



# Perceived organizational support and organizational commitment

## The moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy

Perceived  
organizational  
support

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is to deepen the understanding of the relationships between perceived organizational support (POS) and the dimensions of organizational commitment (i.e. affective, normative and continuance commitment), and to test the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study, based on a cross-sectional research design, was conducted in an organizational setting. The sample includes 249 prison employees. The data were collected through questionnaires.

**Findings** – The results show that POS is positively and significantly correlated with affective and normative commitment. In addition, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses support the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy with regard to the relationship between POS and affective commitment.

**Practical implications** – This study highlights the importance of providing support to employees in order to foster their affective and normative commitment to the organization. Moreover, the results provide evidence in favour of managerial interventions aimed at enhancing perceived control and, consequently, minimizing the negative effects of a lack of organizational support on employees' affective commitment.

**Originality/value** – In addition to taking into account three dimensions of organizational commitment, this study underlines personality and job design factors that can modulate the relationship between POS and organizational commitment.

**Keywords** Autonomous work groups, Employee behaviour, Job design

**Paper type** Research paper

Since the early 1990s, perceived organizational support (POS) has aroused a great deal of interest among researchers in the fields of psychology and management (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004). In 2002, Rhoades and Eisenberger published a meta-analysis on the antecedents and consequences of POS based on 70 empirical papers. Since this meta-analysis was published, Eisenberger *et al.* (2004) estimate that about 50 additional research papers have been published on the subject. The increased attention given to POS is possibly due to the restructuring and downsizing that have occurred over recent years in many North American and European organizations



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(Bishop *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, during times of crisis, POS may be particularly potent in terms of maintaining or increasing organizational and individual outcomes (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

POS refers to the degree to which employees perceive their employer to be concerned with their well-being and to value their contributions to the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). According to Levinson (1965), employees tend to personify the organization for which they work. Based on the actions of executives and managers, employees tend to lend intentions to the organization as a system. POS thus corresponds to the degree to which employees feel that the organization that employs them is willing to equitably compensate them for their efforts, help them in case of need (e.g. illness, work-related problems), make their work interesting and stimulating, and provide them with adequate working conditions (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). In brief, employees form a general idea concerning the support provided by the organization.

Employees may interpret the support provided by their employer as a demonstration of commitment towards them (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Shore and Shore, 1995), which in turn tend to enhance their commitment to the organization. Relationships between POS and organizational commitment are corroborated by many studies (e.g. Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Hutchison, 1997; Hutchison and Garstka, 1996; Jones *et al.*, 1995; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001; Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Shore and Wayne, 1993). However, the strength of these relationships varies from one study to another (see the meta-analysis of Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). These variations in effect size may depend on the dimensions of organizational commitment that are considered and on different moderating factors. From this perspective, this study aims to assess, on the one hand, the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment, and on the other hand, the moderating role of *locus* of control and work autonomy with regard to these relationships. Though *locus* of control is a personal disposition while work autonomy refers to a characteristic of job design (Harris, 2005; Semmer, 2000), both constructs are associated with control over the work environment (Spector, 1988; Terry and Jimmieson, 1999). In this study, we posit that these two factors are likely to play a moderating role on the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment because employees are less sensitive to the support provided by their organizations when personal or contextual factors lead them to believe they can exercise control over their work environment.

Research on POS and organizational commitment has been conducted in various organizational settings, such as manufacturing, private non-manufacturing, health, and education. However, we are not aware of any studies that have explicitly tested the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment in a prison setting. Furthermore, POS proves particularly important for employees in a stressful workplace (Viswesvaran *et al.*, 1999), such as prisons. In this kind of organizational setting, the support provided by the organization (e.g. training, resources) may help individuals cope with dangerous situations, such as fighting among inmates, riots, and hostage-taking incidents. Thus, in the current study, we verify whether the results obtained in prior meta-analyses (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) can be replicated in a prison setting.

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### Perceived organizational support and organizational commitment

Although POS and organizational commitment differ from one another conceptually and empirically (Bishop *et al.*, 2005; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Shore and Tetrick, 1991), these two notions are somewhat analogous. Indeed, the first concerns the commitment of the organization to employees, and the second refers to the degree to which employees are committed to the organization that employs them (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). More specifically, organizational commitment is a three-dimensional concept that includes affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer *et al.*, 1993). Affective commitment represents the employee's attachment to and identification with an organization. Individuals with a high level of affective commitment continue to work for an organization because they want to. Normative commitment refers to the moral obligation to continue working for the organization. Employees with a high level of normative commitment believe they have the duty and responsibility to continue working for their current employer. Finally, continuance commitment indicates the degree to which employees stay with an organization because the costs of leaving are too high. Employees who are essentially bound to their organization on the basis of continuance commitment stay in their jobs because they feel that what they have invested in the organization (e.g., time, energy) would be "lost" if they left their current employer or, they assess their job options outside the organization as being limited. Compared to affective and normative commitment which are positively correlated with performance and various types of productive behaviors in the workplace (e.g. extra-role, organizational citizenship behaviors, work attendance), several studies have indicated that continuance commitment is usually negatively correlated with these same variables (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer *et al.*, 1993). Consequently, from a managerial standpoint, continuance commitment is generally considered to be less desirable than affective and normative commitment.

POS is likely to influence each of these forms of organizational commitment. A meta-analysis conducted by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) shows that POS is strongly and positively correlated with affective commitment. To explain this relationship, Fuller *et al.* (2003) refer to Tyler's (1999) social identity theory, according to which individuals feel recognized within an organization when their employer values their contributions to the functioning of the organization. The recognition of their work and status within the organization helps meet the employees' socio-emotional needs, that is, their needs for esteem, approval and affiliation (Shore and Shore, 1995). Filling these needs contributes to building the employees' social identity, which in turn is likely to enhance their sense of belonging to and pride in the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). On the other hand, the relationship between POS and affective commitment can also be explained by referring to Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, according to which the development and maintenance of all human relationships are based on an exchange of resources which are valued by the individuals who are interacting with one another. In the case of the relationship between POS and affective commitment, it would appear to be mainly the socio-emotional and symbolic aspects of this exchange that are taken into consideration (Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003; Shore *et al.*, 2006). More specifically, behaviors related to organizational support (e.g. promotions, salary increases, training, tangible help) appear to be interpreted by employees as marks of respect and

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consideration on the part of their employer, which in turn appears to increase their trust in and the quality of their relationship with the latter (Chen *et al.*, 2005; Cheung, 2000; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990, 2001). In other words, in order to show their gratitude to their employer, employees appear to develop a positive attitude towards the organization, increasing their level of affective commitment. It should be mentioned that the studies of Rhoades *et al.* (2001) corroborate the idea that it is POS which influences affective commitment and not the reverse. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1.* POS is positively related to affective commitment.

A number of studies corroborate the relationship between POS and normative commitment (see the meta-analysis of Meyer *et al.*, 2002). According to Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), this relationship can essentially be explained by the norm of reciprocity put forward by Gouldner (1960). This norm stipulates that when a person or an entity (e.g. group, organization) does someone a favour, the recipient of this favour feels the obligation to return the favour. Thus, when individuals perceive that their employer shows concern for their well-being and seeks to meet their needs, they are more likely to feel indebted to the organization and show loyalty (Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003). Therefore, POS is likely to increase the level of normative commitment. Compared to the relationship between POS and affective commitment, it appears to be more the economic aspect of the exchange between employees and the organization that explains the link between POS and normative commitment (Shore and Tetrick, 1991). The following hypothesis is formulated:

*H2.* POS is positively related to normative commitment.

Continuance commitment can be distinguished from the other two forms of commitment by the fact that employees continue to work for the organization by default rather than because they really want to (affective commitment) or feel that it is their duty to stay (normative commitment). Moreover, several studies reveal that continuance commitment is not correlated in the same way as affective and normative commitment with the various antecedents of organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Specifically, the results of the meta-analysis conducted by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002, p. 109) reveal that:

POS and affective commitment had a strong, positive relationship, whereas POS and continuance commitment had a small, negative relationship. The effect sizes for both constructs were heterogeneous, even after removal of outliers. Nevertheless, the POS-affective commitment associations were positive in all individual studies. POS-continuance commitment relationships were more variable, ranging from near zero to large and negative.

Thus, it appears that POS increases affective and normative commitment while lowering continuance commitment. Few researchers, however, have attempted to explain the negative relationship between POS and continuance commitment. One possible explanation is that POS lessens the feelings of entrapment that develop when employees feel compelled to continue working for the organization because of the high costs associated with leaving it (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Shore and Tetrick, 1991). A high level of POS may help to restore the balance between the benefits awarded by the organization and the contributions of the individual. Indeed, when

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individuals perceive a high level of organizational support, the costs attached to quitting their job will be perceived as being less significant than if they thought that they had given a great deal to the organization without having received anything in return. Consequently, based on earlier findings on the effects of POS on continuance commitment, we formulate the following hypothesis:

*H3.* POS is negatively related to continuance commitment.

### **The moderating role of *locus* of control and work autonomy**

The strength of the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment is likely to vary according to personal dispositions and job design (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, depending on certain individual or contextual factors, employees can prove to be more or less sensitive to organizational support, thus varying the effect of POS on their level of organizational commitment. Based on this perspective, the present study takes into consideration two moderating factors, namely *locus* of control and work autonomy.

#### *Locus of control*

*Locus* of control is an important determinant of the way individuals interpret the situations they encounter (Rotter, 1966). According to Spector (1982), this personal disposition represents the degree to which individuals tend to attribute what happens to them to internal factors (e.g. skills, efforts, perseverance) or to external factors (e.g. chance, other people, divine intervention). Internal individuals recognize their share of responsibility in their successes and failures, whereas external individuals feel powerless and attribute what happens to them to factors over which they have no control. Spector (1988) operationalized the notion of *locus* of control in a work context by developing the work *locus* of control scale (WLCS) for job-related events such as promotions, salary increases and disciplinary measures. The results of Spector's (1988) study indicate that the WLCS is more appropriate for studies in organizational settings than the general scale of *locus* of control developed by Rotter (1966).

*Locus* of control is likely to have a moderating effect on the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment. According to Chiu *et al.* (2005), individuals who have an external *locus* of control are more sensitive to the support provided by the organization, since they consider that their organizational environment has a great influence on what happens to them. Thus, when they feel that the organization cares about their well-being, they tend to show their gratitude towards their employer and to develop a higher level of affective and normative commitment and a lower level of continuance commitment. However, if they feel that the organization is insensitive to their well-being, they will tend to hold it against their employer, which will translate into a lower level of affective and normative commitment and a higher level of continuance commitment. Conversely, individuals whose *locus* of control is internal appear to be less affected by the organizational support available, which appears to reduce the strength of the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment. Given that these individuals feel they are able to exercise control over their successes and failures, they tend to attribute the retributions and consideration they receive to their own actions rather than to the generosity and benevolence of their employer (Harvey *et al.*, 1974). For example, a promotion will be interpreted as proof of personal competence rather than

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as a favour granted by the employer. Consequently, an internal *locus* of control appears to reduce the feeling of gratitude and obligation towards the organization (Harris, 2005), which weakens the strength of the effect of POS on organizational commitment.

At the empirical level, only the results of the study by Chiu *et al.* (2005) show that *locus* of control can moderate the relationship between POS and organizational commitment. Moreover, this study dealt only with the affective commitment dimension of organizational commitment, and the researchers used a general measure of *locus* of control, which is not necessarily optimal in a work context (Spector, 1988). Thus, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the moderating role of *locus* of control in the relationship between POS and organizational commitment, the present study assesses this moderating effect by considering the three forms of organizational commitment (affective, normative and continuance commitment) and by using a measure of *locus* of control adapted to a work setting (i.e. WLCS). The following hypotheses are formulated:

- H4a.* The more external the *locus* of control, the stronger the relationship between POS and affective commitment.
- H4b.* The more external the *locus* of control, the stronger the relationship between POS and normative commitment.
- H4c.* The more external the *locus* of control, the stronger the relationship between POS and continuance commitment.

#### *Work autonomy*

Work autonomy refers to the latitude the individual is allowed in doing his/her work (Breugh, 1999). This leeway depends on the job design put in place by the managers. Just as for *locus* of control, work autonomy is likely to moderate the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment. More specifically, the less control individuals have in doing their work (low level of autonomy), the more dependent they are on their employer (Semmer, 2000). Consequently, when the level of autonomy is low, a lack of organizational support may lead individuals to feel neglected, perhaps even abandoned, by their employer, which may reduce their level of affective and normative commitment and increase their level of continuance commitment. Moreover, a low level of work autonomy coupled with a high level of organizational support may lead individuals to perceive the organization that employs them in a positive way, which may increase their level of affective and normative commitment and reduce their level of continuance commitment. Conversely, individuals who have a high level of autonomy in doing their work and who consequently are able to exercise control in carrying out their work are less dependent on their employer. In this case, organizational support is less likely to influence organizational commitment.

None of the studies reviewed assessed the moderating effect of work autonomy on the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment. To test this moderating effect, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

- H5a.* The lower the work autonomy, the stronger the relationship between POS and affective commitment.
- H5b.* The lower the work autonomy, the stronger the relationship between POS and normative commitment.



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*H5c.* The lower the work autonomy, the stronger the relationship between POS and continuance commitment.

To sum up, POS is likely to increase affective and normative commitment and reduce continuance commitment. However, the effects of POS on the dimensions of organizational commitment may be less pronounced when individuals believe that they have control over their work environment, whether due to their personality (*locus of control*) or to job design characteristics (work autonomy).

## Methodology

### *Participants*

The study was conducted at a Canadian prison located in a rural area. This prison administers sentences of two years or more. Over the five years previous to the study, the prison was operating at around 90 per cent of its original design capacity. The sample includes 249 employees, which represents a participation rate of 62.6 per cent. Participants' mean age was 42.5 years (SD = 8.8 years) and mean tenure in the organization was 11.4 years (SD = 7.0 years). 62.9 per cent of participants were men and 37.1 per cent were women. One participant did not give information about his/her sex.

### *Procedure*

The study questionnaires were administered by two trained research assistants in an on-site meeting room during regular scheduled working hours. Participants were informed that the study aimed to investigate the quality of work life. They were also told that all individual responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. The research assistants were unaware of the hypotheses of the present study.

### *Measures*

The survey questionnaire included measures of POS, organizational commitment, work *locus of control*, and work autonomy. All of the measures were administered in French after being translated and adapted from existing English scales by using the subject matter expert method. Specifically, two bilingual experts, whose native language is French, individually translated the original scales into French and adapted them to the Canadian context. They then compared their translations and corrected minor discrepancies. A third expert reviewed the original and adapted versions of the scales to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence. The examples of items shown below are the original English items.

*Perceived organizational support.* The short version of the scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) was used to measure POS. This measure includes 17 items (e.g., Help is available from the organization when I have a problem). Participants were asked to rate on a seven-point Likert response scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (7). The score for seven of the items should be reversed.

*Organizational commitment.* The three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment) were assessed by Meyer *et al.*'s (1993) scales. A six-item scale measures affective commitment (e.g. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization). The normative commitment scale includes six items (e.g. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now). The measure of continuance commitment contains six items (e.g. I believe that I

have too few options to consider leaving this organization). Each item was linked to a six-point Likert response scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (6). The scores for two of the items measuring affective commitment should be reversed.

*Work locus of control.* Spector’s (1988) scale was used to measure work *locus* of control. This 16-item measure is specifically adapted to work settings (e.g. Promotions are usually a matter of good fortune). Items are rated on a six-point Likert response scale where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 6 indicates “strongly agree”. The scores for eight of the items should be reversed. A higher global score represents a more external *locus* of control.

*Work autonomy.* To measure work autonomy, Breugh’s (1999) nine-item scale was used (e.g. I am free to choose the method(s) to use in carrying out my work). Participants were asked to rate on a seven-point Likert response scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

**Results**

*Preliminary analyses*

Significance tests (skewness, kurtosis, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov) reveal that no variable departed significantly from normal distribution. In addition, a participant presenting a multivariate extreme score was eliminated. Thus, 248 participants were retained for the statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and Cronbach’s alphas are shown in Table I. Cronbach’s alphas vary from 0.73 to 0.96, indicating that the measures used in this study are fairly reliable.

*Relationships between perceived organizational support and the dimensions of organizational commitment*

The hypotheses regarding relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment were tested by using correlation analyses (see Table I). Results show that POS is positively and significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ) related to affective commitment ( $r = 0.67$ ) and normative commitment ( $r = 0.53$ ), which supports *H1* and *H2*. According to the criteria formulated by Cohen (1992), the effect sizes may be qualified as strong. However, POS is not significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) related to continuance commitment. Therefore, *H3* is not supported.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
POS <sup>a</sup>	3.32	1.35	(0.96)					
AC <sup>b</sup>	3.48	1.03	0.67*	(0.83)				
NC <sup>c</sup>	2.63	1.15	0.53*	0.62*	(0.89)			
CC <sup>d</sup>	3.71	0.94	-0.09	-0.07	0.12	(0.73)		
Locus of control <sup>f</sup>	2.82	0.65	-0.54*	-0.48*	-0.34*	0.16**	(0.84)	
Work autonomy	3.89	1.37	0.47*	0.40*	0.33*	-0.05	-0.38*	(0.92)

**Table I.** Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations between variables

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup> POS (perceived organizational support); <sup>b</sup> AC (affective commitment); <sup>c</sup> NC (normative commitment); <sup>d</sup> CC (continuance commitment); <sup>e</sup> The higher the score, the more external the *locus* of control; \*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; Reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alphas) are in parentheses;  $n = 248$  participants



*Moderating effect of locus of control and work autonomy*

In order to test the hypotheses regarding the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy on the relationships between POS and the dimensions of organizational commitment, we used a two-step hierarchical multiple regression as proposed by Cohen *et al.* (2003). In the first step, the dependent variable is regressed on both the independent and moderating variables. In the second step, an interaction term, created by the multiplication of the scores obtained from the two variables entered in the first step, is added to the regression model. In order to reduce the problem of multicollinearity due to the correlation between the first two variables entered in the model and the interaction term, the scores for the variables are centered before being multiplied. The moderating effect is supported when the regression coefficient associated with the interaction term is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The results of the hierarchical multiple regression shown in Table II reveal that *locus* of control moderates the relationship between POS and affective commitment ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports *H4a*. However, *locus* of control does not significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) moderate the effect that POS may have on normative commitment and continuance commitment. Therefore, *H4b* and *H4c* are not supported.

Concerning the moderating effect of work autonomy, results shown in Table III reveal that this variable moderates the relationship between POS and affective commitment ( $\beta = 0.10$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Just like *locus* of control, work autonomy does not significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) moderate the effect that POS may have on normative commitment and continuance commitment. Consequently, *H5b* and *H5c* are not supported.

To illustrate the moderating effect, Cohen *et al.* (2003) recommend plotting the regression of the dependent variable on the independent variable at three values of the

Model	B	SE B	$\beta^a$	$\Delta R^2$	VIF
<i>Dependent variable: affective commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	0.44	0.04	0.57*		1.41
Locus of control	-0.28	0.08	-0.18*		1.41
Step 2					
POS X locus of control	0.14	0.05	0.13*	0.02**	1.13
<i>Dependent variable: normative commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	0.41	0.06	0.48*		1.41
Locus of control	-0.14	0.11	-0.08		1.41
Step 2					
POS X locus of control	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.00	1.13
<i>Dependent variable: continuance commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	-0.01	0.05	-0.01		1.41
Locus of control	0.22	0.11	0.15**		1.41
Step 2					
POS X locus of control	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.00	1.13

**Note:** <sup>a</sup> Standardized regression coefficient; \*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ;  $n = 248$  participants

**Table II.**  
*Locus* of control  
moderating effect  
analysis

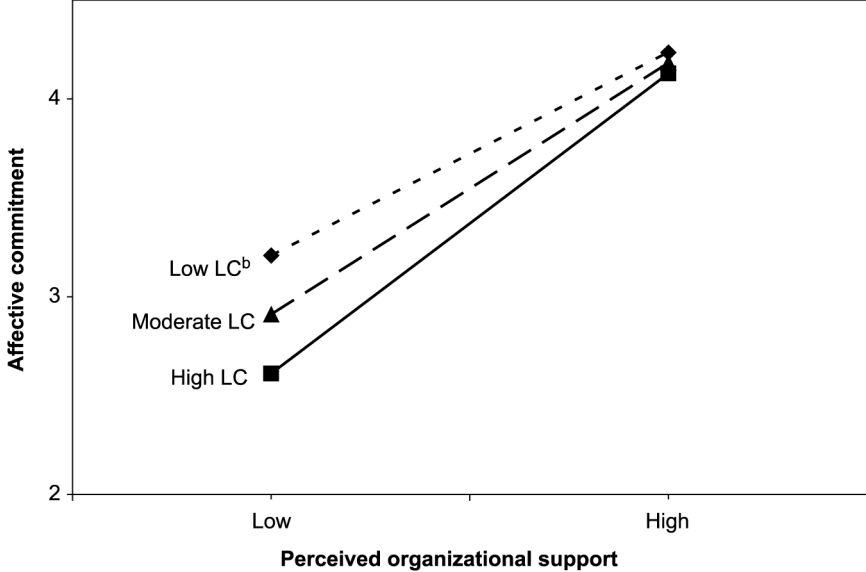
**Table III.**  
Work autonomy  
moderating effect  
analysis

Models	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta^a$	$\Delta R^2$	VIF
<i>Dependent variable: affective commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	0.47	0.04	0.62*		1.28
Work autonomy	0.08	0.04	0.11**		1.28
Step 2					
POS X work autonomy	-0.06	0.03	-0.10**	0.01**	1.06
<i>Dependent variable: normative commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	0.41	0.05	0.48*		1.28
Work autonomy	0.09	0.05	0.10		1.28
Step 2					
POS X work autonomy	-0.06	0.04	-0.10	0.01	1.06
<i>Dependent variable: continuance commitment</i>					
Step 1					
POS	-0.06	0.05	-0.09		1.28
Work autonomy	-0.01	0.05	-0.01		1.28
Step 2					
POS X work autonomy	-0.05	0.03	-0.10	0.01	1.06
<b>Notes:</b> <sup>a</sup> Standardized regression coefficient; * $p < 0.01$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; $n = 248$ participants					

moderating variable. These values are the score at mean, at one standard deviation below the mean and at one standard deviation above the mean. Figure 1 shows how the relationship between POS and affective commitment varies as a function of the *locus* of control. A visual inspection of this figure reveals that the more external the *locus* of control, the stronger the relationship between POS and affective commitment. Furthermore, Figure 2 illustrates how the relationship between POS and affective commitment varies as a function of work autonomy. This figure indicates that the higher the level of work autonomy, the weaker the relationship between POS and affective commitment. The form of the moderating effect is consistent with *H4a* and *H5a*. Thus, these results support the hypotheses regarding the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy on the relationship between POS and affective commitment.

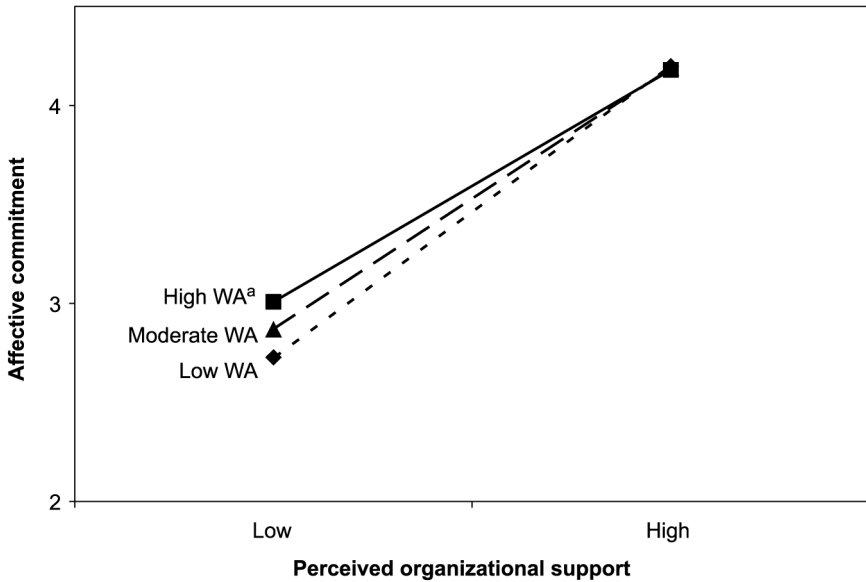
### Discussion

This study sought to assess, on the one hand, the relationship between POS and the three forms of organizational commitment (i.e. affective, normative and continuance commitment) and, on the other hand, the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy on these relationships. As was expected, POS is strongly associated with affective commitment, which is consistent with previous studies conducted in organizational settings other than prisons (see the meta-analysis of Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, POS is likely to lead employees to develop a sense of belonging to and pride in their organization. More specifically, the results of this study indicate that POS accounts for 45 per cent of the variance of affective commitment in the bivariate analysis. The results also indicate that the greater the extent to which individuals have an internal *locus* of control, the weaker the effect of POS on affective



Notes: <sup>a</sup>More the score is high, more the locus of control is external; <sup>b</sup>LC (locus of control)

**Figure 1.** Relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment for high, moderate, and low level locus of control



Note: <sup>a</sup>WA (work autonomy)

**Figure 2.** Relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment for high, moderate, and low level work autonomy

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commitment, which corroborates the results of Chiu *et al.* (2005). Similarly, the greater the extent to which individuals feel they have a high level of autonomy in their work, the less affective commitment is influenced by POS. In brief, the study reveals that the more control individuals feel they exercise over their work environment, whether because of their personality or job design characteristics, the weaker the effect of POS on their level of affective commitment. This moderating effect could be explained by the fact that *locus* of control and work autonomy reinforce employees' feeling of control and make them less dependent on the support provided by their organization (Harvey *et al.*, 1974; Semmer, 2000).

As for normative commitment, the results in the bivariate analysis show that POS accounts for 28 per cent of the variance in this form of organizational commitment. This relationship has also been supported in organizational contexts other than prisons (see the meta-analysis of Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the greater the extent to which employees perceive that the organization is giving them support, the more they feel a moral obligation to keep working for that organization. However, *locus* of control and work autonomy have no influence on the relationship between POS and normative commitment. In other words, POS could increase normative commitment regardless of the control individuals have over their work environment. As stated by Meyer *et al.* (1990, p. 83), normative commitment is increased "by the receipt of benefits from the organization [...] that create a sense of obligation to reciprocate". When the organization provides support to individuals, these individuals feel morally indebted to their organization even if their personal dispositions or job design characteristics give them the feeling of having a degree of independence from managers.

In contrast to what was expected, the results reveal that POS is not significantly associated with continuance commitment and that *locus* of control and work autonomy do not influence the capacity of POS to have an effect on this form of organizational commitment. It should be specified that a non significant relationship between POS and continuance commitment had also been observed in previous studies (see Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis). The absence of a relationship between POS and continuance commitment could be explained by the fact that the organization in which the study took place was one of the main employers in the region. Thus, it is probable that the employees of this organization perceived few alternative employment options, regardless of the level of organizational support they received, and consequently, felt a high level of continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Among the three forms of organizational commitment, continuance commitment obtained the highest average (see Table I), which indicates that it was in fact the predominant form of commitment within this organization. On the whole, POS probably could not reduce continuance commitment, because job opportunity is low. More research is required, however, to refine the role of job opportunity in the relationship between POS and continuance commitment. In addition, prison employees' work content could also explain why POS is not connected to a reduction in continuance commitment. In spite of certain incidents, their work is quite routine and highly specialized (e.g. to open and close the grids, to supervise the comings and goings of the prisoners), which offers very few opportunities for them to develop generic skills that could be useful in other types of organizations. Thus, in prison settings, the nature of the work lessens the capacity for support provided by the organization to develop employees' skills that would lead them to consider job options

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outside the organization. It would nevertheless be worthwhile, in future research, to verify the effect of work content on the relationship between POS and continuance commitment.

#### *Limitations and future directions*

While not invalidating the results of the present study, some of its limitations should be mentioned. First, given the cross-sectional research design of the study, no causal relation between the variables can be inferred. Thus, the results do not allow us to determine the extent to which POS influences the different forms of organizational commitment. To obtain further support for the potential causal links between these variables, future studies should be based on longitudinal design. In addition, given that the variables were measured by using the same method at a single measurement time, the common variance bias may have influenced the results (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In future research aimed at replicating the findings of this study, this bias should be minimized by using multiple methods and multiple sources.

Furthermore, as mentioned, the present study underlines the moderating effect of *locus* of control and work autonomy on the relationship between POS and affective commitment. Given these results, it would be useful in future research to assess the moderating role of other variables related to the notion of control, such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1992) and self-confidence. Similarly, moderating variables associated with the degree of control that an individual attributes to his work group could eventually be considered, for example potency (Guzzo *et al.*, 1993) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Similarly, future studies could attempt to assess to what degree the relationship between POS and organizational commitment is moderated by other variables associated with the belief that things will work out irrespective of control over events, such as positive affect (Watson, 2000), optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1992) and hope (Quick *et al.*, 1996).

Finally, considering the encouraging results of the present study, future research could investigate more discrete dimensions of organizational support in order to achieve a finer understanding of the relationships between POS and each dimension of organizational commitment. In the literature, POS is usually considered as a unidimensional construct (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004). However, Osca *et al.* (2005) recently developed a three-dimensional scale of POS including supervisory and colleague support, training and acknowledgement, and rewards.

#### *Practical implications and conclusion*

In sum, this study corroborates the importance of providing organizational support to stimulate employees' affective and normative commitment. The current state of knowledge indicates that these two forms of commitment are desirable since they constitute significant determinants of performance and quality of life at work (see the meta-analysis of Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, *locus* of control and work autonomy exercise a moderating effect on the relationship between POS and affective commitment. Some practical implications may be highlighted on the basis of these results. In order to enhance affective and normative commitment, employers have access to different ways of providing support to workers, including performance appraisal programs, reward systems, development programs (e.g. coaching, training), and career development (Meyer and Smith, 2000). These practices enable organizations

to demonstrate their recognition of employees' contributions and their concern for employees' well-being. However, in certain organizational contexts, it can be difficult to provide a high level of support (e.g. long distance supervision, virtual work teams, lack of resources). In such contexts, some interventions concerning *locus* of control and work autonomy are likely to compensate for the effect of a lack of POS on affective commitment. Thus, the results of the present study show the relevance of selecting candidates whose *locus* of control is internal, because these individuals might be able to preserve their affective commitment towards the organization in spite of a lack of organizational support. Similarly, it is possible to provide greater work autonomy to employees by intervening in job design (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) or by implementing an empowerment program (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Conger and Kanungo, 1988), which would allow employees to exercise more control in carrying out their work and make a lack of organizational support less detrimental in terms of affective commitment. All in all, this study helps to consider several interventions to reinforce employees' organizational commitment.

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