continued

Lack of Support	Counts
Failure to communicate with employee	1
Violates employee privacy	1

Note. This list should not be taken as exhaustive. A single incident could contain multiple forms.

Table 3. Summary of Higher-Order Theme and Six Lower-Order Themes

Higher-Order Theme:	
<i>Employee Experiences Social Validation Through Organizational Support</i>	
Supporting quotes from lay definitions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant #3: "I would define being supported by your organization means that you are being treated well. That you feel like you are an important individual and contributor to the company." Participant #18: "I would say supported and valued go hand in hand." Participant #20: "Being supported means being loved by the company and its employees." Participant #21: "Being supported means feeling like you matter...Being supported means not feeling like you are an immediately replaceable pawn in the organization." Participant #37: "Backing you and being there to guide you, praise you, work alongside you and see your value and worth." Participant #43: "It means being treated like a human being. Some organizations treat their employees like robots. T[h]ey are expected to perform and not question." Participant #68: "Felling like they give you what you need to do your job and care about you can tell if your having trouble and help without judgement." Participant #91: "To be supported in a company means that they will [reach] out to help their workers when they are in need. When workers feel like their team or company cares about them, they will work harder." Participant #101: "Being supported by your organization means that the company you work for cares about you and your well being." 	

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
Organization helps employee perform their job effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization provides resources to do job Organization provides training and instruction Organization provides feedback and supervision Organization provides on-the-job help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant #3: I felt like I was supported by the organization when they changed office equipment with newer products. Changing computers, monitors and office supplies significantly made a difference around the office...I felt like I was being treated well by the company and feel like I am an important member of the team.” Participant #4: “I work for the au pair foundation and...felt supported in the way management was able to give me fast responses during critical moments. Opposite. Participant #19: “[I] do not feel very supported in my current job. Requesting things that I don’t have the authority to handle on my own often go unanswered...It is frustrating and not motivating.
Organization listens to employee’s voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization listens to employee recommendations Organization listens to employee complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant #48: I currently feel supported at my job. My ideas are taken seriously and some have been put into play. My boss listens attentively.” Participant #98: “Leadership was supportive to employees. Leadership listened to the employees

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
		<p>about company concerns”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposite. Participant #21: “Working for [name removed] is a great way to feel unsupported ... When employees express these concerns, management just brushes it off and tries to defend why it matters, Rather than actually acknowledging concerns.”
Organization rewards employee’s work effort and contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization rewards good performance • Organization provides benefits • Organization expresses praise or gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant #32: “I felt supported when my boss gave me a \$500 bonus for no special reason...just to let me know that I was a valued employee.” • Participant #37: “I used to work for a public school district in one of their elementary schools. I really felt appreciated by the principal and the superintendent of the school district...They gave me feedback and praise often.” • Opposite. Participant #30: “Every job I ever had made me feel like I was a nobody. They just wanted things done as fast as possible with no regard to what was involved in getting things done. I was never paid what I should have been paid.”

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
Organization invests in employee growth and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization provides feedback and supervision • Organization supports career advancement • Organization encourages professional development • Organization provides mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant #19: I felt very supported in my last role by my last supervisor in running my market ...He invested in me by allowing me to attend national conferences and run promotions within my market. I felt like I was learning and growing in my field. • Participant #21: "I had a job where I was originally hired as a shelf stocker, but the Point of Sale/IT Administrator saw far more potential in me, and he strongly encouraged me to apply for the POS/IT assistant position. I got the job, and he was the first person (let alone supervisor) who made me feel as if I had potential and could learn to be proficient in many areas in which I previously had little to no experience." • Opposite. Participant #73: "I've been assigned a research project, but there are no other researchers on staff with similar area expertise who can provide feedback and guidance. The research director has not been particularly helpful in meetings, usually giving advice that simply

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
		reinforces what I have already thought of anyway.”
Organization accommodates employee’s personal well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization values employee health • Organization understands family issues • Organization accommodates employee lifestyle • Organization understands employee mistakes • Organization defends employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant #27: “I was working for a home care company when my son was born. He had some major medical issues and my employer worked with me to keep my job as I needed extensive time off. They continue to be supportive and never make me feel guilty for taking time off to care for my son. It makes everything less stressful to know I won’t lose my job to care for my child.” • Participant #16: “There was once early in my career that I made a programming mistake and sorted a report using 4 digits on the zip code versus 5. My manager needed the report to discuss something with senior management and provide the material incorrectly, which was an embarrassing situation. He pulled me aside and stated the importance of validating results. He could have yelled in anger but he did not.” • Opposite. Participant #4: “I worked for a retail chain once and dealt with a very toxic employee

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
		<p>who delighted in making my day a living hell... When I reported this individual to upper management, I was told to basically just 'deal with it.' I did not feel like I should respect them with a 2 weeks notice and left the store after the meeting."</p>
Organization accepts employee as an in-group member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization provides perks • Organization defends employee • Organization engages in team-building • Organization provides job security • Organization communicates with employees • Organization tries to retain employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant #71: "When I worked in the restaurant industry... [t]he manager came to see me with a customer issue, and I went on the defensive to explain myself. He immediately stopped me to tell me he was asking for the information to make a decision on whether the customer would ever be welcome back. That stands out as a time I felt extremely supported." • Participant #5: "I worked as a Sales Counselor for a major amusement park in the Customer Service Sales Department... To make sure we were able to flawlessly sale the products we were give a tour of each own resort and given a one night's stay to a resort of our choosing"

Table 3 continued

Lower-Order Theme	Example Support Forms	Supporting Quotes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opposite. Participant #16: “There was once a vendor that blamed a problem on me and my staff and our manager believed the vendor. We did have backup emails to reflect that the vendor was to blame. However our manager never once apologized.”

Theme 2: Organization Listens to Employee's Voice

The two support forms, “Organization listens to employee recommendations” and “Organization listens to employee complaints” composed a second theme, the organization listening to the employee’s *voice*. This theme was present in 14% of all positive incidents, and it was also frequently mentioned in employees’ lay definitions (e.g., Participant #1: “Being supported means to me that they will listen to what you have to say”).

Theme 3: Organization Rewards Employee's Work Effort and Contributions

Another four support forms composed a third theme regarding how the organization rewarded an employee’s effort and contributions. Relevant forms included, “Organization rewards good performance,” “Organization expresses praise or gratitude,” “Organization provides benefits,” and “Organization provides perks.” In the positive incidents, 17% of participants cited this theme, and it was present in many employee definitions (e.g., Participant #10: “If you are a good employee you should be recognized”). Within the employee-organization relationship, it is the employees who serve the broader goals of the organization (i.e., employees are “worker bees”), and recognizing their role in this is perceived as support. This can occur informally through verbal recognition and formally through financial compensation (e.g., salary, bonuses) and advancement (e.g., promotions, additional responsibilities).

Theme 4: Organization Invests in Employee Growth and Development

A fourth theme that emerged was the organization supporting the professional and career development of employees, and it comprised four support forms: “Organization provides mentoring,” “Organization encourages professional development,” “Organization supports career advancement,” and “Organization provides feedback and supervision.” Nearly one-third of all positive incidents contained this theme, and many lay definitions cited it (e.g., Participant #56: “I think that being supported means that someone wants you to do better for yourself...For example, offer classes or courses to give your further education or training at no cost to you/encourage you to go back to school”). The human desire for growth and development is well-represented in many psychological paradigms (e.g., Maslow’s needs hierarchy, self-determination theory; Maslow,

1943; Ryff, 1989; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). The workplace provides ample opportunity for this, and employees perceive these as an important support.

Theme 5: Organization Accommodates Employee's Personal Well-Being

A fifth theme was related to the personal well-being of the employee composed of the following five support forms: "Organization values employee health," "Organization understands family issues," "Organization understands employee mistakes," "Organization accommodates employee lifestyle," and "Organization defends employee." This theme was present in over 25% of all positive incidents and was present in the employee definitions of support (e.g., Participant #1: "Being supported means to me that they...care about your general well being"). Simply, employees are human beings with myriad needs, personal issues, goals, feelings and concerns. Although other support forms, like providing fair compensation, relates to well-being, this theme concerns forms that are *directly* about accommodating the personal well-being of employees.

Theme 6: Organization Accepts Employee as an In-Group Member

The final theme was related to the in-group social acceptance of the employee and was composed of six support forms, "Organization provides job security," "Organization tries to retain employee," "Organization defends employee," "Organization provides perks," "Organization engages in team-building," and "Organization communicates with employees." This theme constituted 20% of all positive incidents and was prominent in the lay definitions (e.g., Participant #45: "Being supported by my organization means that I am a valued member of the team"). Organizations are economic and legal entities, but they are also *social groups*. Members of an organization are bound together by their pursuit of common goals and form a strong shared identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This is why they are often described as "teams" or "families" (borrowing the words of participants). Certain actions by the organization can state that the employee is accepted within this group, which is perceived as support.

Higher-Order Theme: Employee Experiences Social Validation Through Organizational Support

It was clear that what employees perceived as support was highly diverse; their personal experiences and lay definitions ranged from being given flexible work arrangements, to verbal words of affirmation, fair promotions, in-group acceptance, and sufficient time to care for illnesses and family. On the surface, these examples had practically nothing in common. However, their underlying structure consisted of the organization (a) recognizing the individual employee and then (b) “deliberately” choosing an action that benefited them in some way. Despite their diversity, every form of organizational support had this structure. For example, providing on-the-job help involves (a) recognizing the employee and a problem they are experiencing and (b) taking concrete action to help them resolve it. Similarly, allowing time off for a family health concerns involves (a) recognizing the employee and the issue and then (b) behaviorally allowing an accommodation.

Like behavior in general, these actions by the organization are means to achieve ends that have been deemed important and worth pursuing (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). These ends can be called *values*, which have been defined as that which is “important to us” and the “broad goals that apply across contexts and time” (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003, p. 1208). Employees counted these diverse support forms as the same phenomenon because, in terms of values, they *were the same*, in spite of their large surface differences. Thus, by choosing to benefit the employee when it could have acted differently, the organization is valuing the employee. Employees at work perceive this valuing, develop a stable belief about its degree, and assign a large degree of importance to it (seen in the consensus that support is very “important”).

This was also seen directly in the participant data. There were myriad instances in which the word “valued,” or a synonym was used (e.g., “matters,” “cares,” “appreciates”). It was most prevalent in employees’ personal definitions of support because this involved them creating an abstract description of the concept’s meaning. Examples here included: “[b]eing supported means feeling like *you matter* [emphasis added]” (Participant #21) and “[b]eing supported...means that the company you work for *cares about you* [emphasis added]” (Participant #101). However, participants could not keep the psychological meaning of POS out of their responses to other questions. In the positive incidents, Participant #1 wrote, “I was working in an organization that...made you feel like *they cared about you* [emphasis added],” and Participant #10 wrote, “I worked for a[n] Office supply company that was good to their employees...you were *more than a*

number [emphasis added].” In the negative incidents, it was also present, such as Participant #30, “Every job I ever had made me feel in *I was a no[b]ody* [emphasis added],” and Participant #80, “we were bought out by a huge corporation and we are *treated like shit*...we are *just a number* to them [emphasis added].” Table 3 provides a list of quotes that support this interpretation of what POS means to employees.

Discussion

This study explored the conceptual meaning of POS from the employee’s perspective in line with best-practice recommendations for gaining construct clarity (Podsakoff et al., 2016). It was found that POS develops from a wide span of organizational behaviors; analyzing the reported incidents led to 25 distinct support forms and 27 lack of support forms. These forms were then aggregated into six major support themes, such as “Organization helps employee perform their job effectively,” “Organization invests in employee growth and development,” and “Organization accommodates employee’s personal well-being.” These themes were integrated into one higher-order theme that represented the essence of POS from the employee’s perspective. Here, it was found that POS is best understood as the perception employees develop of simply whether or not they are *valued by their organization*. That is, because behavior is goal-oriented, and values specify the goals that will be pursued, volitional positive treatment by the organization reveals to employees whether or not they are valued. This conclusion was directly supported by myriad comments in the employee data (e.g., Participant #21: “Being supported means feeling like you matter”) and is supported by theory on *psychological needs* and *the self*.

With regard to needs, many psychological needs have been posited (e.g., competence; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989), but they do not all hold an equal position in the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). The need for social relationships begins well before any of the others, in utero and on the first day of birth (DeCasper & Fifer, 1980; Sullivan, Perry, Sloan, Kleinhaus, & Burtchen, 2012), crucial during infancy (Nelson et al., 2007; Winston & Chicot, 2016), and remaining no less important across the lifespan, despite the development of other needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). These social needs have gone under various names, such as relatedness, connection, affiliation, bonds, and attachment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1982; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1968). These social needs are complex but generally consist of physically being around others and, psychologically,

being valued by them. The latter is called *social validation*, defined as affirmation by others to be of worth (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Rogers, 1959; Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001). Social validation is primarily gained within intimate relationships (Collins, Ford, Guichard, Kane, & Feeney, 2010; Prager, 1995), but this need also extends to all social groups the individual becomes a part of (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The organization is a salient entity in modern society, and the interaction between an employee and their organization, can therefore provide a *substantial* amount of validation—or invalidation. When treatment by the organization suggests that they are perceived to be of value, employees’ need for social validation is fulfilled, and they “*perceive support*.” This experience then likely produces the span of outcomes known to be associated with POS (e.g., positive emotion, job satisfaction, emotional attachment, loyalty, organizational identification, and many others; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

This result requires background theory on the self. In general, psychological theory on the self converges on the idea that: (a) the self consists of many parts (e.g., one’s physical body, emotions, abilities, family, work role, possessions) but that (b) the self is also holistic and experienced by individuals as an integrated whole (Belk, 1988; Baumeister, 2010; W. James, 1890; Kuhl, Quirin, & Koole, 2015; Rogers, 1961; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Therefore, employees develop perceptions that their organization values different aspects of themselves, such as their ability, contributions, ideas, voice, development, and personal health. However, employees also develop a *summary perception* of how much they are valued because these parts are always embedded within a greater holistic self. This is important to state because, although the sciences, including the study of POS, strive to decompose phenomena (e.g., personality, parts of cells), many things operate as irreducible wholes (Rock & Palmer, 1990). The self is a prime example of this (Kuhl, et al., 2015; Rogers, 1961). Figure 1 depicts how the organization valuing aspects of an employee in each theme leads to the summary perception of being holistically valued (i.e., POS).

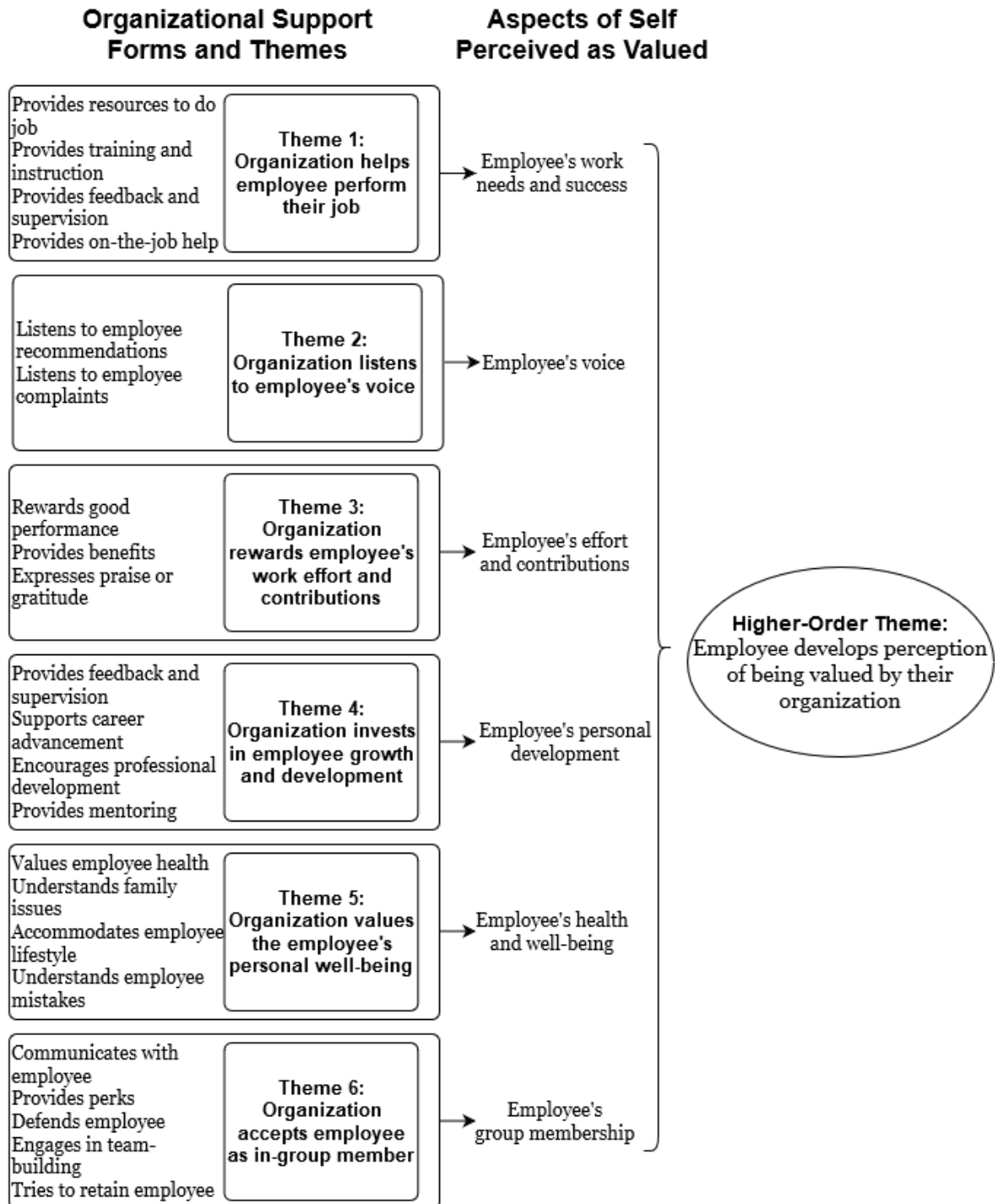


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of POS.

The classical academic definition of POS defined the construct as being how much the employee perceives their organization values two things, their personal well-being and work contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This definition is very much in alignment with what was found here. POS *is* a perception about the organization's values, and an employee's "work contributions" and "well-being" are crucial components. However, the present study extends this conceptualization. It suggests that, although "parts" of an employee can be valued, POS is really the employee's perception of whether or not they valued as a whole by their organization. This would be a revised definition of POS from the employee's perspective.

This conclusion is supported by the theory on the self described above and also that some support forms reported by employees were difficult to fit within the parameters of the classical definition. For example, investing in an employee's professional development is primarily valuing the *competence* of that employee, and including an employee in team-building exercises is valuing the employee's in-group membership. Neither of these behaviors come directly from valuing their work contributions or personal well-being. However, when POS is considered more holistically, they can easily be accounted for.

Interestingly, this holistic conception of POS has been suggested by decades of empirical evidence in the POS literature. The construct has been defined as consisting of "two components," but dimensionality analyses of the POS scale have always shown that just one single latent dimension accounts for the shared variance among the indicators (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This implies that the two components actually reduce, psychologically, to the same thing (L. J. James, 2011). It is also important to note that some academic work has eluded to the holistic nature of POS (e.g., the title of Eisenberger et al. [2020] is, "Perceived Organizational Support: Why Caring about Employees Counts"), even though the explicit academic definition has always been about "components" of the self.

STUDY 2

Study 1 found that, from employee data, POS is the holistic perception of whether or not an employee is valued by their organization. This aligns very much with the classical definition (valuing employee “well-being” and “contributions”) but ultimately conceives the construct with greater breadth. This is not theoretically drastic, but any shift in a construct’s meaning requires re-examining some of its psychometric properties. Specifically, it requires additional content validation because the content of a construct stems directly from its definition (Clark & Watson, 1995, 2019; Hinkin, 1998). Any potential change in the definition may mean that the item content in existing scales is deficient or no longer relevant. Moreover, a systematic content validation of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS; Eisenberger et al., 1986), has not yet been conducted done before, despite have being used many times. The authors of the original 1986 paper did categorize the item content, but this was done rather informally. A number of construct validation studies have been conducted on the SPOS (Hutchison, 1997; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Worley et al., 2009), but these have all focused on other psychometric properties, like reliability, dimensionality, and discriminant validity. Because content validation is essential to validity (AERA et al., 2014; Messick, 1995), Study 2 aims to examine the content validity of the SPOS and its short forms.

The State of the SPOS’s Content Validity

The fact that little-to-no content validation has been attempted for the SPOS, is not surprising; the lack of systematic content validation is not uncommon in industrial-organizational psychology research. Colquitt et al. (2019) recently surveyed content validation practices in four major journals (e.g., *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*) from 2010-2016 and found that the majority of scale development papers in these journals “reported no content validation of any kind” (p. 1249). This is probably because content validation is a very *theoretical* part of scale validation, making it more difficult to evaluate. However, it is a no less important part, as all empirical psychometric properties rely on it (e.g., reliability estimate, number of factors).

Content validation is especially important to do with regard to short forms. This is because a short form, by definition, is just a version of the scale with reduced content. Papers that develop

short forms often report high reliability as some kind of evidence of validity, but as stated earlier, high reliability can easily exist without validity. Smith, McCarthy, and Anderson (2000) stated that failing to check scale content is one of the most prevalent errors of short form development. The 17-item short form developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) did not undergo any content validation, and neither have the voluminous number of short forms that have been used since, such as the 10-item (Eisenberger et al., 2020), 9-item (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990) 8-item (Eisenberger et al., 1997), 7-item (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005), 6-item (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008) and two different 3-item versions (Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Eisenberger, et al., 2002).

Importantly, many of these short forms have also been created by selecting the items with the highest factor loadings. Although this is a common heuristic, this method can incidentally lower validity because of how it restricts item content. Items with the highest loadings are the most highly correlated with other items, but high correlations among items implies they have more similar content. Therefore, selecting the items with the highest factor loadings reduces the breadth of item content and can therefore reduce validity (Clark & Watson, 2019; Schroeders, Wilhlem, & Olaru, 2016). This is known as the “attenuation paradox” (Loevinger, 1954), when an increase in reliability can actually accompany a decrease in validity. However, it is not really a “paradox” because homogenous item content naturally reduces the substantive span of the construct that is being measured.

Conducting Content Validation: Content Deficiency, Relevance, Distinctiveness, and Balance

Content validation is acknowledged to be the least understood and least practiced part of construct validation. For nearly 70 years, it has been known to be an essential part of a scale’s validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), but there is still ambiguity regarding what it is (Fitzpatrick, 1983). The most-cited definition of content validity comes from Haynes et al. (1995), “the degree to which elements of an assessment instrument are relevant to and representative of the targeted construct for a particular assessment purpose” (p. 238). However, this definition is very abstract, and it is important to note that it was meant to apply to *all cases of psychological measurement*, including clinical judgment, behavioral observation, and physiological assessment, which makes it harder to judge what it means for specific measurement methods. Haynes et al. (1995) elaborated that content validity for psychological scales specifically includes item content, response options,

and even participant instructions. However, even though all three impact validity, the term “content validity” is usually taken to refer to the scale’s *substantive* content, and this is how content validity will be considered in the present dissertation.

Logically, there are only a few ways in which item content can capture (or fail to capture) the construct. First, the content as a whole might not represent all essential aspects of the construct (“content deficiency”). Second, an item’s content may not be relevant to the construct’s essence (“content relevance”). Third, the item content might not be distinct from that of other constructs (“content distinctiveness”), and fourth, some content may be so over-represented that it dominates the scale (“content imbalance”). Although more scholarship is required on content validation, it is possible that examining all of these together represents a *comprehensive* assessment of content validity. These are the four ways in which content validity was examined in the present dissertation.

Content Deficiency

The first, *content deficiency*, occurs when the scale items fail to capture the entire essence of the construct. Evaluating deficiency is challenging to evaluate, and there is currently little formal guidance on the subject. First, it requires a construct definition that fully articulates its essence, which may not always be present. Second, evaluating how well an item, or set of items, represents this essence is always a qualitative judgment. Fortunately, Study 1 clarified the essence of POS in its higher-order theme and identified distinct forms and themes of support. This provides a strong rational basis for evaluating the content deficiency of the SPOS and its short forms. It is also important to recognize that scale items can represent the construct’s essence at different levels of generality. For example, some items can be considered “global measures,” items that are so broad that they capture the full essence of the construct by themselves. This is the logic of single-item scales (e.g., “I am satisfied with my current job” for job satisfaction; Warren & Landis, 2007). Items like these guard against deficiency because their scores represent *holistic* assessments of the construct. In other words, in a single-item scale, there is no content deficiency. On the other hand, some items represent the construct in a more specific way, which can be considered “specific measures.” For instance, the item “I am satisfied with my pay” is a good specific measure of job satisfaction because payment is an important part of one’s job satisfaction. However, it would only capture a part of its essence and would be a global measure of the more narrow construct, “pay satisfaction.”

Content Relevance

Another component of content validity is *content relevance*. That is, all scale items must be relevant to the construct's essence (Haynes et al., 1995). Although deficiency and relevance are related (because a scale cannot be sufficient with completely irrelevant items), content relevance deserves its own consideration. This is because deficiency is a property of the scale items *as a whole*, whereas relevance is a property of each individual item. A set of items may fully cover the construct's essence, but it might also include certain items that are not particularly relevant and should be excluded (leading to contamination).

Identifying the relevance of items can be done by methods recently summarized by Colquitt et al. (2019). Specifically, there are two approaches the authors discuss, Anderson and Gerbing (1991) or Schriesheim, Coglisier, Scandura, Lankau, and Powers (1999).³ These are essentially the same technique and involve having a pool of raters assess the degree to which each item matches the target definition. The difference between them is that Schriesheim et al. (1999) uses a Likert rating scale, whereas Anderson and Gerbing (1991) uses a forced-choice approach that compares the target to other constructs. In the present dissertation, Schriesheim et al.'s (1999) approach was taken because, being a Likert scale, it provides more information and also provides an *absolute measure* of how well items match the given definition rather than just a relative measure.

Content Distinctiveness

Another aspect of content validation is to make sure that the item content is *distinctive*, which also guards against content contamination. In evaluating distinctiveness can be done using the approaches described by Colquitt et al. (2019), when the scale's items are rated against definitions of rival constructs. Here, the important decision is which rival constructs to test against. The chosen rivals should be "venerable," those "whose definitions are well understood and whose scales have been used quite frequently in the literature" (Colquitt et al., p. 1250). Using new or ambiguous rivals can make the whole exercise uncertain. Rival constructs should also be at the same level of analysis as the target (e.g., either all at the individual or collective level). Finally, because constructs are abstract, they can legitimately overlap (Newman, Harrison, Carpenter, &

³ Colquitt et al. (2019) attribute the approach to Hinkin and Tracey (1999), but the technique was first used by Schriesheim et al. (1999), whom Hinkin and Tracey (1999) cite as their source.

Rariden, 2016), which causes ratings of distinctiveness to become more ambiguous (because their content should *not be* distinct). Therefore, the rival constructs chosen should be similar but not have severe overlaps. It is also important to note that distinctiveness is only important at the scale-level. There is no reason why certain items cannot be good (or better) measures of other constructs. However, if the *full set* of items is more relevant to another construct, then there is likely contamination.

Content Balance

A final, and often overlooked component of content validity, can be called *content balance*. If there are specific measures within a scale (as opposed to global measures), the scale should not be dominated by this specific content. For example, a 10-item depression scale could have nine items on reduced activities but only one about mood. This would be an imbalanced scale, as the scale would really be measuring “reduced activities,” rather than the broader construct of depression. As a real-life example, the widely-popular Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) has been critiqued for containing mostly high-arousal positive states (Diener et al., 2010). Therefore, imbalances in specific content undermine validity.

Crucially, imbalances in content can exist when there is no content deficiency, all items are relevant, and the content is distinctive. Currently, there are no prescribed methods to assess content balance. However, this dissertation proposes that it should just be examined by researchers and/or subject-matter experts. Items can be classified based on their content, and the number of items in each class can be examined to see whether they proportionally represent the construct. This requires a very clear construct definition and should also be validated by at least one independent scientific peer.

Method

Sample

Data were collected from 405 U.S. adults who were recruited through MTurk via TurkPrime (Litman, Robinson, & Abberbock, 2017). Participants were paid between 1.20-1.80 for their participation. Participants were required to have at least a Bachelor’s degree to ensure that they had sufficient intellectual ability to do the task (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999), rating scale items to

the degree that they matched the definitions of abstract constructs. Participants had a median age of 36 ($M = 39.48$), were 40% female (59% male, 1% “Other”/unreported). Their employment statuses were as follows: full-time (70%), part-time (12%), unemployed (11%), student (1%), retired (3%), and “Other” (3%). The racial distribution was: White (83%), African American (6%), Asian (6%), Hispanic (4%), and Other (1%). The highest reported education levels were: Bachelor’s degree (71%), graduate or professional degree (28%), and “Other”/unreported (1%).

Procedure and Analysis

To examine content validity, the SPOS and three of its short forms were selected and evaluated, the original 17-item (Eisenberger et al., 1986), the 9-item (Eisenberger et al., 1997), and 3-item versions (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Given that many of its short forms differed by only an item or two, this set was sufficient to represent all its short forms.

Content deficiency. To assess content deficiency, first, each SPOS item was examined by the author for whether its content captured the essence of POS. Then, items were categorized as either global measures (those that assess the whole essence of POS) or specific measures (those that capture POS’s essence through a specific way). The way in which the specific measures captured POS was also coded. For example, the item, “The organization would understand a long absence due to my illness” captures POS because it asks whether the organization values the employee’s health. After all items were categorized and coded, a holistic judgment of deficiency was made for the full SPOS and each short form. As a validation check, the SPOS items were categorized as either global or specific by an independent researcher with a doctorate in industrial-organizational psychology. This person also provided an independent coding of the specific item content. Any disagreements were discussed to a consensus. Critiques of SPOS items were also recorded. It should be noted that there is a degree of subjectivity in categorizing items. For example, the SPOS item, “Help is available from the organization when I have a problem” was interpreted by the author as a specific item that captured on-the-job help, but by the independent researcher as a global item (given that “help” is very broad). After conversation, it was ultimately

categorized as a global item, and even though there were some initial subjective differences, they were not so serious as to impact the overall evaluation of content deficiency.

Content relevance. To assess content relevance, Colquitt et al.'s (2019) recommendations were taken and the approach of Schriesheim et al. (1999) was adopted. Study participants completed an online survey which presented either the expanded definition of POS, the classical version, or one of two rival constructs (discussed in the content distinctiveness section below). They were asked to rate how well each of the 36 SPOS items captured the presented definition. This was a mixed 4 (definitions) X 36 (items) design, in which "definitions" was a between-subjects factor, and "items" was a within-subjects factor. Presentation of definitions were counterbalanced across participants. In their study, Colquitt et al. (2019) tried to standardize Schriesheim et al.'s (1999) approach by creating a standard survey instrument. This survey was adapted for the present dissertation. Two deviations from theirs included changing the response format to a 5-point rather than a 7-point Likert scale. This was because participants would probably not make a meaningful distinction between "Very Good" and "Extremely Good." The other deviation was how reverse-worded items were treated. Colquitt et al. (2019) found that, for reverse-worded items, relevance ratings were lower, likely because it was hard for participants to reverse the item's content in their minds to see how well it matched the definition. Half of the SPOS's 36 items are reverse-worded, which posed a problem, and in pilot testing, respondents reported that rating these items was difficult. To solve this, the reverse-worded items were presented in a separate block after the regular items. They were accompanied by a definition that framed the construct in terms of its opposite pole. For instance, the classical definition of POS became "LACK of Perceived Organizational Support: How much you believe your organization DOES NOT value you."

Steps to ensure data quality on MTurk were taken, largely in the same manner as Colquitt et al. (2019) and as recommended by others (e.g., Peer, Vosgerau, & Acquisti, 2013). First, MTurk respondents could not enter the study more than once and could only perform the rating task if they had an approval rating of 90% or above. Second, they also needed to have completed at least 100 hits. Third, there were four attention check items within the 36 SPOS items, and if a respondent failed to answer one of these correctly, their data were removed. Finally, time spend on the survey as a whole was examined.

In analysis, relevance ratings were first analyzed at the item-level. For each item, two statistics were computed: a measure of central tendency and the proportion of ratings deeming the item “relevant” (i.e., “Adequate” or above). The latter summarizes the variability of relevance ratings and is a measure of interrater agreement (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The *htc* statistic proposed by Colquitt et al. (2019) was also computed, which is just the average rating of all the items divided by the number of scale points (to make it comparable to ratings with different formats).

Content distinctiveness. To evaluate distinctiveness, two rival constructs were chosen, organizational trust and organizational commitment. The definitions of these constructs came from Ng (2015) and Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005), respectively, but had been derived from older sources (i.e., Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995 and Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974, respectively). These constructs were chosen to because they were (a) well-established and also (b) similar to POS but avoided large overlaps. The classical definition of POS was also included. Like content relevance, analyses were made on measures of central tendency and the variability of ratings. Colquitt et al.’s (2019) distinctiveness statistic, the *htd*, which simply averages the mean rating differences for all rival constructs (and then standardizes by 1 minus the number of scale points).

Content balance. In the analysis of content deficiency, the specific content of each item had already been coded. These codes were examined to assess content balance. The number of items in each content category were summed and then compared to the other categories.

Results

Content Deficiency

The content deficiency of the SPOS and its short forms was examined by (a) categorizing each item as either a global or specific measure, (b) coding the content of the specific measures, and then (c) making a summary evaluation for each scale form. These various categorizations are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Content Categorization of SPOS Items

SPOS Items	Global/Specific			Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Measure	
1. The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	X		X	Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)
4. The organization strongly considers my goals and values.	X	X	X	Global	
9. The organization really cares about my well-being.	X	X	X	Global	
8. Help is available from the organization when I have a problem.		X	X	Global	
10. The organization is willing to extend Itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.		X	X	Specific	Values job success (Theme 1)
17. The organization provides me little opportunity to move up the ranks.		X	X	Specific	Values career advancement (Theme 4) Promotion opportunities are often constrained by organizational structure.

Table 4 continued

SPOS Items	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Global/Specific Measure	Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
21. The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.	X	X	X		Values work satisfaction (Theme 5)	
23. The organization shows very little concern for me.	X	X	X	Global		
25. The organization cares about my opinions.	X	X	X	Specific	Values voice (Theme 2)	
27. The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	X	X	X	Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	
2. If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so.			X	Specific	Displays loyalty (Theme 6)	Pragmatic reasons sometimes necessitate lower-salary replacement.
3. The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.			X	Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	

Table 4 continued

SPOS Items	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Global/Specific Measure	Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
6. The organization would ignore any complaint from me.			X	Specific	Values voice (Theme 2)	
7. The organization disregards my best Interests when it makes decisions that affect me.			X	Global		
20. The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.			X	Specific	Values personal needs (Theme 5)	May capture employee favoritism.
22. If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me.			X	Global		
35. The organization tries to make my job as interesting as possible.			X	Specific	Values work satisfaction (Theme 5)	
5. The organization would understand a long absence due to my illness.				Specific	Values personal needs (Theme 5)	

Table 4 continued

SPOS Items	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Global/Specific Measure	Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
11. The organization would fail to understand my absence due to a personal problem.				Specific	Values personal needs (Theme 5)	
12. If the organization found a more efficient way to get my job done they would replace me.				Specific	Displays loyalty (Theme 6)	Workers can be replaced more efficient methods for legitimate reasons.
13. The organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.				Specific	Understands errors (Theme 5)	
14. It would take only a small decrease in my performance for the organization to want to replace me.				Specific	Displays loyalty (Theme 6)	Complicated wording.
15. The organization feels there is little to be gained by employing me for the rest of my career.				Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	Complicated wording.
16. The organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions.				Specific	Values personal needs (Theme 5)	

Table 4 continued

SPOS Items	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Global/Specific Measure	Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
18. Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.					Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	
19. If I were laid off, the organization would prefer to hire someone new rather than take me back.				Specific	Displays loyalty (Theme 6)	Complicated wording.
24. If I decided to quit, the organization would try to persuade me to stay.				Specific	Values competence (No theme)	
26. The organization feels that hiring me was a definite mistake.				Global		
28. The organization cares more about making a profit than about me.				Global		Organizations exists to make a profit, so it should be valued highly.
29. The organization would understand if I were unable to finish a task on time.				Specific	Understands errors (Theme 5)	

Table 4 continued

SPOS Items	3-Item	9-Item	17-Item	Global/Specific Measure	Content Category (and Theme)	Item Critiques
30. If the organization earned a greater profit, it would consider increasing my salary.				Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	
31. The organization feels that anyone could perform my job as well as I do.				Specific	Values competence (No theme)	
32. The organization is unconcerned about paying me what I deserve.				Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	
33. The organization wishes to give me the best possible job for which I am qualified.				Specific	Values career development (Theme 4)	
34. If my job were eliminated, the organization would prefer to lay me off rather than transfer me to a new job.				Specific	Displays loyalty (Theme 6)	Complicated wording.

Table 4 continued

36. My supervisors are proud that I am a part of this organization.	Specific	Values effort/ contributions (Theme 3)	This item is the only one where the referent is not the organization.
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Note. Items are arranged by their inclusion in the short forms and then sorted by item number. Global measures are those that broadly capture whether the employee is valued by their organization. Specific measures capture this valuing in a more specific way, coded in the adjacent column to the right. The themes come from Study 1.

The 3-item short form was examined first, as this was the version in the most danger of deficiency due to its shortness. Two of this scale's items were so broad that they were categorized as global measures of POS ("The organization really cares about my well-being" and "The organization strongly considers my goals and values"). Its third item was specific, targeting the organization's valuing of work effort/contributions ("The organization values my contribution to its well-being"). Because two of the three items in this short form were global measures of POS, and the third represented an important component of POS, this scale was judged to not be deficient.

Turning to the 9-item version, this short form had the same two global measures as the 3-item version and added another two ("Help is available from the organization when I have a problem" and "The organization shows very little concern for me"). In the scale, there were also five specific measures, each of which belonged to a different content category, including "Values effort/contributions," "Values job success," and "Values voice." This short form was also judged to not have deficiency.

The 17-item short form included another two global measures of POS ("The organization disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me" and "If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me"), and the rest of the eleven items were spread out across seven content categories. The full SPOS had nine global measures of POS and 28 specific measures that spanned nine different content categories. Due to the presence of many global measures, and the span of the content, both of these larger forms were judged to not be content deficient.

Content Relevance

Content relevance was assessed by judgments made by the author and the same third-party researcher in psychology as to whether each item captured the essence of POS's expanded definition. A consensus was reached that all items captured POS. However, an additional assessment of content relevance was made by gathering ratings from participants based on the approach of Schriesheim et al. (1999) and recommended by Colquitt et al. (2019). For each item, it was found that the distribution of relevance ratings was highly left-skewed (i.e., the bulk of the data was in the higher ratings). This made sense because items are specifically designed to be as relevant as possible to the construct definition. Unfortunately, most prior content relevance approaches focused their analyses on *mean ratings* (e.g., Colquitt, et al., 2019; Hinkin & Tracey,

1999). However, item modes are reported here because the mode provides an intuitive measure of how participants generally rated the scale items. The results per item are shown in the Appendix (Table 8).

For the expanded POS definition, 29 item modes had the highest rating of 5.00 (“Very Good”), and the remaining seven item modes were 4.00 (“Good”). There was also a large amount of agreement in these ratings. For all items, the percent of ratings that deemed them “relevant” (i.e., “Adequate,” “Good,” or “Very Good”) was always greater than 95%, except for four items whose percentages ranged from 83-94%. The *htc*, the statistic introduced by Colquitt et al. (2019) and summarizes the relevance of the entire scale, was .87, which is in the 60-79 percentile relative to other scales in industrial-organizational psychology. However, because this statistic is also based on the mean, it is not particularly meaningful here.

Content Distinctiveness

Content distinctiveness was assessed by comparing the relevance ratings of the SPOS against the two rival constructs, organizational commitment and organizational trust, and the classical definition of POS. However, because of the skew in these distributions, typical analyses based on means were not performed. Instead, the mode was again used as a measure of central tendency. It was found that participants rated the SPOS items as also relevant to the rival constructs. For organizational commitment, 16 items had a mode of “Very Good,” for 19 items it was “Good,” for one item it was “Adequate,” and for no items was it “Bad” or “Very Bad.” For organizational trust, the results were virtually the same (19, 16, one, none, and none, respectively). These numbers seemed to be slightly lower than the expanded definition of POS. There are no significance tests for a difference in modes, but non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests between the definitions found that the median ratings for both organizational commitment ($W = 7,920,900, p < .001$) and organizational trust were significantly lower ($W = 7,813,700, p < .001$).

With regard to the classical POS definition, participants also rated the SPOS items as highly relevant. This was not surprising given the strong conceptual overlap between the two definitions. Twenty items had a mode of 5.00 (“Very Good”), and 16 had a mode of “Good.” Although high, these modes also seemed to be lower than for the expanded definition. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test between the two definitions found that the difference in medians was significant in favor of

the expanded definition ($W = 7,433,400$, $p < .001$). This made sense given that the expanded definition is a broader framing of the construct.

Each item was also analyzed for the percentage of participant ratings that deemed it “relevant” to the rival constructs (i.e., either “Adequate,” “Good” or “Very Good”). For organizational commitment, the agreement that each item was relevant was quite high, with an average agreement across items of 90% (range: 72-96%). Organizational trust also had good agreement for each item, with an average of 89% (range: 70-96%). Like the modes, these ratings seemed slightly worse than the expanded POS definition ($M = 97\%$, range: 83-100%). This was tested formally by chi-square tests comparing these proportions, which were significant for both organizational commitment ($\chi^2 = 132.68$, $p < .001$) and organizational trust ($\chi^2 = 161.22$, $p < .001$). A chi-square test for the classical definition was also significant in favor of the expanded definition ($\chi^2 = 71.20$, $p < .001$). These comparisons are shown in Figure 2.

Given that “Adequate” relevance is somewhat of a low bar, especially given the conceptual overlap of broad constructs, it was thought that analyzing the percentage of ratings that were “Good” or “Very Good” might show a greater discrimination between the construct definitions. This did not turn out to be the case. Ratings of all constructs seemed to drop about the same degree. For the expanded POS definition, the average agreement dropped from 97% to 86% (range: 56-97%). For organizational commitment, it dropped from 90% to 76% across items (range: 40-89%), and for organizational trust, the average dropped from 89% to 75% (range was 42-86%). Just like the rival constructs, the average agreement for the classical POS definition dropped from 92% to 78% (range: 49-94%).

Thus, largely, participants rated each item as being relevant to all four construct definitions. This is not particularly surprising given (a) the broad nature of the items (“The organization cares about my opinions”) and (b) the conceptual overlap across the constructs. However, there were some differences in the degree of positive ratings across the definitions. Both the median ratings and proportion of ratings of “relevant” were higher for the expanded POS definition than the rival constructs and the classical definition.

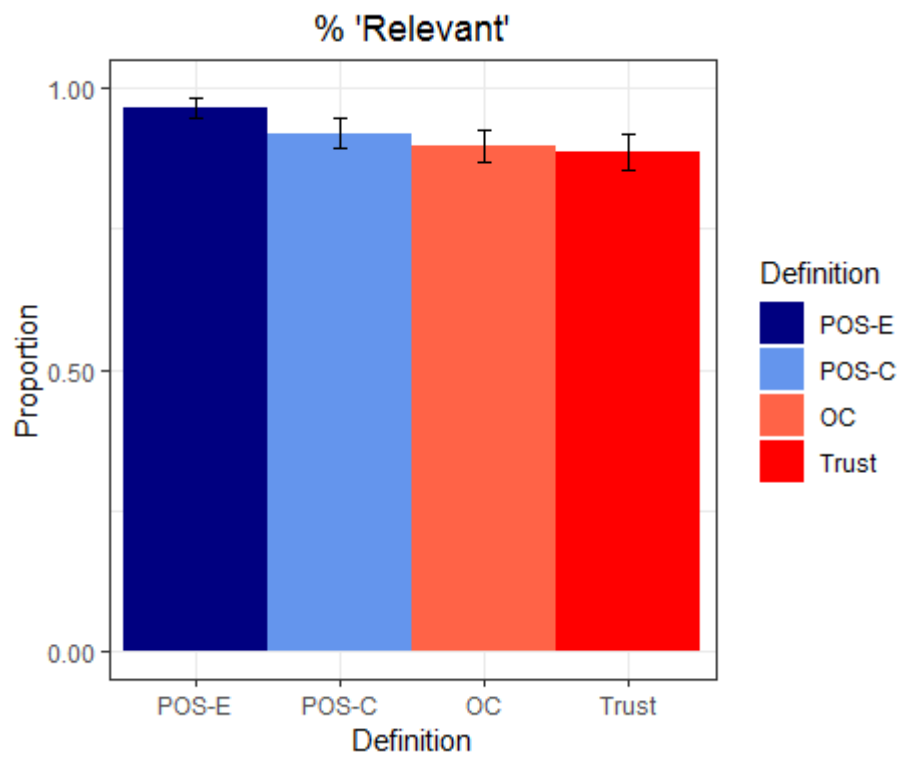


Figure 2. Proportion of item ratings that were “relevant” (i.e., either “Adequate,” “Good,” or “Very Good”). POS-E is the expanded definition of POS, POS-C is the classical definition, OC is organizational commitment, and Trust refers to organizational trust. Bars are standard errors.

Content Balance

Finally, to assess how balanced the content of the SPOS and its short forms were, the number of items representing different categories (categorized in the deficiency section) were counted. These counts and categories are shown in Table 5. In all SPOS forms, there was a good spread of content, and no specific content dominated any version. However, in the full scale, the content category, “Values effort/contributions,” may be slightly overrepresented. This category had eight items, which equaled the number of global measures, and the other content categories usually had around two items. However, because how one’s contributions are valued is a central part of the employee-organization relationship, and more than 75% of the scale items captured different aspects of POS, this does not appear to impair the SPOS’s content validity.

Discussion

Study 2 aimed to provide content validation of the SPOS and several of its major short forms. This was motivated by (a) Study 1, which extended the construct definition of POS and (b) the fact that very little content validation had ever been performed for the SPOS. Within this content validation effort, four specific aspects were evaluated: deficiency, relevance, distinctiveness, and balance. A full summary of the content validation is presented in Table 6. It was found that the content of the SPOS and its short forms was satisfactory. No form was content-deficient. Even the 3-item scale contained two global measures, and these kinds of items help immunize a scale against deficiency. The scale forms with more items also had more global measures as well as a spread of different content categories (e.g., in the full SPOS, the 28 specific measures were spread across eight content categories).

All SPOS items were also content relevant. Consensual judgments from the author and an independent researcher in psychology classified each item as relevant to the expanded POS definition. This was supplemented by participant ratings. Participants rated all SPOS items as highly relevant to its expanded construct definition (all items had a modal rating of either “Very Good” or “Good”), and there was also high agreement (all items were above 95% agreement aside from four, the lowest of which was 83%).

Table 5. Results of Content Balance Analysis

Scale Form	Number of Specific Measures	Content Categories and Counts	Danger of Imbalance
Full SPOS	28	Global measures – 8 items Values effort/contributions – 8 items Displays loyalty – 5 items Values personal needs – 4 items Values work satisfaction – 2 items Values voice – 2 items “Values career advancement – 2 items Values competence – 2 items Understands errors – 2 items Values job success – 1 item	None
17-item	11	Global measures – 6 items Values effort/contributions – 3 items Values work satisfaction – 2 items Values voice – 2 items Values job success – 1 item Values career advancement – 1 item Displays loyalty – 1 item Values personal needs – 1 item	None
9-item	5	Global measures – 4 items Values effort/contributions – 1 item Values work satisfaction – 1 item Values job success – 1 item Values career advancement – 1 item Values voice – 1 item	None
3-item	1	Global measures – 2 items Values effort/contributions – 1 item	None

Note. Content imbalance is caused when certain specific content dominates the scale.

Table 6. Summary of Content Validation of the SPOS and its Short Forms

Scale Form	Content Deficiency	Content Relevance	Content Distinctiveness	Content Balance
Full SPOS	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale contains eight global measures • Scale contains 26 specific measures spanning nine different content categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items were classified by a consensus between the author and a third party • In participant ratings, each item had a modal relevance rating of either 4.00 (“Good”) or 5.00 (“Very Good”), and the percent agreement was usually above 95% and never below 83%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Median relevance ratings and percent agreement of “relevance” were higher for the expanded POS definition than the two rival constructs and the classical definition of POS • The six remaining content categories had between 1-2 items each. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 36 items, the three most common content categories had eight, five, and four items. • The six remaining content categories had between 1-2 items each.
17-Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale contains six global measures • Scale contains eleven specific measures spread across seven content categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 17 items, the most common content category has just three items

Table 6 continued

Scale Form	Content Deficiency	Content Relevance	Content Distinctiveness	Content Balance
9-Item	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale contains four global measures • Scale contains five specific measures all belonging to different content categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the nine items, the most common content category has just one item
3-Item	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.	Satisfactory.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale contains two global measures • Scale contains one specific Measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All items taken from the parent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two of the scale's items are global measures, and only one specific item is in the scale

Evaluating distinctiveness was a little bit less straightforward. The significant skew of the item ratings distributions forced the analyses to depart from typical approaches (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2019; Hinkin & Tracey et al., 1999). Moreover, participants rated the SPOS items as also being relevant to the two rival constructs, organizational commitment and organizational trust. This is reasonable given that they are all very broad constructs with conceptual overlap, and it is probably difficult for participants to make such fine distinctions. However, some evidence of content distinctiveness was found. The median relevance rating was higher for the expanded POS definition than the two rival constructs and the classical POS definition. The proportion of participant agreement that items were “relevant” to the expanded POS definition was also higher than that the other three definitions.

Finally, in examining a new aspect of content validity, content balance, it was found that no SPOS form was dominated by certain content. Rather, all forms were quite balanced; no content category accounted for more than 25% of the items in the scale, and in nearly every case, this percentage was much lower (indicating a good spread of specific content). Because content validation, like validation in general, is always an ongoing process (Clark & Watson, 2019), this study does not offer everlasting “proof” of content validity of the SPOS and its forms. However, based on what was found in this study, users of the SPOS and its short forms can be confident that its validity will not be undermined due to aspects relating to item content.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The Conceptualization of POS

Since its introduction to the scientific literature, POS has been defined as an employee's perception of how much their organization values two things: (1) their personal well-being and (2) work contributions (Eisenberger et al., 2020). However, the academic literature had not yet seen a person-centric study from the employee perspective that investigates issues such as what support means to employees and how it is experienced. Using qualitative research methods, the present dissertation explored POS from this perspective in line with current best-practices recommendations (Podsakoff et al., 2016). It was found that organizational support develops through an incredibly diverse range of organizational behaviors; collecting incidents of support led to the generation of 25 distinct support forms and 27 lack of support forms. These forms were then integrated into six themes, such as "Organization helps employee perform their job effectively," "Organization listens to employee's voice," and "Organization accepts employee as an in-group member." Ultimately, these themes converged into a single higher-order theme that captured the conceptual essence of POS: the *holistic perceptions employees have of whether they are valued or not by their organization*.

This result is best understood in the context of theory related to the nature of the self. Broadly, the self consists of many parts, such as one's abilities, physical body, family, work role, and possessions (Belk, 1988; Baumeister, 2010; W. James, 1890; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). However, it is ultimately holistic and experienced by individuals as an integrated whole (Kuhl, et al., 2015; Rock & Palmer, 1990; Rogers, 1961; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Therefore, employees develop distinct perceptions about how much their organization values different aspects of their selves, such as their ideas, voice, development, work contributions, and personal health. However, because these parts are ultimately embedded within a greater self, employees also develop a holistic perception simply of how much they are valued at work, which is what POS is.

Classically, POS had been defined as the degree to which the employee perceives their organization values two things, their personal well-being and work contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This academic definition very much aligns with the findings in the present study. POS is a perception about the values of one's organization, and one's "work contributions" and

“well-being” are important aspects of the self that must be valued appropriately. However, the present study extends this conceptualization. It suggests that, because employees’ selves are ultimately holistic entities, employees develop *holistic perceptions* of whether they are valued. This perception cannot rightfully be reduced to simpler “components.”

This conclusion is supported by theory on the self, myriad comments in the employee data (e.g., Participant #21: “Being supported means feeling like you matter”), and also that some support forms experienced by employees are difficult to fit within the classical definition. For example, investing in an employee’s professional development is primarily valuing the *competence* of that employee, and including an employee in team-building exercises is valuing the employee simply because they are an in-group member. Neither of these organizational behaviors are directly valuing one’s work contributions or personal well-being. However, when POS is considered more holistically, they can be accounted for.

Interestingly, the fact that POS requires a holistic definition has been suggested by decades of empirical analyses of POS measurement. Although the classical definition consists of two theoretical “components” (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) POS has always been found to form a *unidimensional* scale (L. J. James, 2011). The explanation is simply that these components reduce to the same thing, namely, the employee’s holistic perceptions of whether they are valued by the organization in their relationship with it. It is also important to note that some academic work has eluded to the holistic nature of POS (e.g., the title of Eisenberger et al. [2020] is, “Perceived Organizational Support: Why Caring about Employees Counts”), even though the academic definition has always been framed in terms of components of the self.

The Need for Social Validation

The reason POS is the general perceptions of being valued can be linked back to the fundamental psychological needs of human beings. Unlike any other psychological need, the need for social relationships exists before birth. As the child grows into an adult, other psychological needs develop (e.g., competence; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), but the need for validation from others remains similarly important across the lifespan (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1982; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1968). This need is satisfied mostly through intimate relationships (e.g., family and friends), but it does not simply “end” there; it extends to broader social groups and the general humanity that the individual is a part of (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In modern

society, the organization is a very salient social entity and can therefore provide this validation through various modes of treatment. When support *is* provided, this fundamental psychological need is fulfilled, and they “perceive support.” The diversity of organizational support forms can be reconciled if they are all viewed as forms of fundamental validation, i.e., recognition of the value of the individual employee and providing treatment to them accordingly (i.e., providing “support”).

Although organizational support theory has noted the importance of basic social needs since its beginning (Eisenberger et al., 1986), it has invoked a variety of terms (e.g., “approval, esteem, affiliation, and emotional support;” Kurtessis et al., 2017, p. 1856) that can be better conceived under the singular term, social validation. POS has also been framed as a social exchange construct (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Although this is true, the essence of POS regards social validation, and social exchange processes that result are likely a function of the social validation having already taken place. To put it simply, when an employee receives validation, they seek to repay it, which takes place usually through the only ways they can: increasing performance, loyalty, and citizenship behaviors. In other words, social exchange is an *effect* of POS rather than the essential nature of the construct itself.

Content Validation of the SPOS

Based on this expanded conceptualization of POS, Study 2 conducted a content validation of the SPOS and three of its short forms (the 17-, 9-, and 3-item versions). No systematic content validation had been done for this scale or its short forms, which is not surprising given that content validation is somewhat neglected in industrial-organizational psychology research (Colquitt et al., 2019). Four different aspects of content validity were assessed (i.e., deficiency, relevance, distinctiveness, and balance), and each of these was found to be satisfactory in all of the SPOS’s forms (see Table 6). First, no form was deficient because each had a sufficient number of global measures (items that are so broad they capture the entire construct’s essence), and their specific measures spanned multiple content categories. Second, all items of the SPOS were classified as relevant to the expanded POS definition by the author and an independent researcher in psychology. Participant ratings of item relevance also strongly indicated content relevance, with the modal ratings being either “Good” or “Very Good” for all items. Interrater agreement of relevance was also very high (almost always over 95%).

Third, the content of the SPOS's items were also rated by participants as relevant to two rival constructs (organizational commitment and organizational trust) and the classical definition of POS, as the modal rating of each item was at least "Adequate" for these constructs. However, given the conceptual overlap between these constructs, and the abstractness of items, this was not unexpected. Ultimately, content distinctiveness was evidenced because (a) the median rating for POS's expanded definition was higher than the medians of all three other construct definitions and (b) the interrater agreement of relevance was also higher for the expanded POS definitions. Finally, with regard to content balance, the SPOS forms did not have any specific content category that dominated the scales. Rather, specific content in the items was spread quite well across different categories (see Table 5).

This conclusion about the SPOS's content validity does not stand alone. It finds company with a great deal of evidence in favor of the SPOS's good psychometric properties. Myriad dimensionality analyses have virtually all shown that the SPOS is unidimensional (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), the scale's reliability is consistently high (e.g., $\alpha = .95$; Shore & Tetrick, 1991), and discriminant validation evidence has been found with many different constructs (e.g., affective commitment, perceived supervisory support; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Short Form Proliferation and Lack of Validation

However, there are still psychometric problems undermining POS scholarship, one of which is *short form proliferation*. To date, there are at least 8 shorter versions of the SPOS scale that have been used, including a 17-item version (Eisenberger et al., 1986), a 10-item version (Eisenberger et al., 2020), a 9-item version (Eisenberger et al., 1990), 8-item version (Eisenberger et al., 1997), a 7-item version (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005), a 6-item version (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008), and two different 3-item versions (M. R. Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Eisenberger et al., 2002). At 36 items, the SPOS is a long scale, and researchers understandably would like to use a shorter version, but this large amount of short-form proliferation is unnecessary.

A second major problem is a lack of short-form validation prior to use. POS research has continued to use its many short forms without proper validation. The excellent psychometric qualities of the full SPOS do not necessarily extend to all these short forms. Smith et al. (2000) describe that this is one of the most common faulty assumptions of short form use. In more recent years, a slight amount of systematic validity evidence for these short forms has accumulated, like

Worley et al. (2009), who examined the SPOS and three of its short forms in an article aptly titled, “The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support: Which Measure Should We Use?” However, the sheer multitude of short forms makes POS validation research highly inefficient. Either a researcher has to validate most (or all) of its short forms, or they have to select several while the others remain unvalidated.

What is needed is a single *standardized* short measure of POS. Given its importance as a construct, industrial-organizational researchers need a well-validated short measure of POS that has both high validity and is efficient to implement. This could be a new measure altogether, one derived from the SPOS, or a hybrid that borrows the insights gained about POS’s essence from the present dissertation (e.g., the support forms and themes of Study 1). An initial target length for this scale might be 5-8 items, as many highly-valid scales can be established at this length (e.g., the Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and this length is very desirable given the increasingly large-scale, complex, and longitudinal nature of modern research (Rammstedt & Beierlein, 2014).

Reflections on Content Validation Methods

In trying to implement a thorough content validation on an already-developed scale, it was immediately clear that there is little guidance on the process. This is especially so with regard to content deficiency. This is a task that requires strong substantive understanding and can never be delegated to quantitative statistics. First, a researcher must have a construct definition that clearly specifies its essence. Once this is obtained, the scale items must be categorized into their different content categories. These categories must then be checked to see whether the construct’s essence is fully represented. Another layer of complexity to this is the distinction between global and specific measures. A global measure is an item that is so broad that it captures the entire essence of the construct (e.g., for positive affect: “My mood is usually good”). These items guard against content deficiency because they are so theoretically broad. On the other hand, specific measures measure the construct by capturing a certain manifestation of it (e.g., for positive affect: “I often feel relaxed”). Categorizing content can only apply to specific measures.

With regard to content relevance, it might appear that more progress has been made because of the empirical methods that have been developed, but there are still unresolved issues. Colquitt et al. (2019) strongly encourages empirical approaches where subjects make relevance

ratings for scale items. However, is this necessary? Shouldn't a scholar making a scale be able to tell if an item is simply relevant to their construct or not? These recommendations seem to come from an under-valuing of subjective expert judgment in psychology. Indeed, in their article on content relevance, Hinkin and Tracey (1999) even wrote, "The elimination of the use of subjective judgment for item retention is perhaps the most important contribution of this analysis" (p. 185). More sensibly, participant ratings of relevance are not as important as the expert judgment of scholars but can potentially be used as a supplemental validity check, which was the approach taken in the present dissertation.

Another major issue with content relevance is how ratings data have been analyzed. To date, analyses have always been based on means (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2019; Hinkin & Tracey, 1999), but the mean may not be the best measure of central tendency because these distributions will be so highly skewed. Items are *designed* to be as relevant as possible to the target construct, and therefore most ratings will be in the top response options. If relevance ratings from participants are deemed to be important data, then the impact of this skew needs to be investigated. The two statistics recently introduced by Colquitt et al. (2019), the *htc* and *htd*, are simple transformations of the average, and so are susceptible to this problem, too. Their large dataset of over 12,000 participants might also require re-analysis.

Similar issues exist for ratings of content distinctiveness. If the rival constructs are conceptually similar to the target (which they should be), then they, too, will suffer from skewed distributions, and analyses based on means will be influenced. One important caveat is that skewed distributions only come when ratings are made on a Likert scale (e.g., Hinkin & Tracey, 1999; Schriesheim et al., 1993). A simple alternative is to use the approach by Anderson and Gerbing (1991), which uses a comparison-based method where participants rate which construct definition is *most* relevant. A Likert-based approach was taken in the present dissertation because, based on current recommendations (Colquitt et al., 2019), it was thought this would be more informative, and the methodological guidance available did not mention this problem. However, a comparison approach is likely superior and should possibly be the method of choice in the future. There is also a final major issue with content distinctiveness: that abstract constructs can *legitimately* overlap (Newman et al., 2016). This makes interpreting distinctiveness ratings much harder. For example, an item that is more relevant to a rival construct is not necessarily bad for the target construct if they genuinely overlap. However, if the *entire set* of items are more relevant to a rival, this may

signal a problem. Thus, researchers should note the importance of distinctiveness analyses at the item- versus scale-levels.

Finally, the current dissertation examined a rarely-mentioned aspect of content validity, content balance. A scale is balanced when it is not dominated by specific content. This aspect has long been overlooked, and one prime example of an imbalanced scale is the positive portion of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson et al., 1988). This scale has been highly popular (cited over 35,000 times) but contains mostly high-arousal positive states, something pointed out by Diener et al. (2010) and used as justification for the development of their new affect scales. Content balance is easy to assess; one simply categorizes the item content and then counts each category to see what proportion of the scale they account for.

All in all, there is work to be done in both the theory and method of content validation for psychological scales. In summary, some future areas of development in content validation are: (a) that comprehensive content validation potentially consists of four parts (deficiency, relevance, distinctiveness, balance), (b) that item relevance can foremost be a scholarly judgment, (c) that the impact of skew needs examination in the analysis of relevance ratings, (c) the importance of using a direct comparison approach for distinctiveness (e.g., Anderson and Gerbing, 1991), and (d) the need to assess content balance.

Practical Implications

Several practical implications can be taken from the present research. The first is for employers to know just how important perceptions of organizational support are. In the open-response question asking about this, every participant responded that organizational support was important and roughly 40% of spontaneously added a modifier emphasizing its importance (e.g., “extremely” or “very”). Thus, support looms large in the minds of employees. An analogy can be made to other social relationships. Why would one remain in a relationship with a friend or spouse who was continually unsupportive? The same principles apply to relationships with organizations and help explain the connection between lack of support and turnover: exiting a relationship is usually better than being devalued within it.

In the same way, it is important for supervisors and other high-ranking members to know just how strongly they contribute to perceptions of support. Although the great role of superiors in POS is already known (Eisenberger et al., 2002), this study was able to provide a different kind of

evidence for it. In the incidents of support experiences, over 50% of respondents mentioned superiors, and in the negative incidents, superiors were mentioned in about 45% of cases. These results point to the key importance of the behavior of superiors (especially the supervisor-employee relationship) in support perceptions.

Another piece of information that organizations can take away from this dissertation is what support looks like. How can organizations practically increase these perceptions? A partial answer can be found in Tables 1 and 2, which list the forms of support and support failures, respectively, reported in the dataset. Because employees were able to report just one incident each of support and support failure, they presumably reported something *important* that happened to them. An organization looking to improve perceptions of support can consult these tables for ideas.

Finally, a more general issue of POS is the ever-important distinction between employee *perceptions* and reality. The current dissertation only examined employee perceptions, not the *validity* of these perceptions. When an employee reports a lack of support, this may indeed be the case, or it may not. Employees who are justly punished for theft, absenteeism, harassment, or genuinely poor performance may perceive it as “unfair” and a gross violation of organizational support. Similarly, sometimes employees should not be promoted, trusted, given bonuses or pay increases, or given other forms of positive treatment. Therefore, organizations should not feel compelled to always act in ways that are perceived as support, because these perceptions can also be based on employee *misperception*. A possible strategy to reduce such misperceptions is to (a) make sure organizational behaviors are just and (b) to provide clear and direct communication to employees why certain positive treatment was not given (e.g., the resources were simply not available, the reasons why a different employee was promoted).

Limitations

Despite their important contributions, both studies in the present dissertation had limitations. Study 1 collected qualitative data from employees using online surveys with open-ended questions. Compared to other qualitative data collection methods, this is rather superficial. In industrial-organizational psychology, qualitative data collection is often done by interviewing subjects (e.g., Burris, Rockmann, & Kimmons, 2017), which allows the researcher and participant to interact and delve more deeply into the phenomenon. Even though participants were consulted about how their responses were interpreted, Study 1 is limited in this way. Ultimately, research

methods are not inherently good or bad, but only relative to a particular purpose. Study 1 investigated an important issue but one that was fairly simple, theoretically. It was not concerned with a psychological process or interrelations among variables but to clarify the essence of a single construct. Therefore, a simpler qualitative approach was appropriate. It should also be kept in mind that, unlike quantitative research, *too much data* is a real methodological concern in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Future research on POS can invoke more complex qualitative data collection methods, like interviews, that can allow deeper interactions with participants.

The issue of data quality is also worth discussing. Although it has been done with success before (e.g., Frankowski et al., 2016; Klein, et al., 2020), asking participants to write responses to survey questions presents a challenge to data quality. The method section of Study 1 describes the six strategies that were used to ensure that quality was sufficient, which included replacing any participants who were not willing to expend the necessary effort (data from these participants are available at <https://osf.io/x3mtc/>). However, in spite of this, the final dataset did contain a full spectrum of level of detail provided in the answers. Some responses were short, others long, and it was in their aggregation that the picture of POS manifested.

The second major limitation of the present dissertation was its use of online samples. Study 1 used a survey company, Qualtrics, and Study 2 used MTurk. Online survey panels, especially MTurk, have become astonishingly prevalent in the social sciences in recent years (Bohannon, 2016). However, these panels are known to have slightly different characteristics, such as being more ethnically diverse (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011). All samples have limitations, whether it be undergraduates (Landers & Behrend, 2015) or the “WEIRD” samples that have typically dominated psychology (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). However, the use of these types of online samples carries limitations and encourages the need for replications.

Conclusion

The present study investigated POS from the employee’s perspective and found that a wide variety of organizational behaviors can be perceived as “support.” Ultimately, employees experience POS as a holistic perception of how much their organization values them. This perception includes personal well-being and work contributions but also covers types of support that are harder to place within the classical definition of POS (e.g., trusting employee decision-making, encouraging professional development, providing perks). This conception aligns with

psychological theory about the need to be socially valued and the self being both holistic and made up of “components.” The content validity of the SPOS and its short forms were also evaluated and found to be satisfactory. However, there remains a strong need for a single standardized short measure of POS and for the procedures of content validation to be better developed.

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APPENDIX

Study 1

Open-Response Survey Questions

- Q1. Describe a time when you worked for an organization and **felt supported**. **What made you feel this way?** Please think for at least 1-2 minutes before answering. When ready, please write **at least several complete sentences** and include as much detail as possible. Some things to include might be what your job was, how your organization impacted you, what your experiences were, how you felt, etc.
- Q2. Describe a time when you worked for an organization and **did NOT feel supported**. **What made you feel this way?** Please think for at least 1-2 minutes before answering. When ready, please write **at least several complete sentences** and include as much detail as possible.
- Q3. How would **you define** being “supported” by your organization? In other words, **what does that mean to you?** Please write **at least 2-4 complete sentences**.
- Q4. Is it **important** for an organization to support its employees? **Why or why not?** Please write **at least 2-4 complete sentences**.
- Q5. Is there anything else that **you think is important that we should know** about being supported by one's organization?

Trustworthiness Techniques

Peer feedback. To gather critical feedback and alternative interpretations, the data and codings from ten different participants were sent to two independent academic peers, both of whom had a PhD in psychology and one having substantial expertise in qualitative research. A description of the themes and a draft of the results write-up were also sent. Their commentary is provided below in Table 7 with any resulting analytic changes made. This table was sent to both peers and received approval from them before inclusion.

Table 7. Peer Feedback on Data Analysis and Interpretation

Peer #1	
Comments on Codings of Participants #1-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes are “good.” • When participants mention good communication within their organization,, this should be the support form, “Organization communicates with employee,” rather than the support form, “Organization provides resources to do job.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken, and data was recoded. • Possibly create a support form about “emotional support” and “being respected” to capture more general participant comments (e.g., Participant #1: “...made you feel like they cared about you”). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: New support forms were not created because these were meant to be concrete organizational behaviors, and this language by participants describes the higher-order socioemotional content of support. These participant comments are represented in the higher-order theme. • Possibly create a lack of support form called “failure to protect work time” for cases where too much additional work is demanded (e.g., overtime). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new lack of support form was not created because these cases can fit within the form, “Assigns unreasonable work demands.” • Code “coworker lack of support” as a form of lack of support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Coworker support is not the “organization” per se. As articulated by organizational support theory, it is the members of the organization with institutional power who represent its behaviors. • Participant #8: Include “personal development” in the coded effects of support (“The support in my organization is very important, because that guarantees a better job and professional development and as a person in the workplace and creates an atmosphere of coexistence and innovation”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken. • Participant #9: Remove “Organization provides feedback and supervision” as a form of support in their incident because there was no direct quote supporting this (“My previous supervisor was always there and actually mentored my to be able to replace him when he retired, which is what I did.”). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: The coding was not changed because, “My previous supervisor was always there,” to the author, suggests consistent supervision (as well as on-the-job help).

Table 7 continued

Comments on Lower-Order Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include more information on how themes were derived. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken. • In theme 1, “The organization helps the employee perform their job,” resources can be divided by material vs. cognitive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Resources remained divided into the following three categories: “tangible” (e.g., work tools and materials), “intangible” (e.g., information), and “human” (e.g., staffing). • Include participant ID numbers with quotes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken. • Comments on writing and presentation.
Comments on Higher-Order These	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include more information on how theme was derived. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken. • Suggested renaming the theme to be shorter. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken. • Comments on writing and presentation.
Peer #2	
Comments on Codings of Participants #11-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two general themes noticed about the presence of organizational support: (1) that is often about going “above and beyond” the formal obligations of the employee-organization relationship (e.g., allowances for personal issues) and (2) that it is about being valued <i>beyond</i> their work contributions and abilities (i.e., valued inherently). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: The theme of being valued inherently is the substance of the higher-order theme. The theme about going “above and beyond” is a description of these behaviors and is <i>caused</i> by the valuing of the employee as an individual. • Possibly create a support form about “recognizing the competence of employees.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: The support forms were intended to be more concrete behaviors, and recognizing competence is a higher-order phenomenon that is actually present in many of the current forms (e.g., “Organization assigns important tasks to employee,” “Organization tries to retain employee”). Recognizing

Table 7 continued

	<p>competence had actually been a lower-order theme but was taken out due to its overlap with other themes (e.g., “The organization invests in employee growth and development” is largely a sign their competence is recognized). The idea of recognizing competence in organizational support is important and perhaps more could be done to integrate it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many support failures are about justice violations or violations of the expectations that employees have (e.g., they will be trained but organizational fails to do it). The absence of organizational support occurs when respondents perceive the organization not only fails to value the employee by going above and beyond norms and policies, but fails to even meet the norms and policies that would aid the employee in successfully performing their work duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: This is surely a significant part of lack of support. The current dissertation’s focus, however, is on the presence of organizational support and its meaning to employees. This is an important issue for future research (i.e., how lack of support relates to organizational justice and psychological contract breach). • Participant #12: Their response to Question 4 (whether organizational support is important) also mentions being valued outside of the work that they do, not just for the work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Advice taken and data recoded. • Participant #14: Their response to Question 2 (negative incidents) might also include “Failure to provide proper resources.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: The response (“[I] taught school in milford ohio and had no administration help on discipline from the administration”) seems more to be “Failure to provide on-the-job help”
Comments on Lower-Order Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some slight rewording suggestions on the theme names.
Comments on Higher-Order Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theme could potentially be broken down further into being valued (a) as a worker and (b) as a person. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: This was actually how the analysis had been structured at one point. However, after more contemplation, this dichotomy was removed because there are support forms that seem to combine these together, such

Table 7 continued

<p>as providing mentoring or expressing gratitude and praise. Put simply, organizational support can be both personal and work-related simultaneously, which suggests that POS should be kept holistic, at least until further theory is developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many instances of POS are about the organization communicating to make the employee <i>feel</i> a certain way, like feeling valued and feel like the organization <i>wants</i> to help the employee. The organization's motivations for doing things, inferred or explicit, seems important. • Response: Yes, this was absolutely found to be the case. In the introduction, one pivotal theoretical question about POS's definition is whether it should be defined as values or behaviors. "Motivations" are all about values, and it became clear that, even though organizational behaviors are certainly salient, POS is about the deeper phenomenon of values. 	
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Member-checking. Member-checking is the trustworthiness strategy where participants are asked to check the accuracy and fairness of researcher interpretations of their responses. In Study 1, 15 participants who had voluntarily provided their emails were contacted. These were participants who had most recently completed the study. The email that reminded them of the study itself, thanked them for their participation, provided a description of member-checking, and asked if they would be willing to provide their input. The email was accompanied by a 2-page Word document that included (a) each question, (b) their responses, (c) a summary of how their responses were coded, and (d) questions asking if each was fair and accurate. An example of the Word document is shown below (for Participant #72). From these emails, four participants replied with direct feedback. The relevant excerpts from their emails are provided below.

- Participant #72: "I reviewed the attached document and find your interpretations very fair. I was not able to open it in an editable format on the device I have access to at the moment. So I did not write any responses to your questions within the document, but I do understand and agree with the way you coded my responses."
- Participant #87: "I read the document you sent and I do not have any suggested changes. The way you coded the responses fit very well with what my intentions were in answering. Thanks for the opportunity."

- Participant #94: “Thanks for reaching out. After reviewing my responses and your comments, I believe you hit the nail on the head with all of them! I don’t have anything else to add.”
- Participant #95: “I did read through my responses and your remarks. I believe all is well. If I am really treated fairly and appreciated for my work and effort I usually find reward in my day to day activities, and I will look for ways to do more, and enjoy my ‘work.’”

Q1. Describe a time when you worked for an organization and felt supported. What made you feel this way?

"When I worked in the restaurant industry, I had gone from working for a corporate chain to a single concept with one owner. The manager came to me with a customer issue, and I went on the defensive to explain myself. He immediately stopped me to tell me he was asking for the information to make a decision on whether the customer would ever be welcome back. That stands out as a time I felt extremely supported. This same organization was excellent about planning retreats to celebrate employees and give them time to connect."

This question was coded in two different ways.

1. It was first coded for the *source* of support (e.g., organization, supervisor, coworker). Here, I coded your response as "supervisor" and "organization."
2. Then, I coded the answers in terms of the different *forms of support* that the organization showed (what the organization did). Your experience with the manager and customer was coded as, "Organization defends employee when necessary." Your second comment about the organization planning retreats, I coded as, "Organization offers perks" and "Organization promotes team-building."

How do these descriptions seem to you?

Q2. Describe a time when you worked for an organization and did NOT feel supported. What made you feel this way?

"I do not feel supported at my current job at all. I am a public school teacher. A couple of years ago I had a violent student along with another student whose family had sued several school systems over allergy issues that there was no medical backing to support. I was spending so many hours documenting on both students that I was regularly working twelve hour days, I also often had to make sub plans to miss class time to go meet with lawyers. I was really struggling and went to my principal multiple times to express my frustrations and ask for help. Instead of support, I was made to feel inadequate and comments were made that made me feel like she thought I was inept for not being able to handle it, even though I am a veteran teacher. I pointed out that in all my years I had never been and asked for help like this and that I really needed it. It came to the point where told my principal that the school may not be the right place for me and I was told that it very well may not be. This all came from a second-year principal. Without speaking to me, she then moved the violent student who subsequently held scissors to another students throat. He has since been in and out of facilities, had multiple issues with police, and currently has a shortened school day with a one-on-one teacher. To this day, no apology has ever been given to me. I am

still at the same school, mainly because of being able to see retiring in a few years, but many employees there continue to be treated this way."

1. Again, answers to this question were coded for their *source* of unsupport first. In your case, the source was your supervisor again.
2. The answers were also coded by the *forms* of unsupport (what the organization did). I coded your interaction with your principle as the organization, "Failing to listen to employee complaints" because you were experiencing a problem that was ignored. I also coded it as "Supervisor mistreatment" because this person belittled you. Finally, I counted it as "Failing to provide on-the-job help" because you were also asking for help that was not given.

How do these descriptions strike you?

Q3. How would you define being supported by your organization? In other words, what does that mean to you?

"It would mean for me that someone comes and regularly checks on you and shows concern for your well-being,, and they take the time to do this in person. It would mean that if any parent, student, or fellow employee came to them about an issue involving you, that you are given the opportunity to be involved in a conversation about it before judgments are made. It would mean that you can visibly see that the people higher than you in the organization are pulling their weight also and ensuring that everyone is playing as equally as possible on the team."

I coded this question in terms of (1) broad descriptions of support, (2) types of support, and (3) effects of support.

1. You broadly described support as the organization valuing an employee's well-being ("shows concern for your well-being").
2. You also gave types of support. You seemed to say that it involves supervision ("someone comes and regularly checks on you "), being trusted and communicated with ("you are given the opportunity to be involved in the conversation before judgments are made"), and supervisor support ("the people higher than you in the organization are pulling their weight...").
3. You did not write about any effects of support.

What do you think about these interpretations?

Q4. Is it important for an organization to support its employees? Why or why not?

"If an organization wants to continue to grow, it is vitally important. Supported employees are happier and more productive. They are more willing to go above and beyond. I currently work in an environment where the supported employees are simply the partying buddies of the administration, and the apathy among everyone else is palpable."

- Here, I was largely interested in counting whether people said yes or no. The rest of your answer describes the effects of support (e.g., organizational growth,

employees are happier and more productive and willing to go above and beyond).

Q5. Is there anything else that you think is important that we should know about being supported by one's organization?

"I think it is an important concept you are looking at, and I hope you find some interesting results that are widely shared, especially if they could make their way to my current boss. I think when employees are supported, they feel part of a team, rather than having simply a boss. I think some of the biggest issues we have with that in my current situation is that they organization wants to avoid conflict at all cost. If you're going to grow and support your best employees, sometimes you have to be tough and move other people out of the way who may be inhibiting that growth. Way too many people dont have what it takes to actually do that."

I also coded this question in terms of (1) broader description of support, (2) specific types of support, and (3) effects of support.

1. You broadly described support as employees being accepted and valued as group members ("When employees are supported, they feel part of a team.").
2. You also wrote about a type of support, that it is making necessary difficult decisions in terms of organizational structuring ("you have to be tough and move other people out of the way who may be inhibiting that growth").
3. Finally, you did not write about any effects of support here.

Negative case analysis. One informant, when asked to provide an incident of organizational support wrote, "I have never felt supported by a company and have no need to. I work they pay me. End of transaction. I'm not even sure I know what this idiotic question actually means." Another respondent wrote something similar, "oh my god, organizations don't support their people, they are just workers to them." Both of these participants ended up being excluded because their subsequent responses were antagonist and did not represent serious attempts to answer the questions. However, these early responses revealed something worth discussing

Although a number of other participants wrote that they had never been supported (or unsupported), these two participants went so far as to deny the *very existence* of organizational support. To them, even asking about the construct was absurd. This reveals a distinct subpopulation of workers for whom organizational support is just not relevant. In both cases, the participants appear to be entirely focused on the *transactional* nature of the employee-organization relationship ("I work they pay me. End of transaction.") and care next-to-nothing about its interpersonal sides.

However, this should not be taken to mean that, for them, organizational support simply does not exist (and organizational support theory is invalidated). Rather, it is that for these

individuals, organizational support is *unimportant*. This is a very important distinction because it means that all employees *do* develop support perceptions, but that they are not important to all.

This can be seen if one imagines a scenario where one of these employees is compensated unfairly by their organization (e.g., ignoring overtime hours), and the transactional nature of the relationship is breached. If this were to happen, the individual would feel a strong sense of violation and perceive a strong lack of support. Similarly, if either of these individuals developed a severe sickness or family issues that were not accommodated, they would, in all likelihood, dislike this lack of support. It is also reasonable to assume that they would appreciate (on some level), being properly trained, having enough resources to do their jobs, being listened to, and having their mistakes understood. In other words, these individuals still experience organizational support and its lacks. However, in their minds, it is just not salient and therefore seems like an absurd thing to bring up to study. Therefore, these individuals are operating with a more narrow conception of the employee-organization relationship that is purely transactional. However, this conception is belied by their probable reactions to hypothetical events that would validate or invalidate them.

Audit trail. An audit trail is a researcher's written account of all procedures and decisions made during the course of the study, which is necessary because qualitative designs are often adapted at various times to meet the needs of the project. The design of Study 1 was fairly simple and did not require much changing. As opposed to other qualitative approaches, the mode of data collection was survey-based. Here is a written time-line of Study 1's development and processes (all dates are in the year 2020).

- 1/24-2/7: Qualitative survey was created and refined with colleagues.
- 2/7-2/14: Survey was pilot-tested with family and friends and instructions were revised based on the feedback.
- 2/16: Survey was sent to pilot subjects for approval.
- 2/26: A soft launch was conducted (initial 10 subjects) with Qualtrics. The median time to completion was 11 minutes. Any future responses less than half of this time were eliminated. Also, "English-speaking" was included as a sampling parameter, as this had been omitted.
- 3/2: Data collection resumed, and data from 40 more participants were collected. Demographic statistics were computed to ensure that the sampling had enough breadth.
- 3/6-3/12: Data collection resumed to collect data from 70 participants.
- 3/13-3/24: Given that some participants in each round had unusable data, the remaining data was collected in multiple rounds during this time.

Study 2 Content Validation

Table 8. Content Relevance Ratings of Each SPOS Item

SPOS Item	Expanded Definition		Classical Definition		Organizational Commitment		Organizational Trust	
	Mode	% Positive Ratings	Mode	% Positive Ratings	Mode	% Positive Ratings	Mode	% Positive Ratings
1.	5	99	5	92	5	96	4	91
2.	5	99	5	91	5	92	5	91
3.	5	99	5	97	5	95	5	90
4.	5	99	5	93	5	95	5	89
5.	4	96	4	93	4	76	5	91
6.	5	97	5	93	4	94	4	91
7.	5	97	5	95	5	95	5	91
8.	5	95	5	95	5	87	4	96
9.	5	100	5	98	4	88	5	93
10.	5	98	5	98	5	95	5	95
11.	5	96	4	94	4	86	4	91
12.	5	97	5	97	5	95	5	93
13.	4	96	4	87	4	82	4	95
14.	5	97	4	96	4	93	5	91
15.	5	96	5	91	4	93	5	90
16.	4	96	4	91	4	87	4	85
17.	5	98	5	95	5	94	5	92
18.	4	96	4	94	4	83	4	95
19.	5	96	5	90	4	93	5	92
20.	5	98	4	81	4	85	4	86
21.	5	96	5	95	4	89	4	91
22.	5	98	5	89	5	91	5	92
23.	5	100	5	94	5	94	5	91
24.	5	99	4	83	4	83	4	70
25.	5	100	4	93	5	95	4	88
26.	5	94	5	80	5	89	4	81
27.	5	99	5	94	5	95	4	85
28.	5	97	5	95	5	91	5	91
29.	4	91	4	78	3	72	4	92
30.	4	89	4	68	4	78	4	79

Table 8 continued

31.	5	98	4	94	4	91	4	88
32.	5	97	5	96	4	91	4	90
33.	5	95	4	90	4	90	4	91
34.	5	95	4	94	5	94	5	91
35.	4	83	4	77	4	83	3	71
36.	5	97	4	89	5	94	4	80

Note. Item numbers are from Eisenberger et al. (1986). The classical POS definition is how much the employee perceives the organization values their well-being and work contribution. The expanded POS definition is how much the employee perceives they are valued by their organization. A “positive rating” is one that was at least a 3 on the 5-point Likert scale (either “Adequate,” “Good,” or “Very Good”).