

## Perceived Organizational Support, Discretionary Treatment, and Job Satisfaction

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A diverse sample of 295 employees drawn from a variety of organizations was surveyed to investigate (a) whether the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and perceived organizational support (POS) depends on employee perceptions concerning the organization's freedom of action and (b) whether POS and overall job satisfaction are distinct constructs. The favorableness of high-discretion job conditions was found to be much more closely associated with POS than was the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions. No such relationship was found between job conditions and satisfaction. To decide how much the organization values their contributions and well-being, employees distinguish job conditions whose favorableness the organization readily controls versus job conditions whose favorableness is constrained by limits on the organization's discretion.

Organizational theorists and researchers have frequently alluded to employment as the trade of effort and loyalty for such impersonal benefits as pay and fringe benefits and such socioemotional benefits as esteem and approval (e.g., Angle & Perry, 1983; Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; Levinson, 1965; March & Simon, 1958; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Social exchange theory, developed to explain the initiation, strengthening, and continued maintenance of interpersonal relationships, provides a possible conceptual basis for understanding relationships between individuals and their work organization. Central to social exchange theory is the norm of reciprocity, which obligates people to respond positively to favorable treatment received from others (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960).

Employees' view of employment as a reciprocal-exchange relationship may be encouraged by the anthropomorphic attribution of benevolent or malevolent intent to the organization (Levinson, 1965). Such personification of the employer, suggested Levinson, is abetted by its legal, moral, and financial responsibility for the actions of its agents; by organizational policies, norms, and culture that provide continuity and prescribe role behaviors; and by the power that the organization exerts over individual employees. Thus, employees would view many actions

by agents of the organization as representing the organization itself.

The norm of reciprocity requires employees to respond positively to favorable treatment from one's employer. Consistent with this view, Rousseau (1989, 1990) found that many employees believed that they and their work organization had reciprocal obligations that exceeded formal responsibilities by both parties. Rousseau characterized this psychological contract as an implicit understanding by employees that they and their employer will consider each other's needs and desires when taking actions that affect the other. Continued reciprocation of resources beyond those required by formal agreements would strengthen the psychological contract; in contrast, the employer's failure to fulfill the terms of the psychological contract would reduce employees' inclination to work beyond their explicit job responsibilities (Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Rousseau & Parks, 1993).

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) suggested that employees form a general perception concerning the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. High perceived organizational support (POS) would (a) meet needs for approval, esteem, and social identity and (b) produce the expectation that superior conventional performance and extrarole behavior, carried out for the organization, will be recognized and rewarded. On the basis of the norm of reciprocity, POS would strengthen affective commitment to the organization and increase efforts made on its behalf (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). By comparison, repeated indications that the organization places little value on one's contributions and

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well-being would reduce POS and lessen the employee's perceived obligations to the employer. Here, employees would decrease their affective organizational commitment and lessen their performance of standard job activities and extrarole behaviors. Employees would further decrease organizational involvement by being absent more often and would be more likely to search for employment elsewhere or to take early retirement.

Consistent with the view that employees form a general belief regarding the organization's commitment to them, employees showed a consistent pattern of agreement with a variety of statements concerning whether the organization appreciated their contributions and would treat them favorably or unfavorably in differing circumstances (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicate that POS can be empirically distinguished from affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991), effort-reward expectancies (Eisenberger et al., 1990), continuance commitment (Shore & Tetrick, 1991), and leader-member exchange (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). POS was positively related to a variety of work-related outcomes, including affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Settoon et al., 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991), effort-reward expectancies (Eisenberger et al., 1990), evaluative and objective measures of in-role job performance (Eisenberger et al., 1990, 1986), help given coworkers (Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997; Witt, 1991), constructive suggestions for improving the operations of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1990), and influence tactics designed by employees to make supervisors aware of their dedication and accomplishments (Shore & Wayne, 1993). POS was negatively related to absenteeism (Eisenberger et al., 1990, 1986) and turnover intention (Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Wayne et al., 1997). In addition, POS moderated nurses' negative affect resulting from contacts with AIDS patients (George, Reed, Ballard, Colin, & Fielding, 1993).

Less evidence has been gathered concerning antecedents of POS. Guzzo et al. (1994) found among managers holding overseas assignments that the sufficiency of financial inducements, family-oriented actions, and other favorable job conditions was positively related to POS. Also positively associated with POS were developmental training experiences, promotions, and organizational tenure (Wayne et al., 1997) and procedural justice in performance appraisal decisions (Fasolo, 1995). In contrast with these studies, the present research was not concerned with identifying specific job conditions that contribute most to POS. We investigated how employee beliefs concerning the organization's motivation for treating them

favorably or unfavorably might moderate the relationship between job-condition favorableness and POS.

Social exchange theorists have argued that the receipt of resources from another person is valued more highly if thought to be discretionary rather than dictated by circumstances largely beyond the donor's control. Such voluntary aid would be welcomed as an indication that the donor genuinely values and respects the recipient (e.g., Blau, 1964; Cotterell, Eisenberger, & Speicher, 1992; Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987; Gouldner, 1960). Accordingly, recipients returned greater benefits and expressed greater liking for the donor if aid was made to appear voluntary rather than required by the experimenter (Goranson & Berkowitz, 1966; Gross & Latane, 1974; Kiesler, 1966; Nemeth, 1970). Similarly, employees may be attentive to whether or not various aspects of their treatment by the organization result from discretionary decisions or from external constraints. Koys (1991) found that the strength of employee beliefs that the organization's personnel policies were enacted to treat them fairly and justly was positively related to affective commitment to the organization. In contrast, beliefs that such policies were required by legal regulations were not related to affective organizational commitment.

According to social exchange theory, the favorableness of job conditions should contribute to POS more substantially if believed to be the result of voluntary action by the organization, thereby reflecting the organization's valuation of the employee (cf. Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). In contrast, the favorableness of job conditions over which employees believe the organization has low control should exert little influence on POS. Employee views concerning which job conditions are the result of discretionary actions by the organization should vary systematically across organizations. The employer's freedom to determine pay, training, promotions, work schedule, task variety, stress and pressure, and so on can be influenced by a variety of factors. Constraints may include the financial well-being of the organization, contractual obligations concerning pay and work rules, government health and safety regulations, technologies required for the product or service supplied by the employee, efficiencies required by competition, supply and demand for jobs, and societal norms that define standards for the treatment of employees. We surveyed a diverse sample of employees drawn from a variety of organizations to test the hypothesis that the favorableness of job conditions, over which the organization is believed to have high discretionary control, is more strongly related to POS than the favorableness of job conditions over which the organization has little discretionary control.

A second purpose of our study was to provide empirical evidence for the distinction between POS and overall job satisfaction. The hypothesized contribution of the organi-

zation's discretionary actions to POS may help distinguish POS from overall job satisfaction. Beliefs about the organization's discretionary control over job conditions should exert less influence on job satisfaction than on POS. Overall job satisfaction would be influenced by the favorableness of job conditions, largely independent of whether those conditions resulted from the employer's free choice. Favorable job conditions should increase overall job satisfaction even when they result from actions dictated by outside circumstances. For example, a pay raise due to an increase in the government-mandated minimum wage would be expected to increase job satisfaction. Similarly, the institution of unfavorable job conditions would reduce overall job satisfaction even if employees did not assign responsibility to the organization. By illustration, the failure to receive an expected pay raise, if understood to result from the organization's financial difficulties, should reduce job satisfaction without having much effect on POS. We tested the prediction that the relationship between favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction would be less influenced by employee beliefs concerning the organization's control than would be the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and POS.

Shore and Tetrick (1991) noted the following additional conceptual differences between POS and overall job satisfaction. POS was conceived as a descriptive belief about the organization, whereas job satisfaction was considered an affective-laden attitude. Furthermore, overall job satisfaction was argued to be more subject to recent changes in job conditions than was POS, which was assumed to depend on accumulated experience. Despite these theoretical distinctions between POS and overall job satisfaction, a confirmatory factor analysis carried out by Shore and Tetrick failed to produce a clear empirical differentiation of the two constructs. Because Shore and Tetrick sampled employees in a single organization, the variability of POS and overall job satisfaction among employees may have been limited. We carried out a confirmatory factor analysis of the relationship between POS and overall job satisfaction, using a diverse sample of organizations to help ensure high degrees of variation in POS and overall job satisfaction.

## Method

### Design

Employees of various work organizations were surveyed concerning POS, overall job satisfaction, favorableness of job conditions, and the organization's discretionary control over job conditions. Participants rated the favorableness of 18 job conditions. They were also asked to select 6 job conditions that the organization controlled most, 6 conditions controlled intermediately, and 6 conditions controlled least. The relationship between

favorableness of job conditions and POS was examined for the job conditions identified by each employee as being controlled by the organization to a high degree, intermediate degree, and low degree. Similarly, the association between the favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction was compared for conditions identified by each employee as being under high, intermediate, and low employer control. Also, confirmatory factor analysis assessed whether POS and overall job satisfaction were better represented by a single common construct or by two related-but-distinct constructs.

### Sample and Procedure

To obtain a diverse sample of job types and organizations, names and phone numbers of a random sample of 485 alumni, whose ages ranged between 25 and 60, of the University of Delaware were obtained from university records. Prospective participants were contacted by phone and asked whether they would be willing to participate in a larger study examining work, health, and daily living. Employees who agreed to participate were mailed a questionnaire packet containing a consent form, the survey, a postage-paid return envelope, and an alumni sticker as an incentive for completing the survey. Following Dillman's (1978) suggestion for maximizing return rates, we mailed follow-up letters to noncompliant participants at 7 days, 3 weeks, and 6 weeks after the initial mailing to remind them that their participation was important. The third follow-up letter included a duplicate copy of the survey.

Of the employees contacted by phone, 447 (92%) agreed to participate, and, among this group, 295 (70%) returned completed questionnaires. The average age of the final sample was 41.5 years ( $SD = 15.0$ ), of whom 58% were female. Overall, 37% of the respondents worked in private business, 28% worked in educational institutions, 18% worked in other public sector jobs, 10% worked in hospitals, and 6% worked in other private nonprofit institutions. Forty-eight percent of the respondents were employed in large organizations (more than 700 employees), 18% worked in midsized organizations (200–700 employees), and 34% worked in small organizations (fewer than 200 employees). The average organizational tenure was 9.4 years ( $SD = 9.1$ ).

### Measures

**POS.** Because of the high internal reliability reported for the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1990, 1986), we selected 8 of the 36 items that had been found to load highly on the main factor and that seemed applicable to a wide array of organizations (see Figure 1). Respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 7 = *strongly disagree*). In the scale's source publication (Eisenberger et al., 1986), a principal-components analysis conducted on responses from 361 respondents in nine organizations revealed a single factor accounting for 48% of the total variance. The Cronbach's alpha found for this scale in our study was .90.

**Favorableness of job conditions.** For assessing the favorableness of job conditions, 18 job conditions were selected for their diversity and relevance to a variety of job types (see Table

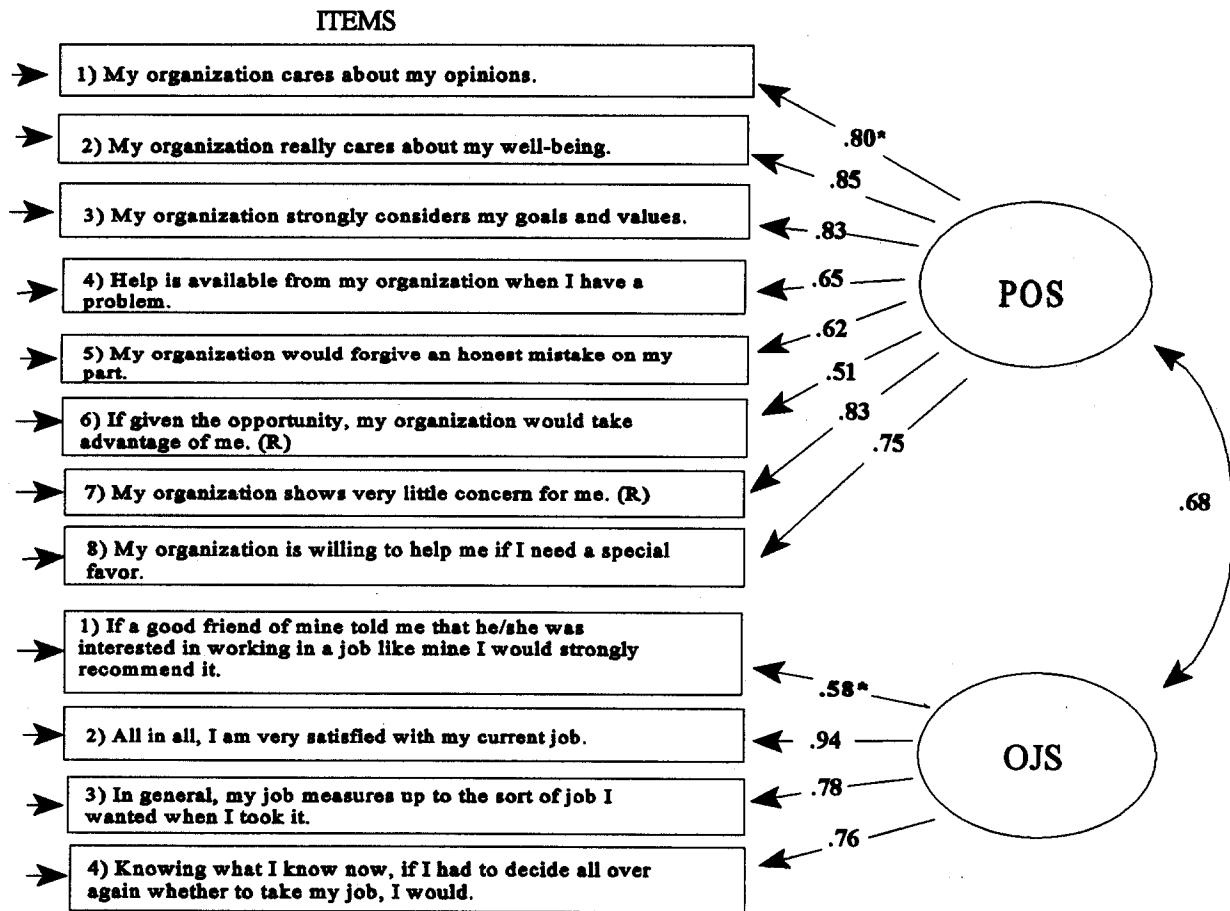


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis with a two-factor solution for items assessing perceived organizational support (POS) and overall job satisfaction (OJS). Indicator loadings and the factor correlation are all standardized. Asterisk indicates items with loadings fixed to 1.0 to set the metric of latent variable. R = reverse-coded items that have been recoded.

1). Respondents rated the favorableness of job conditions on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very unfavorable*, 5 = *very favorable*).

**Discretionary control over job conditions.** Respondents evaluated the degree of the organization's discretionary control over the 18 job conditions. The employees were asked to select 6 job conditions they believed were most controlled by the organization, then 6 job conditions that were least controlled, and finally 6 job conditions over which the organization had an intermediate level of control. We used this ipsative scaling procedure to assess the individual employee's beliefs concerning which job conditions were more controlled by the organization and which job conditions were less controlled. We were not interested, for the purposes of this study, in employees' beliefs about the total amount of control by the organization, accumulated across job conditions. Our method allowed assessment of the individual employee's beliefs concerning the relative degrees of organizational control over different job conditions, no matter whether the employee believed that the organization had a low or high overall level of control.

**Overall job satisfaction.** To assess employees' overall level

of job satisfaction, we used four items from Quinn and Shepard's (1974) job satisfaction index (see Figure 1). Respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 7 = *strongly disagree*). Quinn and Shepard reported satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ), and subsequent studies have reported similar degrees of internal reliability (Rice, McFarlin, Hunt, & Near, 1985).

## Results

The percentage of employees in the total sample who rated each job condition as being under the organization's high, intermediate, or low discretionary control is given in Table 1. Employees varied considerably concerning which of the 18 job conditions they believed to be under high, medium, or low control. Job conditions that produced substantial agreement concerning the organization's high control were training opportunities, physical working conditions, and fringe benefits. There was also

Table 1  
*Percentages of Employees Who Designated the Organization's Control Over Each Job Condition as Low, Medium, or High*

Job condition	Control		
	Low	Medium	High
1. Time for personal life	36.9	41.0	22.1
2. Opportunity for challenging tasks	33.6	39.3	27.1
3. Training opportunities	8.8	28.8	62.4
4. Physical working conditions	15.9	22.4	61.7
5. Relationship with supervisor	43.7	33.6	22.7
6. Job security	22.4	31.2	46.4
7. Freedom to adopt own approach to job	30.5	37.3	32.2
8. Relationship with coworkers	71.2	20.0	8.8
9. Fringe benefits	24.4	16.6	59.0
10. Opportunity to make contribution to organization's success	34.9	44.1	21.0
11. Opportunity for high earnings	32.2	27.8	40.0
12. Recognition for good work	6.8	40.3	52.9
13. Work schedule	24.4	38.0	37.6
14. Opportunity for advancement	32.2	36.6	31.2
15. Variety and adventure	51.2	36.9	11.9
16. Opportunity to work in prestigious organization	31.7	37.3	31.2
17. Opportunity to help others	50.8	26.8	22.4
18. Low stress and pressure	48.5	42.0	9.5

substantial agreement that the organization had little control over relationships among coworkers. In contrast, employees were almost evenly divided among those designating the opportunity for advancement, freedom to adopt one's own approach to the job, and opportunity to work in a prestigious organization as being under the high, intermediate, or low control of the organization.

Employee views concerning organizational control over job conditions were broken down by the five categories of organizations we studied (private business, education, public sector, hospitals, and other nonprofit institutions). Chi-square analyses revealed that employees' assessment of particular job conditions as being under high, intermediate, or low control differed reliably across organizations for 9 of the 18 job conditions, with 3 additional job conditions being marginally significant ( $p$ s < .10). Some job conditions produced substantial disagreement, from one type of organization to another, concerning the discretionary control exerted by the organization. For example, private business employees were twice as likely as teachers to believe their organization had high control over opportunities for advancement (40.9% and 19.3%, respectively), overall  $\chi^2(8, N = 295) = 24.7, p < .002$ , and were 3 times more likely than teachers to believe that their organization highly controlled time for personal life (32.3% and 12.0%),  $\chi^2(8, N = 295) = 20.3, p < .01$ . Teachers were twice as likely as private business employees to believe that their organization highly controlled the employees' relationship with their supervisor (30.1% and 16.1%),  $\chi^2(8, N = 295) = 20.3, p < .03$ . Hospital employees were twice as likely as government employees to believe that their organization highly controlled fringe

benefits (84.6% and 40.4%),  $\chi^2(8, N = 295) = 21.6, p < .006$ .

The main analysis of interest concerned whether the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and POS would be greater for conditions considered by employees to be highly discretionary by the organization, as opposed to job conditions that employees believed to involve little organizational control. We averaged the employee's favorableness ratings for the six job conditions he or she designated as highly controlled by the organization. We then obtained similar averages for the six intermediate-control job conditions and the six low-control job conditions. Next, we obtained the correlation between the favorableness of job conditions and POS, using the average favorableness score for the six job conditions designated by each employee as highly discretionary. This procedure was then repeated for intermediate-discretion job conditions and low-discretion job conditions.

Because nonorthogonal multiple comparisons can inflate the number of results found reliable at a conventional level of statistical significance, we computed a conservative criterion of statistical significance for the planned comparisons. The conventional level of statistical significance was divided by the number of nonorthogonal planned comparisons (Kirk, 1968). Eight nonorthogonal comparisons among correlations were planned so that the probability level required for the statistical significance of each comparison was set at .05/8, or .0063.

As illustrated in the next-to-last row of Table 2, the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and POS was greater for high-discretion job conditions than for low-discretion job conditions  $t(292) = 5.79$ ,

Table 2  
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Measures

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Favorableness of low-discretion job conditions	3.10	0.75	(.63)				
2. Favorableness of medium-discretion job conditions	3.26	0.71	.35*	(.62)			
3. Favorableness of high-discretion job conditions	3.38	0.88	.10	.54*	(.77)		
4. Perceived organizational support	4.69	1.28	.24*	.57*	.61*	(.90)	
5. Overall job satisfaction	5.36	1.28	.45*	.56*	.49*	.60*	(.85)

Note. All significance levels are two-tailed.  $N = 295$ . Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses.

\*  $p < .01$ .

$p < .001$ . Similarly, the favorableness of intermediate-discretion job conditions was more closely related to POS than was the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions,  $t(292) = 5.92$ ,  $p < .001$ . The favorableness of high-discretion job conditions and intermediate-discretion job conditions did not differ in their relationship to POS,  $t(292) = 0.94$ . As seen in the final row of Table 2, the organization's discretionary control did not reliably moderate the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction. The relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction was not reliably greater for high-discretion job conditions than for low-discretion job conditions,  $t(292) = 0.62$ . Similarly, the favorableness of intermediate-discretion job conditions was not more closely related to job satisfaction than was the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions,  $t(292) = 2.04$ . The favorableness of high-discretion job conditions and intermediate-discretion job conditions also did not differ in their relationship with overall job satisfaction,  $t(292) = -1.54$ . Favorableness of high-discretion job conditions was more strongly associated with POS than with overall job satisfaction,  $r_s = .61$  and  $.49$ , respectively,  $t(292) = 3.18$ ,  $p < .003$ . In contrast, the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions was more strongly associated with overall job satisfaction than with POS,  $r_s = .45$  and  $.24$ , respectively,  $t(292) = 5.47$ ,  $p < .001$ .

The obtained estimates of the relationships between the favorableness of job conditions and both POS and overall job satisfaction can be argued to underestimate the true relationships because of unreliability in the measurement instruments. The hypothetical true relationship between job-condition favorableness and POS can be obtained with the standard formula for disattenuating the effects of such unreliability (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 68). The disattenuated correlations of POS with the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions, intermediate-discretion job conditions, and high-discretion job conditions were  $.32$ ,  $.76$ , and  $.74$ , respectively. By squaring these correlations, it can be seen that the favorableness of high-discretion job conditions accounted for about 5.5 times as much

variance in POS as did low-discretion job conditions. Corresponding disattenuated correlations between job-condition favorableness and overall job satisfaction at low, intermediate, and high discretion, respectively, were  $.45$ ,  $.56$ , and  $.49$ . Thus, organizational discretion reliably moderated the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and POS but did not reliably moderate the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction.

To assess the distinction between POS and job satisfaction further, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on the combined set of POS and overall-job-satisfaction items, using LISREL8 statistical software. The models were estimated from the covariance matrix produced by PRELIS2 and used maximum likelihood estimation. We compared two models: one with all of the items loading on a global overall job satisfaction-POS latent variable (Model 1) and a second model with the overall job satisfaction items and POS items loading on two separate latent variables (Model 2). The indices of fit used to examine the two models were as follows: the comparative-fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973; see also Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). To assess whether Model 2 fit the data better than Model 1, we performed chi-square significance test of the difference between the two models (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982).

Model 1, supposing a combined POS-overall-job-satisfaction model, showed a poor fit as indicated by a highly significant RMSEA ( $.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and low values of CFI, TLI, GFI, and AGFI ( $.83$ ,  $.79$ ,  $.78$ , and  $.69$ , respectively). Examination of the items and their standardized factor loadings revealed that overall-job-satisfaction items were among the lower loading items on the global factor. Furthermore, examination of the modification indices showed evidence of significant correlated measurement error among the overall-job-satisfaction items. Model 2, which hypothesized separate factors for POS and overall job

satisfaction, is shown in Figure 1. This model yielded values of CFI, TLI, GFI, and AGFI (.97, .96, .94, and .91 respectively) that were much greater than the suggested cutoffs for satisfactory model fit. The RMSEA value was nonsignificant (.06,  $p = .12$ ), indicating a close fit to the data. Comparing Model 2 with Model 1 directly, Widaman (1985) suggested that increases in CFI of greater than 0.01 represent substantive model improvement. The CFI increased by 0.14, far more than this amount, from the one-factor model to the two-factor model. Furthermore, the chi-square difference between Model 1 and Model 2 was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 295) = 285.4, p < .01$ , similarly suggesting that the two-factor model provided a better fit than the one-factor model. Finally, examination of the individual items for the two-factor model revealed that all of the items significantly loaded on their expected factors and that all of the hypothesized loadings were above .51, whereas none of the cross-loadings surpassed .28. Thus, confirmatory factor analysis provided strong evidence that POS and overall job satisfaction are related but distinct factors.

### Discussion

To decide how much the organization values their contributions and well-being, employees distinguish job conditions whose favorableness the organization readily controls versus job conditions whose favorableness is constrained by limits on the organization's freedom of action. The favorableness of job conditions that employees believed were readily controlled by their employer was more strongly related to POS than was the favorableness of job conditions over which the employer was believed to have little control. Systematic differences across organizations were found in the job conditions believed by employees to be under the high, intermediate, or low control of the organization. Therefore, the findings are not attributable to a strong relationship between a specific set of job conditions and POS. Because (a) POS is far more strongly related to the favorableness of high-discretion job conditions than low-discretion job conditions and (b) employees' views concerning the job conditions that are readily controlled by their employer differ systematically across organizations, the job conditions that contribute most to POS vary from one organization to another.

Employee attention to the organization's discretionary control over job conditions is consistent with the view that workers attribute benevolent or malevolent intent to the organization's actions (Levinson, 1965). Because most employers have substantial influence over individuals' gainful employment and quality of work life, employees are strongly motivated to make inferences concerning their employer's valuation of them. The personification of the employer as a social exchange partner (Levinson,

1965) may lead to the use of the same attributional processes that people use generally to infer commitment by others to interpersonal relationships. Making a general attribution concerning the extent to which the organization values one's contributions and cares about one's well-being provides a basis for deciding whether increased effort for the organization will be noticed and rewarded (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The results support social exchange interpretations that treat employment as a reciprocal-exchange relationship between the organization and employees. Rousseau (1989, 1990) suggested that the employee's psychological contract involves the belief that the employer takes into account the employee's best interests. Repeated favorable treatment of the employee by the organization would increase trust in the organization's general benevolence (Robinson & Morrison, 1995). The present results indicate that employees consider the organization's discretion when evaluating their treatment by the organization. Highly discretionary actions by the employer should have greater influence on employees' perceived obligations and produce a stronger psychological contract than treatment dictated by outside influences.

POS and overall job satisfaction were found to be strongly related but distinct constructs. The favorableness of high-discretion job conditions was more strongly related to POS than was the favorableness of low-discretion job conditions. In comparison, the relationship between the favorableness of job conditions and overall job satisfaction did not differ reliably across levels of control. The favorableness of high-discretion job conditions was more strongly associated with POS than with overall job satisfaction. The favorableness of low-discretion job conditions was more strongly associated with overall job satisfaction than with POS.

An employee may believe that the organization strongly values his or her contribution and cares about his or her well-being yet have low overall job satisfaction because the employer does not have the resources to prevent unfavorable treatment. For example, poor economic conditions may reduce sales of products or services and thereby lessen a company's ability to give substantial pay raises or improve physical working conditions. The employee's recognition of these financial restrictions may prevent a decline in POS but not stop a loss of overall job satisfaction. Conversely, favorable job conditions over which the organization has little discretionary control may lead to an increase in overall job satisfaction without an accompanying increase in POS. For example, favorable pay and physical working conditions resulting from a union strike would be more likely to increase job satisfaction than to increase POS.

The distinctiveness of POS and overall job satisfaction is also indicated by the results of the confirmatory factor

analysis. A model that treated POS and overall job satisfaction as separate factors provided a better approximation of the pattern of employee responses than did a model that treated POS and overall job satisfaction as a single factor. Thus, although a strong positive relationship between POS and overall job satisfaction was found by Shore and Tetrick (1991) and by ourselves, employees can distinguish between the two factors. These results are consistent with the view that POS is a general belief concerning the benevolent or malevolent intent of the organization toward the employee, whereas overall job satisfaction represents a summary tabulation of the favorableness of various aspects of the job (Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

We are not suggesting that overall job satisfaction is irrelevant to the exchange relationship between employee and employer. Both POS and job satisfaction might create a felt obligation to repay the organization. Organ (1988) maintained that measures of job satisfaction mainly assess judgments of fairness of treatment that create a desire to recompense the organization with extra-role performance. Fair treatment can result from either discretionary action by the organization or external constraints imposed on the organization. Fair treatment required by external constraints may produce a reciprocal obligation to work harder for the organization, although perhaps not as great an obligation as when the fairness is discretionary.

The findings suggest actions that organizations may take to enhance positive effects of favorable job conditions on POS and to lessen negative effects of unfavorable job conditions. POS is strongly related to employer actions and policies of the employer believed by employees to be voluntary (cf. Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). Managers and supervisors might strengthen employees' beliefs that the organization is committed to them by making salient (a) the discretionary nature and benevolent intent of favorable treatment (cf. Koys, 1991) and (b) the external constraints that restrict the organization's ability to relieve unfavorable job conditions. For example, a new policy allowing employees several days off from work annually for personal reasons could be presented as being designed to increase employee satisfaction. Or, an employer experiencing a decline in profits that prevents giving traditional bonuses might brief employees on this problem, including access to financial information necessary to make the claim credible.

Further research is needed on factors influencing employee perceptions about the organization's discretionary control over the favorableness of job conditions. When organizations inform employees that improvements of job conditions are voluntary or that poor working conditions are unavoidable, workers may consider the veracity of prior claims. For instance, if the employer previously used the excuse of financial exigency for the absence of high pay but was found to have made a high profit or to have

given a high payout to top managers, present claims of inability to improve job conditions might be met with considerable skepticism.

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