

Impact of Perceived Organisational Support on Employee Career Goals

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Abstract: This research investigates the impact of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) on career goal formulation and pursuit, with a focus on Sri Lankan marine engineers. Career goals are essential to professional growth, driving motivation, job satisfaction, and long-term career fulfilment. The study explores how POS, personal ambition, and external factors shape career aspirations, emphasizing the importance of a supportive work environment. POS, defined as employees' perceptions of how much their organisation values and cares for them, is found to significantly enhance self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement, aligning personal career goals with organisational success. By providing both tangible resources such as training, mentorship, and emotional support, organisations can empower employees to pursue ambitious career goals. This study, employing a quantitative research methodology, investigates the impact of perceived organisational support (POS) on motivation and goal-setting behaviours, drawing on Goal-Setting Theory, Super's Lifespan, Life-Space Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory explain how POS fosters reciprocal relationships and intrinsic motivation. A survey of 400 marine engineers was conducted using structured questionnaires, demonstrating high reliability and confirming that higher POS positively influences career aspirations. The findings highlight the importance of a supportive organisational culture in enhancing career goal achievement, with key implications for improving employee commitment and organisational outcomes. This research contributes to understanding POS's role in career development and its potential to drive both personal and organisational growth.

Keywords: *Career Goals, Perceived Organisational Support (POS)*

Introduction

Career goals play a vital role in shaping an individual's professional trajectory and long-term aspirations. They represent the specific objectives employees aim to achieve within their career, such as promotions, skill acquisition, leadership roles, or transitions into new areas of expertise. Setting career goals provides employees with direction and motivation, enabling them to focus their efforts on achieving significant milestones that align with their professional development. Research shows that clear career goals contribute to higher job satisfaction, increased motivation, and enhanced performance, as employees are more likely to feel engaged and committed

when they have a well-defined career path (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006).

The pursuit of career goals is influenced by several factors, including personal ambition, available opportunities, and organisational support. In a supportive work environment, employees are more likely to feel confident in their ability to reach their career objectives, as they believe the organisation values their growth and contributions. The alignment between individual career goals and the strategic direction of the organisation leads to mutual benefits, as employees contribute to organisational success while advancing their personal career aspirations (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) is a critical factor that impacts employees' ability to set and achieve career goals. POS refers to the extent to which employees believe their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). When employees perceive high levels of organisational support, they are more likely to pursue ambitious career goals, as they feel that their organisation is invested in their success and provides the necessary resources for growth.

POS plays a significant role in fostering employees' career development. It strengthens their self-efficacy—the belief in their ability to achieve specific outcomes—and increases motivation to strive for career-related milestones (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Employees who perceive strong organisational support tend to be more engaged in their work and are more likely to set career goals that align with both their personal ambitions and the organisation's strategic needs. This alignment not only enhances individual job satisfaction but also contributes to the organisation's long-term success by ensuring a motivated and capable workforce (Baran et al., 2012).

Furthermore, POS influences career goal setting by providing employees with opportunities for development, such as training, mentorship, and career advancement programs. These resources enable employees to build the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue their career goals effectively. When employees feel supported in their development, they are more likely to remain committed to their career objectives, seeing their goals as achievable within the organisation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Beyond tangible resources, POS also addresses employees' emotional and psychological needs. High levels of organisational support reduce stress and job insecurity, creating an environment

where employees feel safe to take on challenges and pursue their goals without fear of negative repercussions, such as job loss or lack of recognition (Baran et al., 2012). This sense of security fosters a more positive outlook on career development and encourages employees to actively engage in setting and striving for long-term professional objectives.

The objective of this research is to investigate how perceived organisational support (POS) influences the formulation and pursuit of career goals. Specifically, it seeks to understand the extent to which POS affects employees' motivation to set and achieve their career objectives, and how organisational support shapes their commitment to long-term career aspirations. The study will focus on examining the direct relationship between POS and career goal-setting, providing insights into the role of POS in fostering employees' career development.

In conclusion, career goals are central to an employee's professional development, and perceived organisational support significantly influences the ability to set and achieve these goals. By offering both tangible resources and emotional support, organisations can create an environment where employees feel empowered to pursue their career aspirations, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

Literature Review

Career Goals

Career goals are fundamental to an employee's professional journey, shaping both individual development and organisational outcomes. A career goal can be defined as a desired position or achievement that an individual aspires to reach within their professional life. The pursuit of career goals influences how employees engage in their work, their

commitment to professional growth, and their overall job satisfaction (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006). Setting and striving for career goals not only motivates employees but also enhances their sense of purpose and long-term career satisfaction (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Career goals are influenced by a range of factors, including personal ambition, organisational support, and external market conditions. Employees often adjust their aspirations based on changing industry demands, technological advancements, and economic shifts (Baruch, 2004; Heslin, 2005). For example, in industries undergoing rapid transformation, employees may focus on developing adaptability and diversifying their skills, seeking roles that provide opportunities for continuous learning and professional growth (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This broader context ensures that career goals remain relevant and achievable in dynamic work environments (Hall, 2004).

Additionally, intrinsic factors such as personal motivation, ambition, perseverance, and the desire for self-actualisation play a significant role in shaping career goals (Super, 1990). Employees often set career goals that align with their values and professional identity, which are shaped by their workplace experiences and expectations (Hall, 2004). These various factors together create a comprehensive framework within which career goals are developed and pursued.

Moreover, external factors such as mentorship, leadership, and workplace culture play a pivotal role in shaping career goals. Research has shown that employees who receive mentoring or professional guidance are more likely to establish and pursue clear career objectives (Bozionelos et al., 2016). Mentors help employees identify opportunities for growth and provide the necessary encouragement and feedback

that fosters goal clarity and confidence in achieving those goals. Similarly, organisations with a strong focus on employee development through training and skill-building programs also influence employees' career aspirations positively (King, 2004).

Career goals are often fluid, evolving as individuals advance in their careers and adapt to changing personal or professional circumstances (Heslin, 2005). This adaptability is crucial in dynamic work environments where industry changes or shifting job roles require employees to re-evaluate their career trajectories and adjust their goals accordingly (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). A flexible approach to career goal-setting enables employees to seize new opportunities and maintain resilience in the face of challenges.

Another key aspect of career goals is the alignment between individual goals and organisational objectives. When employees' career aspirations align with the strategic direction of the organisation, both parties benefit. The organisation can leverage employees' skills and ambitions to fill key positions, contributing to succession planning and organisational growth (De Vos & Soens, 2008). At the same time, employees gain fulfilment and progression in their careers, leading to enhanced loyalty and reduced turnover (Weng & McElroy, 2012).

In conclusion, employee career goals are shaped by a complex interplay of personal aspirations, workplace experiences, and external support systems. Organisations that foster a culture of development and provide opportunities for growth can help employees achieve their career goals, benefiting both individual career trajectories and overall organisational success.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS)

Perceived organisational support (POS) is critical in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours, influencing various work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and career development. According to organisational support theory (OST), POS is the employees' perception of how much their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This perceived support strengthens the employee-organisation relationship, motivating employees to engage more proactively in their roles and contribute to organisational goals (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Research has shown that antecedents such as fairness, supervisory support, and job conditions play a key role in shaping POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Effective leadership and supportive HR practices further reinforce these perceptions (Kurtessis et al., 2017). High levels of POS are positively associated with employee engagement in organisational citizenship behaviours and improved performance, leading to higher job satisfaction, increased emotional commitment, and better work outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

From a career development perspective, POS can significantly enhance employees' willingness to pursue long-term career goals. When employees perceive that the organisation is invested in their professional growth, they are more likely to set ambitious career goals that align with the company's objectives (Santos & Liguori, 2019). Furthermore, organisational support for training, development opportunities, and communication around work conditions fosters a positive workplace culture that enhances employees' interest in advancing their careers (Sun, 2019). In this context, POS acts as a facilitator, providing employees with the necessary resources and motivation to achieve their career aspirations.

In conclusion, POS serves as a critical driver of employee commitment, satisfaction, and career development, reinforcing employees' sense of value and their motivation to pursue career goals that contribute to organisational success.

Theoretical Background

Career goals and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) are key constructs in understanding an individual's professional development within an organisational setting. Both concepts are underpinned by well-established theories of motivation, goal-setting, and social exchange, which provide insights into how employees set and achieve career objectives in response to the support they perceive from their organisation.

Career goals serve as a fundamental aspect of an individual's career development, offering a structured path toward both personal and organisational success. Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) forms the foundation for understanding career goals, positing that specific, challenging goals lead to higher performance and motivation than vague or simple objectives. This theory stresses the importance of goal clarity and commitment, suggesting that well-defined career goals enhance motivation and engagement in career development activities.

Additionally, Super's Lifespan, Life-Space Theory (1990) highlights the evolving nature of career goals throughout an individual's life. Super argued that career development is a lifelong process shaped by personal growth, changing life roles, and career stages. Career goals adapt as individuals progress through various phases of their personal and professional lives, with self-concept playing a critical role in the formation of these goals. Super's theory emphasises the alignment of career goals with an individual's

evolving identity, ensuring that employees remain focused on long-term aspirations that reflect their personal values and professional ambitions.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) further deepens the understanding of career goals by introducing the role of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal interests in career decision-making. SCCT suggests that employees' belief in their ability to achieve specific outcomes (self-efficacy) and their expectations of those outcomes (outcome expectations) directly influence the setting and pursuit of career goals. These cognitive and motivational factors guide employees in selecting career paths that align with both their personal aspirations and their perception of achievable outcomes within the organisational context.

The concept of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) originates from Organisational Support Theory (OST), as introduced by Eisenberger et al. (1986). POS refers to employees' generalised beliefs about the extent to which their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being. According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), POS encompasses the recognition of employees' efforts, the provision of necessary resources for professional development, and the support for their overall success within the organisation.

POS significantly influences employees' attitudes and behaviours at work, enhancing job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Employees who perceive high levels of organisational support are more likely to pursue challenging career goals, take advantage of developmental opportunities, and remain dedicated to their long-term aspirations. By fostering a supportive environment, organisations can cultivate a motivated and engaged

workforce that is aligned with both individual and organisational objectives.

POS is also closely tied to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests that employees engage in reciprocal relationships with their organisation. When employees perceive support, they feel an obligation to reciprocate by striving for career success and contributing to organisational outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2001). This reciprocal relationship strengthens employees' motivation to set and achieve career goals, benefiting both the individual and the organisation by fostering a culture of mutual growth and achievement.

Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a lens through which to understand how POS influences intrinsic motivation. SDT posits that individuals have basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Organisations that provide POS through mentorship, development opportunities, and recognition fulfil these needs, thereby enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation to pursue career-related achievements.

The relationship between career goals and POS is inherently linked through theories of motivation, support, and personal development. Career goals are shaped by internal factors, such as self-efficacy and self-concept, and external factors, such as organisational support and resources. POS plays a critical role in reinforcing employees' motivation and confidence to pursue their career goals, by offering both tangible resources and emotional support.

In summary, the theoretical background of career goals and POS highlights the importance of goal setting, self-concept, and social exchange in professional development. While career goals provide employees with a sense of direction and purpose, POS enhances their ability to

achieve these goals by offering support, recognition, and opportunities for growth. Together, these concepts form the foundation for understanding how individuals navigate their career aspirations within a supportive organisational environment.

Hypotheses Formulation and Conceptualisation:

Perceived Organisational Support and (POS) and Career Goals

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between employees' interest and career goals. POS, defined as the extent to which employees believe their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986), enhances employee motivation through mechanisms rooted in social exchange theory. This theory suggests that when employees feel valued, they reciprocate by engaging in positive organisational behaviours, including the pursuit of career goals (Blau, 1964).

Several studies underscore the link between POS and career-related outcomes. For instance, Seema and Sujatha (2017) found that employees who feel supported by their organisation are more likely to participate in career-advancing activities, leading to better career outcomes. Similarly, Suifan et al. (2017) reported that employees perceiving high organisational support are more inclined to exert effort in work-related activities, ultimately advancing their professional growth. POS fosters a

conducive environment where employees are motivated to align their personal interests with their career goals.

Furthermore, job satisfaction is a key mediator in the relationship between POS and career goal pursuit. Employees who experience greater satisfaction with their job are more likely to apply the skills gained through training programs, and this satisfaction is closely linked to perceived organisational support (Zumrah & Boyle, 2015). Research by Wickramaratne (2021) involving Sri Lankan supervisory managers further highlights that POS aligns employees' career advancement with their personal values and objectives, positively impacting career success.

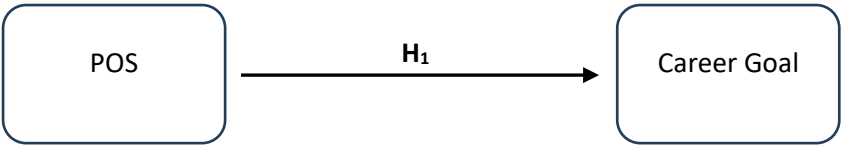
POS also reduces the negative effects of work-related stress. Employees with high POS experience work as less stressful and more enjoyable, which enhances their commitment to career-related tasks (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A meta-analysis conducted by Kurtessis et al. (2017) reinforces this, showing that POS positively influences employees' attitudes and their engagement in activities that advance their career goals.

Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: There is a positive relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and career goals.

This hypothesis suggests that higher levels of POS positively influence employees' motivation to achieve their career goals, as they feel supported by their organisation.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology and Measurements

The study aimed to examine the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and career goals. The hypothesis proposed that POS would have a positive impact on career goals, suggesting that greater perceived support from the organisation would enhance career aspirations among marine engineers.

To measure POS, the study utilized Rhoades et al.'s (2001) eight-item scale, which is widely used and demonstrates high internal consistency. The scale assessed employees' perceptions of the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

Career goals were measured using Gregor and O'Brien's (2016) career aspiration scale, focusing on educational and career advancement aspirations. This scale includes items that assess the level of ambition regarding career progression, further education, and achieving specific career-related milestones.

The questionnaire was pretested with a pilot study involving 51 marine engineers to ensure the reliability and validity of the measures. Cronbach's Alpha values for both POS and career goals exceeded 0.77, indicating strong internal consistency. The final sample consisted of 400 marine engineers, selected from an online professional network, with demographic factors controlled.

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 20, and regression analysis was employed to test the relationship between POS and career goals. The hypothesis was that POS would positively influence career goals, with higher POS leading to greater career aspirations among the participants.

Results

The construct of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) was measured using eight items, yielding an overall mean value of

4.67. The mean values of the individual items ranged from 4.11 to 5.17. The inter-item correlations for these items varied from -0.142 to 0.845, with the lowest corrected item-total correlation being -0.248. Despite some variability in the correlations, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for POS was 0.887, indicating that the items reliably measured the construct. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) measure for the POS items was 0.719, suggesting an acceptable level of sampling adequacy, with Bartlett's test of sphericity yielding significant results ($p < 0.001$). The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed that the factor matrix values ranged from 0.322 to 0.918, with 63% of the variance explained, further supporting the construct's validity.

For Career Goals, eight items were identified to measure this construct, with an overall mean of 4.25. The individual items had mean values ranging from 4.09 to 4.45, with the highest inter-item correlations ranging between 0.310 and 0.771. The corrected item-total correlations were all above 0.633, indicating strong internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for career goals was 0.924, suggesting that the items effectively represented the construct. The KMO measure for the career goals items was 0.861, indicating a high level of sampling adequacy. The factor matrix values for the items ranged from 0.707 to 0.891, and 66% of the variance was explained by the items in the exploratory factor analysis. This further confirmed the reliability and validity of the career goals construct.

Summary of Reliability and Validity for POS and Career Goals:

POS: Cronbach's alpha = 0.887, KMO = 0.719, Bartlett's test significant, 63% variance explained.

Career Goals: Cronbach's alpha = 0.924, KMO = 0.861, Bartlett's test significant, 66% variance explained.

These results suggest that both POS and career goals are measured reliably and validly within the context of this study.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a strong, positive relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and career goals among Sri Lankan marine engineers. The significant influence of POS on career aspirations highlights the vital role of organisational backing in shaping employees' career trajectories. This is particularly relevant in hierarchical occupations, where career development often depends on the resources, opportunities, and encouragement provided by the organisation (Ho, 2023).

The high factor loadings for POS items, such as "Help is available from my organization when I have a problem" (0.900) and "My organization really cares about my well-being" (0.849), underscore the importance of a supportive work environment in fostering career goal commitment. These results align with existing research that demonstrates how organisational support can alleviate career-related anxieties and provide the necessary tools for employees to reach their professional aspirations (Eisenberger et al., 2002). When employees perceive that their organisation values their contributions and supports their development, they are more likely to set and pursue ambitious career goals.

Moreover, the variance explained by the POS items (63%) suggests that a considerable portion of the career goal commitment can be attributed to employees' perceptions of organisational support. This reinforces the notion that a supportive organisational culture can enhance employee engagement, motivation, and goal-setting behaviours. In line with social exchange theory, employees who feel valued by their

organisations are more likely to reciprocate with increased effort and loyalty, ultimately translating this into stronger career goal orientation (Blau, 1964).

The findings also suggest that career goal commitment is not just a reflection of personal capabilities or external rewards, but is heavily influenced by the psychological and material resources provided by the organisation. Engineers who perceive their workplace as supportive are likely to feel more confident in their ability to succeed, reinforcing the relationship between POS and career goal attainment. This suggests that organisations seeking to enhance employee career goal outcomes should consider focusing on improving POS by fostering a supportive culture that encourages growth, offers mentorship, and provides adequate resources for skill development.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This study successfully examined the role of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) in shaping the career goals of Sri Lankan marine engineers. The findings highlight that POS plays a critical role in influencing career aspirations, suggesting that when engineers perceive strong support from their organisation, they are more likely to set and pursue ambitious career goals. The analysis reveals the significant relationship between POS and career goal commitment, emphasizing that organisational support provides the necessary resources and encouragement for employees to thrive in their career development (Ho, 2023).

The study contributes to the field by validating measurement items for POS in the context of career goals, offering a robust set of constructs that can be used to understand how organisational support impacts career aspirations. The insights gained are particularly valuable for

organisations seeking to enhance employee motivation and career development, demonstrating the importance of aligning organisational support with individual career goals to foster a productive and committed workforce (Bullard & Manchanda, 2017).

Future research could expand the scope by exploring the impact of different organisational contexts and sectors on the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and career goals. This would allow for a deeper

understanding of how organisational culture, leadership styles, and industry-specific factors influence career aspirations. Additionally, qualitative research methods, such as interviews or case studies, could provide more nuanced insights into the lived experiences of employees and how they perceive organisational support in relation to their career development. Exploring cross-cultural differences could also offer valuable perspectives on how POS affects career goals in different national or regional settings (Johnson et al., 2015).

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