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Perceived organizational support:

The role of coworkers' perceptions and employees' voice

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the present study is to investigate whether a focal employee's perceptions of organizational support (POS) is shaped by the social context and, more specifically, by his/her coworkers' POS. We further aim to identify conditions under which coworkers' POS may have more influence or, on the contrary, less or even no influence.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were obtained from questionnaires distributed among a sample of 195 employees and among their supervisors.

Findings – Coworkers' levels of POS are positively related to the focal employee's POS with positive consequences in terms of job satisfaction and, finally, organizational citizenship behaviors. This influence of coworkers' POS is strengthened when the focal employee experiences low voice in the workplace.

Research implications – Overall, this research contributes to organizational support theory by showing that POS may also develop based on a socially-constructed process and not only on an individual-level psychological process.

Practical implications – Our findings have practical implications for HR policies employed by practitioners to socialize newcomers and to manage perceived support in a context of organizational change.

Originality/value – Building on a few recent studies suggesting that the social context may influence employees' perceptions of organizational support, the present study is the first to show that the influence of the social context is more likely to occur under specific conditions, i.e. when employees experience low voice.

Keywords: Perceived organizational support; employee-employer relationships; social influence; job satisfaction; organizational citizenship behaviors; voice.

Perceived organizational support:**The interactive role of coworkers' perceptions and employees' voice**

Perceived organizational support (POS) is defined as employees' perceptions of the extent to which their organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p.501). Since its emergence in the literature, a huge body of research has been devoted to its study. On the one hand, studies on its consequences have accumulated evidence showing that a high POS is predictive of outcomes beneficial for both the employee and the organization (e.g., an increasing job satisfaction and performance) (Kurtessis et al., 2017). On the other hand, research on its predictors has indicated that the receipt of favorable treatment by organizational members (e.g., supervisors), contextual indicators of the employee-organization relationship quality (e.g., procedural justice), and HR practices and job conditions (e.g., job security) are important determinants in its formation (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

To date, most POS studies adopt an approach in which it is examined how people *personally* perceive to be more or less supported by their organization based on their *own* work experiences. In this way, most POS research has focused on employees' *individual* relationship to the organization and its agents. Researchers have indeed neglected an important source of information in the formation of employees' POS, i.e. the social environment. Yet, Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) noted that employees' attitudes and beliefs regarding their job are influenced by social information processing of the expressed attitudes and behaviors of fellow employees. In line with this view, we argue in this study that employees' POS is also a socially constructed concept, i.e. is influenced by information that employees acquire from their direct coworkers. Through coworkers' POS, the social environment would provide cues that the focal employee uses to form his/her own views regarding the organization's valuation of him/herself. Accordingly, our first goal in this paper

is to examine whether coworkers' POS influences the focal employee's POS, which, furthermore, should serve to evaluate his/her job satisfaction and to accordingly display organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB).

By pursuing this first objective, our approach in the present research is in line with the two studies which constitute exceptions to the main stream literature on POS, namely Zagenczyk and colleagues' (2010), and, more recently, Vardaman and colleagues' (2016) work. Our research shares with these studies the view that considering the social context is useful for understanding how POS shapes and impacts employees' attitudes and behaviors. More precisely, the central theoretical claim of this study is aligned with Zagenczyk et al.'s (2010) work as we proposed that, by sharing their perceptions of organizational support among colleagues, a sort of social contagion effect takes place in the formation of a focal employee's POS. However, we tested this contagion effect by examining whether the focal employee's POS is associated with the POS of his/her direct coworkers, i.e. the people pertaining to the same workgroup. The social referent considered here is thus the people with whom the focal employee must interact because they are by default part of his/her work environment without him/her having any say in the matter. On this point, our approach is more in line with Vardaman et al.'s (2016) work who were interested the effects of social comparison in the formation of POS *within* the focal employee's workgroup. On the contrary, it differs from that of Zagenczyk et al. (2010) who focused on the similarity between perceptions of support among the focal employee and either people the focal employee has chosen to listen to (people who give him/her advices) or monitor the opinion (people who occupied similar positions in organizational networks).

The second goal of this paper completely departs our research from what has been done previously and is therefore an important originality and contribution of our research. We indeed go beyond what prior studies have done (i.e. Zagenczyk et al., 2010) by getting a

better understanding of the social contagion effect. More precisely, we aimed to identify conditions under which coworkers' POS may have more influence or, on the contrary, less or even no influence on the focal employee's POS. In particular, we propose that social information should have more influence when the employee directly experiences low procedural justice, especially voice, in the workplace. Because low voice entails uncertainty and makes the employees feel like a non-valued organizational member, he/she would rely on others' judgments to a greater extent to build his/her own perceptions. Figure 1 provides with an overview of our conceptual model. The specific assumptions examined in our research are developed below.

Insert Figure 1 here

Organizational support theory and social information processing

When proposing POS as a new construct, Eisenberger et al. (1986) applied the social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1964) to the employer–employee relationship. Organizational support theory indeed suggests that the employee-organization relationship is fostered through the trade of mutual positive benefits between employees and their organization. Employees trade their efforts and dedication to their organization for tangible incentives (e.g., pay), but also for socioemotional benefits such as approval and caring (Eisenberger et al., 1986). As such, POS initiates a social exchange process wherein employees feel an obligation to help the organization reach its goals and expect that their increased performance or efforts on behalf of the organization will be rewarded. In addition, organizational support theory holds that POS contributes to fulfil several employees' socioemotional needs in the workplace such as need for esteem or affiliation, leading employees to develop a better orientation toward their organization and a greater level of well-being (e.g., Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Because of its numerous beneficial outcomes for both employees and organizations (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), many scholars have examined the determinants of employees' POS. Relying on their meta-analytic review, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) identified three main categories of antecedents: justice perceptions, human resources practices as well as favorable job conditions (i.e., training, autonomy), and finally support received from supervisors. In their recent meta-analysis, Kurtessis et al. (2017) extended this categorization by adding elements related to the quality of employee-organization relationship and other types of treatment by organizational members, such as perceived coworker support.

Overall, this literature has mainly focused on individual-level psychological explanations in order to explain the development of POS, without considering the influence of the social context (Zagenczyk et al., 2010). The paucity of research examining the impact of the social environment on the formation of employees' POS is somewhat surprising. Indeed, far from being isolated from each other, employees composing an organization interact on an every-day basis with their coworkers. As a consequence of these social interactions, employees may assign weight to their coworkers' feelings and judgements to shape their own perceptions of the organizational functioning. In line with this view, literature has indicated that workers collect and interpret data from their coworkers to assess their work environments and organizations. Empirical evidence indeed showed that how others are treated should also be attended to when making judgments about one's own treatment in the working environment (e.g., Stinglhamber & De Cremer, 2008).

It is only recently that scholars such as Zagenczyk et al. (2010) underlined that "perceived organizational support is not solely psychological but also a social process influenced by information that employees acquire from the social context" (p.127). Following these authors, "social exchange occurs within a social context which affects both perceptions of exchange relationships as well as the exchange behaviors of the individual" (p.128). In line

with this, they suggested that employees interpret a great deal of information which is collected through interaction with coworkers and by monitoring the organizational environment. Relying on a social network analysis, they conducted a research in which they identified the people with whom each focal employee has social relations within the organization. Based on this analysis, they then showed that employees sharing advice ties in the organization (i.e., “instrumental relationships through which employees share job- and organization-related information”, p.129) have similar levels of perceived organizational support. They further found that it is also the case for employees having ties with similar others in the organization, i.e. employees who occupies structurally equivalent positions in organizational friendship and advise networks (Zagenczyk et al., 2010). They conclude from their study that if employees pay attention to the treatment they received from the organization to shape their POS, they also seem to consider how this treatment is perceived by both coworkers with who they share advice and coworkers who reside in structurally equivalent networks positions.

In another vein, Vardaman and his colleagues (2016) recently suggested that, above and beyond judging their own POS in absolute value, employees are also likely to determine their POS *relative* to their reference group. They considered that the most salient reference point for a focal employee is coworkers with whom they frequently interact at work, i.e. coworkers pertaining to the same workgroup. They thus proposed that employees would compare their POS with the average support that his/her *direct* coworkers perceive. They found that favorable within-group comparisons are associated with higher levels of affective commitment and retention whereas unfavorable comparisons are negatively related (especially in less-supported workgroups). Their findings highlight the importance of social comparisons in eliciting responses to POS.

Both studies consider that POS does not develop or operate in isolation of social context. However, while Zagenczyk et al. (2010) have shown a contagion effect from the POS of organizational members pertaining to the social network of the focal employee, Vardaman et al. (2016) have focused their research on comparison effects within the workgroup of the focal employee. Our research lies at the intersection of these two previous studies. In line with Zagenczyk et al. (2010), the central theoretical claim of this research is that, in order to form his/her perception of how he/she is supported by the organization, the focal employee relies on coworkers' perceptions. We thus assumed a contagion effect and accordingly proposed to consider that the level of POS of a focal employee will be associated with the average level of support among coworkers. In line with Vardaman et al. (2016), we however consider that coworkers of the same workgroup are the significant others that may shape the focal employee's POS by communicating on their own POS. Past empirical evidence indeed indicates that direct coworkers are for employees the most important source of information and the most relevant discussion partners to speak about their job conditions and decode them (Alicke, Zell, & Bloom, 2010). As further stated by Li and Cropanzano (2009), within a workgroup, "members interact with each other, observe each other's behavior, and engage in collective sense making, a tendency that may ultimately lead to the development of shared perceptions" (p.566). Based on this rationale, we argue that organizational support perceptions of direct coworkers might affect the formation of a meaningful interpretation of organizational events and policies and, finally, shape the focal employee's own perceptions of organizational support. Consider the example of two hypothetical employees experiencing different situations. The organization of Employee A announces that it wants to transform offices into hotdesking. Although the organization claims it made this decision because it cares about its employees and therefore wants to provide pleasant, beautiful and well-thought-out workspaces, Employee A receives this news with a certain reserve, since he/she will no

longer have his/her own workspace and will have to apply the clean office policy. Not knowing what to think about this initiative, Employee A will naturally turn to his/her coworkers and pay particular attention to their opinion on the subject. If most of them are convinced that what guided their organization towards this decision is above all the reduction of economic costs regardless of the consequences for the staff, this will probably have a negative effect on their POS and therefore on that of Employee A as well. Employee B arrived barely 1 month ago and is therefore new to the organization. Based on the selection process, he/she anticipated that the organization is attentive to the well-being of its employees and is likely to value their contributions. With little direct evidence yet, he/she is particularly receptive about what his/her more senior coworkers think and might tell him/her about the subject in order to confirm or disconfirm his/her initial judgment. If most of them seem to share the perception that the organization is trustworthy and sincerely put the human being at the core of its management, this will probably have a positive effect on their POS and therefore on that of Employee B as well.

This assumption that an employee's perceptions of organizational support should be influenced by the corresponding perceptions of coworkers is rooted in several theoretical frameworks. Primarily, social information processing theory states that employees collect information from their immediate social environment in order to better understand work situations (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). More precisely, employees' social environment shapes employees' own perceptions of certain aspects of their job (e.g., meaningfulness) by providing cues that employees use to construct and interpret events. Social environment has also an indirect influence on employees' judgements and perceptions by focusing their individual attention on certain information (e.g., Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

In developing their argumentation for a socially constructed work world, Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) also refer to Festinger's work. Festinger (1954) argued that people are

motivated to communicate with others and to develop subsequent socially-derived interpretations of events when their own judgment is uncertain. Relying on this, the authors suggest that the more ambiguous the job aspects, the more social influence will operate. In sum, the focal employee is likely to seek cues from their coworkers to reduce the ambiguity about the meaning of organizational events and policies. Accordingly, we posited that:

Hypothesis 1: Coworkers' POS is positively related to the focal employee's POS.

Further, we aimed to link this social influence effect to the nomological network of POS, and particularly to its consequences. In this research, we focus on the consequences of this construct in terms of both job satisfaction and OCB. Defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p.1300), job satisfaction is a dominant construct in the organizational literature notably because of its relationships to a variety of relevant workplace behaviors (Crede, Chernyshenko, Stark, Dalal, Bashshur, 2007). Job satisfaction has been shown to be among the most important attitudinal outcomes of POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Regarding its behavioral consequences, numerous studies also showed that POS is strongly and positively related to OCB (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Organ (1988) defines OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (p.4). Along with withdrawal behaviors, OCB is certainly the most important behavioral outcomes of POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Far from being disconnected, job satisfaction and OCB were found to be related in numerous studies (cf. Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001 for a meta-analysis). Importantly, Crede et al. (2007) showed that job satisfaction can successfully be positioned as a mediator between four categories of antecedent variables (i.e., dispositions, workplace events, job characteristics, job opportunities) and volitional workplace behaviors such as

OCB. More specifically, research has reported that job satisfaction also mediates the POS-OCB relationship (e.g., Muse & Stamper, 2007). Based on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which proposes a sequential order of influence among beliefs/perceptions, attitudes, intentions and behaviors, job satisfaction has been proposed to be a more proximal outcome of POS than OCB. POS is thus positively related to job satisfaction which, in turn, influences employees' OCB.

Taking into consideration this mediating effect, we suggest in the present research that socially constructed POS judgments can serve as a heuristic for employees to appraise their general work situation and to finally engage or not in OCB. That is, if the focal employee perceives his/her relationships with the organization as supportive (i.e. based on the experiences of coworkers), he/she may infer that employees in this organization (including him/herself) have a favorable appraisal of their job experiences, resulting in higher job satisfaction and finally in more OCB. Accordingly, we posited that:

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS carries over to his/her job satisfaction and, finally, to his/her OCB.

The moderating role of voice

So far, we thus propose to consider in the formation of POS that people exchange and communicate information and opinions about organizational events and policies and about the POS they therefore feel. This social context influences the formation of employees' POS judgements, with consequences for their job satisfaction and finally their OCB. However, going one step further than what Zagenczyk et al. (2010) have previously done, the present research also aims at identifying conditions under which contagion effect is more or less likely to occur.

Festinger (1954) stated that, by default, employees prefer to base their judgments about a situation on more objective or non-social standards. As explained earlier, it is when

such standards are not available, uncertain or ambiguous that employees seek out and rely on social information from others to help them interpreting the situation. More precisely, it is when physical evidence is unavailable or judgement is uncertain so that employees are not able to interpret the complex cues of their work environment and do not know how to react (just as in the case of Employee A and B described above), that the impact of the social environment should be greatest (see also Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In agreement with Festinger (1954) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1978), we propose that the extent to which employees personally and directly face work experiences which attenuate or accentuate this uncertainty in the work situation should modulate the impact of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS.

Among the work experiences able to generate or reduce uncertainty, we decided to focus in this research on employees' "voice", i.e. employees' perceptions of their opportunity to express their views and feelings regarding organizational decisions (Lind & Kulik, 2009). There are two main reasons behind this choice. First, voice is a key component of procedural justice, i.e. the work experience which is the antecedent the most related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). It was thus interesting to show how the social context influences POS in presence and, furthermore, in interaction of this well-known and influential antecedent of POS.

Second, voice appeared as particularly relevant since it captures the possibility to *personally* take an active part in the decision-making process instead of referring to a general perception of the intrinsic quality of the process. As such and importantly for the goals of this research, having voice reduces uncertainty by increasing individuals' felt control over the processes that lead to outcomes (Bashshur & Oc, 2015). Voice indeed allows employees some direct control over various aspects of their work conditions and some degree of influence in decisions that are made regarding them. Controlling situations make individuals believe that they have the power to reverse, attenuate or remove sources of potential threat, thus

increasing predictability and reducing uncertainty (Elovainio et al., 2005). On the contrary, because not benefiting from voice opportunities entails low perceived control on the work situation, experiencing low voice does not remove or, at least, attenuate uncertainty (Elovainio et al., 2005). Owing to the modulating effect of voice in terms of uncertainty, we thus argued in agreement with Festinger (1954) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) that when the focal employee may not rely on instituted procedures to voice his/her opinions, thoughts, feelings, and potential grievances, the influence of the social environment should be strengthened.

This hypothesis is also supported by the group value model which proposes that voice provides information about one's position within a group and finally influences one self-concept (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Opportunity to participate in decision making indicates to people that they are valued group members. Such treatment communicates acceptance and respect to the individual. On the contrary, employees who are not able to participate in organizational decision making will not feel respected and valued by the organization, which conveys a negative message in terms of self-regard (Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008). As a result, these individuals lack confidence in their own thoughts and feelings and depend therefore more on information from outside sources. Conforming to the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of others is notably a way for these less accepted, respected and valued employees to gain others' approval and hope for an increase of their integration in the group. In sum, the focal employee experiencing low voice should be more malleable to social cues and therefore more likely to attach importance to others' perceptions of organizational support to determine his/her own level of POS.

Prior research provides preliminary evidence in line with our proposition. A low procedural justice has been shown to accentuate the seeking for external cues (Khoreva & Tenhiälä, 2016). Furthermore, a slightly participative work climate has been shown to

increase the spread of opinions and emotions regarding the treatment received (Sheppard, Lewicki & Minton, 1992). Relying on this theoretical and empirical evidence, we thus posited that:

Hypothesis 3: The focal employee's voice moderates the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS such that the relationship is strengthened when his/her voice is low.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of employees working in health and social services organizations (e.g., child protection centers, retirement homes, and homecare services) located in France. All respondents were permanent staff members with administrative, medical or social responsibilities. Paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed to employees and their supervisors. As part of a larger survey, employees were invited to answer to items assessing notably POS, voice and job satisfaction, whereas their supervisors answered a survey measuring their employees' OCB. The final sample included 195 employees for whom we collected both surveys (response rate of 33%). Among respondents, 8.7% were below age 26, 24.1% were in the 26 to 35 age group, 31.8% were between 36 and 45 years of age, 24.1% were aged between 46 and 55 years, and 9.2% were more than 55 years. 76.4 % were female. 10.8% of respondents worked for their organization for less than 1 year, 34.4% between 1 and 3 years, 26.7% between 3 and 10 years, and 26.7% had been employed by the company for at least 10 years. Finally, 33.9% of respondents went to high school but did not graduate, 24.6 % graduates from high school, and 36.9% have received higher education.

Measures

For all measures, respondents rated their agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=*strongly disagree*; 7=*strongly agree*).

POS. We measured the focal employee's POS using 3 high-loading items of the Survey of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). A sample item is "This organization shows very little concern for me" (R).

Coworkers' POS. Coworkers' POS was obtained from our measure of POS. For each focal employee, we calculated a mean score of POS based on the POS reported by his/her direct coworkers, i.e. the other fellow employees who pertain to the same workgroup and thus refer to the same supervisor. On average, respondents had 6.76 coworkers.

Voice. We measured the focal employee's voice using 3 items from Ohana (2016) which, for two of them, come from Colquitt's (2001) work. A sample item is "I am able to express my views and feelings before decisions are made by my organization".

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction of the focal employee was measured with three items from Cammann et al. (1979). A sample item is "All in all, I am satisfied with my job".

OCB. Supervisors rated the focal employee's OCB through four items coming from the seminal work of Williams and Anderson (1991), Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990), and Smith, Organ and Near (1983). A sample item is "This employee keeps up to date with the changes related to the organization".

Control variables. Following Becker's (2005) recommendations, we controlled only for socio-demographic variables that were related to our dependent variables (i.e., the two mediators and the ultimate outcome variable) to reduce model complexity. Correlations indicated that gender displays a significant correlation with POS ($r=-.14, p<.05$) while level of education is related to OCB ($r=.38, p<.001$). These two variables were thus introduced as control variables in our analyses.

Results

Discriminant Validity. The distinctiveness between POS, voice, job satisfaction, and OCB was assessed through confirmatory factor analyses using Lisrel 8.8. Fit indices for the

measurement models that were tested are reported in Table 1. The results indicated that the four-factor model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(59)=132.12$, $p<.001$; NNFI=.94; CFI=.95; RMSEA=.08) and was significantly superior to all more constrained models. All the items loaded reliably on their predicted factors, with standardized loadings ranging from .54 to .87 for POS, .64 to .91 for voice, .54 to .94 for job satisfaction, and .46 to .90 for OCB.

Insert Table 1 here

Relationships among variables. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations among variables are displayed in Table 2. In line with our Hypotheses 1 and 2, coworkers' POS is positively related to POS and to job satisfaction, POS is positively associated to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction is positively linked to OCB. However, neither coworkers' POS nor POS are significantly related to OCB. According to several authors (e.g., MacKinnon, Krull, Lockwood, 2000), finding a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is not a necessary condition for mediation to occur and the indirect effect can be used as the criterion to conclude that mediation exists. We therefore decided not to consider the direct effect of coworkers' POS and POS on OCB as a prerequisite for mediation (Hypothesis 2).

Insert Table 2 here

Test of hypotheses. First, we used Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 6; 10,000 bootstrap samples) for SPSS to estimate the direct effect of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS (Hypothesis 1) and its indirect effect on the focal employee's OCB through his/her POS and then his/her job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2; sequential mediation) and obtain bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals. As it can be seen in Table 3, controlling for gender and level of education, coworkers' POS is a significant predictor of the

focal employee's POS that significantly predicts his/her job satisfaction, which in turn positively influences his/her OCB. The estimate and bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect indicate that the indirect effect of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's OCB via his/her POS and then his/her job satisfaction is positive and significant (indirect effect=.02; SE=.02; BCa95%CI=[.001; .066]). Overall, these results provide support for our two first hypotheses.

 Insert Table 3 here

Second, we used Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 1) for SPSS to estimate whether voice moderates the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS (Hypothesis 3). As shown in Table 4, the results support our hypothesis by indicating that the focal employee's voice negatively interacts with coworkers' POS in the prediction of the focal employee's POS. To further examine the interactive effect of coworkers' POS and the focal employee's voice on the focal employee's POS, lines representing the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS were plotted at high and low levels of the focal employee's voice. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS was statistically not significant when the focal employee's voice was high ($B=-.08$, n.s.), and significant when his/her voice was low ($B=.42$, $p<.01$).

 Insert Table 4 and Figure 2 here

As a combination of the two previous analyses, we relied on Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 7) for SPSS to test whether the interactive effect carries over to the focal employee's job satisfaction and, accordingly, compute the conditional indirect effects (i.e., the value of the indirect effect conditioned on one or more values of the moderator). As shown in Table 4, the results indicate that the focal employee's voice negatively interacts with coworkers'

POS in the prediction of the focal employee's POS which in turn predicts his/her job satisfaction. Further, conditional indirect effects showed that the focal employee's POS mediates the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's job satisfaction at low or medium values of his/her voice only. Finally, the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) is significantly different from 0 (index=-.06; SE=.02; BCa95%CI=[-.11; -.02]). We also performed a path analysis testing the whole model (Figure 1). As Figure 3 shows, the results are in accordance with the findings of the bootstrap analyses. Coworkers' POS and the focal employee's voice negatively interact in their prediction of the focal employee's POS that is related to his/her job satisfaction which, in turn, predicts his/her OCB. Moreover, the focal employee's voice has a direct influence on his/her job satisfaction. Overall, these results indicate that, when he/she does not have voice, the focal employee relies on the POS of his/her coworkers to establish his/her own POS and its subsequent outcomes.⁵

 Insert Figure 3 here

Discussion

Far from considering that employees do not share information and feelings about how they are treated by the organization, the objective of the present research was to examine the impact of social environment on employees' perceptions. Results of our study indicated that the POS of his/her direct coworkers has an impact on the focal employee's POS, with positive consequences in terms of increasing job satisfaction and then OCB. In addition, we found that the focal employee's voice modulates the influence of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS. More specifically, the influence of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS and its

⁵ As the variance in POS may strongly differ from one workgroup to the other, we run again all the analyses controlling for this within workgroup variance. The results are essentially similar to those presented here.

subsequent outcomes was significant only when the focal employee's perceptions of voice were low.

As a whole, our research contributes to the development of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). While organizational support theory has, to date, mainly considered that employees build their POS based on their personal work experiences, the present research indeed showed that employees may be influenced by information acquired from their social context. In line with Zagenczyk et al.'s (2010) study, these findings confirm that POS may also be formed based on a socially-constructed process and not only on an individual-level psychological process. They however extend Zagenczyk et al.'s (2010) work by showing that this influence also emanates from direct coworkers, i.e. people who are by default part of the focal employee's work environment, and not just people the focal employee would have chosen to listen to (people who give them advices) or monitor the opinion (people who occupied similar positions in the organization). By showing that employees rely on social information from their coworkers to evaluate their own POS, our work also complements Vardaman et al.'s (2016) findings. While these authors showed that employees' POS is sensitive to comparison effects with their direct coworkers, we found that employees collect and rely on information from the same coworkers to build their own perceptions. In line with Zagenczyk et al. (2010), our study concludes to contagion effects whereas Vardaman et al.'s (2016) study indicates comparison processes. If all studies argue for an effect of the social context, the processes at stake are very different. Future research should now determine the individual and situational conditions (e.g., psychological proximity, personality variables) under which contagion versus comparison processes would take place.

By expanding and deepening the comprehension of POS formation, the present research also provides new insight to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1960). Rooted in this latter theory, POS has essentially been viewed as the result and the origin of a dyadic exchange

relationship between an employee and his/her personified organization (Levinson, 1965). In contrast, our findings showed that it is a too limited view of what happens in reality. Accordingly, social exchange theory would benefit from adopting a more dynamic view of the exchange that exceeds the two-by-two relationships between each employee and the organization and considering the social contagion or ripple effects that may occur in organizations (Barsade, 2002).

More importantly, results of our research extend the existing literature by exploring a factor exacerbating the influence of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS and its outcomes. To the best of our knowledge, prior study has not examined the possibility that the influence of the social context might be more or less important depending on specific circumstances. Consistent with Festinger's (1954) work, our results suggest that under circumstances of low voice leading to uncertainty in their work environment, the focal employee will particularly rely on coworkers' perceptions of organizational support in order to evaluate his/her own POS. On the contrary, when he/she benefits from opportunities to voice his/her feelings and opinions during procedures, and therefore experiences reduced uncertainty and/or feels a valued member in the organization, he/she will not take into consideration others' judgments to build his/her own perceptions.

This finding that coworkers' POS does not influence at all the focal employee's POS and his/her subsequent job attitudes and behaviors at a high level of voice is somewhat surprising. While we certainly expected that the effect of coworkers' POS would be reduced, we did not anticipate that the effect would fully disappear. It would be worthwhile to examine the conditions under which this social influence would still be significant when the focal employee has voice in his/her work environment. One might for instance examine the role played by the interdependence level among coworkers for decision making, setting goals, and achieving objectives. Highly interdependent coworkers may interact on a more regularly basis.

This increased communication and information sharing implied by task interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1995) may also imply more communication and information sharing on informal aspects of the job. One may reasonably assume that, when informal communication channels are used more intensively, social influence has more impact on the formation of the focal employee's perceptions of organizational support even when he/she has voice in the organization and uncertainty is thus reduced. In another vein, a central tenet of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2004) is that favorable treatment received from the organization contributes more to perceived organizational support when it is considered discretionary rather than being impelled by external circumstances. Discretionary actions are a stronger indication of the organization's favorable or unfavorable orientation toward employees than actions that appear influenced by external constraints (such as union contracts or government regulations). In line with this view, the focal employee's voice may be all the more impactful on the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS than it is perceived as provided on a discretionary basis. On the contrary, if the focal employee perceives that the organization provides him/her with voice as a result of union pressure for instance, this voice may have less impact on the relationship between coworkers' POS and the focal employee's POS, so that social influence may continue to exert an effect. In any case, considering these triple interactions between coworkers' POS, voice and on the one hand interdependence level and on the other hand discretionary treatment represents an interesting perspective for future research.

Above and beyond theoretical contributions, this study has also practical implications for managers and organizations. This research indicates that providing voice may limit the influence of the social context, with POS stories that may damage the organization's reputation. Even though organizations pay close attention to their procedural justice, one cannot exclude that employees will always perceive to not have the opportunity to express

their views and feelings with respect to organizational decisions. Therefore, managing perceptions of organizational support in organizations may not only require attempts at creating favorable conditions and work experiences through organizational policies and practices, but also at influencing the interpretative activities by which organizational support is socially constructed. An important process in this vein is certainly the socialization of newcomers. But, with longer-term employees, targeting employees who serve as opinion leaders within a given group may be of particular relevance too (Degoe, 2000). Providing them with detailed explanations of specific actions may serve to guide their opinions and own perceptions in terms of POS, thereby indirectly shaping the opinions of their coworkers and finally their work attitudes and behaviors at work.

Further, our findings also suggest that implementing HR practices or providing job conditions that would specifically support certain employees, based for instance on their high potential, may not have the expected beneficial effects or, at least, may have less beneficial effects than expected. Indeed, our results indicate that these highly-supported high potentials may be contaminated by the lack of support that coworkers experience in the organization. On the contrary, having a general supportive policy within the organization would have multiplicative effects that is of interest for organizations (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), employees' POS being reinforced by the POS that their coworkers feel. These multiplicative effects might be of particular relevance in a context of organizational change where uncertainty is high and may cause damaging effects notably because employees do not have a say.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its originality and strengths, this study is not without limitations. First, while coworkers' POS was objectively computed and the focal employee's OCB was independently rated by supervisors, the focal employee's POS, voice and job satisfaction were all three

captured from the same source. As a consequence, this part of the model is thus subject to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Nevertheless, our statistical analyses demonstrate the construct validity of the used measures, which rules out substantial method effects (Conway & Lance, 2010).

To examine social influence on the focal employee's POS, we focused in this research on coworkers' POS. Based on past research, we considered that coworkers are the first persons who employees turn to in order to speak about their job conditions and thus represent the primary source of information and communication partners for the majority of employees. As suggested by Zagenczyk et al. (2010), other sources of influence such as family members or friends outside the organization might be at stake. Further, one can assume that the closer to the source, the more strongly the social influence is present. Future research might examine either the influence of closer sources or the factors that render coworkers closer such as task interdependence (see above) but also friendship ties.

Future research should also examine other factors modulating the effect of coworkers' POS. Procedural justice (and as a result its voice component) has been found to be the most important antecedent of POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). It would thus be worthwhile to examine whether other direct and tangible work experiences from which the focal employee individually benefits (e.g., favorable job conditions and HR practices) may sufficiently reduce uncertainty to attenuate or totally neutralize the effect of coworkers' POS on his/her POS and its outcomes. More generally, future research should identify other factors that may render the influence of the social context more or less likely to occur, such as individual differences (e.g., sensitivity to social cues, characteristics of the social environment (e.g., diverse nature of the workforce; Degoe, 2000) but also characteristics of the interpersonal relationships among the focal employee and his/her coworkers. Regarding the latter category, research might focus in particular on the sense of

“shared fate” that the focal employee feels more or less strongly with his/her coworkers.

Shared fate implies a link of one’s own fate or fortune with that of the group (Brown, 1988) and, as such, has been considered an antecedent to employee’s identification to that group (e.g., Reade, 2001). One can therefore reasonably assume that the more the focal employee identifies with the members of his/her workgroup, the greater the social influence can be. In other words, workgroup identification may intervene as a potential moderator in the relationship between coworkers’ POS and the focal employee’s POS.

Finally, our methodological design does not permit us to adopt a dynamic approach of the examination of social influences in the development of the focal employee’s POS. By definition, the topic itself should need to explore how social influences occur in the organizational environment by dynamically identifying how coworkers influence each other and make perceptions of organizational support evolving within time (Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Ohana, 2016). Furthermore, future research might examine the mechanisms underlying this contagion effect from coworkers’ POS and the focal employee’s POS. For instance, this contagion effect may partly be explained by the fact that by sharing their perceptions in terms of POS, coworkers put themselves in a position of vulnerability and authenticity, thereby building trust and indicating to the focal employee that human values are at the core of organizational functioning, which may increase his/her own POS. Finally, we cannot rule out the possibility that the association found in the present research between coworkers’ POS and the focal employee’s POS merely reflects a general climate of POS due to some third variable that would not be measured (e.g. perceived supervisor support). In the same time, if this was true, the effect between coworkers’ POS and the focal employee’s POS should not have been so attenuated at a high level of the focal employee’s voice. Anyway, given the results of the present research and regarding the potential importance of social processes in most actual

organizational structures and functioning, the issue certainly warrants attention and interest of scholars in the future.

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Table 1

Confirmatory Factor Analyses: Fit Indices for Measurement Models

	Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δ df)	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA
1.	Four-factor model	132.12	59	---	.94	.95	.08
2.	Three-factor model (POS and voice = 1 factor)	266.15	62	134.03 (3)	.87	.90	.13
3.	Three-factor model (POS and job satisfaction = 1 factor)	231.58	62	99.46 (3)	.88	.90	.12
4.	Three-factor model (voice and job satisfaction = 1 factor)	291.84	62	159.72 (3)	.84	.87	.14
5.	Three-factor model (voice and OCB = 1 factor)	435.57	62	303.45 (3)	.75	.80	.18
6.	Three-factor model (POS and OCB = 1 factor)	438.18	62	306.06 (3)	.75	.80	.18
7.	Three-factor model (job satisfaction and OCB = 1 factor)	433.92	62	301.80 (3)	.76	.81	.18
8.	Two-factor model (POS, voice and job satisfaction = 1 factor)	338.81	64	206.69 (5)	.81	.84	.15
5.	One-factor model	623.81	65	491.69 (6)	.64	.70	.21

Note. $N = 195$. POS = perceived organizational support; OCB = organizational citizenship

behaviors; NNFI = Non-Normed Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

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

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	3.01	1.11	--								
2. Gender	1.78	.42	-.19**	--							
3. Organizational tenure	2.70	.99	.56***	-.14	--						
4. Level of education	3.24	1.36	-.08	-.10	-.00	--					
5. Coworkers' POS	4.80	.84	-.01	-.11	-.10	.15*	--				
6. The focal employee's POS	4.80	1.34	-.12	-.15*	-.08	.03	.23**	(.73)			
7. The focal employee's voice	4.03	1.46	-.07	-.20**	-.00	.03	.19*	.57***	(.79)		
8. The focal employee's job satisfaction	5.98	1.02	-.04	-.08	-.11	.07	.16*	.48***	.43***	(.69)	
9. The focal employee's OCB	5.62	1.03	.08	.03	.00	.36***	-.00	.02	.10	.15*	(.72)

Note. $N = 195$ (except for age and gender, $N=191$; for tenure, $N=192$; for level of education, $N=186$, and for job satisfaction, $N=194$). Cronbach's alphas are provided in parentheses on the diagonal. Age classes were as follows: 1 = 25 years or less, 2 = between 26 and 35 years, 3 = between 36 and 45 years, 4 = between 46 and 55, and 5 = more than 55 years. Gender was coded 1 = male and 2 = female. Classes for organizational tenure were as follows: 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = between 1 and 3 years, 3 = between 3 and 10 years, and 4 = more than 10 years. Level of Education was coded from 1 to 6 following the French educational system. POS = perceived organizational support; OCB = organizational citizenship behaviors.

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

Table 3

Results of bootstrap analyses examining the impact of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's OCB through his/her POS and job satisfaction (model 6)

Predictor	B	SE	t
<u>DV: The focal employee's POS</u>			
Constant	3.90	.74	5.28***
Gender	-.39	.23	-1.70
Level of education	-.02	.07	-.24
Coworkers' POS	.34	.11	3.01**
<u>DV: The focal employee's job satisfaction</u>			
Constant	3.96	.55	7.24***
Gender	-.01	.16	-.03
Level of education	.02	.05	.35
Coworkers' POS	.06	.08	.68
The focal employee's POS	.36	.05	7.12***
<u>DV: The focal employee's OCB</u>			
Constant	3.97	.65	6.15***
Gender	.17	.17	1.04
Level of education	.30	.05	5.85***
Coworkers' POS	-.10	.09	-1.21
The focal employee's POS	-.04	.06	-.67
The focal employee's job satisfaction	.17	.08	2.29*

Note. N=195. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. Level of confidence for all confidence intervals is 95%. DV = Dependent variable; POS = perceived organizational support; OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Results of bootstrap analyses examining the impact of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's POS versus on his/her job satisfaction through his/her POS, and with his/her voice as moderator (models 1 and 7, respectively)

Predictor	Model 1			Model 7		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
<u>DV: The focal employee's POS</u>						
Constant	5.01	.42	11.93***	5.01	.42	11.93***
Gender	-.06	.20	-.31	-.06	.20	-.31
Level of education	-.02	.06	-.30	-.02	.06	-.30
Coworkers' POS	.17	.10	1.73†	.17	.10	1.73†
The focal employee's_voice	.49	.06	8.81***	.49	.06	8.81***
Coworkers' POS x The focal employee's_voice	-.17	.07	-2.36*	-.17	.07	-2.36*
<u>DV: The focal employee's job satisfaction</u>						
Constant	--	--	--	4.22	.44	9.59***
Gender	--	--	--	-.01	.16	-.03
Level of education	--	--	--	.02	.05	.35
Coworkers' POS	--	--	--	.06	.08	.68
The focal employee's_POS	--	--	--	.36	.05	7.12***
Conditional effect of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's_POS at values of voice (Model 1):						
The focal employee's voice	Boot indirect effect		Boot SE	LL CI	UL CI	
-1 SD	.41		.13	.15	.67	
Mean	.17		.10	-.02	.36	
+1 SD	-.07		.15	-.37	.23	
Conditional indirect effect of coworkers' POS on the focal employee's_job satisfaction at values of voice (Model 7):						
The focal employee's voice	Boot indirect effect		Boot SE	LL CI	UL CI	
-1 SD	.15		.05	.05	.26	
Mean	.06		.03	.00	.13	
+1 SD	-.03		.04	-.12	.05	

Note. N=195. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. Level of confidence for all confidence intervals is 95%.

DV = Dependent variable; POS = perceived organizational support; OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors; LL = Lower Limit; CI = Confidence interval; UL = Upper Limit.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1.

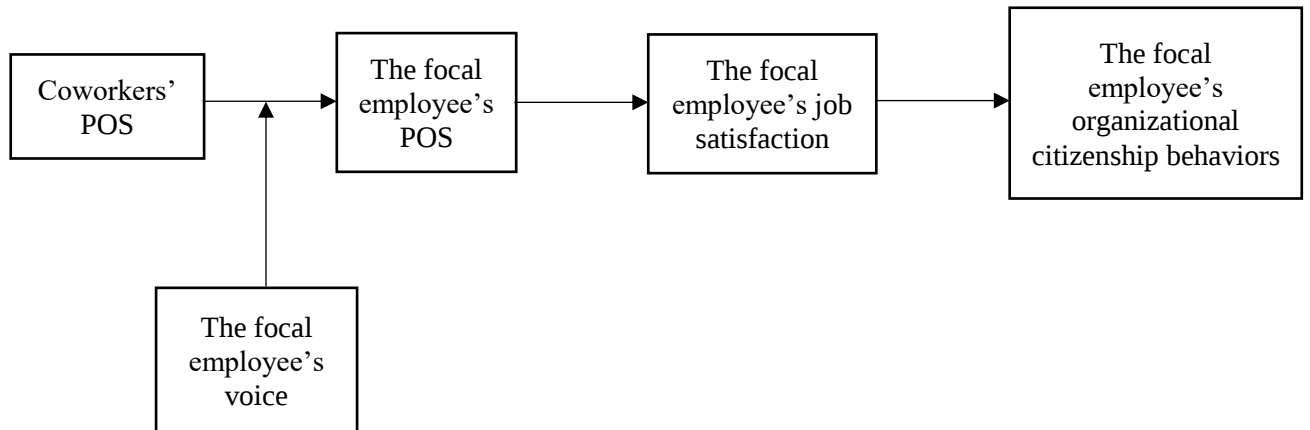
Conceptual model.

Figure 2.

POS as a function of coworkers' POS at low (-1 SD) and high ($+1$ SD) levels of the focal employee's voice.

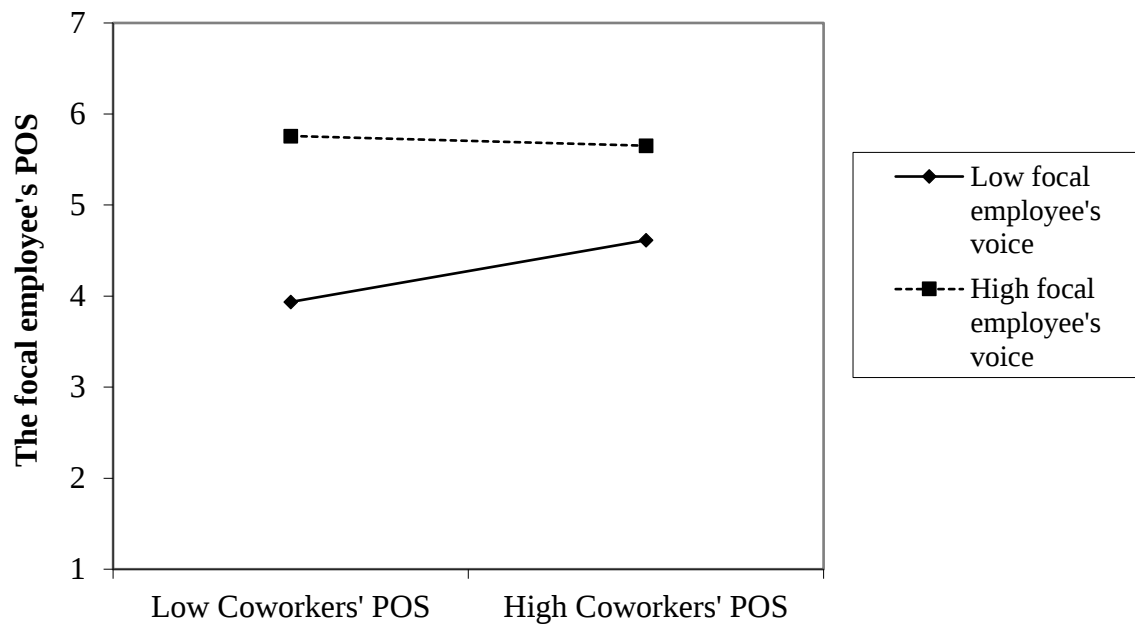
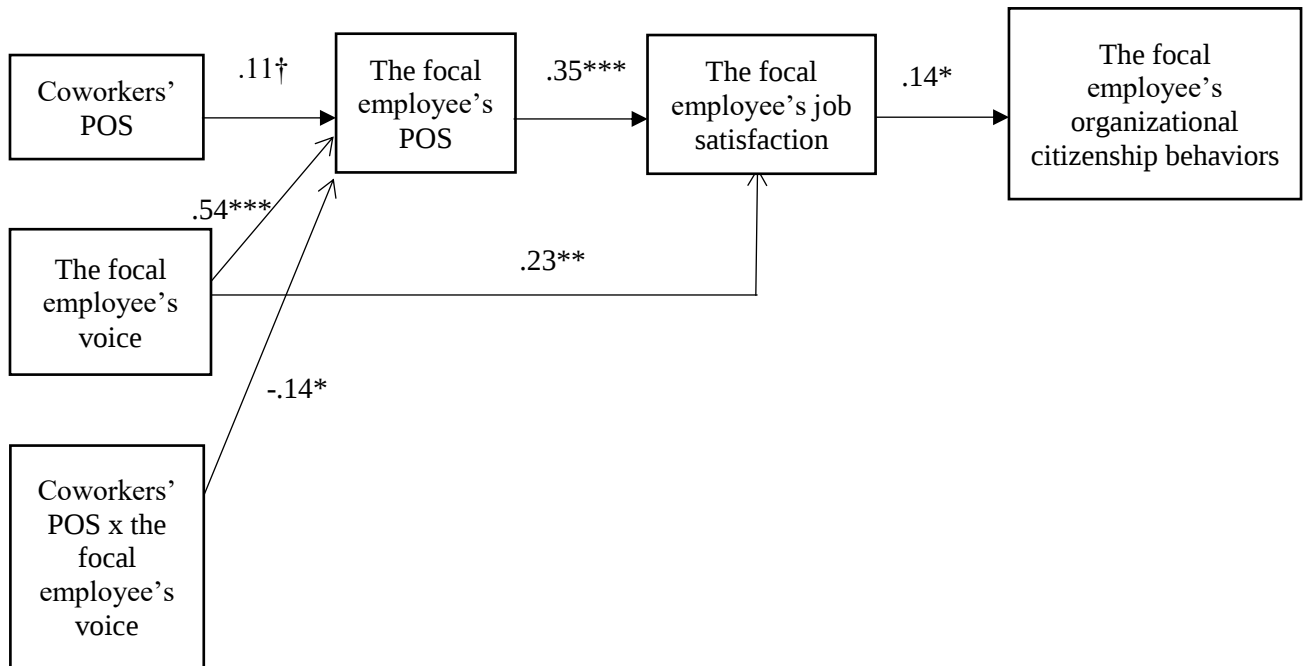


Figure 3.

Results of the path analysis.

Note. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.