

# Linking Perceived Organizational Support to Affective Organizational Commitment & Resistance to Change Through Organizational Trust and Identification

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*This study examines employees' perceived organizational support as an antecedent of their affective organizational commitment and resistance to change when such linkages are mediated first by their levels of organizational trust and then by their organizational identification. 882 complete and usable data, collected from Indian managerial executives, were scrutinized by subjecting them to various quantitative techniques. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings were expounded. The study concluded by observing its limitations and recording its future research scope.*

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## Introduction

The contemporary business environment may be construed as one that is frequently in a state of turbulence and disruption (Amarantou et al., 2018). While the bases of such states of recurring flux may be attributed to the transitional nature of technology, economic cycles, and/or socio-political circumstances, its attendant repercussions on organizational policies and practices often lead to individual role ambiguity and conflict, problems of metacognition, and work-life disbalances, especially, for those who carry the onus of implementing these changes (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2018). Indeed, employees often succumb to stresses arising out of emotional labor while coping with organizational transitions and this leads to an overall loss of their subjective well-being and a distinctive reduction in their affective organizational commitment (AC) (Fouquereau et al., 2019). Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study is to ascertain whether, in times of shift and fluidity, employees'

perceptions of support received from their organization make them correspond to the same through enhanced AC and reduced resistance to change (RtC). Additionally, the study proposed to investigate the role of organizational trust (OT) and organizational identification (OI) as potential mediators.

### Literature Review & Hypotheses

*POS, OT, and OI:* The extant literature indicates that organizational changes increase managerial challenges when employees find it difficult to accomplish tasks that are otherwise routine and commonplace (Kovoor-Misra et al., 2021). This may lead to several unwarranted outcomes including employee cynicism, job apathy, and counterproductivity which may culminate in a toxic work environment (Omari & Paull, 2015). From the employees' viewpoint, organizational impetus towards implementing changes without their consent may be construed as workplace bullying (Martin, 2000). As such, responsible organizations consider it their duty to convince their employees with change-related sensemaking by providing them with support in terms of recognizing their efforts that are in keeping with the intended changes and tolerating in-role errors that are committed as a part of matching up to the organizational change paradigms, thereby, contributing to reinforcing their OT (Peng, 2018).

Furthermore, the literature suggests that job insecurity is one of the most common outcomes that link organizational changes to employees' predilection to resist such events and weaken their af-

fective dispositions towards the change agents (Volkova & Chiker, 2020). However, in the presence of POS and, consequently their OT, employees tend to develop a long-term relational tie with the organization that eventually leads to a psychological connectedness between these two entities, and over time, they become participants in the organizational change process (Kim, 2019). This implies the development of employees' in-group persona, denoting their OI, when their levels of OT are amplified by their POS (Su et al., 2019).

Based on the discussion above, the following hypotheses are propounded.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Employees' perceived organizational support advances their levels of organizational trust.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). When employees experience high levels of organizational trust, it significantly escalates their levels of organizational identification.

*OI, AC, and RtC:* From the discussion above, it is apparent that when employees receive facilitation and support, it helps *them* align with their organization's objectives indicating a congruence of their identity with that of their organization (Aitken & von Treuer, 2021). This is because OI reflects employees' acknowledgment of socio-emotional need satisfaction in their association with their organization which justifies the blend of their personal and organizational identity (Grego-Planer, 2019). As such, it induces in them a strong sense of intuitive affinity

to the extent that the possibility of dissension with their organization is not only undesirable but even regrettable, especially, during organizational change periods when employees with strong OI perceive it to be their moral responsibility to be with the organization (Liu et al., 2020). By providing a sense of inclusion, particularly, during times of organizational transformations, OI therefore, amplifies employees' AC to bring change processes to their desired conclusions (Toth et al., 2021).

Furthermore, as a corollary of employees' OT, OI evokes favorable and negates detrimental employee attitudes (Qiuyun et al., 2020). It is therefore not surprising that employees' OI, especially when routines and regularity are constantly challenged by necessary organizational changes, prohibits them from displaying their RtC (Lupina-Wegener et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the next study hypotheses are postulated as follows:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). A high level of employees' organizational identification

is linked to their pronounced levels of affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). The higher the level of employees' organizational identification, the lower their resistance to change.

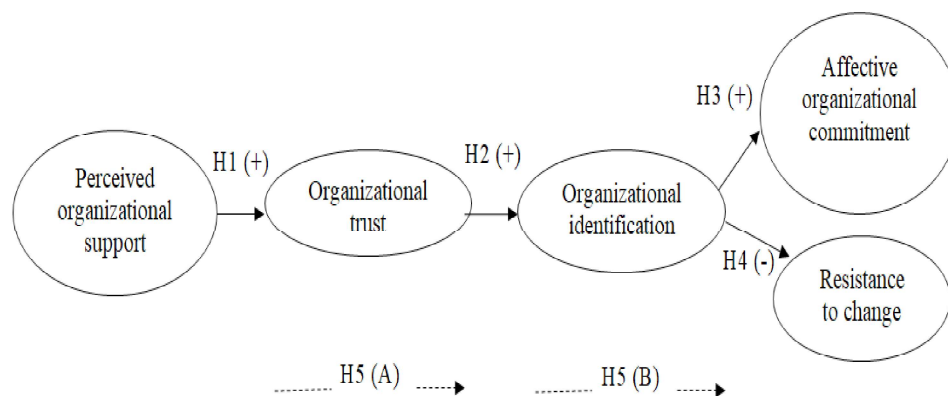
Additionally, the following study hypotheses are also conjectured.

Hypothesis 5(A) (H5(A)). Organizational trust mediates the relationship between employees' perceived organizational support and their levels of organizational identification.

Hypothesis 5(B) (H5(B)). Organizational identification intervenes between employees' organizational trust on the one hand and their affective organizational commitment and resistance to change on the other.

In summary, all of the above hypotheses are presented as a conceptual latent variable model (LVM) for further empirical scrutiny in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 The Conceptual Latent Variable Model



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## Sample & Procedure

Data for this study were collected through a random survey conducted in multiple organizations across India. With the exact data not available for the workforce population, the sample size was approximated using the method when the population is infinite (Liu, 2014), and accordingly, the recommended sample size was 771.

To collect data, the Yellow Pages Business Directory of India was consulted to randomly select 47 organizations from all over the country whose human resource (HR) departments were contacted and approval was sought for data collection. 13 organizations allowed their employees to take part in the survey. Eight of the organizations belonged to the manufacturing sector and were involved in businesses related to automobiles, power transmissions, agricultural tools, tower installation, sheet cutting, metal fabrication, paints and chemicals, and iron and steel products. The remaining were from the services sector and included businesses concerning life insurance, banking, hotels and hospitality, human resource consultancy, and information technology-enabled services. Thereafter, a list of participants who agreed to fill up the study questionnaire was prepared. A cover letter explaining the study purpose, a brief profile of the researcher, a pledge of respondent anonymity, and an assurance that the data being collected was only for academic purposes were attached along with the questionnaires. About 1300 questionnaires were distributed of which 882 completed and

usable ones were returned. Thus, the response rate was about 67.85 percent.

All the respondents were full-time executives belonging to the managerial cadre of their respective organizations. Their average age was 36.95 years and their average work experience was 10.52 years. While 526 respondents were employed by manufacturing sector companies, the remaining 356 were from organizations in the services sector. Further, 521 of the respondents were males and 361 were females. Moreover, 136 of the respondents were from the senior level, 395 from the middle level, and 351 from the junior level of managerial cadres of their respective organizations.

## Measures

All the five study constructs namely, POS, OT, OI, AC, and RtC were operationalized using a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

*POS.* Employees' POS was measured with nine items of the short POS scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). An example of the items used was 'My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work'. Two out of these nine items were reverse scored. The internal consistency reliability for this measure was .91.

*OT.* Employees' OT was measured using the seven-item scale developed by Robinson (1996). An item from the scale was 'I believe my organization has high integrity'. Three out of these seven

items, one of which was ‘I am not sure I fully trust my organization’, had to be reverse scored. For this measure, the Cronbach’s alpha value was .81.

*OI.* OI of employees was measured adapting the six-item institutional identification scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). An example item of this inventory was ‘When I talk about my organization, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’’. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability index for this measure was .88.

*AC.* Eight items specifying employees’ AC towards their organization, out of the 24 items capturing their overall organizational commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997), were used to measure this construct. A sample item of this measure was ‘I really feel as if my organization’s problems are my own’. Three items were reverse-scored. The measure’s internal consistency reliability was computed as .72.

*RtC.* Seven items representing two factors namely, routine-seeking comprising five items and emotional reactions comprising two items developed by Saruhan (2014) were employed to measure employees’ RtC. An example item was ‘I sometimes find myself avoiding changes that I know will be good for me’. The internal consistency reliability as per the measure’s Cronbach’s alpha was .85.

*Control variables.* For all subsequent analyses, respondents’ age, work experience, employment sector, gender, and level of management (LoM) were

treated as control variables. The respondents’ age and work experience were treated as ratio variables. While their employment sector (1 = manufacturing and 2 = services) and gender (1 = male and 2 = female) were categorized as dichotomous variables, their LoM had three categories (1 = senior, 2 = middle, and 3 = junior). These variables were chosen as per similar research (Kim et al., 2020).

### Common Method Bias

A single latent factor approach was utilized to test the presence of latent variable common method bias (CMB) (Siemsen et al., 2010). A common latent variable model (CLVM) associating the indicators of all the study variables was tested against the conceptual LVM to inspect differences in model fit. The comparative-fit-index and the incremental-fit-index of the proposed model were .97 and .97, respectively whereas these indices were .75 and .75 for the CLVM. Thus, the CLVM could not be accepted and this eliminated the risk of CMB in the proposed LVM.

### Evaluation of the Measurement Model

As per Table I, the composite reliability values ranged from .78 to .85 thus establishing construct reliability while the average variance extracted (AVE) values varied between .52 and .67 demonstrating convergent validity. Moreover, the squares of the intercorrelations between the study variables were less than the AVE values which provided evidence of discriminant validity (Koufteros, 1999).

Also, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) results spread from .22 to .48, providing further substantiation of discriminant validity.

**Table 1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model**

Variables	CR	1	2	3	4	5
1. POS	.84	.67				
2. OT	.82	.19 (.27)	.58			
3. OI	.85	.08 (.22)	.04 (.24)	.64		
4. AC	.78	.14 (.23)	.10 (.30)	.10 (.29)	.52	
5. RtC	.81	.17 (.36)	.14 (.48)	.13 (.39)	.12 (.45)	.53

Note.  $n = 882$ ; CR is 'Composite reliability'; The diagonal values of the matrix represent the average variance extracted (AVE) while the off-diagonal values are the squares of the inter-correlations between the study variables; Off-diagonal values in parentheses are results of the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) analysis; 'POS' is 'Perceived organizational support', 'OT' is 'Organizational trust', 'OI' is 'Organizational identification', 'AC' is 'Affective organizational commitment' and 'RtC' is 'Resistance to Change'.

**Configural Invariance Tests**

The results of the configural invariance tests confirmed that the measures were invariant between the various groups, that is, sector ( $\Delta\chi^2_{df} = 620_{637}, p = .68$ ), gender ( $\Delta\chi^2_{df} = 351.6_{352}, p = .49$ ), and LoM ( $\Delta\chi^2_{df} = 925.7_{950}, p = .71$ ). Therefore, the results obtained could be applied consistently to all groups in the present study.

**Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations & Internal Reliabilities**

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and Cronbach's alpha of the study variables. While, POS correlated significantly and positively with OT ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ) as did OT with OI ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ), a significant positive ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ) and a significant negative ( $r = -.36, p < .01$ ) correlation was computed between OI and AC and OI and RtC, respectively.

**Path Analyses Result for the Proposed Model**

The paths connecting the main study variables were tested through simultaneous regression using AMOS, version 24.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). As shown in Table 3, OT regressed significantly and positively on POS (standardized  $\beta = .46, p < .01$ ) as did OI on OT (standardized  $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ) thus supporting H1 and H2, respectively. Moreover, AC regressed significantly and positively on OI (standardized  $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ) leading to the acceptance of H3. Finally, RtC regressed significantly and negatively on OI (standardized  $\beta = -.38, p < .01$ ).

**OT regressed significantly and positively on POS (standardized  $\beta = .46, p < .01$ ) as did OI on OT (standardized  $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ) thus supporting H1 and H2, respectively.**

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Inter-correlations &amp; Alpha Reliability Indices

Values (→) Variables (↓)	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	36.95	8.68	1.00									
2. Work experience	10.52	8.27	.07*	1.00								
3. Sector	1.33	.47	.03	.09	1.00							
4. Gender	1.31	.42	.13**	.11*	-.18*	1.00						
5. LoM	2.37	.69	.14	.16**	.13	.15*	1.00					
6. POS	3.39	.82	.01	.04	.06	.07**	-.04	1.00				
7. OT	3.34	.72	.02	-.06**	-.09*	.04	.04*	.44**	(.91)			
8. OI	3.36	.65	.04*	.05	.06**	.08**	.02	.28*	.20**	(.88)		
9. AC	3.14	.67	.01	.07*	.02	-.09	.04**	.37**	.31**	.32**	(.72)	
10. RtC	2.23	.39	-.07*	.04*	-.03	.07**	.06**	-.41**	-.38*	-.36**	-.35**	(.85)

Note.  $n = 882$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; SD, Standard Deviation. Cronbach's Alpha reliability indices are reported in parentheses on the diagonal; short forms are as mentioned in the previous tables and the text.

d" .01) resulting in the acceptance of H4.

### Mediation Analyses Through Competing LVMs

To test for mediation in the proposed model, three competing LVMs were assessed using three absolute and four comparative fit indices. The absolute fit indices comprised the normed  $\chi^2$ , the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the root-mean-square-error-of-approximation (RMSEA). The comparative fit indices included the comparative-fit-index (CFI), the incremental-fit-index (IFI), the normed-fit-index (NFI), and the relative-fit-index (RFI).

The three LVMs, labeled LVM1, LVM2, and LVM3 and representing no mediation, *quasi*-mediation, and full mediation by OT and OI respectively, were cross-checked. LVM1 comprised POS as the latent exogenous variable and AC and RtC as the latent endogenous variables excluding OT and OI exemplifying no mediation. LVM2, the *quasi*-mediation model, included the direct and indirect paths from POS to AC and RtC through OT and OI. Finally, LVM3 represented the full-mediation model, had OT as the first-order and OI as the second-order mediator linking POS with AC and RtC. While inspecting the absolute and the comparative fit indices of the three LVMs only those related to LVM3 were found not only to be above the recommended threshold but also had the best fit. For LVM3, the absolute fit indices that are, normed  $\chi^2$  was 2.38, GFI was .98, and RMSEA was .03 while the com-

**Table 3 Regression Analyses Results**

Values (→) Paths (↓)	Unstandardized coefficients (b)	Standardized β estimates	C.R. <sup>†</sup>	Remarks
POS → OT	.61	.46	13.05	H1 accepted
OT → OI	.37	.25	11.67	H2 accepted
OI → AC	.43	.36	14.82	H3 accepted
OI → RtC	-.45	-.38	-14.55	H4 accepted

Note. n = 882; short-forms are as mentioned in the previous table(s) and the text; †C.R. is 'Critical Ratios', a recommended basis for testing the statistical significance of SEM components. C.R. ≥ ±1.96 indicates significance at the 95% level and C.R.e"≥2.58 indicates significance at the 99% level.

**Table 4 Analysis of Competing LVMs**

Values (→) Models (↓)	Fit Indices						
	Absolute Fit Indices			Comparative Fit Indices			
	Normed $\chi^2$	GFI	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NFI	RFI
LVM1 (no mediation)	3.83	.83	.08	.83	.83	.78	.76
LVM2 (quasi-mediation)	4.58	.82	.09	.81	.81	.77	.74
LVM3 (full mediation)	2.38	.98	.03	.97	.97	.96	.94

Note. n = 882; "LVMs' is 'Latent Variable Models'; short-forms are as mentioned in the previous table(s) and the text; Minimum acceptable values of the fit indices are as mentioned in the text.

parative fit indices that are, CFI and IFI both .97, NFI was .96, and RFI was .94. As such, LVM3 was chosen against the other LVMs for further empirical analyses. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4.

**Additional Mediation Analyses for the Accepted LVM**

It was decided to conduct the Sobel's (1982), the Aorian's (1944), and the Goodman's (1960) tests as per the z-prime method (MacKinnon et al., 2002) to discount the possibilities of Type-1 error and explore the strength of mediation. Also, the ratios of the indirect to the total effects were computed and la-

beled as 'percentage of mediation'. These results are presented in Table 5.

Further, additional mediation analyses as per the procedures suggested by MacKinnon et al. (1995) were also conducted. As per the results, all mediators pertaining to LVM3 were considered full mediators as stated in Table 5.

A final test of mediation was performed on LVM3 using the AMOS 24.0 plugin for specific indirect effects (Gaskin & Lim, 2018). According to the results, presented in Table 6, all mediated paths in LVM3 were found significant resulting in the acceptance of H5(A) and H5(B).

Table 5. Additional Analysis of Mediation

Values (→) Paths (↓)	Additional Mediation Tests			Path Analyses		Results of the additional mediation analyses	
	Sobel's test	Aorian's test	Goodman's test	Percentage of mediation	Whether regression estimate of (direct paths) > (paths under mediated condition)?		Whether regression estimate of (paths under mediated conditions) is significant?
POS à OT à OI	3.76**	3.73**	3.79**	36.63	NO	YES	All variables designated as mediators fulfill the full mediator role
OT à OI à AC	4.16**	4.14**	4.19**	37.44			
OT à OI à RtC	-4.64**	-4.65**	-4.62**	44.93			

Note.  $n = 882$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; short-forms are as mentioned in the previous table(s) and the text.

## Theoretical Implications

Apropos the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2020), the acceptance of the first study hypothesis suggests that employees' intentions and responses to change-related reactions can be prearranged by supportive management leading to the development of positive attitudes which in this case is the development of their OT as a fallout of their POS. The acceptance of the second hypothesis corroborated with the theory of sensemaking based on the distributed imagining process, whereby employees' trust gained through their POS, is manifested in their in-group status signifying their OI (Weick, 2012). Accordingly, the acceptance of the H2 purports that employees contingently ratiocinate organizational actions, particularly those related to organizational transformations, and this buttresses their OI through the recognition of an overlap of their personal and organizational well-being.

**When individuals cognitively evaluate organizational actions and their explanations to be conceivably in their favor, they respond to their OI through enhanced level of AC and a reduced RtC.**

The acceptance of both the third and the fourth study hypotheses reinforces the theory of reasoned action (TRA) in conjunction with the SET (Anthony Jr., 2019). As per the TRA and concerning this study, when individuals cognitively evaluate organizational actions and their explanations to be conceivably in their

**Table 6 Specific Indirect Effects**

Indirect Paths	Unstandardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate
POS → OT → OI	.83	.68**
POS → OT → OI → AC	1.05	.82***
POS → OT → OI → RtC	-.19	-.28***
OT → OI → AC	.63	.51***
OT → OI → RtC	-.23	-.29***

Note.  $n = 882$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ ; short-forms are as mentioned in the previous table(s) and the text.

favor, they respond to their OI through enhanced level of AC and a reduced RtC.

Finally, the acceptance of both parts of the fifth hypothesis has implications from the perspective of the theory of organizational support and development (Kumar et al., 2018). As this theory suggests and the LVM3 depicts, the hypothesized paths denoted by H5(A) and H5(B) portray organizational endeavors towards supporting employees to adapt and develop their positive attitudes to meet new challenges during and after organizational changes. In return, employees' perceptions regarding their organization's purpose towards their growth simultaneous to its own make it an entity to be trusted and identified with protracted AC and curtailed RtC.

**Practical Implications**

Regarding the first hypothesis, managers should be conscientious while han-

**Change agents should be designated from within the rank and files keeping in mind their approachability, availability, and influence.**

dling HR-related issues during periods of organizational change. They should be advised against carrying out recruitment processes at such times as it would help avoid the intensification of interpersonal conflicts between existing organizational members and those who would newly arrive. Also, to the extent possible, change agents should be designated from within the rank and files keeping in mind their approachability, availability, and influence which may not be understood, if not disregarded, by the fresh recruits.

Additionally, managers should continuously facilitate institutional assistance by modifying job specifications, supplementing new roles and responsibilities with commensurate incentives and rewards, providing skill development opportunities, and attitudinal reconditioning through suitable training and learning opportunities in accordance with the intended organizational changes. In keeping with the second hypothesis, this would further cement employees' OT and extend it to the development of their OI whereby they perceive that the organizational changes that are publicized as organizationally opportune are concurrently beneficial to their prosperity.

The acceptance of the third and the fourth hypotheses connote that, during periods of organizational changes, managers should perpetually monitor the internal communication climate. As such, an emphasis on employee inputs and inclusion in decision-making helps create a climate that encourages their psychological attachment to their work and the organization and by extension effectuates high levels of their AC and reduced RtC.

The acceptance of both parts of the fifth hypothesis and the overall LVM that is, LVM3, signify that honest mistakes that are committed concomitant to realignment with organizational modifications in terms of changed norms and practices should be overlooked. This would justify the organization's trustworthiness concerning its resolve to carry out renovations with the existing personnel and its faith that its extant HR is willing and capable of successfully concluding the process of the organizational overhaul.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

The results of this study and the ensuing discussion should be interpreted within the boundaries of certain reasonable limitations. First, this study was pursued among managerial executives in Indian organizations who themselves were all Indians by descent. As such, it precluded the perspective of all employees of an organization irrespective of their designation and also excluded the possibilities of cross-national comparisons of the hypothesized links between the study constructs. Additionally, the research design was cross-sectional and thus omit-

ted longitudinal variations. Since the underlying objective of this study was to understand the attitudinal reactions to organizational change efforts, perhaps a mixed-methods approach would have been a more appropriate research design.

Ergo, while LVM3 was found best suited to fulfil the current research objectives, future studies are encouraged to replicate this model in a cross-cultural, cross-national, and cross-temporal context. Future studies may also define a more broad-based sampling frame such as non-managerial workforce, employees who work from home, and contract employees to gain a wider understanding of employee perceptions and attitudes, especially concerning individual uncertainty during periods of organizational changes.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study successfully connected employees' POS with their enhanced AC and reduced RtC through OT and OI as the first- and second-order mediators, respectively. For this purpose, the study constructs were based on theoretical background and the hypothesized linkages among them were propounded as per the literature review. A path model labeled as the conceptual LVM was proposed which was then empirically examined by comparing it with competing LVMs. A specific LVM namely, LVM3, that represented full mediation first by OT and then by OI was accepted along with all the study hypotheses. The results and their implications were then discussed. Notwithstanding certain limitations, the study concluded

by outlining coherent scopes for future research.

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