Role of Perceived Organizational Support and Social Connectedness in Employee Engagement Among Remote and Hybrid Workers

Teresa Joseph Kavalam[1], Anitha Mary Mathew[2]

[1]Student M.Sc. Psychology, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru

Abstract

The transition to remote and hybrid work setups has notably altered traditional workplace dynamics, presenting new challenges in maintaining employee engagement in virtual environments. This research examines the role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Social Connectedness (SCS) in work engagement among employees working remotely or in hybrid settings. A quantitative research approach was employed, gathering data from 131 participants (64 males and 67 females, aged 21-50) who had been working remotely or in a hybrid mode as full-time employees for at least six months. Standardized tools were utilized, including the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS), the Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R), and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The results indicated that POS was a significant predictor of work engagement, highlighting the importance of organizational care, recognition, and support in virtual work environments. In contrast, SCS showed no significant relationship with engagement, suggesting that traditional social connections may have less impact in remote settings. Regression analysis further confirmed the stronger influence of POS over SCS in predicting engagement. These findings suggest that in remote and hybrid work environments, employees may value autonomy, flexibility, and organizational trust more than frequent social interactions as in traditional office settings.

Keywords: Organizational climate, Work environment, Psychological factors, Employee motivation, Work involvement, Human relations

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the nature of work has undergone substantial transformation, with remote work emerging as the predominant mode of employment. The shift to remote and hybrid work environments, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced new challenges in sustaining employee engagement. Employee engagement is crucial as it affects job satisfaction, productivity, and overall workplace well-being. This study examines the impact of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and social connectedness in employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers. It explores how employees' perceptions of organizational care and value, along with their sense of connection to both colleagues and the organization, influence their levels of work engagement. Understanding these dynamics is essential for organizations seeking to enhance the productivity, well-being, and overall satisfaction of their remote workforce.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is a crucial concept in organizational behaviour that encompasses employees' beliefs about their organization's commitment to them. It pertains to how employees perceive the extent to which their organization appreciates their efforts and is concerned about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Research suggests that POS significantly impacts work engagement by enhancing employees' sense of belonging and commitment (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Pimenta et al., 2023). Employees who perceive strong organizational support demonstrate higher levels of vigor, absorption, and dedication in their roles (Pimenta et al., 2023). In remote work settings, where traditional workplace interactions are limited, POS becomes even more critical in ensuring engagement (Fatima et al., 2024). While POS provides a foundation for employee loyalty and productivity, social connectedness enriches this relationship by fulfilling employees' intrinsic need for belonging.

Social connectedness is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of meaningful, close, and constructive relationships with others (O'Rourke & Sidani, 2017). It comprises two main components: feeling cared for by others and belonging to a group or community (O'Rourke & Sidani, 2017). Studies indicate that strong social connectedness reduces employee ill-being and enhances engagement, whereas isolation and lack of connection can negatively impact motivation and performance (Brown & Leite, 2022). Baumeister and Leary (1995) emphasize that need to belong is a fundamental human motivation, and when this need is met, employees experience greater emotional commitment and job satisfaction. Additionally, Setiabudhi et al. (2021) found that social support positively influences engagement through affective commitment, reinforcing the need for organizations to foster strong interpersonal relationships among remote employees. Studies show that increased social connectedness and organizational support correlate with decreased ill-being and more favourable remote work experiences (Brown & Leite, 2022). Nonetheless, the influence of social connectedness on remote work is intricate and multifaceted. By cultivating a sense of belonging and addressing both psychological and physical isolation, organizations can boost telecommuters' emotional commitment and overall engagement (Wang et al., 2020). Employees who feel socially connected are more inclined to collaborate effectively, exchange ideas, and support each other, which can improve both engagement and overall team dynamics.

According to Schaufeli (2013), work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Research indicates that remote work presents unique engagement challenges such as professional isolation, cyber ostracism, and communication barriers (Yang et al., 2022). Remote workers often face loneliness, procrastination, work-home interference, and decreased social interactions, which can reduce their engagement and mental well-being (Fatima et al., 2024). Organizations must develop strategies to mitigate these challenges and enhance engagement through supportive policies and robust communication structures.

Empirical studies support a positive relationship between POS and engagement. For instance, Al Riyami et al. (2023) found that low levels of POS exacerbate workplace ostracism among remote workers. Khaliq et al. (2024) established that POS fosters creativity through increased engagement, while Nargotra and Sarangal (2021) highlighted that POS enhances both engagement and employee retention. Silva and Lopes (2021) found that POS positively influenced engagement, reduced occupational stress, and improved job performance.

This study's theoretical foundation is based on Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to OST, employees form beliefs about how much their organization appreciates their contributions and cares for their well-being, which in turn affects their attitudes and

behaviors at work (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Conversely, SET proposes that employees respond to perceived organizational support by exhibiting positive behaviors in the workplace, such as heightened engagement (Saks, 2006; Zhong et al., 2015). By combining OST and SET, this research explores how perceived organizational support and social connectedness work together to enhance engagement among remote employees.

2. Review of Literature

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and social connectedness have been recognized as significant factors influencing employee engagement in work-from-home environments. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of POS as a determinant of employee engagement. For instance, studies conducted by Imran et al. (2020) and Headley (2024) demonstrated that when employees perceived themselves as valued and supported by their organization, their levels of engagement were higher, even in remote settings. POS has been associated with various positive outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and greater work engagement, particularly when organizations created supportive work environments and provided resources tailored to the needs of remote employees.

Social connectedness, while also crucial, plays a more complex role in remote work contexts. Strong social connections have been found to enhance engagement and well-being, as noted in studies by Brown and Leite (2022) and Martin (2022). However, the inherent lack of face-to-face interaction in remote work can lead to feelings of isolation, negatively impacting engagement and overall employee morale. Zhang (2022) observed that reduced social connectedness could exacerbate psychological strain, further affecting employee health and performance.

The literature suggests that organizations should focus not only on providing robust support systems (POS) but also on actively promoting social connectedness among remote employees to sustain high levels of engagement. Strategies that combine organizational support with opportunities for social interaction, even though virtual means, are essential for keeping work-from-home employees engaged and connected to their organization.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research on Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and social connectedness, a gap remains in understanding the relationship between social connectedness and work engagement, as well as the combined effects of POS and social connectedness on remote work engagement. While existing studies have explored the individual influence of POS on engagement and the role of social connectedness in mitigating isolation, limited research has examined their joint impact. Moreover, most previous studies have primarily focused on the IT sector, leaving other industries relatively unexplored. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of how POS and social connectedness influence employee engagement across various sectors, including education and e-learning, consulting services, customer service, marketing and advertising, information technology, and IT-enabled services etc. where employees often work remotely or in hybrid work modes.

3. Objectives

- To assess the relationship between social connectedness and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers
- To assess the relationship between employee engagement and perceived organisational support among remote and hybrid workers

- To examine the combined effects of perceived organizational support and social connectedness on employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers

4. Methodology

A quantitative research approach was employed to examine the relationships between perceived organizational support, social connectedness, and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers. The study included a purposive sample of 131 full-time employees aged between 21 and 50 years, comprising both male and female participants, who had been working remotely or in a hybrid mode for at least the past six months. Participants represented various sectors including education and e-learning, customer service, consulting, marketing and advertising, information technology, and IT-enabled services. Data were collected via Google Forms using standardized instruments: the 8-item Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1997), the 20-item Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001), and the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). These tools demonstrated high internal reliability and strong validity. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi 2.5.6, with descriptive statistics used to summarize the data, Pearson's correlation to examine relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis to assess the combined impact of perceived organizational support and social connectedness on employee engagement.

5. Operational Definition

- Perceived Organizational Support refers to the belief that the organization values the employee's work and cares about their well-being. It reflects how supported and appreciated employees feel by their organisation.
- Social Connectedness refers to the feeling of emotional closeness and connection that employees have with others, such as colleagues, friends, or family and society in general.
- Work Engagement refers to the level of energy, involvement, and focus an employee brings to their job tasks. It shows how enthusiastic and absorbed they are in their work.

6. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1- There is no relationship between social connectedness and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers.

Hypothesis 2- There is no relationship between perceived organisational support and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers.

Hypothesis 3- There is no significant impact of perceived organizational support and social connectedness in employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers.

7. Result

Following are the results for correlation and multiple regression to assess the relationship between social connectedness and employee engagement, perceived organizational support and employee engagement and impact of POS and social connectedness on employee engagement.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	n	M	SD
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)		37.70	5.81
Social Connectedness (SCS)	131	81.30	11.30
Work Engagement (UWES)		29.80	7.46

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Social Connectedness (SCS), and Work Engagement (UWES), based on sample of 131 participants. The mean score for POS is 37.7, suggesting moderate perceived organizational support. The median is 38, with half of participants scoring above and half below. The standard deviation of 5.81 indicates moderate variability. The mean score for SCS is 81.3, indicating moderate to high social connectedness. The median of 81 suggests a symmetrical distribution. The standard deviation of 11.3 reflects higher variability compared to POS. The mean score for UWES is 29.8, indicating moderate work engagement. The median of 29 confirms a relatively even distribution. The standard deviation of 7.46 suggests moderate variation in work engagement levels among remote employees.

Table 2 Pearson's Correlation between Social Connectedness and Work Engagement

Variable	1	2
1. Social Connectedness (SCS)	—	.003
2. Work Engagement (UWES)	.003	—

Note. N = 131, p = .977 > 0.01, The correlation is not statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the results of a Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis, exploring the relationship between social connectedness (SCS) and work engagement (UWES) among 131 remote employees. The analysis reveals a negligible positive correlation (r = .003) between the two variables. However, the correlation is not statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value (p = .977), which is < 0.05. This finding suggests that in this sample, employees' perceived level of social connection does not appear to significantly impact their engagement at work.

Table 3 Correlation Between Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement

Variable	1	2
1. Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	—	0.396***
2. Work Engagement (UWES)	0.396***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis conducted to examine the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and work engagement (UWES) among 131 participants. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation, $r(129) = .396$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher levels of perceived organizational support are associated with higher levels of work engagement. The correlation is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ indicating that employees who perceive greater support from their organization tend to report higher engagement in their work.

Table 4 Regression Analysis

Variable	R	R^2	SE	t	p
POS TOTAL SCORE	0.418	0.174	0.1090	5.20	$< .001$
SCS SCORE TOTAL			0.0561	-1.66	0.099

Table 4 shows a moderate correlation coefficient ($R = 0.418$), indicating a positive relationship between the predictors and employee engagement. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.174$) suggests that approximately 17.4% of the variance in employee engagement. The regression coefficients indicate that Perceived Organizational Support (POS) significantly predicts employee engagement, with a standard error of 0.1090, a t-value of 5.20, and a p-value less than .001, confirming strong statistical significance. This suggests that higher POS is associated with higher levels of employee engagement. In contrast, the Social Connectedness Scale (SCS) score has a standard error of 0.0561, a t-value of -1.66, and a p-value of 0.099, indicating that it is not a statistically significant predictor of employee engagement within the model.

Given these results, H01 is accepted as the correlation coefficient $r = .003$ suggests an extremely weak relationship between social connectedness and work engagement. Thus, there is no significant relationship between social connectedness and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers in this sample. H02 is rejected as there is a significant moderate positive relationship between perceived organisational support and employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers. H03 is partially rejected, as POS significantly influences employee engagement, but SCS does not demonstrate a meaningful impact. These findings emphasize the critical role of perceived organizational support in fostering employee engagement among remote and hybrid workers while highlighting the need to explore other potential factors that may contribute to engagement levels in remote work settings.

8. Discussion

Perceived organizational support and social connectedness are crucial factors impacting employee engagement in remote work environments. The results indicate that there is no positive correlation between social connectedness and engagement among remote and hybrid workers. This challenges the belief that enhancing social connections automatically boosts engagement. Instead, it suggests remote work settings may change how social interactions affect employee attitudes and behaviors. Several reasons might account for this absence of correlation. Remote workers might prioritize elements like autonomy, flexibility, or work-life balance over social connections. Moreover, they might find alternative social support outside work, lessening workplace social connections' importance. These findings highlight the need for organizations to re-evaluate strategies for enhancing engagement in remote settings, as traditional methods may not produce anticipated outcomes.

The results indicated a moderate positive correlation between POS and work engagement, further regres

sion analysis showed that POS is a significant positive predictor of work engagement, suggesting that higher perceived organizational support enhances work engagement among remote employees. Several studies have supported this relationship. Yongxing et al. (2017) found work engagement positively relates to task performance, strengthened by higher POS. Zhong et al. (2015) indicate that high-performance HR practices that contribute to POS are directly related to job engagement. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) found during the pandemic, employees perceiving higher organizational support reported greater engagement. This suggests supportive organizational practices are crucial for maintaining engagement, especially in challenging circumstances.

Furthermore, SCS shows a negative but statistically insignificant effect, indicating that social connectedness does not play a significant role in work engagement for this group of remote workers. This suggests that factors such as having a sense of purpose in their work, clear objectives, recognition, opportunities for career growth, and trust in leadership might have a more substantial influence on employee engagement in a virtual setting than social connections alone. This also indicates that employee engagement can be sustained even without in-person interactions if the right communication tools, processes, and strategies are implemented. Examples include virtual meetings, collaboration platforms, and regular check-ins. Additionally, employees' social needs may have evolved, with some preferring remote work over face-to-face interaction due to its autonomy and flexibility. In this context, remote work environments can still meet their participation needs without heavily emphasizing interpersonal relationships. Especially in context of hybrid work environments companies may have adapted their work cultures to better support remote as well as hybrid teams, ensuring that employees feel motivated, engaged, and valued even when not physically present. This could involve fostering a culture that emphasizes results, personal growth, and a sense of community, albeit in a nontraditional manner.

9. Conclusion

The findings from this study challenge the traditional assumption that social connectedness directly drives employee engagement in remote work environments. Despite the crucial role of perceived organizational support (POS), which was found to significantly enhance work engagement, social connectedness does not appear to have the same impact in a virtual setting. This suggests that remote workers may prioritize autonomy, flexibility, work-life balance, and other factors over traditional social connections. Additionally, virtual interactions may not replicate the depth of in-person interactions, reducing their influence on engagement. The results also indicate that a sense of purpose, clear objectives, recognition, career growth opportunities, and trust in leadership are more substantial drivers of engagement for remote employees than social connections alone. Furthermore, employees' social needs may have evolved, with many preferring the flexibility and autonomy of remote work over face-to-face interaction. Thus, organizations should consider the unique needs and preferences of remote workers and adapt their engagement strategies, accordingly, placing greater emphasis on organizational support, work clarity, and career development etc. to sustain engagement in virtual environments.

10. Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable insights for organizations seeking to optimize employee engagement in remote work settings. First and foremost, companies should prioritize initiatives that enhance perceived organizational support. This can be achieved through regular check-ins with employees, transparent communication about organizational goals and expectations, and providing

necessary tools and resources for remote work. Recognition programs and employee well-being initiatives can further reinforce the perception that the organization values its workforce.

Moreover, organizations should reconsider their approach to fostering social connectedness. While social connections remain important for employee well-being, they may not be the primary drivers of engagement in remote settings. Instead, companies should focus on creating a supportive virtual work culture that emphasizes trust, autonomy, and meaningful work. Leadership training programs that equip managers with the skills to provide individualized support to remote employees can also contribute to higher engagement levels.

11. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. One limitation is the sample size, which consisted of 131 participants. While this sample provided meaningful insights, a larger and more diverse sample would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability and self-perception errors.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional research design, which captures data at a single point in time and does not allow for causal inferences. A longitudinal study tracking employee engagement over time would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how POS and social connectedness influence engagement. Furthermore, the study primarily focused on work-from-home employees across various industries but did not examine sector-specific differences. Future qualitative research can be helpful in investigating whether certain industries or job roles experience different levels of engagement based on these variables.

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