Author's response to reviews

Title: The relationship between job performance and perceived organizational support in faculty members at a Chinese university: A questionnaire survey

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor and Reviewers,

Thank you very much for your letter and advice. Our paper entitled ‘The relationship between job performance and perceived organizational support in faculty members at Chinese universities: A questionnaire survey’ has been revised in accordance with the comments of reviewers and have responded point-by-point to each reviewer comment below. We hope that the revised manuscript is now acceptable for publication, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Question 1: Page 2, results: « between POS and JP » (see background) or « between JP and POS ». Same comment for conclusion.
Answer 1: It should be consistently stated ‘the relationship between POS and JP’. We make this relationship consistent in the revised manuscript.

Question 2: Page 2, conclusion: How can you conclude that the relationship between POS and JP is influenced by POS?
Answer 2: Thanks for this valuable suggestion. In the original manuscript, we make the misunderstanding in the explanation of ‘influence by POS’, it should be stated that POS is influenced by procedural and distributive justice. This sentence has been corrected in the revised manuscript.

Question 3: Page 3, 1st paragraph: Please add references to justify your claims.
Answer 3: I have added some relevant reference in the revised manuscript.
It is generally believed that universities perform well in the areas of teaching and research in terms of discovering and developing talent for the development of science and technology [1]. Each university conducts an annual review and an evaluation of faculty job performance (JP). The items for evaluation include instructional responsibility, intellectual contribution, professional service, collegiality, and professionalism [2]. These areas are used for the determination of salary increases, qualification for promotion and tenure, reappointment of non-tenured faculty, and
faculty awards in China [3]. In addition, some studies have been performed to investigate the relationship between JP and pressure [4]. However, the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and JP among university faculties has not been investigated.

According to organizational support theory, POS reflects the degree to which employees believe that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being [5, 6]. POS could produce a felt obligation to care about the organization’s welfare and to help the organization achieve its goal [7]. Meanwhile, POS should fulfill socioemotional needs by incorporating organizational membership and role status into their social identity and strengthen employees’ beliefs that organization rewards increased performance [6]. Employers want employees to be dedicated and loyal to their work. If employers provide a high level of support to their employees, based on the norm of reciprocity, employees are likely to emotionally commit to their organizations with a low likelihood of turnover and a high level of job performance [8, 9]. In a meta-analysis of 70 studies, Rhoades et al. demonstrated that employees’ POS could increase JP [6]. However, some previous studies have presented inconsistent results. Stamper et al. reported that POS was unrelated to task performance among salespeople [10]. Moreover, previous evidence has suggested that POS mediates numerous types of organizational experience variables and may not directly influence job performance [6, 7, 10]. Therefore, it is unknown whether POS is directly correlated with JP or is mediated by other factors for university faculty members.

**Question 4:** Page 3: There is no link between these two sentences: “However, job performance may decrease under pressure. The relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and JP among university faculties has not been investigated.”

**Answer 4:** Indeed, there is no clear link between these two sentences. We have made them in logistic in the revised manuscript. It should be as noted in 2nd Page. ‘So far,
some studies have been performed to investigate the relationship between JP and pressure. However, the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and JP among university faculties has not been investigated’.

**Question 5:** Page 3, 2nd paragraph: More explanations are needed for the effects of POS.

**Answer 5:** Indeed, in the original manuscript, we did not provide the sufficient explanation for the effects of POS, so according to the comments from the reviewer, we have added more explanation about the effects of POS in Page 3, 2nd paragraph, and listed them as follows:

In our model, the core feature is POS. Based on the studies about the psychological processes underlying consequences of POS from Rhoades and Eisenberger [6], it is found that POS should produce a felt obligation to care about the organization’s welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives. Meanwhile, the caring, approval, and respect connoted, by POS should fulfill socioemotional needs, helping workers to incorporate organizational membership and role status into their social identity. Besides, POS should strengthen employees’ beliefs that the organization recognizes and rewards increased performance. These processes should have favorable outcomes both for employees and for the organization.

**Question 6:** Page 3: Please provide rationales to explain why you consider these determinants and these mediating variables.

**Answer 6:** These determinant and these mediating variables in this manuscript considered in this study were based on both references and the reality in China. For instance, according to meta-analysis from Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), organizational justice is an antecedent variable of POS and POS could increase affective commitment and performance. Based on our observational experience from Department of Human Resource in university, it is found that job satisfaction, positive affectivity and affective commitment might be positively related with both POS and job performance (JP). Therefore, we make a hypothesis that job satisfaction, positive
affectivity and affective commitment might play mediating roles in the relationship between POS and JP.

**Question 7:** Page 4: Please detail studies on the POS-Satisfaction relationship. Same comment for the effects of satisfaction on performance and once again a theoretical rationale is needed to explain why satisfaction could be significantly associated with performance.

**Answer 7:** We described the studies on the POS-Satisfaction relationship in details in the revised manuscript. In addition, we still put on more explanation about the effects of satisfaction on performance and a theoretical rationale about the association between satisfaction and performance. ‘Job satisfaction reflects an individual’s level of contentment with his or her job. During a social exchange, a person identifies the amount of input gained from a relationship compared to the output as well as the amount of effort the other person puts forth [11]. An increase in the help delivered to a recipient has been found to increase the aid returned and the liking for the donor [12]. According to organizational support theory, POS meets the need for social emotion, but praise and approval are still needed [5]. Job satisfaction refers to employees' attitude toward their job[13]. POS should can meet socioemotional needs and increase performance-reward expectancies, or signal the availability of aid, which could contribute to overall job satisfaction. Therefore, we assume that POS is positively related to job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1a: POS is positively related to employees’ job satisfaction.*

The Hawthorne studies indicate that the relationship between workplace attitudes and productivity has been a venerable research tradition [14]. Previous studies have presumed a relationship between attitude and behavior [15-18]. Due to human relations movement, satisfaction follows from the rewards produced by performance. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) concluded that people who evaluate an attitude object favorably (that is, high level of job satisfaction) tend to engage in behaviors that foster or support it, and people who evaluate an attitude object unfavorably (that is, low
level of job satisfaction) tend to engage in behaviors that hinder or oppose it [19]. Following this logic, the attitude towards a job should influence behavior in the workplace, of which job performance is the central part [17]. Additionally, we are interested in the possible mediating effect of employees’ sense of satisfaction in terms of POS and performance [6].

**Question 8:** Hypothesis 1b: Why do you propose a partial mediation?

**Answer 8:** The hypothesis about a partial mediation is based on the inconsistent conclusions from studies about the relationship between POS and JP. Stamper and Johlke (2003) declared that there is no relationship between POS and JP, while Rhoades et al. (2002) stated that POS is statistically associated with performance. Therefore, we assume that there can be some mediation mechanisms for explaining the relationship between POS and performance and the suspected mediators were chosen in this study.

**Question 9:** Page 5: Please detail studies on the POS-PA relationship. Same comment for the effects of PA on performance and once again a theoretical rationale is needed to explain why PA could be significantly associated with performance (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001). I do not understand why you refer to Meyer and Allen (1991) in a section on PA.

**Answer 9:** We described the studies on the relationship between POS and PA in details and the effects of PA on the performance as well in the revised manuscript. Positive affectivity is a characteristic that describes how animals and humans experience positive emotions and interact with others and with their surroundings [20]. Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) defined positive affectivity as involving feelings of enthusiasm, excitement, confidence, and alertness [21]. Positive affectivity, which is also referred to as positive mood, can be enhanced by events at work that indicate an employee’s competence, worth, or achievement [22]. Meyer and Allen (1991) suggested that emotional attachment was enhanced by work experiences contributing to employee comfort and perceived competence. POS might contribute to such
experiences, fostering positive affectivity [7]. George and Brief (1992) proposed that
events at work reflecting an employee's competence, worth, or achievement would
enhance positive affectivity [22]. POS may contribute to positive affectivity by
conveying an organization’s positive valuation of an employee’s work and care for the
employee’s well-being [7].
Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

_Hypothesis 2a: POS is positively related to employees’ positive affectivity._

George and Brief (1992) noted that positive affectivity was a pivotal construct in the
model and posited that it was the direct precursor of organizational spontaneity. It
includes helping co-workers, protecting the organization, and making constructive
suggestions, which are performance-related behaviors [22]. Performance is a function
of ability and motivation [23-25]. The existing research on positive affectivity has
suggested that positive feeling states influence the ability component of task
performance in a variety of ways [24, 26, 27]. Kaplan et al. (2009) proved a positive
relationship between PA and job performance [28]. They concluded that higher PA is
associated with greater expectancy and optimism, in turn, it should foster different
behaviors beneficial to performance. For instance, those high in PA may select more
demanding goals [29], demonstrate greater determination, engage in effective
problem-solving strategies [30], and utilize more efficacious coping strategies [31].
Thus, whereas other workers may show less initiative or fail to persevere, the positive
expectations held by higher PA individuals ultimately should result in their selecting
and completing challenging work tasks [28]. Due to other mediating variables, such as
job satisfaction and affective commitment, we believe that positive affectivity
partially mediates the relationship between POS and employees’ job performance.

Indeed, Fredrickson (2001) talks much about broaden-and-build theory of positive
affectivity, but this paper mentioned few about the relationship between positive
affectivity with job performance. So we did not cite it here.
Furthermore, thanks for this comment about reference from Meyer and Allen (1991). The reference written by Meyer and Allen (1991) should be not cited here, since this paper talks about the POS and PA, and it should be cited in the section of relationship between POS and AC, not in this part. This has been corrected in the revised paper.

**Question 10:** Page 6: Please detail studies on the POS-AC relationship. Same comment for the effects of AC on performance and once again a theoretical rationale is needed to explain why AC could be significantly associated with performance. You also need to explain why you only focus on AC and do not consider the other forms of organizational commitment.

**Answer 10:** We described the studies on the relationship between POS and AC in details and the effects of PA on the performance as well in the revised manuscript. This has been added Page 7, 2nd paragraph. Meyer and Allen (1991) considered a positive emotional attachment by employees to their work organization as a distinct type of organizational commitment [32]. Tsui et al (1997) suggested that caring and positive regard for employees from organization act to enhance affective commitment via the reciprocity norm [33]. Organizational support theory supposes that POS contributes to affective commitment by creating a felt obligation to care about the organization and meet the organization's objectives [7]. We also explain the reasons why AC could significantly associate with performance. In this manuscript we focus on AC rather than other forms of organizational commitment, since we referred to the meta-analysis from Meyer et al (2002), where affective commitment had the strongest and most favorable correlations with organization-relevant outcomes (attendance, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior). Normative commitment was also associated with desirable outcomes, albeit not as strongly. Continuance commitment was unrelated or related negatively, with these outcomes. Furthermore, in our analysis, we found that there is strong correlation between affective commitment and normative commitment ($\rho=0.77$, $p<0.001$). Based on the meta-analysis from Meyer et al (2002) and our preliminary analysis, we put emphasis on AC alone and explore the relationship between POS and
AC based on our data and illustrate this relationship in the staff in Chinese universities.

Question 11: Page 7: You need to explain why you do not consider other forms of organizational justice. Please provide a theoretical rationale for the effects of justice on POS.

Answer 11: In the original survey, we collected the data about interactional justice, one form of organizational justice. The reasons we did not consider the interactional justice in the final analysis are as follows: one is that in the preliminary analysis, we found that there is high correlation between PJ and interactional justice ($\rho=0.85$), so we assume that these two forms of organization justice reflect overlapping information. More importantly, interactional justice is the social aspect of procedural justice and involves the quality of interpersonal treatment in resource allocation. (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997), which is not the objective of our study. Therefore, we did not take this into our final model.

More arguments about the effects of justice on POS have been added on page 9.

Based on organizational support theory, POS is influenced by various aspects of an employee’s treatment by his or her organization. Specifically, these aspects include the organization’s desire to pay a fair salary and to make the employee’s job meaningful and interesting [5]. In the present study, we propose that organizational justice (especially procedural justice and distributive justice) and personal and organizational characteristics contribute to perceived organizational support.

As defined by Greenberg (1987), organizational justice or fairness is related to how an employee judges the behavior of an organization and the resulting attitude and behavior. There are three main proposed components of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice [41]. Distributive justice is conceptualized as the fairness associated with decision outcomes and the distribution of resources [42]. The distributed outcomes or resources may be tangible (e.g., pay) or intangible (e.g., praise). According to organizational support theory, favorable opportunities for rewards communicate a positive valuation of employees’
contributions and thus contribute to POS [5, 6]. Procedural justice is defined as the fairness of the process that leads to outcomes. When individuals feel that they have a voice in the process or that the process involves characteristics such as consistency, accuracy, ethicality, and a lack of bias, procedural justice is enhanced [43]. Procedural justice is used to determine the distribution of resources among employees [44]. Shore and Shore (1995) suggested that repeated instances of fairness in decisions concerning resource distribution should have a strong cumulative effect on POS by indicating a concern for employees’ welfare [45]. Rhoades et al. reported that more than 70 studies suggest that basic antecedents of POS include fair organizational procedures, supervisor support, and favorable rewards and job conditions (which are the same as distributive justice) [6].

Question 12: Page 8: Why did you choose these control variables?

Answer 12: We chose these control variables from demographical characteristics from epidemiological consideration, since these control variables might be confounding factors which will influence the analysis results, or even worse, make a biased conclusion. In order to avoid this condition, we adjust these control variables (confounding factors) in this study to make the conclusion more reliable, which is similar to the multivariate analysis. Based on our observational experience and knowledge, age, gender, work experience, tenure, subject type and school type were selected as control variables.

Question 13: Results: Please test a measurement model with all dimensions instead of conducting 7 CFAs. You should use all the items and latent variables rather than a single indicator for each construct (SEM analysis with latent variables). The internal consistency of the job satisfaction scale is not acceptable (.56).

Answer 13: Thanks for the advice. In the revised manuscript, we have performed the CFA with all dimensions, which includes 44 observed variables and 7 latent variables simultaneously. After model modification, the chi-square value is 2038.33 with degree of freedom 805 and p< 0.001. GFI, CFI, NFI and SRMR are 0.86, 0.95, 0.90 and 0.10
respectively. All these indices show a moderate fit for the desired model. Indeed, the internal consistency for job satisfaction is not high (0.56). This might be a limitation for our study. However, Hatcher and Stepanski (1994) reports that for social studies, a Cronbach alpha as low as 0.55 could be recognized and accepted from statistical consideration. So even not high, it is still be acceptable for this study.

**Question 14:** Discussion: This section must be completely rewritten by shedding light on the theoretical and practical implications of the present research.

**Answer 14:** The discussion section has been rewritten in the revised manuscript.

Diverse samples of employees from different levels of universities in China were used in this study. The analysis results indicated that POS is positively related to JS, PA, and AC, and these three mediators are positively associated with JP. These findings are consistent with organizational support theory. Eisenberger et al. (2001) found that the relationship between POS and AC was partly mediated by employees’ perceived obligation to care about the welfare of the organization and to help the organization achieve its goals. Eisenberger et al. (1997) reported that favorable work experiences were associated with POS, and employees believe these to be under the organization’s control. In our results we presented the mediating effect of proposed variables. The logic is that without any mediating variables, POS would positively predict JP, while once added them, the effect of POS was not statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship between POS and JP was entirely mediated by JS, PA, and AC. Employees who perceive that their organization cares about and values them seem to develop stronger affective commitment to their organization. Choi found that AC is a partial mediator of the relationship between POS and contextual performance [40]. Takeuchi et al.’s longitudinal survey also demonstrated a positive correlation between current assignment POS and JP, which is affected by AC [34]. The results suggest that organizations must improve JS, PA, and AC for employees by taking various measures to increase the JP of university faculty members.

We also found that procedural and distributive justice are positively related to
employees’ POS. This finding is consistent with organizational support theory, which suggests that favorable opportunities for rewards communicate a positive valuation of employees’ contributions and contribute to POS (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades et al. 2002). The hierarchical multiple regression analysis results revealed that procedural and distributive justice explain almost half of the variation of POS, and these two dimensions of organizational justice can positively predict POS.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how to achieve the organizational effectiveness, which is a major concern of organizational theorists and practitioners in faculty staff in Chinese university and could help better understand the relationships between POS, JS and JP in China. One objective is to examine the extent to which POS is associated with JP. Another is to investigate the relationships between JS and JP.

The approach that we used in this study gives us a more precise understanding of the relationship between POS and JP. The effects of mediators in this relationship indicated that POS is positively related to JS, PA, and AC, and these three mediators are positively associated with JP, which partially explain the long confusion in past regarding the relationship between POS and JP. This highlights the importance of choosing mediators and criteria in terms of compatibility, both conceptually and empirically.

The results of this study generally suggest that administrators should seek to increase the level of support given to these staff by universities. By implementing policies and work processes sending information to employees that the organization cares about their well-being and highly values his or her contributions, the organization will reduce the amount of stress of the employee. For example, programs and processes such as flexible scheduling for employee, participatory decision making, and employee award programs, may benefit the organization by improving the job-related positivity on employees’ likelihood of reducing negative work attitude. In addition, informal support such as encouraging employees and acknowledging their hard work may also act to send the message that the organization supports them in their tasks.
In summary, the present study provides evidence that perceived organizational support is correlated with job performance, with mediating effects of job satisfaction, positive affect, and affective commitment. These findings can help administrators to find ways to use POS to increase JP. Furthermore, organizational justice, including procedural and distributive justice, is an antecedent of POS and helps to improve POS in practice.

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, it is cross-sectional design that precludes from drawing conclusions concerning the causal relationships among the observational variables. Secondly, the sample was not large, thus our power for detecting between several relationships effects was relatively low. Finally, our sample was limited to the faculty members in universities located in the north part of China which may limit the generalizability of the results. Further studies should be performed in the large-scale survey or cohort around China.

**Question 15:** The authors should provide a brief paragraph acknowledging the limitations to their study, if only 2-3 sentences. While I understand that the authors have executed the methodology well, the limitations of research should be explicitly reported.

**Answer 15:** Limitations to this study are as follows. It is cross-sectional design that precludes from drawing conclusions concerning the causal relationships among the observational variables. In addition, the sample was not large, thus our power for detecting between several relationships effects was relatively low. Finally, our sample was limited to the faculty members in universities located in the north part of China which may limit the generalizability of the results. Further studies should be performed in the large-scale survey or cohort around China.

**Editors’ Comments:**

**Question 16:** the authors include a short section that explores how these findings might be utilized in medical education specifically.
Answer 16: Since once medical educators are hired by universities in China and they could work until retire without any pressure about the work. Therefore, some of them might have no motivation to develop their instructional responsibility, intellectual contribution, professional service, collegiality, and professionalism. For this reason, we must create an effective system to raise faculty members’ job performance. Our results provide the administrator information on how to improve the job performance of faculty members in university in China. According to our results, administrators could increase their JP through POS, and POS could be improved by enhancing job satisfaction, positive affectivity, affective commitment, procedural and distributive justice. It is generally suggested that administers should seek to increase the level of support given to these staff by universities. By implementing policies and work processes sending information to employees that the organization cares about their well-being and highly values his or her contributions, the organization will reduce the amount of stress of the employee. For example, programs and processes such as flexible scheduling for employee, participatory decision making, and employee award programs, may benefit the organization by improving the job-related positivity on employees’ likelihood of reducing negative work attitude. In addition, informal support such as encouraging employees and acknowledging their hard work may also act to send the message that the organization supports them in their tasks.