



2528-9705



MEDIATING ROLE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL IN THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT ON WORK ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research is to determine whether positive psychological capital has an effect on a perceived organizational support on work engagement. The study was designed with a quantitative research method and survey technique. The survey form created for the study was sent to the participants online. In this way, 314 surveys convenient for the analysis were obtained and the analyzes were carried out through these surveys. A positive and moderate relationship was found among perceived organizational support and positive psychological capital. A positive and moderate correlation was discovered between perceived organizational support and work engagement. Otherwise, a positive and high-level relation was found among positive psychological capital and work engagement. In addition, positive psychological capital was found to have a partial mediation effect between perceived organizational support with work engagement. The results from the study are limited to the sample group and the items given in the survey form. It is believed that the findings will contribute to the literature and guide the organization managers.

Keywords: Perceived organizational support, Positive psychological capital, Work engagement, Covid-19, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

WHO declared the Outbreak of COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). After the COVID-19 Pandemic, there has been an increase in the stress, anxiety, and depression levels of the employees (Potcovaru, 2020). Many of the employees had to work remotely during the pandemic. This was unfamiliar to most employees and led to significant effects on both their psychological capital and their level of work engagement. Employees needed much more organizational support during this period compared to the times before the pandemic. Perceived organizational support, work engagement, and positive psychological capital are very important concepts for organizations, and the Covid 19 Pandemic has further increased the significance of these concepts as well. Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) first discussed perceived organizational support and defined as the contribution made by employees to their organizations and their welfare is important by the organization they work for. Many studies were conducted on perceived organizational support and efforts were made to reveal the importance of the subject.

Luthans *et al.* (2007) believes that psychological capital represents a person's positive evaluation of circumstances and the accomplishment probability based on perseverance and motivated

Geliş tarihi/Received: 21.11.2021 – Kabul tarihi/Accepted: 05.03.2022 – Yayın tarihi/Published: 30.03.2022

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effort. It has dimensions of optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy. Positive organizational behavior, on the other hand, contributes positively to the achievement of organizations today and examine and applies positively oriented human resources forces and psychological capacities that are measurable, improved, and managed effectively to improve performance in the workplace (Gooty *et al.*, 2009).

Work engagement is a mental state in which the employee, performing a work-related activity, completely gets carried away by the activity and feels energetic and enthusiastic about the work (Bakker, 2017). Work engagement is considered the opposite of burnout and cynicism. Employees with high work engagement display higher performance and make more contributions to their organizations. Therefore, organizations are required to produce policies and activities that support their employees' work engagement behavior.

This study has been tried to determine whether positive psychological capital plays a mediating role in the effect of perceived organizational support on work engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic period. In the literature review, no study was found in which these variables were discussed in different studies, but the concepts of organizational support, work dedication, and positive psychological capital were discussed together. For this reason, it is thought that it will contribute to the literature in this sense. In the first part of the study, the conceptual framework was emphasized. In the second part, the method of the study is explained. The third section contains the findings of the research. In the last part, the findings obtained from the research were evaluated.

Conceptual Framework

Perceived Organizational Support

Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) first discussed perceived organizational support. In the study in question, perceived organizational support was defined as the contribution made by employees to their organizations and their welfare being considered important by the organization they work for. Kurtessis *et al.* (2017), the perception of organizational support includes how much the organization cares about an employee's contributions to the workplace and how much it cares about his or her well-being. In respect of organizational support theory, such perceptions have a significant impact on employees' business results (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2020). Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) believes that practices such as wages, job enrichment, organizational policies, and participation increase the perception of organizational support of employees.

Perceived organizational support plays an essential part in the employee-employer relationship and perceived organizational support has also effects on enhancing the welfare of employees and increasing the harmony of employees and the goals of the organization (Aldabbas *et al.*, 2021). For instance, many empirical studies are revealing that perceived organizational support is the most significant organizational issue that reduces the intention to quit (Dawley *et al.*, 2008).

Perceived organizational support includes the organization's possible reaction to the employee's superior performance, faults, and, further illnesses and the business's desire to make the employee's job more interesting and meaningful and pay fair wages. Perceived organizational support will increase an employee's expectation that the organization will reward further effort to achieve organizational goals (effort-result expectation) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).



The staff will include organizational membership into their self-identity and thus, create a positive emotional bond (emotional attachment) towards the organization to the extent that perceived organizational support also satisfies the workers' needs for approval and praise. An effort-result expectation and emotional commitment will enhance an employee's efforts to achieve the organization's goals by greater engagement and performance. Scholars attempted to clarify the perceived organizational support with two different theories. The first of these is social exchange theory. This theory argues that the perception of organizational support generates feelings of obligation towards the organization and leads the employees to respond with greater effort. The latter is social identity theory. This theory indicates that perceived organizational support enables employees to identify with the organization, and the higher organizational support perception causes individuals to apply more effort in the name of the organization (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2020).

Social exchange theory has been often applied to the study of organizations so that better understand the interrelationships that develop between the organization and employees (Dawley *et al.*, 2008). Social exchange theory also helps our understanding of perceived organizational support. It proposes that employees place greater value on job rewards when rewards are based on the organization's discretion rather than being influenced by outside influences such as health or unions and safety regulations. Voluntary rewards coming directly from the organization are perceived as a sign that the organization values employee well-being. Voluntary job rewards like job enrichment, promotions, and compensation provide more to perceived organizational support if they are viewed as purely voluntary organizational actions (Dawley *et al.*, 2008).

Perceived organizational support helps employees show commitment and effort to the organization to meet socio-emotional needs such as financial benefits and approval and respect (DeConinck, 2010). Social exchange theory mentions the correlation between the significance of understanding employee motivation and the achievement of organizational goals. Such approaches to organizational behavior include the motivation of employees to perform certain activities within the mutual obligations between employees and employers (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003).

Many recent studies have determined significant empirical relations among perceived organizational support and organizational outcomes (Lin, 2006; Maertz *et al.*, 2007; Sluss *et al.*, 2008; Özdemir, 2010; Celep & Yilmaztürk, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2016; Altaş, 2021). Apart from these, the study conducted by Zagenczyk *et al.* (2011) found it to be organizational support has a mediating effect between psychological contract and organizational identification. In the study conducted by Özdemir *et al.* (2019), it was identified that perceived organizational support positively affects work engagement. Turunç and Çelik (2010) determined that organizational support perceived by employees significantly increases the level of organizational identification. İplik *et al.* (2014) established that there is a positive relationship among employees' perceptions of organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior and that organizational identification plays a mediating role in this relationship concerning research conducted by Sökmen *et al.* (2015), there is an important and positive relationship among perceived organizational support and organizational identification.



Psychological capital demonstrates a person's positive evaluation of circumstances and the possibility of accomplishment, based on perseverance and motivated effort. In addition, psychological capital is defined as the positive psychological development status of an individual and is characterized by: (1) undertaking the effort necessary to succeed in challenging tasks and having the self-confidence (self-efficacy) to perform those tasks; (2) having a positive mindset (optimism) about being successful at present and in the future; (3) persevering towards goals and reorienting paths to aim to achieve success when necessary (hope); and (4) surviving to succeed when beset with difficulties and problems (resilience) (Luthans *et al.*, 2007).

It is according to the concepts of psychological capital, positive organizational behavior, and positive psychology. Until the end of the century, applied psychology was mainly concerned with the problems of people who had mental problems and sought solutions to them. However, with the gaining importance of the personal development of individuals without psychological problems in the 2000s, it seems discussions and researches have started on the concept of positive psychology, which is considered a new trend in psychology. With the positive psychology movement, which was first initiated by Seligman (1998), the importance of determining positive and right aspects of psychology and developing it accordingly, as well as determining what is wrong with people, is emphasized. In this context, positive psychology brings a different perspective to the science of psychology, not only for those who have problems but also because it provides opportunities for all people to have a better quality of life, to discover and develop their abilities (Findıklı, 2014).

Psychological capital comprises four components. One of these components is; *Self-Confidence-Self-efficacy* and it is the belief of an individual in his/her abilities to successfully fulfill a certain task (Luthans *et al.*, 2004). *Hope*; It expresses the belief that all obstacles that may be encountered to set valuable goals and achieve these goals can be overcome. *Optimism*; is a positive assessment of one's social or material future (Gooty *et al.*, 2009). Optimism is closely related to overall positive psychology than any other trait. For example, optimists interpret bad events only temporarily as "I am exhausted", while pessimists interpret bad events permanently as "everything is over" (Luthans *et al.*, 2004). *Resilience*; is a person's ability to cope with various circumstances, including distress and uncertainty, and yet be successful (Gooty *et al.*, 2009). Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from difficulties, uncertainties, failures, and even seemingly overwhelming changes such as increased responsibilities (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Positive organizational behavior contributes positively to the achievement of organizations today and is described as the inspection and implementation of positively oriented human resources forces and psychological capacities, which can be measured, improved, and effectively managed to improve performance in the workplace (Gooty *et al.*, 2009). Studies demonstrate that people could learn ways to be resilient and apply techniques that help them stay in the present times, keep things in perspective, and focus on the problems at hand (Luthans *et al.*, 2006).

It is noticed that there are several researches in the literature conducted on positive psychological capital (Clapp-Smith *et al.*, 2009; Avey *et al.*, 2010a; Avey *et al.*, 2010b). In addition to these, in the study conducted by Avey *et al.* (2011), an important correlation was found between the psychological capital of the workers and their performance. In the study of Çalışkan and Pekkan (2017), it was determined to be that all of the sub-dimensions of psychological capital (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism) correlated with perceived organizational support, and these dimensions positively and significantly increased organizational support. Erdem *et al.* (2015)



conducted a study and found that psychological capital positively and significantly affects organizational identification and perceived organizational support, and that perceived organizational support has a partial mediating role in the correlation between psychological capital and organizational identification. Hilal Büyükgöze and Kavak (2017) determined that there is a moderate correlation between teachers' perceived organizational support levels and their overall psychological capital levels. Cömert and Yurr (2017) found out that employees' perceptions of organizational support positively affect their positive psychological capital. Mert and Şen (2019) also found that organizational support affects psychological capital.

Work Engagement

Engagement refers to participation, commitment, passion; and work engagement first emerged in the business world (Schaufeli, 2012). Work Engagement is a positive, satisfying, work-related state of mind mostly defined with vigor, absorption, and dedication (Bakker *et al.*, 2011). Also, work engagement is a mental state in which the person, performing a work-related activity, completely gets carried away by the activity and feels energetic and enthusiastic about the work (Bakker, 2017).

Research studies have revealed that workers with a high level of work engagement are highly energetic, self-sufficient individuals who influence the events that affect their lives (Bakker *et al.*, 2011). Workers with a high level of work engagement are physically involved in the job and mentally alert. While working, these employees communicate with others within the framework of empathy by displaying their creativity, values, beliefs, what they think and what they feel (Başoda, 2017). Even though employees with higher work engagement feel tired after a long working day, they describe their fatigue as a very pleasant situation as it is associated with positive achievements (Bakker *et al.*, 2011).

Work engagement is regarded as the opposite of burnout by some researchers. Unlike those who experience burnout, engaged employees have an energetic and effective sense of attachment with their work activities and believe that they can cope well with the requirements of their jobs (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

Work engagement dimensions include vigor, dedication, and absorption. In the vigor dimension (vigor), employees feel a high level of power and mental stamina while working. In addition, these employees persistently feel the willingness to put effort into their job, even in the face of complexities. Employees who show dedication behavior are strongly involved in their work. These employees experience a feeling of importance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge towards their work. Lastly, absorption is characterized by one's being fully concentrated and happily participating in work. In this case, time passes quickly and the employee finds it difficult to distance himself from work. In this understanding, vigor is considered the opposite of burnout, and devotion is the opposite of cynicism (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

When the studies conducted on work engagement are examined; Balcı and Ağ (2020) investigated the effect of organizational identification and intention to quit on work engagement and revealed that the individual's identification with the organization is a precursor to the work engagement. In the study conducted by Öztürk Anabal and Arıkan (2019), it was found that positive psychological capital has a direct positive correlation with the concept of work



engagement. Kaya (2016) carried out a study and investigated the mediating role of positive psychological capital in the impact of job demands and job resources on work engagement and determined that positive psychological capital sub-dimensions and work engagement sub-dimensions were significantly and positively related.

In line with the explanations given up above, the undermentioned hypotheses have been developed:

H₁: There is a correlation between perceived organizational support, work engagement, and positive psychological capital.

H₂: Positive psychological capital has a mediating role in the influence of perceived organizational support on work engagement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purpose and Importance of the Study

This study aims to determine whether positive psychological capital has a mediating role in the effect of perceived organizational support on work engagement. For the study, an ethics committee approval dated 08/04/2021 and numbered E-26428519-044-9546 was obtained from the Ethics Committee under the Sakarya University of Applied Sciences.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

The research was implemented in the logistics sector employees in Turkey. The scope of the study consists of those that work in the logistics sector in Turkey. It was assumed that the questions in the survey form were understood correctly by the participants and that they truly gave their answers. The findings obtained from the research are limited to the sample group and the items given in the survey form.

Sampling and Data Collection

To measure perceived organizational support, Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) improved the scale was used. This scale was translated into Turkish by Turunç and Çelik (2010). The scale in question was taken from Gülkaya Anık's (2020) study. The scale developed by Luthans *et al.* (2007) was used to measure the psychological capital of employees. The scale in question was adapted into Turkish by Oruç (2018). This version was used in the study. Also, the scale was developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) and adapted into Turkish by Turgut (2011) was implemented to measure the participants' perceptions of work engagement. A 5-point Likert was used for all scales.

The exemplary of the research consists of logistics sector employees in Turkey. The most important factor in choosing the logistics sector as the sample group for the study is that this sector continues its activities quite intensely during the Covid 19 Pandemic period. The data of the research were obtained from the participants who answered the survey voluntarily through the convenience sampling method. The survey form created for the study was sent to the participants online via LinkedIn social network. In this way, 314 surveys suitable for the analysis were obtained. Analyzes were carried out through these surveys. Data were collected in the period of June-July 2021. It was acknowledged that the research sample was large enough for performing quantitative statistical analysis.

Research Model and Hypotheses



The model developed for the study is given in **Figure 1**. In this model, it is specified that there is a correlation between the variables. The model also points out that positive psychological capital has a mediating role between work engagement and perceived organizational support.

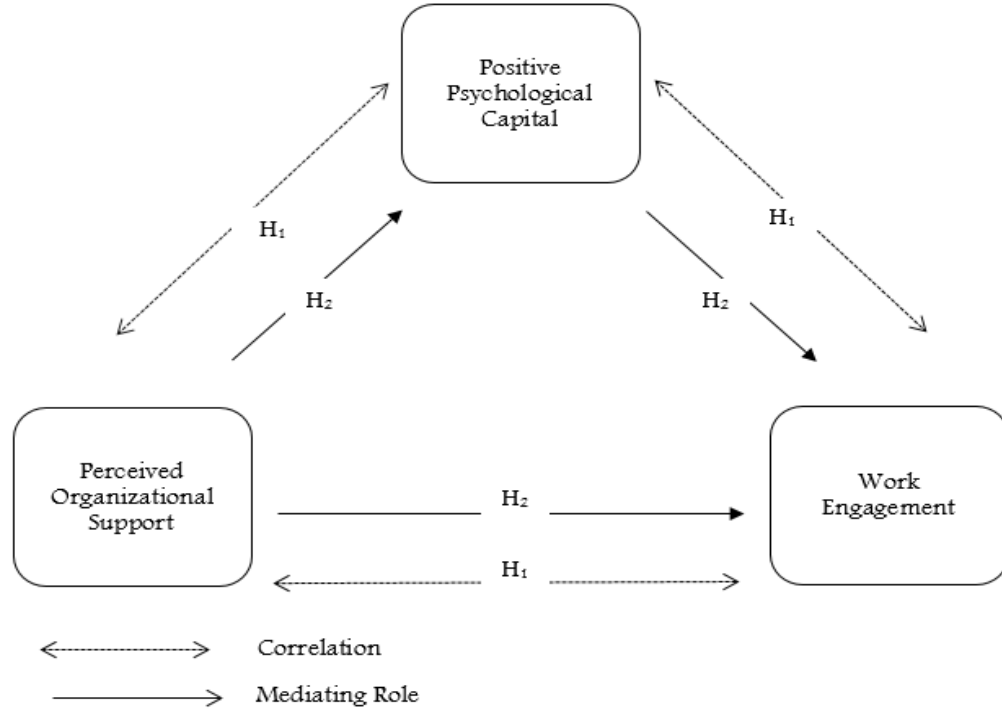


Figure 1. Research model

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part includes the findings that are related to the data subjected to statistical analysis in the scope of the research. In the study, descriptive statistical analyzes were utilized to reveal the characteristics of the sample; also, correlation analysis was used to investigate the correlation between variables, and regression analysis to determine the mediating effect. 314 people participated in the research. The demographic characteristics of these people are shown in **Table 1**. When looking up at this table, it is seen that the majority of the participants are male (56.1%), married (64.3%), logistics operations officer (30.9%), and have a bachelor's degree (54.5%).

Table 1. Descriptive traits of the research group (n=314)

Gender	n	%	Position / Title	n	%
Male	176	56.1	Logistics operation	97	30.9
Female	138	43.9	Import-export-operation	55	17.5
Marital Status			Expert	41	13.1
Married	202	64.3	Manager	50	15.9
Single	112	35.7	Office worker	71	22.6
Age		Total working years			
25-29	66	21.0	1-5	73	23.2

30-34	67	21.3	6-10	69	22.0
35-39	56	17.8	11-15	63	20.1
40-44	40	12.7	16-20	41	13.1
45 ≥	85	27.1	21-25	36	11.5
Educational status			26 ≥	32	10.2
High school	65	20.7			
Associate degree	39	12.4			
Bachelor's degree	171	54.5			
Postgraduate degree	39	12.4			

Reliability Analysis of Scales

The reliability analysis results of the scales utilized in the research are shown in **Table 2**. Following the results obtained, Cronbach's Alpha value of Perceived Organizational Support Scale was found as 0.841; Cronbach's Alpha value of Positive Psychological Capital Scale was found as 0.878, and Work Engagement Scale's value was 0.916.

Table 2. Reliability results of the scales

Scale	Sub-Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Organizational Support Scale		10	0.841
Positive Psychological Capital Scale		12	0.878
Work Engagement Scale	Vigor	6	0.838
	Absorption	6	0.805
	Dedication	5	0.902



The Perceived Organizational Support Scale consists of 10 items, the Positive Psychological Capital Scale consists of 12, and the Work Engagement Scale consists of 17 items. As the reliability test (Cronbach alpha) results for the items constituting all three scales were above the critical value of 0.70, it was determined that the internal consistency of the scales was high (Özdamar, 2004).

Correlation Findings

Correlation analysis was carried out to determine the assumed relationships among the variables and the direction of the relationships. The correlation between perceived organizational support, positive psychological capital, and work engagement are shown in **Table 3**. The correlations among the variables were analyzed by using the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 3. Correlation among variables.

Variables	1	2	3
Perceived Organizational Support (1)	1	.459**	.489**
Positive Psychological Capital (2)		1	.651**
Work Engagement (3)			1

** . Correlation. is significant. at the 0.01. level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows that there is a positive and moderate ($r=0.459$) correlation between perceived organizational support and positive psychological capital. A moderate and positive relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement ($r=0.489$) exists. Finally, it is seen that there is a positive and high level ($r=0.651$) correlation between work engagement and positive psychological capital.

Following the findings obtained from the correlation analysis, the H_1 hypothesis was accepted.

Regression Findings

The findings of the regression analysis that examines what brings about positive psychological capital between work engagement and perceived organizational support are shown in **Table 4**. In this table, work engagement is considered as the dependent variable, perceived organizational support is considered as the independent variable, and positive psychological capital is considered as the mediating variable.

Table 4. Mediating effect of positive psychological capital between perceived organizational support and work engagement

Step 1	Positive Psychological Capital	β	t	Sig.
Perceived Organizational Support	→	0.459	9.133	0.000
		$R^2: 0.211$	$F: 83.406$	
Step 2	Work Engagement	β	t	Sig.
Perceived Organizational Support	→	0.489	9.913	0.000
		$R^2: 0.240$	$F: 98.268$	
Step 3	Work Engagement	β	t	Sig.
Perceived Organizational Support	→	Perceived Organizational Support .241	5.191	0.000
Positive Psychological Capital		Positive Psychological Capital .540	11.625	0.000
		$R^2: 0.466$	$F: 137.827$	

In **Table 4**, it can be seen that the mediator variable conditions of Baron and Kenny (1986) are met. In the scope of the research, regression analysis was performed for the variables. The first condition for the mediating variable was that the independent variable (perceived organizational support) had a significant effect on the mediating variable (positive psychological capital), and this effect was statistically significant ($\beta=0.459$; $p=0.000$). The second condition was that the dependent variable (work engagement) is significantly affected by the independent variable (perceived organizational support) and this effect was statistically significant ($\beta=0.489$; $p=0.000$). Lastly, the mediating variable (positive psychological capital) and the independent variable (perceived organizational support) are included in the model together and it is attempted to explain the dependent variable (work engagement). At this stage, the insignificance of the significant effect in the second step will show us that there is a full mediating effect, or weakening of the effect level, on the other hand, will show us that there is a partial mediating effect. It is observed that the effect of organizational support on work engagement (In comparison with the second step) does not become insignificant when the third step in **Table 4**

is examined, but the level of effect decreases ($\beta=0.241$; $p=0.000$). This situation reveals that positive psychological capital has a partial mediating effect between perceived organizational support and work engagement. However, the significance of the decreased amount in Beta (β) values should be determined to talk about this mediating effect. The significance level of the decrease in beta values, on the other hand, is tested using the Sobel Test. Sobel Test results are found as $z=3.382$, $p=0.000$. According to the results explained above, the decrease in Beta values is statistically significant and it has been determined that positive psychological capital has a partial mediating role between work engagement and perceived organizational support.

According to the results of the regression analysis; the H₂ hypothesis is supported.

Covid 19 started in China in December 2019 and spread all over the world and then it is turned into an epidemic that affected both businesses and employees (Sines, 2020). While the Covid 19 Pandemic continues, the vast majority of the white-collar employees had to work from home. Both the alarming effect of the Pandemic and the changing working conditions have led to significant effects on the employees' perception of organizational support, positive psychological capital structures, and their levels of work engagement.

According to the research' results, a moderately positive correlation between work engagement and perceived organizational support exists. More so, a moderate and positive correlation was found between positive psychological capital and perceived organizational support. Moreover, it has been evaluated that there is a positive and high level of relationship between positive psychological capital and work engagement. The findings received from the research are similar to the results of the studies done by Özdemir *et al.* (2019); Turunç and Çelik (2010); Sökmen *et al.* (2015); Çalışkan and Pekkan (2017); Büyükgöze and Kavak (2017); Mert and Şen (2019); Öztürk Anabal and Arıkan (2019) and Kaya (2016).

As employees' sense of organizational support increases, the positive psychological capital perceptions and work engagement levels increase as well. Therefore, organizational managers should place importance on the contribution of workers to the organization and their welfare. In addition, managers should ensure that employees are involved in organizational decisions and implement the necessary wage and job enrichment practices.

Another result obtained from the research; positive psychological capital has a partial mediation effect among perceived organizational support and work engagement. It is observed that there are similar results when the mediating variable studies on perceived organizational support, positive psychological capital, and work engagement are examined. For instance, in a study managed by Özdemir *et al.* (2019), it was discovered that work engagement can be positively affected by perceived organizational support and that trust in the manager and trust in the organization that are the organizational trust's sub-dimensions, have a partial mediating effect in influencing the perceived organizational support level on the vigor dimension of work engagement.

Results from research conducted revealed that positive psychological capital has a partial mediating role in the effect of organizational support on work engagement. Based on this result, part of the impact of employees' perception of organizational support on work engagement takes place through employees' positive psychological capital. Thus, keeping the positive psychological capital of the employees at higher levels will contribute to the increase in their work engagement behavior.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research determined that there is a correlation between perceived organizational support, work engagement, and positive psychological capital and that positive psychological capital has a partial mediating role in the effect of organizational support perception on work engagement. The fact that organizations increase the worker's perception of organizational support and positive psychological capital levels enables them to display more work engagement behavior. Supportive practices implemented by organizations towards employees gain even more importance during the Covid 19 Pandemic period, which is a very difficult time for them.


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Thanks to the participants who contributed to the research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: None

ETHICS STATEMENT: None

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