SOCIAL SUPPORT AND JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Using an expectancy violation theoretical framework, this investigation provides an examination of the association between workplace social support and job satisfaction. In particular, this study explores the relationship between the appropriateness of emotional social support and job satisfaction. To assess these relationships, employees ($N = 206$) reported on the social support they received from their coworkers and supervisors. Results indicated that emotional support received from coworkers was not viewed to be more appropriate than emotional support received from supervisors. Emotional support received from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than emotional support received from coworkers. Likewise, instrumental support received from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than instrumental support received from coworkers. Implications of this research and future directions are provided.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

One variable that has been important for job satisfaction is social support (Balzer et al., 2000; Ducharme & Martin, 2000; Lowers, 2000). Job satisfaction can be described as “the feelings a worker has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives” (Balzer et al., 2000, p. 7). If job satisfaction is partially dependent upon one’s expectations, it seems logical that expectations of social support may differentially impact job satisfaction. In particular, employees may develop unique expectations about receiving certain types of social support (e.g., emotional or instrumental) at the workplace. Employees may also base their expectations for receiving certain types of social support on whom the support is received from (e.g., coworkers or supervisors). Further, employees may use their expectations to determine what is appropriate when receiving social support in the workplace. As the expectations for the appropriateness of social support are confirmed or violated, certain effects on job satisfaction may be anticipated. A closer examination of the type of support and the perceived appropriateness of support may further explain the relationship between social support and job satisfaction.

Expectancy Violations Theory

Expectations are set beliefs about how individuals should communicate in certain situations. Burgoon and Walther (1990) define communication expectancies as “cognitions about the anticipated communicative behavior of specific others, as embedded within and shaped by the social norms for the contemporaneous roles, relationships, and context” (p. 236). As social support is a communicative phenomenon,
expectancy violations theory (EVT) will be used as a theoretical framework from which to examine how expectations of the appropriateness of social support differ when received from different levels of employment. Before exploring social support in the organization, it is important to gain an understanding of EVT.

EVT was originally created to explain responses to personal space incursions (Burgoon, 1978; Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Since its inception, EVT has been reformulated to provide explanatory power for a variety of actions including verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Floyd, Ramirez, & Burgoon, 1999). Expectations are generally formed from three sources including: individual characteristics, relational characteristics, or contextual factors (Burgoon & Walther, 1990). Individual characteristics may include things such as gender, age, physical appearance, and personality. Relational characteristics deal with the association between individuals. Factors that define the association between individuals include: level of familiarity, status, and previous experiences with that person (Floyd et al., 1999). Contextual factors include circumstances surrounding the human interaction. It is the accumulation of these factors that form expectations about workplace social support.

Types of Expectations

There are two types of expectations. The first is predictive expectations which are based on what occurred in the past or are based on routine (Staines & Libby, 1986). The second is prescriptive expectations which are based on what is proper or preferred in a given relationship or context (Staines & Libby, 1986). The present study concerns
employees’ expectations about the social support that is received from different people within the workplace, therefore this study will focus on prescriptive expectations.

*Violations of Expectations*

After expectations are formed, other individuals may either confirm or violate those expectations. When expectations are confirmed or met, the behavior may go unnoticed. This is because expectancy confirmations allow individuals to verify their predictions and may allow for a sense of security about future interactions. However, when an expectation is unmet, EVT contends that notice will be taken. These unmet expectations are termed expectancy violations. Expectation violations can be interpreted as positive, negative, or ambiguous (Burgoon, 1978). What determines how a violation is interpreted is violation valence and communicator reward level (Burgoon & Walther, 1990).

*Violation valence.* Violation valence refers to the positive or negative value attached to the unexpected behavior (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993). Generally, a violation of an expectation is interpreted as negative. This is because expectancy violations force individuals to recognize that their predictions were incorrect and may cause some uncertainty. However, it is possible for individuals to react positively to a violation (Burgoon & Walther, 1990). For example, employees would have a positive violation of expectations if they were unexpectedly acknowledged by a supervisor for doing a good job. In essence, if the result of the violation is agreeable, a positive valance is attached (Burgoon & Walther, 1990); whereas, if the result of the violation is disagreeable, a negative valance is attached (Burgoon & Walther, 1990).
Some violations are more difficult to decipher. The result of violation may not be readily apparent at the time of the violation. In this situation, the result of the violation may be ambiguous. For instance, if a supervisor suddenly begins paying more attention to an employee by asking specific job related questions, the employee may view these questions as positive or negative. Perhaps the supervisor is trying to get to know the employee better by showing interest in him or her (e.g., positive valence violation). Although, the employee may think that the supervisor is trying to judge the employee’s contribution to the company for a possible lay off (e.g., negative valence violation). EVT explains that, in this situation, the employee may turn to the communicator reward level to determine whether a violation is positive or negative.

**Communicator reward level.** The communicator reward level comes into play when evaluating ambiguous expectancy violations. Ambiguous violations occur when an expectation goes unmet for reasons that are not readily apparent. The communicator reward level refers to how an individual views the person committing the violation. The communicator reward level can range from low to high. If the violator is a person that is viewed positively (i.e., high communicator reward level), an ambiguous violation may be viewed positively. Floyd et al. (1999) explain that ambiguous violations by powerful authority figures may be viewed positively. Powerful authority figures have the ability to provide rewards to the less powerful. On the other hand, ambiguous violations by low power individuals are generally viewed negatively. In this situation, less powerful individuals tend to have fewer rewards to offer and are therefore not looked favorably on when committing violations. Thus, it may be especially important to evaluate how
employees view expectancy violations committed by people with different levels of power.

**Summary and Application of EVT**

EVT contends that individuals form expectations about future human interaction. As the interaction occurs, expectations can be either confirmed or violated. Confirmed expectations generally go unnoticed, whereas expectation violations are noticed and evaluated. Expectation violations can be positive, negative, or ambiguous. A positive violation of expectations may result in pleasurable emotions whereas a negative violation of expectations may result in unpleasant emotions. When an ambiguous violation occurs, individuals may turn to the communicator reward level to determine whether a pleasurable or unpleasant emotion will result. If an individual who has a high communicator reward level creates a violation, a pleasurable emotion may result. However, if an individual with a low communicator reward level commits a violation, an unpleasant emotion may result.

The present study will examine expectations for social support in the workplace. Specifically, prescriptive expectations of social support will be examined as all employees develop expectations about future behavior which are predicated on what they feel is proper. Employees develop expectations about how they will communicate with their coworkers and supervisors. Thus, within the workplace, the reactions that employees have to expectation violations may be dependent on level of employment. Moreover, violations of employees’ expectations for social support will be investigated.
Towards that end, an understanding of the available types of social support and appropriateness of social support received is necessary.

Types of Social Support

Behavior that is seen as supportive of others has been coined social support. Support may be provided in different ways, thus there are various types of social support. It is important to look at specific types of social support in order gain a more in depth understanding of how expectations of social support function in the workplace. Fenlason and Beehr (1994) explain that emotional and instrumental support types are the most frequently studied forms of workplace social support. Thus, a review of these types of social support is to follow.

Emotional Social Support

Social support that involves people having positive social relationships with other members of the organization is termed emotional social support (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Dormann & Zapf, 1999; Lim, 1997; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Emotional support includes feelings of acknowledgement and acceptance (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). Some specific forms of emotional support include “providing empathy, caring, love, and trust” (House, 1981, p. 24). In other words, social support places an assessment on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Appropriateness of Emotional Social Support

To further evaluate emotional social support, it is important to assess when the social support is deemed appropriate and/or inappropriate. Appropriateness is conceptualized as an interaction-related reaction to social support (Deelstra, Peeters,
Schaufeli, Stoebe, Zijlstra, & Doormen, 2003). For emotional support to be deemed appropriate, it should be useful, effective, and necessary. Emotional support may be deemed inappropriate when it is given to seek or maintain power within an organization. One way to further explore emotional social support is by examining the appropriateness with which it is received from different levels of employment.

Level of employment may have a role in the appropriateness of the received emotional social support (Deelstra et al., 2003). Emotional support from individuals of a higher or lower power status (i.e. coworkers receiving emotional support from supervisors) is infrequent and unexpected (Marcelissen et al., 1988). When employees accept emotional support from individuals of higher or lower status, they may be altering their power role within the organizational (Ray, 1993). If individuals accept support from individuals below or above them, they may be relinquishing power to those individuals (Ray, 1993). Thus, employees may develop prescriptive expectations that they should only receive emotional support from individuals of equal power status in order to maintain their own power status. When emotional support from different power status levels is received, it may violate prescriptive expectations and be deemed inappropriate. Receiving emotional support from employees who have equal power (i.e., coworkers) will have a positive valence and thus will be deemed appropriate. Those who receive emotional support from sources with more power (i.e., superiors) will attach a negative valence to the behavior and deem it inappropriate. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H1: Emotional support received from coworkers will be deemed more appropriate than emotional support received from supervisors.

*Instrumental Social Support*

Another important type of social support is that of instrumental support. Cunningham and Barbee (2000) state that instrumental social support involves a group of individuals from which a person can expect to receive help from in a time of need. Instrumental support includes participating in activities that directly assist a person in need. House (1981) contends that these behaviors occur when individuals assist others in completing work or sharing the workload. In general, studies have found that instrumental support is a factor for maintaining a positive environment at the workplace (House, 1981; Parris, 2003; Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995). The appropriateness of instrumental support will not be examined due to the lack of a theoretical and empirical foundation to support such an exploration.

Although the importance of emotional and instrumental social support remains unchallenged, their effects can be altered depending upon from whom the support is received (Jung, 1987). Consequently, much research has confirmed the necessity to evaluate relationship type when studying social support. The present study will examine the association between expectations for types of social support from different workplace relationships (i.e., supervisor and coworker) and job satisfaction.

*Types of Social Support and Job Satisfaction*

Several components of organizational life are important in determining employees' overall fulfillment or satisfaction with their jobs (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin,
Balzer et al. (2000) explains that overall job satisfaction is related to satisfaction with supervision, satisfaction with people on the job, and satisfaction with work itself. Each type of social support may uniquely address a specific aspect of job satisfaction. Recall that emotional support is used to create a sense of belonging, whereas instrumental support is used to help employees complete their tasks (House, 1981). A review of the literature on the association between social support types and job satisfaction is to follow.

**Emotional Social Support and Job Satisfaction**

Previous research on job satisfaction indicates that it is important for employees to feel as though they are accepted by other people on the job (Balzer et al., 2000). According to Balzer et al. (2000), supervisors should be able to commend quality performances, listen to employees' problems or concerns, and take a personal interest in employees. Similarly, job satisfaction is governed by “work-related interaction among co-workers and the mutual liking or admiration of fellow employees” (Balzer et al., 2000, p. 36). If employees tend to like others that they feel an emotional connection with, it seems logical to expect an association between emotional support and job satisfaction. However, this association may vary according to whom the social support is received from.

Previous research has found that some organizational members' emotional social support is more responsible for job satisfaction than others. Employees view supervisor support as less frequent than coworker support (Marcelissen et al., 1988), but supervisor social support as more important than coworker social support (Fenlason & Beehr, 1994; Marcelissen et al., 1988). Therefore, employees may have prescriptive expectations that
emotional support from supervisors is more unexpected than is emotional support from coworkers. Emotional support from supervisors is unexpected because it occurs less frequently than coworker support (Marcelissen et al., 1998). When emotional support from supervisors does occur, it may violate prescriptive expectations. Floyd et al. (1999) explain that ambiguous violations committed by authority figures are generally considered positive violations. Thus, when supervisors provide emotional support it creates a positive violation of expectations. This, in turn, may increases job satisfaction because employees generally value the opinion of their supervisors (Fenlason & Beehr, 1994; Marcelissen et al., 1988) and value feeling that they are a part of the organization (House, 1981). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Emotional support received from supervisors will have a stronger association with job satisfaction than emotional support received from coworkers, when expectations for emotional support from supervisors are low.

Instrumental Social Support and Job Satisfaction

While emotional social support is likely to have a large impact on employees’ job satisfaction (House, 1981), it is not the only factor that should be considered when looking at job satisfaction. Research shows that instrumental social support may also be important for job satisfaction (Peeters et al., 1995). Balzer et al. (2000) explain that in order to be satisfied with their job, employees must be satisfied with the support required to complete their jobs effectively. In fact, instrumental support has been found to be a required component for employees to be able to function effectively in the workplace.
Instrumental support is an important tool that employees need so that they can complete their jobs effectively (Lambert, Hogan, Barton, & Clarke, 2002). Thus employees who receive instrumental support or information on how to effectively do their jobs may feel more satisfied with their jobs (Peeters et al., 1995).

Previous research has shown that job ambiguity can affect employees’ satisfaction with their jobs (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994; Singh, 1993). Essentially, employees’ job satisfaction may decrease without specific instruction and without receiving help from other organizational members. The better employees are able to complete their job, the more satisfied they will be with their job (Blazer et al., 2000).

Instrumental support may reduce job-related stressors and thereby increase job satisfaction. For example, employees may experience work stress if they do not completely understand their job (Chang & Hancock, 2003). By reducing stress, employees may become more satisfied with their employment (Blazer et al., 2000). Thus receiving instrumental social support should be associated with job satisfaction as it is a barrier to stress, whether present or not.

The association between instrumental social support and job satisfaction may be dependent on the person from whom the support is received. With instrumental support, supervisors should hold more knowledge about the given task and therefore be able to provide support that is more satisfying (Podsakoff, Todor, & Schuler, 1983). However, employees may develop prescriptive expectations that they should receive instrumental support from coworkers rather than supervisors (Marcelissen et al., 1988). This may be because coworkers typically perform the same job. Coworkers may not expect
instrumental support from supervisors because supervisors may have more important
things to do. Thus, employees may feel that instrumental support received from
supervisors is infrequent (Marcelissen et al., 1988). This, in turn, may force employees to
develop prescriptive expectations that they will not receive as much instrumental support
from supervisors as they will from coworkers. When instrumental support from
supervisors does occur, it may violate prescriptive expectations. Floyd et al. (1999)
explains that prescriptive violations committed by authority figures are generally
considered positive violations. Thus, when supervisors provide instrumental support it
creates a positive violation of expectations, which in turn increases job satisfaction. This
line of reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: Instrumental support received from supervisors will have a stronger
association with job satisfaction than instrumental support received from
coworkers, when expectations for instrumental support from supervisors
are low.
CHAPTER 2. METHOD

Respondents

Two hundred and fifteen participants who were currently employed were recruited from undergraduate communication classes at a large Pacific university. If participants were unemployed, they were able to ask an employed friend or family member to complete the survey. Nine respondents were removed from the analysis due to incomplete surveys. The total number of employees was two hundred and six ($N = 206$). Employees reported on the social support received from supervisors and coworkers.

Respondents were employed for an average of two years ($M = 2.18$ years, $SD = 4.35$ years), with the least time employed being 1 month and the most being employed 28 years. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 56, with an average age of twenty-two ($M = 22.19$, $SD = 7.45$). Male ($n = 95$) and female ($n = 110$) participants were Japanese 26% ($n = 55$), Caucasian 24% ($n = 49$), Filipino 13.5% ($n = 28$), Chinese 12.0% ($n = 25$), Pacific Islander 7.7% ($n = 16$), Korean 5.8% ($n = 12$), other Asian 2.4% ($n = 5$), Samoan 1.9% ($n = 4$), Latino 1.9% ($n = 4$), African American 1.4% ($n = 3$), Vietnamese 1.4% ($n = 3$), and other 1% ($n = 2$). Sample types of industries in which the respondents worked in were: customer service, law enforcement, computer technicians, sales, and food service. Student participants received course credit in exchange for their participation or for the participation of their network members.

Procedure

The researcher visited several undergraduate communication classes in order to seek participants. Respondents were enrolled in the study in line with procedures.
established by the committee for human subjects. If the student participant was employed, he or she was asked to complete the survey. If the student was unemployed, he or she was asked to have a network member complete the survey. Students who were not employed, were given a survey to take home for an older employed friend or family member to complete. In order to ensure that individuals did not complete multiple surveys, all respondents were asked to provide contact information (i.e., name, phone, and email). When the completed surveys were returned during the next class period, instructors were asked to note participants’ names on a separate form for the sole purpose of giving extra credit.

**Instruments**

Participants were asked to complete several questions involving their personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity; see Appendix A) and employment history (e.g., length of employment, organizational position, type of organization; see Appendix A). Respondents also completed several self report measures of workplace social support (i.e., appropriateness of support, emotional support, instrumental support, support expectations) and job satisfaction.

*Appropriateness of emotional social support.* A scale was developed to measure the appropriateness of the social support received by employees (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to describe the appropriateness of emotional social support received from organizational members (i.e., coworkers or supervisors). Respondents were given a definition of emotional support (i.e., providing others with a feeling of acknowledgement and acceptance or providing empathy, caring, love, and trust) and then
asked to rate the emotional support received using a five item semantic-differential scale. The scale anchors included: appropriate, suitable, proper, fitting, and just. Sample bipolar adjectives include: proper-improper and appropriate-inappropriate. The scale was shown to be reliable (α = .94 coworkers, α = .94 supervisors).

*Emotional social support.* A scale was developed to measure the emotional support that employees received from coworkers and supervisors (see Appendix C). Scales by House (1981) and Ducharme and Martin (2000) were combined to create a nine item instrument for this study. Although House (1981) is one of the most frequently used measures of emotional support, Deeter-Schmelz and Ramsey (1997) question its ability to assess emotional support among employees in the sales industry. Due to the probably of having participants from the sales field included in the sample, a second measure (Ducharme & Martin, 2000) of emotional social support was added as a way to ensure reliability across industries. Participants were asked to rate the frequency or truthfulness of nine items on a four point Likert type scale that ranged from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (4). Sample items that measured emotional support were “How much are your (i.e., coworkers, supervisors) willing to listen to your work related problems?” and “Your (i.e., coworkers, supervisors) really care about you.” The present study found the scale to be reliable for both coworkers (α = .88) and supervisors (α = .94).

*Instrumental social support.* A scale was also developed to measure the instrumental support employees receive from coworkers and supervisors (see Appendix D). Scales by House (1981) and Ducharme and Martin (2000) were used to create a six item scale for measuring instrumental support. The scales contained an identical item,
one of which was removed for this analysis. Participants were asked to rate the frequency or truthfulness of statements on a four point Likert type scale that ranged from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (4). A sample item that measured instrumental support was “How much are each of the following people (coworkers, supervisor) helpful to you in getting your job done?” The combined instrumental support scale proved to be reliable for coworkers ($\alpha = .82$) and supervisors ($\alpha = .87$).

*Expectations of emotional social support.* A scale was developed to measure employees’ expectations of receiving emotional support from coworkers and supervisors (see Appendix E). The scale was comprised of three items which ranged from 0 (i.e., does not expect any support) to 3 (i.e., expects a high level of support). A sample item includes: “How much do you expect your coworkers to provide you with a feeling of caring?” Cronbach’s alpha estimate of reliability indicated the scale was a reliable measure for expectations of emotional support from both coworkers ($\alpha = .89$) and supervisors ($\alpha = .90$).

*Expectations of instrumental social support.* A scale was developed to assess employees’ expectations of receiving instrumental support from coworkers and supervisors (see Appendix F). The scale was comprised of three items which ranged from 0 (i.e., does not expect any support) to 3 (i.e., expects a high level of support). A sample item includes: “How much do you expect your coworkers to share your workload?” Cronbach’s alpha estimate of reliability indicated the scale was a reliable measure of expectations for instrumental support from both coworkers ($\alpha = .71$) and supervisors ($\alpha = .80$).
Job satisfaction. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Balzer et al., 2000) was used to measure job satisfaction (see Appendix G). The JDI is the most widely used measure of job satisfaction in existence today (DeMeuse, 1985; Yeager, 1981). The JDI consisted of a total of 18 items, each of which includes no more than five words (e.g., pleasant, worthwhile, acceptable, enjoyable). Respondents were asked to indicate whether these items described their job by marking yes (i.e., describes the participant’s job), no (i.e., does not describe the participant’s job), or ? (i.e., unable to be determined). Previous applications of the JDI demonstrated high scale reliability ($\alpha = .92$; Balzer et al., 2000), as did the present study ($\alpha = .90$).
CHAPTER 3. RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

A preliminary analysis was conducted to test for confounding variables. The variables of age, length of employment, length of relationship with coworkers, and length of relationship with supervisors were tested for significant associations with the dependent variable of job satisfaction. Neither age ($r[205] = .07, p = .31$), length of employment ($r[205] = .09, p = .20$), length of relationship with coworkers ($r[205] = .09, p = .20$), nor length of relationship with supervisors ($r[205] = .10, p = .18$) were significantly related to job satisfaction. Thus, these relationships were not controlled for in statistical analyses. The descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables in the present study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependant Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coworkers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>0 - 54</td>
<td>39.40</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>39.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Support</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of Emotional Support</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of Instrumental Support</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Emotional Support</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary Analysis

Appropriateness of Emotional Social Support

Hypothesis one predicted that emotional support from coworkers will be deemed more appropriate than emotional support from supervisors. A paired-samples t test was conducted to test for a significant differences in the appropriateness of receiving emotional support from coworkers and the appropriateness of receiving emotional support from supervisors, \( t(205) = 1.78, p = .08 \). The hypothesized difference between the appropriateness of the emotional support received from supervisors and the appropriateness of emotional support received from coworkers was not supported.

Social Support Types and Job Satisfaction

Hypothesis two predicted that emotional support received from supervisors will have a stronger association with job satisfaction than that received from coworkers, when expectations for emotional support from supervisors are low. In order to account for low expectations of emotional support from supervisors, individuals with mean scores of less than the midpoint (i.e., 1.50 on the 0 to 3) on the emotional support expectations scale were included in this analysis (\( n = 49 \)). Zero-order correlations between coworker emotional social support, supervisor emotional social support, and job satisfaction are presented in Table 2.
Table 2.

Zero-order Correlations for Emotional and Instrumental Social Support and Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers Emotional Social Support</td>
<td>.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors Emotional Social Support</td>
<td>.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers Instrumental Social Support</td>
<td>.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors Instrumental Social Support</td>
<td>.46**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .001

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to test the relationships between emotional support (i.e., supervisors and coworkers) and job satisfaction (see Table 3). The first predictor of supervisor emotional support accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in job satisfaction, \( R^2 = .52, F(2,48) = 17.59, p < .001 \). The linear combination of supervisor and coworker emotional support were significantly related to job satisfaction, \( R^2 \text{ change} = .10, F(2,48) = 13.87, p < .001 \). The individual contribution of supervisor emotional support to the prediction equation was significant, \( \beta = .52, t(48) = 2.10, p = .04 \). The additional contribution of coworkers emotional support to the prediction equation was also significant, \( \beta = .40, t(48) = 2.77, p = .01 \). The stepwise multiple regression indicated that 27\% (\( R^2 = .27 \)) of the variance in job satisfaction can be accounted for by supervisor emotional support. The addition of coworker emotional support to the prediction equation resulted in adjusted \( R^2 = .35 \). Although there was a significant association between emotional support and job satisfaction, hypothesis two
was not supported as the association for supervisor emotional support and job satisfaction was not stronger than that of coworker emotional support and job satisfaction when expectations for emotional support from supervisors were low.

Table 3.

Emotional Social Support and Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Emotional Social Support</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>( t )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step One</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Emotional Social Support</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.10*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step Two</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors Emotional Social Support</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers Emotional Social Support</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>2.77*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE. \( R^2 = .27 \) for Step 1, \( \Delta R^2 = .35 \) for Step 2. \( *p < .05, **p < .001 \)

Hypothesis three predicted that instrumental support received from supervisors will have a stronger association with job satisfaction than that which is received from coworkers, when expectations for instrumental support from supervisors are low. In order to account for low expectations of instrumental support from supervisors, individuals with mean scores of less than the midpoint (i.e., 1.50 on the 0 to 3) on the instrumental support expectations scale were included in this analysis (\( n = 127 \)). Zero-order correlations between coworker instrumental social support, supervisor instrumental social support, and job satisfaction are presented in Table 2. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationships between instrumental support (i.e., coworkers and supervisors) and job satisfaction (see Table 4). The first predictor of supervisor instrumental support accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in job satisfaction, \( R^2 = .52, F(1, 126) = 47.76, p < .001 \). The linear combination of
supervisor and coworkers instrumental support were significantly related to job satisfaction, $R^2$ change $= .06$, $F(1, 126) = 31.06$, $p < .001$. The individual contribution of supervisor instrumental support to the prediction equation was significant, $\beta = .52$, $t(127) = 3.87$, $p < .001$. The additional contribution of coworkers instrumental support to the prediction equation was also significant, $\beta = .29$, $t(127) = 3.27$, $p < .001$. The stepwise multiple regression indicated that 28% ($R^2 = .28$) of the variance in job satisfaction can be accounted for by supervisor instrumental support. The addition of coworker instrumental support to the prediction equation resulted in adjusted $R^2 = .32$. Hypothesis three was not supported as the association for supervisor instrumental support and job satisfaction was not stronger than that of coworker instrumental support and job satisfaction when expectations for instrumental support from supervisors were low.

Table 4.

Instrumental Social Support and Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
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<td><strong>Step One</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Instrumental Social Support</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>3.87**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisors Instrumental Social Support</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>4.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers Instrumental Social Support</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>3.27*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $R^2 = .28$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .32$ for Step 2.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$
CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to examine social support in the workplace. Specifically, this research provided an examination of the relationships between emotional and instrumental support, the appropriateness of social support, and job satisfaction. The examination of these relationships was guided by expectancy violation theory. A significant difference was not found between the appropriateness of emotional support received from coworkers and the appropriateness of emotional support received from supervisors (H1). Emotional support from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than emotional support from coworkers, when expectations for supervisor emotional support were low (H2). Similarly, instrumental support from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than coworker instrumental support when expectations for supervisor instrumental support were low (H3). Although not the focus of this study, the findings herein suggest that receiving emotional and instrumental support from coworkers as well as supervisors is associated with job satisfaction. In order to gain a better understanding of the findings of this study, the specific conclusions, limitations, and future directions are reviewed.

Appropriateness of Emotional Social Support and Job Satisfaction

The prediction that emotional support from coworkers would be deemed more appropriate than emotional support from supervisors was not supported (H1). However, the difference in means between the appropriateness of coworker emotional support and the appropriateness of supervisor emotional support was in the direction predicted (i.e.,
coworker emotional support was more appropriate than supervisor emotional support) and did approach significance. It appears that the appropriateness of coworker emotional support did not supersede the other enough to corroborate this prediction. It seems that employees feel it is appropriate to receive emotional social support from both coworkers and supervisors. Perhaps employees in this sample did not feel that supervisors provide emotional support in order to gain power as suggested by Nadler (2002). Thus, the emotional support received at the workplace may not have been considered a means to relinquish or gain power. Employees may have felt that emotional social support received from coworkers is marginally more appropriate than emotional social support received from supervisors simply because it is more frequent as suggested by Marcelissen et al. (1988) and therefore respondents are more accustomed to it. In essence, it appears that employees may feel that it is appropriate to receive emotional social support from both levels of employment.

Types of Social Support and Job Satisfaction

The prediction that emotional support from supervisors would have a stronger association with job satisfaction than emotional support from coworkers, when expectations for emotional support from supervisors are low, was not supported (H2). Although emotional support was found to be important for job satisfaction, the relationship was not stronger for supervisors than it was for coworkers, when expectations were low. These results are different from existing research that contends that support from supervisors is more valuable to employees than support from coworkers.
(Fenlason & Beehr, 1994; Marcelissen et al., 1988). The difference between the finding of this study and existing research may be attributed to the expectancy violation theory.

In order for H2 to be supported, employees had to have a violation of expectations with a positive valence. In other words, employees had to develop low expectations to receive supervisor emotional support, have those expectations violated (i.e., receive more support than expected), and then be pleasantly surprised by the violation. By receiving an unexpected highly level of emotional support from supervisors, employees would have an increase in job satisfaction. Perhaps employees with low expectations for supervisor emotional support did not have their expectations violated. It is plausible that employees who were expecting low levels of emotional support from supervisors did in fact receive low levels of emotional support from supervisors, thus not resulting in a violation. Without a violation, employees with low expectations for supervisor emotional support may not feel any more or less satisfied with their jobs.

It was also predicted that instrumental support from supervisors would have a stronger association with job satisfaction than instrumental support from coworkers, when expectations for instrumental support from supervisors were low (H3). This study did not confirm existing research which implies that supervisors may be able to better match employees’ needs for instrumental support and thus provide more effective support than coworkers (Dormann & Zapf, 1999). Again, it is possible that employees with low expectations for supervisor instrumental support did not have their expectations violated. Possibly, employees who were expecting low levels of instrumental support from supervisors did in fact receive low levels of instrumental support from supervisors, thus
not resulting in a violation. Without a violation, employees with low expectations for supervisor instrumental support may not feel any more or less satisfied with their jobs.

Although not the focus of the hypotheses herein, the findings of the present study do suggest there is an association between the social support types and job satisfaction. In relation to H2, it appears that receiving emotional support from both coworkers and managers is important for job satisfaction, even when expectations are low. As was the case with emotional support, results for H3 indicate that it is important for employees to receive instrumental support from both levels of employees. Thus, overall, it appears that receiving emotional and instrumental support from both levels of employees is associated with job satisfaction. In other words, employees who have low expectations for the receipt of social support, still report that support as being important for their job satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when evaluating the findings presented herein. First, participants in this study had a relatively short length of employment; an average of approximately two years total. Due to the short length of employment, participants may have still been developing expectations with regard to their coworkers’ and supervisors’ behaviors. If participants had been employed longer, their relationships with their coworkers and supervisors may have produced expectations that were more steadfast. The prescriptive expectations that participants developed may have been stronger with a longer history of employment, thus making a violation of these expectations more salient. Stronger expectations for support along with more attention
paid to the violation of these expectations may have increased the variance between relationships. More variance between variables may have lead to a better understanding of the difference in emphasis employees placed on coworker versus supervisor emotional and instrumental support. In order to provide more robust findings, this study should be repeated using a sample with more work experience.

Second, this study used primarily college students who may not have career jobs and who may be only working part time. Many students work their way through college with the expectation of obtaining a career job (e.g., better paying, with in their field of study, upward mobility) after graduation from college. College students may consider their jobs to be temporary and therefore have lower expectations than employees in non-temporary jobs (Rowh, 1998). Some of these lower expectations may include an acceptance of lower pay, less challenging work, and aloof coworkers and supervisors. Normally these factors may reduce job satisfaction and ratings of social support.

However, since college age workers are not expecting to have the ideal job, participants’ low expectations of job satisfaction may cause this study to reveal more satisfied employees than would otherwise exist if a non-college student sample were used. Using a sample that has higher expectations for job satisfaction may lead to employees being more critical of the support they receive from coworkers and supervisors.

Additionally, employees who only work part time may depend more heavily on sources of support outside the workplace, whereas full time employees spend more hours each week at work and may depend more on workplace relationships. Using full time employees who are out of college may produce a sample that is more concerned with
being satisfied at work which may lead to a more defined relationship between social
support and job satisfaction. This study should be replicated through sampling other than
a primarily college student base. It may be important to sample individuals who are
employed full time and working in their career job.

A third limitation is that participants were not asked to report on received
instrumental support that was above and beyond the support giver’s job description. It is
possible that some participants were in a position in which they were expected to provide
instrumental support as part of their assigned job duties. If employees were in a position
in which they were expecting to receive instrumental support because of their coworkers’
or supervisors’ assigned job duties, then their responses may have indicated a different
level of expectations than employees who did not have coworkers and supervisors who
were assigned to provide instrumental support. This potential limitation may have
impacted employees’ ratings of their expectations for support. Future studies should
clearly ask respondents to report on instrumental support that is above and beyond their
job description.

Fourth, this study did not ask for detailed information about individual differences
in workplace autonomy, which may have confounded some of the results. Some
employees may be more autonomous than others (Green & James, 2003). For example,
some employees may be assigned to work in groups with other employees whereas other
individuals may work independently. Employees that spend more time working in groups
may have different expectations of social support from coworkers and managers than
autonomous individuals. The amount of time that individuals spend working in groups
may have been an important variable to control for in this study. Future social support research should ask employees to report on what percentage of time they spend working in groups and independently.

A fifth limitation involves the generalizability of these results to different industries. Potentially, associations concerning workplace social support may be context dependent. Employees involved in sales may have higher or lower expectations for emotional and instrumental support than employees in engineering. For example, if individuals in the sales field face a lot of rejection when dealing customers, they may need more emotional support than employees in other industries. Likewise, individuals in the field of engineering may need more instrumental support if they are faced with scientific questions outside of their area of specialty. The results of future studies may reveal that certain types of support may be industry-specific. Although a fair number of industries were represented within this research, future researchers should attempt to replicate this study while looking at individual industries.

Finally, future researchers should attempt to replicate this study using an experimental design. This study relies on prescriptive expectations to be violated. If participants were to identify their expectations for specific types of support, thereby pre-testing for low and high expectations, comparison groups could be created. This would help to obtain equal groups with low expectations of emotional and instrumental support. Researchers would then violate their expectations in a controlled environment. Possibly, stories or vignettes could be developed that are similar to or different from an individual’s expectations. After reading the vignette, participants could be asked to
evaluate the situation based on if their coworker and supervisors acted in a similar fashion. An experimental design may help to further explicate the role of expectation violations in the study of social support and job satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

Overall, there does not appear to be a significant difference between the appropriateness of emotional support received from coworkers and the appropriateness of emotional support received from supervisors. Emotional support from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than emotional support from coworkers when expectations for supervisor emotional support were low. Instrumental support from supervisors was not found to have a stronger association with job satisfaction than coworker instrumental support when expectations for supervisor instrumental support were low. However, both the emotional and instrumental support received from coworkers as well as supervisors were associated with job satisfaction. Thus, it appears that to maximize job satisfaction, emotional and instrumental support at the workplace should come from both coworkers and supervisors in an appropriate fashion.
Appendix A

Demographic Information

1. What is your gender: Male Female

2. What is your age: __________

3. What ethnic group describes you best?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Japanese</td>
<td>(2) White</td>
<td>(3) Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Native American</td>
<td>(5) Chinese</td>
<td>(6) Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Indo-Chinese</td>
<td>(8) Vietnamese</td>
<td>(9) Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Portuguese</td>
<td>(11) African American</td>
<td>(12) Hispanic/Latino/Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) American Indian</td>
<td>(14) Other Asian</td>
<td>(15) Other Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please describe your employment by answering the following questions. If you have more than one job, please answer using what you consider your primary occupation.

4. What type of organization do you work for?

5. How long have you worked for your present employer?

6. What is your job position?

7. How long do you **plan** to work at your present job? ________________

8. Given that you have known some individuals at work longer than others, what is the average length of time that you have known your coworkers?

   _______ Years _________ Months

9. Given that you have known some individuals at work longer than others, what is the average length of time that you have known your supervisor(s)?

   _______ Years _________ Months
Appendix B

Emotional Support Appropriateness Scale

*Emotional support* is defined as: “providing others with a feeling of acknowledgement and acceptance or providing empathy, caring, love, and trust.” Please circle a number based on how you would describe the emotional support you receive from your (coworkers, supervisors).

1. Inappropriate 1 2 3 4 Appropriate
2. Unsuitable 1 2 3 4 Suitable
3. Improper 1 2 3 4 Proper
4. Unfitting 1 2 3 4 Fitting
5. Unjust 1 2 3 4 Just
Appendix C

Emotional Social Support Measure

1. How much can your (coworkers, supervisors) be relied on when things get tough at work?
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

2. How much are your (coworkers, supervisors) willing to listen to your work-related problems?
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

3. My (coworkers, supervisors) are very concerned about the welfare of those around them.
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

4. My (coworkers, supervisors) go out of their way to praise good work.
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

5. Your (coworker, supervisor) really cares about you.
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

6. You feel close to your (coworkers, supervisors).
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

7. Your (coworkers, supervisors) take a personal interest in you.
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

8. You feel appreciated by your (coworkers, supervisors).
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

9. Your (coworkers, supervisors) are friendly to you.
   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much
Appendix D

Instrumental Social Support Measure

1. How much are each of the following people (coworkers, supervisors) helpful to you in getting your job done?

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

2. My (coworkers, supervisors) are competent in doing their jobs.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

3. Your (coworkers, supervisors) would fill in while you’re absent.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

4. Your (coworkers, supervisors) give useful advice on job problems.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

5. Your (coworkers, supervisors) assist with unusual work problems.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much

6. Your (coworkers, supervisors) will pitch in and help.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very much
Appendix E

Emotional Support Expectation Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Expectations</th>
<th>High Expectations</th>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How much do you **EXPECT** your (coworkers, supervisors) to provide you with a feeling of acceptance?
2. How much do you **EXPECT** your (coworkers, supervisors) to provide you with a feeling of caring?
3. How much do you **EXPECT** your (coworkers, supervisors) to provide you with a feeling of empathy?
Appendix F

Instrumental Support Expectation Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Expectations</th>
<th>High Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How much do you EXPECT your (coworkers, supervisors) to share your workload?
2. How much do you EXPECT your (coworkers, supervisors) to do your work for you?
3. How much do you EXPECT your (coworkers, supervisors) to complete tasks that you cannot?
Appendix G

Job Satisfaction Scale

Think of your job in general. All in all, what is it like most of the time? In the list of choices beside each word or phrase, circle:

Y for “Yes” if it describes your job
N for “No” if it does not describe it
? for “?” of you cannot decide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pleasant</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>Superior</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Better than most</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Disagreeable</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste of time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Makes me content</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthwhile</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rotten</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse than most</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Enjoyable</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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