

Unlocking Employee Engagement: Exploring Organisational Identification as a Mediator between Supervisor Support and Work Engagement

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Abstract

In the competitive landscape of modern organisations, employee engagement is critical to organisational success. This conceptual paper examines the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and work engagement (WE), with a particular focus on the mediating role of organisational identification (OI). The study adopts a conceptual approach and integrates findings from Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory to propose a theoretical framework. By synthesising the existing literature, it explores the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between PSS and WE and develops propositions that explain how OI mediates this link. The proposed framework highlights that supportive supervisor behaviours promote OI, which in turn increases WE. By positioning OI as a mediator, the study fills a gap in the existing literature and provides a deeper understanding of the psychological processes involved. In practice, companies should encourage supportive behaviours from managers, such as empathy and recognition, to strengthen OI, which ultimately leads to an improvement in WE. Aligning employees with organisational values and integrating the JD-R framework can balance job demands with resources such as PSS and OI, creating a supportive environment that improves employee wellbeing, engagement and overall performance. This paper contributes to academic discourse by addressing the overlooked mediating role of OI in the relationship between PSS and WE, while the integration of JD-R theory offers a novel perspective on how personal and organisational resources interact to promote WE.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Perceived Supervisor Support, Organisational Identification, Jd-R Theory

Introduction

In the increasingly competitive and dynamic landscape of modern organisations, employee engagement has emerged as a critical determinant of organisational success (Bakker et al., 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Engaged employees are more productive, innovative, and

loyal, making them invaluable assets to their organisations. Despite the extensive research on understanding and enhancing employee engagement, organisations continue to struggle with low engagement levels (Gallup, 2022, 2023). This challenge has intensified in recent years due to the rapid increase in hybrid working models, digital transformation and the changing expectations of employees. As a result, traditional approaches to increasing employee engagement may no longer be enough, so the factors that sustain engagement in challenging work environments need to be examined more closely. This problem is particularly pronounced when employees face high demands and stress, highlighting the need to explore personal and organisational resources that might help mitigate these challenges (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). However, achieving and sustaining high levels of work engagement (WE) requires more than just providing employees with the necessary resources and opportunities. It demands a deep understanding of the psychological processes that connect these resources to employee outcomes.

One such psychological process is organisational identification (OI), which reflects how employees align themselves with their organisation's values, goals, and identity (Başar, 2024). When employees identify strongly with their organisation, they are more likely to be committed, motivated, and engaged in their work (Kazmi & Javaid, 2022). This sense of identification can be significantly influenced by perceived supervisor support (PSS), which refers to employees' perceptions of how much their supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being (Valle et al., 2020). Supervisors play a crucial role in shaping employees' perceptions of the organisation, and supportive supervisors can enhance employees' sense of belonging, thereby fostering more robust organisational identification (Uzun, 2018).

While the relationship between PSS and work engagement has been well-documented (Mazzetti et al., 2021), the mediating role of organisational identification within this relationship remains underexplored. By integrating OI as a mediator into Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, this study provides a new perspective on the mechanisms through which job resources such as PSS contribute to WE. This approach extends theoretical insights and also offers practical implications for improving employee engagement in modern organisations.

Although previous research recognises the importance of PSS in improving workplace outcomes, the psychological pathways linking PSS to engagement have not been sufficiently explored. In particular, little attention has been paid to the mediating role of organisational identification. Understanding this mediating role is crucial for both theoretical advancement and practical application, as it can provide organisations with actionable insights into enhancing employee engagement through targeted support strategies.

The primary objective of this paper is to develop a conceptual model that explains the mediating role of organisational identification in the relationship between PSS and work engagement within the JD-R framework. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature on organisational behaviour and provide practical recommendations for organisations seeking to enhance employee engagement.

The article is organised as follows: First, the literature review on the concepts of the study is presented. Then the theoretical framework is outlined, focusing on JD-R theory, PSS as a job resource and the concepts of organisational identification and work engagement. The conceptual model is then developed to explore the relationships between PSS, organisational identification, and work engagement, focusing on the mediating role of organisational identification. Implications for theory and practice are then discussed, highlighting the contributions of the proposed model to the existing literature and providing practical recommendations for organisations. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research directions and a summary of key findings.

Literature Review

Work Engagement

Work engagement is a widely researched concept, although its definition varies across studies and is often used interchangeably with "employee engagement" (Singh, 2018). Kahn (1990) first conceptualised engagement as the emotional and psychological connection that employees have with their work role, drawing on sociological concepts of attachment. Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) later expanded this foundational work, which defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. This definition has become widely accepted as it covers both the emotional and cognitive aspects of work well and is now used in most studies on engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017).

Meta-analyses of work engagement have identified several key factors, such as personal resources, supportive leadership and a positive organisational climate, all of which contribute to fostering engagement (Christian *et al.*, 2011; Halbesleben, 2010). Engaged employees consistently report higher levels of job satisfaction, well-being, organisational commitment, and lower turnover intention (Firzly *et al.*, 2022; Mazzetti *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, research highlights the detrimental effects of low engagement, such as burnout and reduced productivity, emphasising the need for organisations to prioritise engagement for long-term success.

Beyond its antecedents, work engagement also serves as a mediating factor in key organisational processes. Engaged employees exhibit proactive behaviours such as job crafting and innovation, as demonstrated in various studies (Sharma & Nambudiri, 2020). Furthermore, the mediating role of engagement explains how resources such as psychological capital and organisational justice lead to better health and performance outcomes (Alessandri *et al.*, 2018; Lupsa *et al.*, 2020). These findings highlight the importance of work engagement not only as an outcome, but also as a vital link through which other positive behaviours and outcomes are realised in the workplace.

Work engagement was primarily determined by job demands and job resources in conjunction with personal resources and their interaction with each other (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024; Kelesoglu *et al.*, 2024). One such important job resource is perceived supervisor support, but its relationship to work engagement has not yet been adequately explored in the literature. Identification with the organisation is also an important psychological process between PSS and work engagement, discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Perceived Supervisor Support

Perceived Supervisor Support refers to the extent to which employees believe that their supervisor values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). PSS has its roots in organisational support theory and differs from general organisational support in emphasising the direct relationship between supervisors and their subordinates. According to Eisenberger et al. (2002), supervisors play a central role in allocating resources and enforcing policies, making them an essential source of support for employees. This support can manifest itself in various forms, including emotional, informational and instrumental support, and plays an important role in employee motivation and engagement. For example, a study by Muse & Pichler (2011) emphasises the importance of PSS as it provides employees with the resources and encouragement which they use them to cope with job demands, leading to better performance and job satisfaction.

Examples from the literature show the impact of PSS on organisational outcomes. Studies have shown that employees who feel supported by their supervisors are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction, less stress and higher engagement (Chae et al., 2019; Huo & Jiang, 2021). In addition, supervisors who provide constructive feedback and show empathy foster an environment in which employees feel valued and are more likely to be committed to their organisation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For example, a study by Ng & Sorensen (2008) found that instrumental support from supervisors, such as providing crucial work-related information, promotes employee development and retention. Thus, PSS is critical in improving employee well-being and productivity, especially in high-stress environments.

Organisational Identification

Organisational identification refers to the psychological connection that individuals form with their organisation, whereby they perceive themselves as part of the organisation and view its successes and failures as their own (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This concept has evolved since the 1950s, with researchers such as Ashforth & Mael (1989) emphasising its role in shaping employee behaviour and organisational outcomes. Organisational identification differs from related concepts such as organisational commitment, which focuses on employee dedication to organisational goals, and organisational citizenship behaviour, which involves voluntary actions to improve organisational performance (Riketta, 2005). On the other hand, organisational identification involves employees aligning their identity with the values, goals and identity of the organisation, creating a shared sense of belonging and attachment (Dutton et al., 1994).

Examples from the literature show the practical importance of organisational identification. For example, studies based on social identity theory argue that employees derive a sense of self-worth from their organisational membership, which can strengthen their engagement and loyalty (Blader et al., 2017; Van Knippenberg et al., 2007). Research shows that employees with a strong identification with the organisation are more willing to adopt the organisation's goals as their own, which leads to higher motivation and lower turnover (Buil et al., 2019; Zappalà et al., 2019). This identification promotes emotional and cognitive attachment to the organisation and thus improves work performance and engagement. Kazmi & Javaid (2022), for example, found that employees with a high level of identification with the organisation showed a better overall attitude to work, a higher level of commitment and greater involvement in their role.

Gap in the Psychological Process: The Missing Link

The prevailing explanations in the literature emphasise the role of external resources. In the context of the JD-R theory, PSS acts as a job resource that helps employees mitigate job demands, thereby enhancing their capacity to stay engaged (Mazzetti et al., 2021). This resource-based approach captures how supervisors provide the tools and emotional support needed for employees to thrive in their roles. In parallel, SET frames the relationship through the lens of reciprocal social exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees who perceive their supervisors as supportive feel obligated to reciprocate through higher engagement and performance (Cropanzano et al., 2017). While these theories provide valuable insights into the external dynamics of support, they offer limited explanations for the internal psychological mechanisms that translate PSS into engagement. What is often missing from the literature is a deeper exploration of the psychological processes that mediate this relationship. How exactly does PSS transform into increased engagement on a psychological level? This is where the concept of organisational identification could contribute to a deeper understanding.

Organisational identification offers a promising but underexplored explanation for this psychological process. It refers to how employees align themselves with their organisation's values, goals, and identity (Edwards & Peccei, 2007). When employees feel that their supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being, they are more likely to identify strongly with the organisation (Edwards & Peccei, 2010). This identification fosters a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation, encouraging employees to engage more deeply in their work. Although research on psychological capital (PsyCap) (Albrecht et al., 2023) suggests that personal psychological resources may also play a role in this process, discussion on specifically examining organisational identification as a mediator remains limited.

Theoretical Foundation

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

The JD-R theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how job demands and resources impact employee well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). According to this theory, job demands (such as high workloads or emotional strain) can lead to burnout, whereas job resources (such as supervisor support or opportunities for professional development) buffer these adverse effects and enhance positive outcomes like work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2024). The JD-R model is widely accepted in organisational behaviour research for its flexibility, allowing researchers to examine how various demands and resources influence employee outcomes across different contexts.

This study conceptualises PSS as a job resource that directly influences employee work engagement. Supervisors who provide clear guidance, emotional support, and constructive feedback help employees manage the demands of their roles, leading to higher levels of engagement (Abualigah et al., 2023; Abukhalifa et al., 2023). However, the existing literature often overlooks how PSS interacts with employees' psychological processes, such as their identification with the organisation. This paper suggests that organisational identification is a key mediator in the PSS-WE relationship, providing a deeper understanding of how job resources affect employee outcomes.

Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) and Organisational Identification

PSS plays a central role in shaping how employees perceive their workplace environment. Supportive supervisors provide the practical tools needed for success and foster a sense of belonging and alignment with the organisation's mission and values (Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Organisational identification occurs when employees internalise these values, viewing themselves as integral parts of the organisation (Edwards & Peccei, 2010). This identification strengthens employees' commitment and motivation, leading to higher engagement levels.

Previous studies have established that PSS enhances work engagement (Haynie et al., 2022; Holland et al., 2017; Tauetsile, 2021; Yorgancioglu Tarcan et al., 2021), but the psychological mechanisms that facilitate this relationship remain unclear. This paper proposes that organisational identification serves as a key mediator, explaining how PSS translates into greater engagement. When employees identify with their organisation, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to contribute, as their personal success aligns with the organisation's success.

Conceptual Framework

This section outlines the proposed conceptual model, highlighting the relationships between perceived supervisor support, organisational identification, and work engagement. Grounded in the JD-R theory, the framework aims to fill an important gap in the literature by introducing organisational identification as a mediator in the PSS-WE relationship. The framework reflects the idea that employees' psychological connection with their organisation strengthens the positive effects of supervisor support, ultimately leading to higher levels of work engagement. After discussing the concepts and their relationships, the conceptual framework of this study is presented at the end of the section in Figure 1.

The Relationship between Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) and Work Engagement

Research consistently demonstrates that Perceived Supervisor Support plays a crucial role in enhancing work engagement (Abualigah et al., 2023; Holland et al., 2017; Jin & McDonald, 2017). According to the Job Demands-Resources theory, PSS is a critical job resource, providing employees with the emotional and instrumental support they need to effectively manage their job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2024). Studies like those by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) argue that employees, who feel supported by their supervisors, experience reduced job-related stress, higher motivation, and consequently, greater engagement in their work. Supervisors help create a supportive work environment that facilitates better performance and well-being, making PSS a central resource in driving employee engagement (Mazzetti et al., 2021).

In addition, Social Exchange Theory (SET) further explains this relationship by suggesting that when employees receive support from their supervisors, they feel an obligation to reciprocate through enhanced commitment and engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees view supportive supervisors as trusted allies, fostering a sense of reciprocity that leads to increased effort and focus on their work (Fan et al., 2019; Imam et al., 2023). This mutually beneficial exchange strengthens the bond between employees and their supervisors, reinforcing higher levels of engagement over time (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Proposition 1: Perceived supervisor support (PSS) is positively related to work engagement.

Perceived Supervisor Support and Organisational Identification

Perceived supervisor support plays a crucial role in promoting employees' organisational identification. As organisation representatives, supervisors influence employees' perceptions of organisational support through their actions and attitudes (Eisenberger et al., 2002). When supervisors provide guidance, recognition and support, employees interpret this as an expression of the esteem in which they are held by the organisation, which strengthens their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Edwards & Peccei, 2010). Social exchange and social identity theories suggest that employees who feel supported by their superiors are more likely to internalise a sense of identification with the organisation as they begin to view the organisation as an important part of their self-concept (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This dynamic fosters an emotional bond between employees and their organisation and creates a shared social identity that strengthens their commitment to the workplace (Kazmi & Javaid, 2022).

Empirical studies repeatedly emphasise the positive relationship between PSS and OI. For example, Kazmi and Javaid (2022) demonstrated that perceived supervisor support positively impacts the organisational identification of faculty members at Pakistani universities and emphasised that supportive supervisors help employees feel emotionally connected to their organisation. Similarly, Uzun (2018) found a strong correlation between PSS and OI among high school teachers in Türkiye, supporting the notion that employees with supportive supervisors are more likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging and identification with their organisation. These studies highlight the importance of supervisor support as a critical job resource that promotes not only employees' emotional well-being but also their organisational psychological link which is organisational identification. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 2: Perceived supervisor support is positively related to organisational identification.

Organisational Identification and Work Engagement

Organisational identification (OI) and work engagement (WE) are conceptually closely linked, as both are based on a positive cognitive and emotional bond between employees and their organisation. Organisational identification refers to the sense of belonging and unity that employees feel towards their organisation, whereby they internalise its values and are proud of their affiliation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This identification fosters a deep connection with the tasks and responsibilities of the organisation and leads to greater engagement and dedication (Buil et al., 2019). Similarly, engagement at work is characterised by high levels of vigour, dedication and absorption in work tasks (Schaufeli, 2021). Employees who identify closely with their organisation tend to develop a greater sense of ownership and loyalty, which translates into higher work engagement as they align their personal goals with the goals of the organisation (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Nabhan & Munajat, 2023).

Empirical studies have repeatedly confirmed the positive relationship between OI and WE in various contexts. Studies show that employees who identify strongly with their organisation are more likely to invest energy, time and effort in their work, which increases their engagement (Zhang et al., 2017) For example, studies among employees of Korean airlines (Lee & Suh, 2023), Chinese hotels (Zhang et al., 2017) and Spanish hotels (Buil et al., 2019) show that OI promotes higher work engagement as employees perceive the success of the organisation as their own. Similar findings among university lecturers in Indonesia also

confirm that a strong organisational identity increases employees' dedication to their tasks and their general work engagement (Nabhan & Munajat, 2023). Identification with the organisation is therefore an important factor for job commitment, as it strengthens employees' emotional and cognitive attachment to their work and the organisation. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 3: Organisational identification is positively related to work engagement.

The Mediating Role of Organisational Identification between Perceived Supervisor Support and Work Engagement

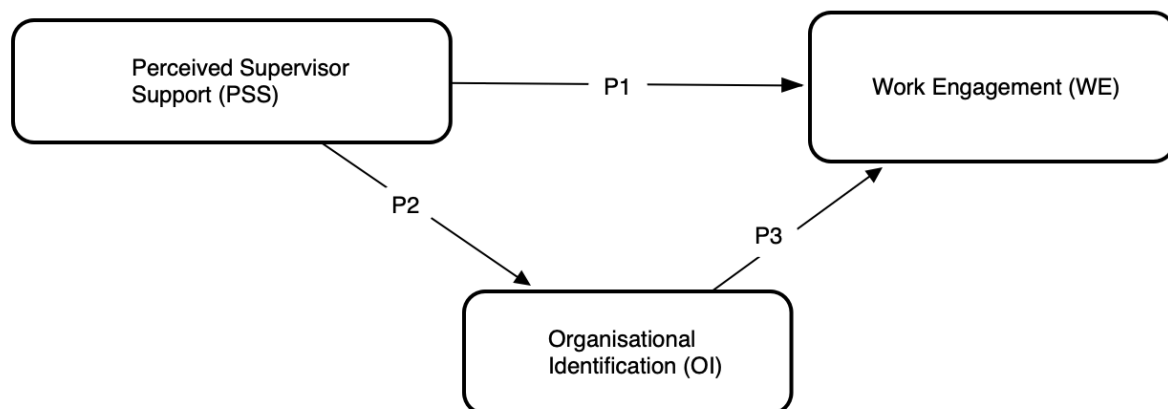
The mediating role of organisational identification between perceived supervisor support and work engagement is an area that is often overlooked in the literature. While many studies have examined the individual relationships between PSS and OI, and OI and WE, the integration of these concepts into a coherent framework has been largely neglected. The Job Demands-Resources model provides a valuable tool for exploring this relationship as it highlights how job resources such as supervisor support can promote personal resources such as OI (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023), which in turn leads to engagement at work. The current study aims to fill this gap by demonstrating how OI functions as a psychological mechanism linking PSS to WE.

Perceived supervisor support (PSS) plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and identification with the organisation, and then it can increase employee engagement. The core assumption behind this model is that supportive supervisors strengthen employees' sense of being valued and understood, which deepens their identification with the organisation (Ashforth et al., 2008). This identification in turn motivates employees to engage more fully in their work (Zappalà et al., 2019). When employees perceive support from their supervisors, they experience greater psychological safety and validation, which are crucial for their self-concept and well-being (Ashforth et al., 2008; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This support fosters a sense of belonging as employees feel recognised and valued within the organisation (Kazmi & Javaid, 2022).

When employees internalise the values and goals of the company, they begin to align their personal identity with the organisation's identity (Ashforth et al., 2008; Mael & Ashforth, 1992) This alignment leads to a deeper psychological connection in which employees see themselves as integral members of the collective (Ashforth et al., 2008). This emotional connection, created through supportive interactions, strengthens employees' self-esteem and commitment (Valle et al., 2020; Zappalà et al., 2019) As identification with the organisation deepens, employees are more likely to be enthusiastic about their work and show higher levels of motivation, dedication, and enthusiasm (Kazmi & Javaid, 2022) Therefore, the transition from feeling supported to identifying with the organisation is an important psychological mechanism that promotes engagement at work.

Although previous research confirms the individual links between PSS and organisational identification (Valle et al., 2020; Zappalà et al., 2019) and between OI and work engagement (Lee & Suh, 2023; Nabhan & Munajat, 2023) the mediating role of OI in this relationship has been largely overlooked. This article seeks to address this gap by exploring how PSS leads to higher work engagement through the development of organisational identification. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 4: Organisational identification mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work engagement.



Note: P4 is the mediation role OI between PSS and WE

Figure 1 Conceptual Model of the Study

Implications for Research and Practice

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual paper contributes to the existing literature on work engagement by introducing organisational identification as a critical mediator in the PSS-work engagement relationship. By integrating this psychological mechanism into the JD-R framework, the paper provides a more detailed understanding of how job resources, particularly supervisor support, influence employee engagement.

The inclusion of organisational identification enhances the JD-R theory by addressing the role of personal resources (such as identity and motivation) in the engagement process. This expanded model offers researchers new avenues for exploring how various psychological and organisational factors interact to shape employee outcomes. Additionally, the paper opens up future empirical studies to test the proposed relationships across different organisational settings and cultures.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the proposed model provides actionable insights for organisations aiming to improve employee engagement. Supervisors should not only provide direct support but also foster a sense of belonging and identity within the organisation. This can be achieved through clear communication of organisational values, recognition of individual contributions, and opportunities for employees to see how their work aligns with the organisation's mission.

Organisations, especially those in high-demand sectors like banking or fast-paced environments, can benefit from implementing training programs that equip supervisors with the skills needed to enhance PSS. By promoting a supportive work environment and

strengthening employees' identification with the organisation, companies can significantly improve work engagement, leading to better performance and lower turnover.

Future Research Directions

This conceptual framework lays the groundwork for future empirical research to validate the proposed relationships. Scholars should explore the mediating role of organisational identification in different organisational contexts, industries, and cultures. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how PSS and organisational identification evolve over time and contribute to sustained engagement.

Future research could also examine the moderating effects of other personal resources, such as psychological capital or growth mindset, on the PSS-organisational identification-work engagement relationship. Exploring these factors will further refine our understanding of how organisations can enhance employee engagement through targeted support strategies.

Conclusion

This paper proposes a conceptual model integrating organisational identification as a mediator between perceived supervisor support and work engagement within the JD-R theory framework. By highlighting the role of organisational identification, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how PSS influences work engagement through psychological mechanisms. The model offers valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners, suggesting that enhancing organisational identification can be a key strategy for improving employee engagement. Future empirical studies are encouraged to test this framework across diverse organisational settings, contributing to the development of a more engaged and productive workforce.

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