Fostering Creativity and Work Engagement Through Perceived Organizational Support: The Interactive Role of Stressors

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Abstract
The increasing interest of organizations in innovating and surviving during stressful work environments has led scholars to ponder ways to increase employee’s creativity. The study aims to empirically examine the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and employee creativity through work engagement and the moderating effect of challenge and hindrance stressors. The theoretical lens of social exchange theory was used to explain the study framework. Data was collected from 324 marketing personnel of the beverage and telecom sector in Pakistan and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The findings revealed that the direct relationship between POS with work engagement and employee creativity was significant. Interestingly, the moderator has shown a prominent effect, which illustrated that low hindrance stressors strengthened the relationship between POS and work engagement. The study contributes by enhancing the employee’s creativity by reducing stressful working environments in many ways.

Keywords
work engagement, hindrance stressors, perceived organizational support, creativity

Introduction
Creativity is the ability to come up with novel ideas and practical solutions to issues and problems (Amabile, 1983). Creative organizations are more likely to keep ahead of their competitors and adapt better to changes in the environment (Baer, 2012; Bammens, 2016) and creativity has been identified as one of the significant elements that help an organization achieve success. As a result, organizations have realized the importance of creativity and the need to engage employees in creative behaviors. This importance underlies the need to identify ways to increase employee engagement in creative behaviors (Yoon et al., 2020). Bakker et al. (2020) identify the need for employees to proactively manage their psychological resources since these resources can facilitate and promote creativity. While perceived organizational support (POS), workplace stress, and work engagement have been examined in influencing creativity (Bakker et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020; Thao & Kang, 2018), there are relatively very few empirical investigations into the interplay of all these factors in influencing the creativity of employees. Moreover, Duan et al. (2020) emphasize the need to investigate the indirect effect of POS in influencing creativity. There are three primary aims of this paper: 1. To investigate whether POS and work engagement influence employee creativity; 2. To examine how POS through work engagement influences employee creativity; 3. To assess how challenge and hindrance stressors affect the strength of the relationship between POS and employee creativity.

Employees’ perceptions of how much the company values their contribution and cares about their well-being are referred to as POS (Lin et al., 2014; Paillé & Raineri, 2015). The phenomenon that is connected with POS is the norm of reciprocity since POS instills not only positive emotional and cognitive assessments toward the organization, but also the feeling of duty among employees to give back to their organization (Asif et al., 2019; Byrne & Hochwater, 2008; Gouldner, 1960; Shore & Wayne, 1993). POS influences an individual’s intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and builds
some individuals may perceive certain job stressors as a hindrance and organizational politics (Lepine et al., 2005). Although such as bureaucratic organization structures, job insecurity, and extrinsic motivation of personal goals and the development of employees (Bammens et al., 2013). POS has been found to make employees mentally fit and increases resilience to vulnerabilities and challenges which as a result, increases the employee’s creativity (Demerouti et al., 2015; Imran et al., 2020). Findings from several studies suggest that POS enhances work engagement (e.g., Adil et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020) increases motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), encourages responsibility toward work (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and develops a reciprocal obligation to pay back the organization (Shore & Wayne, 1993). Together with work engagement, POS (Bammens et al., 2013; Demerouti et al., 2015) can lead to employee creativity since engaged employees are more open to new things (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) and would find new and innovative ways of accomplishing their assigned tasks. In other words, employees will exhibit creativity when they perceive support from their supervisors and their organizations (Motlau, 2018; Scott & Bruce, 1994). While studies have demonstrated that POS and employee creativity are linked (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2016), the underlying mechanism that strengthens the relationship between the research variables is still at its infancy stage (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Asif et al., 2019; DiLiello et al., 2011; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Imran et al., 2020). Hence, this study seeks to examine the influence of POS and work engagement on employee creativity and whether work engagement mediates the POS-creativity relationship.

Stressors can play a conditional role in the relationship between the resources provided to the employees and the workplace outcomes (Zhang et al., 2016). This indicates that the impact of POS on creativity may be conditional. Employees who fail to cope with stressors may experience mental health issues that reduce their ability to execute tasks which consequently affects their business relationships (Beechr & Newman, 1978; Prem et al., 2017). Stressors can translate into positive or negative outcomes based on the extent to which the stressors promote or hinder potential gains, known as challenge and hindrance stressors (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Jiang et al., 2020). Challenge stressors comprise opportunities like workload, responsibility, and time pressure (Yang & Li, 2021; Zhang et al., 2016). For instance, time pressure is a challenging stressor rather than a hindrance stressor and is considered useful when the duration of time pressure is kept to a minimum and manageable (Baethge et al., 2018). Hindrance stressors are those which hinder the achievement of personal goals and the development of employees such as bureaucratic organization structures, job insecurity, and organizational politics (Lepine et al., 2005). Although some individuals may perceive certain job stressors as a potential for personal growth, others may see them as an obstruction to achieving job-related goals (Prem et al., 2017). For instance, challenge stressors which are sometimes regarded as job responsibilities, can increase work engagement because these challenge stressors at the workplace stimulate employees to dedicate time and energy and increase an individual’s motivation and ability to learn and develop according to the needs of the job. On the other hand, hindrance stressors restrict goal attainments and create hurdles in the progress (Cavanaugh et al., 2000) which may result in resentment and anxiety among employees (Turgut et al., 2017). As a result, hindrance stressors lead to individuals conserving their resources, thereby investing fewer resources such as their time and knowledge to achieve organizational goals (Dawson et al., 2016). Although prior researches have looked at the moderating role of stressors in general, these studies have extensively ignored how different forms of stressors may influence the POS-work engagement relationship (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hockey, 1997; Zhang et al., 2016). To date, there has been little agreement on how POS affects work engagement (Murthy, 2017; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2021), which highlights the need to introduce moderators that may affect the POS-work engagement link. Therefore, this research fills the second theoretical gap by highlighting the moderating role of hindrance and challenge stressors in the POS-work engagement relationship.

This study is segregated into five sections. The first section elaborated the brief introduction of the study. The second section explains the conceptual framework and the hypotheses development of all the associations used. The third section will describe the methodology chosen for executing this study. In the fourth section, the data will be analyzed to examine whether the hypothesized relationships are supported or non-supported. The last section will discuss the findings, implications, limitations, and future recommendations.

**Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical basis for our research model relies upon two theories that is organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976). The organizational support theory explains that employees work for the betterment of the organization when they perceive that their organization provides the necessary support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Organizational support theory not only relies on one’s motive when explaining the positive intent of employees toward their organization, but that a positive intent may result from how much the organization values and cares for their employees (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Levinson, 1965).

Social exchange theory is used as a theoretical lens to explain how the perception of getting support from the organization may create psychological obligation which in turn translates into better work engagement and creativity. The organizational support theory is premised on the social exchange theory which
explains that how organizational support creates a reciprocal belief for the employee to return the favor in the form of efforts which results in positive organizational outcomes (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The social exchange theory views organizational support as the resources received from the organization which is more valued and respected by the individuals. Such resources which are given during the exchange relationship, results in higher satisfaction and positive mood, thereby creating a felt obligation to engage in activities that assist in meeting organizational goals (Bierstedt & Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Gouldner, 1960).

POS is viewed as an employee’s expectation of getting psychological resources to satisfy their socio-economic and performance requirements and expectations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The theoretical viewpoint of social exchange theory explains the social interactions between the leader/organization where such social interactions generate a sense of obligation among the employee (Bierstedt & Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The theoretical lens of social exchange theory and organizational support theory was also used to explain the effect of POS on creativity through work engagement. We incorporated the person-situational approach (Hattrup & Jackson, 1996) to explain the boundary conditions that challenge and hindrance stressors may have on the POS and work engagement relationship. Figure 1 illustrates all the hypothesized relationships.

**Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

**Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement**

Our study uses the term “work engagement” as provided by Bakker and Demerouti (2008), Gorgievski et al. (2010), and Karatepe (2013) and in the broadest sense refers to “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 702). Vigour is understood to mean a high degree of mental ability and power while absorption is characterized by the extent to which employees are satisfied and engaged in their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The term “dedication” refers to how much an individual is involved in one’s work. Work engagement and its related constructs have been differently labeled as employee engagement, job engagement, and personal engagement (Iddagoda et al., 2016). We have used the term work engagement rather than employee engagement because employee engagement covers only the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of a particular work or job (Iddagoda et al., 2016) and discusses the engagement of an employee with the organization. On the other hand, work engagement covers the practical, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and affective aspects (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020) and describes the engagement of employees specifically with their work (Truss et al., 2013).

POS relates to organizational support toward the tasks of the employees in general and not for a specific task (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined POS as the perception that employees have concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. This approach is based on the reciprocal relationship of the social exchanges between the employee and the organization or supervisors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 1986). These exchanges are reciprocated by the employee when the employee feels obligated to return the favorable treatment and support received from the organization (Zhang et al., 2016) since POS amplifies the sense of reciprocity and a feeling of obligation in employees to pay back to their organization (Shore & Wayne, 1993). When employees perceive a high degree of organizational support, they will be more dedicated in their jobs (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).
POS has a significant impact on work engagement, which leads to a variety of outcomes such as improved organizational citizenship behaviors and decreased counterproductive behaviors (Sulea et al., 2012). Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) found that employee’s inner interest in their tasks increases with higher levels of POS which means that employees will show more work engagement and commitment if they are supported and valued by the organization (Caesens & Stiggelbout, 2014). POS has considerable consequences on several work-related issues such as increasing employee performance and lowering employee absenteeism and employee turnover (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Lamm et al., 2015; Wang & Wang, 2020). Employees want dedication from the organization to fulfill their socio-emotional needs (Imran et al., 2020; Riggle et al., 2009). The support received by the employees can be returned in the form of engaging themselves in their work (Blau, 1964). The social exchange theory explains this exchange relationship by stating that an employee generates a sense of obligation to contribute back to the organization by engaging in their work (Blau, 1964).

While an individual is employed in an organization, the employee has an exchange relationship with the organization in which both parties try to gain some benefit from this exchange relationship (Agarwal, 2014; Blau, 1964). These exchange relationships can be either monetary or socio-emotional benefits like respect, dignity, or support (Agarwal, 2014) and involve two parties that is, the giver and receiver (Konstantinou & Fincham, 2011). The giver offers the receiver some benefit in return for the accomplishment of specific tasks while the receiver has the option of either rejecting or accepting the offer (Konstantinou & Fincham, 2011). On the acceptance of the giver’s offer, both parties experience a moral debt in which the receiver feels obligated to repay to the organization. Social exchange theorists consider such reciprocity, obligation, and the mutual relationship as an integral part of social exchange (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Lavelle et al., 2007; Raineri et al., 2016). To reciprocate the organization for its support, employees engage in extrarole behaviors, work with more dedication, are ready to go for the extra miles and put their effort into meeting organizational goals and objectives (Imran et al., 2020; Organ, 1988). According to the social exchange theory, when employees think that the organization appreciates their contribution and cares about their well-being, they try to repay the organization by meeting their organization-related obligations and being more engaged at work (Imran et al., 2020). Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: POS has a significant relation with work engagement.

Work Engagement and Employee Creativity

Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2013) found that individuals who were not engaged at work performed less creatively. On the other hand, employees who were engaged in their work were more receptive to new things (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) and as such, more creative. Furthermore, highly engaged employees are better able to deal well with stress and anxiety which enables them to think creatively (Asif et al., 2019). In other words, increased levels of work engagement will foster employees’ ability to think creatively and bring about new ideas for the betterment of the organization (Kim & Park, 2017). This view is supported by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) who found that the engaged behavior of employees will lead to more efforts at work and higher performance thus resulting in more innovative behaviors and creativity in the organization. Drawing from the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), we postulate that employees who are highly engaged at work will feel obliged to put in efforts that will benefit their organizations and will use the work-related resources available to them to engage in creative behaviors (Asif et al., 2019; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013; Imran et al., 2020). Thus, the following hypothesis was postulated:

Hypothesis 2: Work engagement is positively related to employee creativity.

Perceived Organizational Support and Creativity

Developing innovative ideas is sometimes risky and unpredictable, which may lead to anxiety (Zhang et al., 2016). However, organizations value and respect employees who work creatively (Ibrahim et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhou & George, 2001) and would try to support such employees (Duan et al., 2020; Gichohi, 2014). Richardson et al. (2008) stated that POS can reduce strains and encourage employees to take risks since the perceived risk associated with creativity will be reduced through POS (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Hence, employees will perform creatively when they perceive that organization gives importance to creativity (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Gichohi, 2014). Individuals who perceive high organizational support will feel compelled to be innovative and return the good treatment they have received from the organization (Yu & Frenkel, 2013). This corroborates with the social exchange theory in which the employee tries to reflect the favors received from the organization or its representatives (Bierstedt & Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Raineri et al., 2016). The favor received from the organization in the form of support creates a healthy environment for the employee within the organization to think innovatively and share novel ideas (Asif et al., 2019). The support of the organization for the employees develops cognitive thinking, motivation, and expertise of employees to participate in creative tasks (Ali Chughtai, 2016). Researchers have indicated a positive significant impact of POS on employee’s creativity (Aldabbas et al., in press; Amabile, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993; Zhou & George, 2001) where employees are more motivated to participate in
creative processes when they sense more organizational support (Bammens et al., 2013; Zaitouni & Ouakouak, 2018). In other words, when employees perceive that their organization supports them, they are more likely to engage in creative activities. Therefore, we stated that:

**Hypothesis 3:** POS is positively related to employee creativity.

**Mediating Effect of Work Engagement**

POS increases the employee’s intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and interests to perform their work which inspires them to put their dedication, efforts, absorption, and enthusiasm into their job (Tan et al., 2020). These positive emotions are likely to enhance one’s cognitive ability to think in creative ways and to fulfill performance needs and personal growth (Bindl et al., 2019). Utilizing the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), this study postulates that creativity is the result of the cognitive gratification which occur when the perception of organizational support is evident. As a result, employees feel a sense of obligation to return the support in the form of engaging themselves in creative activities (Nazir et al., 2018). In support of the mediating role of work engagement in the association between POS and creativity, some evidence has been found. For example, Amabile et al. (1996) reported that the extent to which an individual generates beneficial ideas relies on the support given by the organization; when employees perceive support from their organizations, high work engagement occurs (Paille, 2015). A number of studies (e.g., Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Binnewies et al., 2008) have found that employees who are closely linked to their organizations are more likely to provide innovative solutions to organizational problems. Based on the above arguments, this study hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 4:** Work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between POS and employee creativity.

**Moderating Role of Stressors**

Two types of job-related stresses, namely challenge and hindrance stressors, have a substantial influence on creativity (Zhang et al., 2016). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals think differently in stressful situations. They either perceive such situations as a threat or to achieve personal growth and future outcomes. Based on the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), employees who perceive negative or distressing workplace conditions will develop negative work attitudes while employees who perceive challenges and positive workplace conditions will develop positive work attitudes. Employees frequently see challenge stresses as possible reciprocal norms imposed by their employers (Jiang et al., 2020). Challenges at the job enhance the cognitive processes of the employees because they strive to fulfill the challenges to meet the organizational goals and receive the rewards in return (Zhang et al., 2016). Besides POS, challenge stressors can also influence work engagement (Kronenwett & Rigotti, 2020), while POS and high levels of challenge stressors have an interaction effect on work engagement (Jiang et al., 2020). According to Cavanaugh et al. (2000), challenge stressors include extreme workloads, time pressure, increased obligation, job contentment, job attainment, and dedication to the organization all act as challenge stressors.

An organization that supports its employees reduces unnecessary work complications and distractions. During challenging stressors, employees who feel a strong level of support from the organization will work harder and with higher levels of dedication (Haar, 2006). Therefore, it is likely that the positive relationship between POS and work engagement is enhanced when the employee is given more workplace challenges. This is because employees in such situations will try to engage in the work more to overcome those challenges but would require sufficient support to make the process efficient. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 5:** Challenge stressors will strengthen the relationship between POS and work engagement.

Hindrance stressors are the uncontrollable stressful workplace demands which decrease personal advancement (Crawford et al., 2010) and increases distress and negative work outcomes. According to Boswell et al. (2004), hindrance stressors consist of job demands that can cause interference and acts as a constraint in achieving work-related goals. When employees face hindrance stressors, they will think that they do not have any opportunities for personal development and progress. Employees in any firm with a high degree of red tape may have to use a big number of resources to counteract the bad consequences of hindrance stress with no or little payback (Zhang et al., 2016). Thus, hindrance stress negatively affects the POS and work engagement of employees. Under the situation of high hindrance stressors (job insecurity, red tape, organizational politics), POS fails to lead toward employees development and creativity (Zhang et al., 2016) because an organization that creates hindrance stressors for its employees is likely to cultivate a sense of dissatisfaction among its employees which then results in negative work attitudes (Ulrich et al., 2009) and low dedication (Haar, 2006; Yang & Li, 2021). Furthermore, hindrance work stressors create an unsupportive environment that encourages turnover (Ulrich et al., 2009). Thus, employees are unlikely to take the initiative to protect their resources (Kronenwett & Rigotti, 2020). A low level of hindrance stressors, on the other hand, has no detrimental impact on the link between job resources and work outcomes (Zhang et al., 2016) because the low level of hindrance stressors still provides employees enough opportunities for personal growth.
(Lepine et al., 2005) and enables the social exchange process to take place (Zhang et al., 2016). Therefore, based on the negative aftermath of hindrance stressors, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 6: Hindrance stressors will weaken the relationship between POS and work engagement.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

This study used a quantitative research design in which the cross-sectional field survey was conducted to gather data from marketing/sales employees (salespersons) working in the marketing/sales department of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and the telecom sector of Pakistan. The selected geographical region for this study is the province named “Punjab” which according to the Population Welfare Department (2017), covers around 53% of the total population and according to Emerging Pakistan (2019), cities in Punjab is where most of the retail service stores are found and have the potential for significant growth in future. Concerning this, the highly populated cities in Punjab are selected which include Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi. To ensure effective data collection, the questionnaires were sent out through self-visits, e-mails, and courier services. A power analysis was performed using G*Power 3.1.9.2 to estimate the sample size (Erdfelder et al., 2009) which yielded 172 as a required sample size. Researchers have also exhibited that 200 is a fair demonstration of sample size (Comrey & Lee, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). For that, using the purposive sampling technique, a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed out of which 324 sample survey responses were collected. The author used the purposive sampling technique because of the non-availability of the sampling frame.

The response rate of this study was around 81% which was in accordance with the response rate similar studies such as Khan et al. (2016) and Adeniji et al. (2020). The responses were collected from managers (54.6%) and salespersons (45.4%) working in the marketing (62.7%) and the sales departments (37.3%) of the fast-moving consumer goods (43.2%) and telecom sectors (56.8%) in Pakistan. Respondents were both males (83.6%) and females (16.4%). The responses received from Multan were 81.5%, 13.3% from Lahore, and 5.2% from Rawalpindi. The respondents had work experience which ranged from 0 to 5 years (51.5%), 4 to 6 years (30.9%), 7 to 9 years (7.4%), and above 10 years (9.9%). This is shown in Table 1.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of 41 items to measure the five constructs and responses were recorded on a five-point Likert Scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items are mentioned in the Appendix.

Table 1. Demographic Statistics (N=324).

| Demographic variable | Category | Frequency | %   |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----|
| Gender               | Male     | 271       | 83.6|
|                      | Female   | 53        | 16.4|
| City                 | Multan   | 264       | 81.5|
|                      | Lahore   | 43        | 13.3|
|                      | Rawalpindi | 17   | 5.2 |
| Work Experience      | 1≤3 years| 167       | 51.5|
|                      | 4–6 years| 100       | 30.9|
|                      | 7–9 years| 25        | 7.7 |
|                      | ≥10 years| 32        | 9.9 |
| Sector               | FMCG     | 140       | 43.2|
|                      | Telecom  | 184       | 56.8|
| Department           | Marketing| 203       | 62.7|
|                      | Sales    | 121       | 37.3|
| Designation          | Manager  | 179       | 54.6|
|                      | Salesperson | 69  | 45.4|

Note. FMCG = fast-moving consumer goods.

POS

Eight items were adopted to measure POS which reflected the extent to which an organization valued, cared, appreciated, noticed, showed concern, took pride in the employee’s work, or ignored complaints from the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The sample item for this scale included, “My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work” and the reliability value obtained was α=.89.

Work Engagement

Work engagement (α=.90) was operationalized as an employee’s positive work-related state of mind, commitment, and absorption in the work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work engagement was measured by nine items that reflected an employee’s energy, vigor, enthusiasm, inspiration, happiness, pride, and immersion at work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The sample item included, “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.”

Employee Creativity

Employee creativity (α=.93) refers to the capacity to generate new ideas and useful solutions to problems (Amabile, 1983). It was measured with 13 items developed by Sigala and Chalkiti (2015) which reflected an employee’s ability to produce new and practical ideas, take risks, and seek opportunities to find creative ideas and solutions (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). A sample item for this scale is, “I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.”
Challenge Stressors

Challenge stressors ($\alpha = .86$) refer to stressors such as workload, time pressure, obligation, and responsibility which give the feeling of achievement and a sense of positive outcomes (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Six items were adapted to measure challenge stressors which reflected the task-related responsibilities, volume of work, the time spent at work, and time pressure (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). The sample item included, “I have large number of projects and assignments.”

Hindrance Stressors

Hindrance stressors ($\alpha = .87$) are the uncontrollable stressful workplace demands which reduce an individual’s growth (Crawford et al., 2010). It also relates to distress and negative work outcomes. Five items were used to measure hindrance stressors which reflected the inability to understand the job expectations, red tape (regulations and conformity to formal rules), job and career security, and organizational politics (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). The sample item included, “The amount of red tape I need to go through to get my job done.”

Data Analysis

The data collected did not consist of any missing values or outliers. Initially, the variables’ reliability and validity were assessed by computing the Cronbach’s alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) values, respectively. The results shown in Table 2 illustrate good reliability and validity for all the variables. In addition, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed, which shows the item’s factor loadings.

Although a factor loading above 0.80 was preferred, items with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 can also be retained (e.g., POS2 = 0.58) if the item contributes to the construct’s reliability and content validity (Hair et al., 2014; Hulland, 1999). After assessing the individual item reliability and convergent validity, we evaluated the discriminant validity of the measurement. We analyzed the average variance extracted (AVE) test to assess the discriminant validity. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE should be greater than 0.5 for all constructs and to assess discriminant validity, the square root of AVE for each latent variable should be greater than the correlation coefficients between the latent variables. This rule is met in the correlation matrix shown in Table 3, indicating adequate discriminant validity.

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) yielded a good model fit index (i.e., $\text{CMIN}/DF = 2.76$, $\text{CFI} = 0.95$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.04$, $\text{GFI} = 0.91$, $\text{SRMR} = 0.01$, $\text{PClose} = 0.97$) (see Table 2) where the parameters were within the acceptable cut-off values as recommended by Hair et al. (2014) (i.e., $\text{CMIN}/DF > 3$, $\text{CFI} > 0.95$, $\text{RMSEA} < 0.06$, $\text{GFI} > 0.90$, $\text{SRMR} < 0.08$, $\text{PClose} > 0.05$). Harman’s single factor test was conducted, and the resultant variance was 27.8%, suggesting that common method variance was not an issue for this study.

To examine the hypothesized relationships, we applied structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS. The hypotheses were tested by taking the bootstrap of 5,000 and the confidence interval by 90%. By using the mediation approach by Hayes and Preacher (2014) which is the commonly accepted method for mediation analysis (Hair et al., 2014), the mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between POS and employees’ creativity,

### Table 2. Reliability and Validity Analysis and Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

| Construct          | Items   | Factor loadings | CR  | $\alpha$ | AVE |
|--------------------|---------|----------------|-----|----------|-----|
| **POS**            |         |                |     |          |     |
| POS1               | 0.82    | 0.92           | .89 | 0.53     |     |
| POS2               | 0.58    |                |     |          |     |
| POS3               | 0.61    |                |     |          |     |
| POS4               | 0.80    |                |     |          |     |
| POS5               | 0.70    |                |     |          |     |
| POS6               | 0.75    |                |     |          |     |
| POS7               | 0.63    |                |     |          |     |
| POS8               | 0.88    |                |     |          |     |
| **Work engagement**|         |                |     |          |     |
| WE1                | 0.80    | 0.92           | .90 | 0.52     |     |
| WE2                | 0.72    |                |     |          |     |
| WE3                | 0.65    |                |     |          |     |
| WE4                | 0.67    |                |     |          |     |
| WE5                | 0.83    |                |     |          |     |
| WE6                | 0.70    |                |     |          |     |
| WE7                | 0.79    |                |     |          |     |
| WE8                | 0.61    |                |     |          |     |
| WE9                | 0.75    |                |     |          |     |
| **Employees’ creativity** |     |                |     |          |     |
| EC1                | 0.73    |                |     |          |     |
| EC2                | 0.72    |                |     |          |     |
| EC3                | 0.71    |                |     |          |     |
| EC4                | 0.80    |                |     |          |     |
| EC5                | 0.72    |                |     |          |     |
| EC6                | 0.74    |                |     |          |     |
| EC7                | 0.80    |                |     |          |     |
| EC8                | 0.82    |                |     |          |     |
| EC9                | 0.63    |                |     |          |     |
| EC10               | 0.64    |                |     |          |     |
| EC11               | 0.65    |                |     |          |     |
| EC12               | 0.74    |                |     |          |     |
| EC13               | 0.74    |                |     |          |     |
| **Challenge stressor** |     |                |     |          |     |
| CS1                | 0.71    |                |     |          |     |
| CS2                | 0.81    |                |     |          |     |
| CS3                | 0.69    |                |     |          |     |
| CS4                | 0.63    |                |     |          |     |
| CS5                | 0.84    |                |     |          |     |
| CS6                | 0.62    |                |     |          |     |
| **Hindrance stressors** |     |                |     |          |     |
| HS1                | 0.84    |                |     |          |     |
| HS2                | 0.74    |                |     |          |     |
| HS3                | 0.70    |                |     |          |     |
| HS4                | 0.76    |                |     |          |     |
| HS5                | 0.74    |                |     |          |     |

Note. CR = composite reliability; $\alpha =$ Cronbach’s alpha; $\lambda =$ factor loadings.

### Challenge Stressors

Challenge stressors ($\alpha = .86$) refer to stressors such as workload, time pressure, obligation, and responsibility which give the feeling of achievement and a sense of positive outcomes (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Six items were adapted to measure challenge stressors which reflected the task-related responsibilities, volume of work, the time spent at work, and time pressure (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). The sample item included, “I have large number of projects and assignments.”
was determined. The direct effects of POS and employees’ creativity ($\beta = .62$, $p \leq .05$), POS and work engagement ($\beta = .71$, $p \leq .05$), and work engagement and employee creativity ($\beta = .44$, $p \leq .05$) show significant relationships (see Figure 2). Therefore, hypotheses H1-H3 were supported at $p \leq .05$. Hypothesis H4 predicted that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between POS and employee creativity. As the results in Table 4 show, the indirect effect ($\beta = .39$, $p \leq .05$), direct effect ($\beta = .21$, $p \leq .05$), and total effect ($\beta = .60$, $p \leq .05$) indicated the presence of a mediator. Therefore, work engagement significantly mediated between POS and employees’ creativity, providing support to H4.

Hypothesis H5 predicted that challenge stressors strengthened the relationship between POS and work engagement while hypothesis H6 predicted that hindrance stressors weakened the relationship between POS and work engagement. In the first moderation analysis, POS ($\beta = .62$, $p \leq .05$) and challenge stressor ($\beta = -.04$, $p \leq .05$) was found to be significant but the interaction term (POS $\times$ CS) was insignificant ($\beta = .44$, $p > .05$) which indicated no moderation. Hence, hypothesis H5 was not supported at $p \leq .05$. In the second moderation, POS ($\beta = .62$, $p \leq .05$), hindrance stressor ($\beta = -.02$, $p \leq .05$), and the interaction term (POS $\times$ HS) were found to be significant ($\beta = -.22$, $p \leq .05$) which showed the occurrence of the moderation. Hence, hypothesis H6 was accepted.

Based on Figure 3, we can conclude that if the hindrance stressors are low, the relationship between POS and work engagement shows an increasing trend while in the presence of high hindrance stressors, the slope shows a relatively smaller increasing trend. This shows that the presence of high hindrance stressors will eventually decrease the work engagement while low hindrance stressors weaken the relationship between POS and work engagement.

**Discussion**

This study set out to investigate the influence of POS and work engagement on employee creativity and whether POS mediated the POS-creativity relationship. We also assessed the moderating influence of challenge and hindrance stressors on the relationship between POS and work engagement. The results of our investigation show that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between POS and employee’s creativity. Our study also found that challenge stressors did not significantly moderate the relationship between POS and work engagement. However, low levels of hindrance stressors were found to strengthen the association between POS and work engagement.

**Table 3. Correlations and the Square Root of AVE.**

| No. | Variables         | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      |
|-----|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1   | POS               | 0.73   |        |        |        |        |
| 2   | Work engagement   | 0.43   | 0.72   |        |        |        |
| 3   | Employees’ creativity | 0.30   | 0.34   | 0.74   |        |        |
| 4   | Challenge stressor | 0.11   | 0.41   | 0.49   | 0.72   |        |
| 5   | Hindrance stressors | −0.32 | −0.02  | −0.39  | 0.12   | 0.75   |

Note. Non-diagonal values are correlation coefficients between the latent constructs. Diagonal bold values are the square root of average variance extracted values ($\sqrt{AVE}$).
The results of our study found that POS has a positive significant effect on work engagement and reflects those of previous studies (Adil et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020). According to the proposed theoretical model, POS is illustrated as a significant organizational resource that enables employees to carry out their job tasks with dedication and commitment. A possible explanation for this might be that a high level of organizational support develops intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among employees (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) which results in a responsibility to work and contribute toward the development and efficiency of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Our results further support the idea that employees positively engage in their work when
they feel supported, cared for, and valued by their organizations (Lavelle et al., 2007; Raineri et al., 2016). Based on the notion that POS develops a feeling of obligation to pay back the organization (Shore & Wayne, 1993; Zhang et al., 2016), the employees will divert their full energies to fulfill the responsibility supplemented by POS.

This study has also shown that work engagement resulted in employee creativity. This relationship can be explained by the fact that engaged employees are more energetic thereby, more inclined to find new ways to perform their jobs (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that more engaged workers have the ability to deal better with anxiety which enables them to become highly productive, passionate, and creative (Asif et al., 2019). Another important finding was that POS had a significant positive impact on employee creativity. The finding is consistent with previous studies (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Eisenberger et al., 2011; Yu & Frenkel, 2013) and results indicate that employees tend to engage in the creative process when they perceive support from their management. This is because POS encourages employees to take risks by making them feel that their inputs are valued by their organization. Furthermore, when employees perceive that their organizations value and care for them, it is they are more likely to feel connected to their organization (Ibrahim et al., 2016) and feel compelled to engage in creative behavior that will benefit the organization.

On the question of work engagement as a mediator, our study found that POS leads to employee creativity through work engagement. The results indicated that when employees perceive that their organizations support them, these employees will feel obliged to repay the organization with the same treatment that has been bestowed on them. This obligation to repay motivates the employees to engage with their work with high dedication and motivation. These engaged employees may think innovatively to go beyond the expectations of their organization (Asif et al., 2019).

In our study, we argued that challenge stressors moderated the relationship between POS and work engagement. Surprisingly, our findings did not detect any evidence that challenge stressors moderate the POS-work engagement relationship. A possible explanation for this insignificant relationship could be due to the possibility of a three-way interaction effect (i.e., POS × challenge stressor × core self-evaluation) which Jiang et al. (2020) found to be significant. According to Jiang et al. (2020) core-self-evaluation can be an important factor in understanding the interaction effect of POS and challenge stressors because people high in core self-evaluation have been found to also have high adaptability, self-confidence, self-efficacy, locus of control, emotional stability, and are good in understanding and executing the job requirements (Rich et al., 2010). Moreover, the literature indicates that POS can have a negative buffering effect such that it can strengthen the positive relationship between job demands and work-family conflict (Wallace, 2005), and between role conflict and emotional exhaustion (Kickul & Posig, 2001). POS can also weaken the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction (Stamper & Johlke, 2003).

Finally, our results found that hindrance stressors negatively moderated the relationship between POS and work engagement in a way that hindrance stressors reduced the positive influence of POS on work engagement. This means that in the presence of hindrance stressors such as job insecurity or organizational politics, employees will perceive that the organization does not support them and will always create hindrances in the performance of their tasks which impedes their work engagement. These findings agree with Sawhney and Michel (in press) and are not congruent with the contrasting findings reported by Olugbade and Karatepe (2019).

**Theoretical Implications**

This study has four important theoretical implications. First, the results expanded the research conducted by Zhang et al. (2016) in which it was established that perceived organizational support impacted creativity and this relationship is moderated by the influence of stressors. Our study supported and extended the study of Zhang et al. (2016) in which the mediating mechanism of work engagement was tested. The present research also extends the study of Akgunduz et al. (2018) by introducing work engagement as a mediator between the perceived organization and employee creativity and stressors as the moderators. Additionally, our study extends the literature based on the interaction effect of the stressors with POS in influencing work engagement which further translates into creativity.

Second, the significant findings of our study strengthen the idea that POS enhances employee’s creativity (Chand & Ambardar, 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Eisenberger et al., 2020). Employees require psychological resources to uplift their potential to think and letting themselves engage in creative ways. This requirement can be fulfilled by providing support from the organization to the employee.

Third, this study gives additional support to the relationship between POS and work engagement by providing evidence about the boundary condition of stressors (challenge stressors and hindrance stressors). Some moderators such as socio-economic needs (Armeli et al., 1998), cultural factors (Farh et al., 2007), and type of organizations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) have been previously identified in the relationship between POS and workplace outcomes. However, the results of our study highlight the importance of challenge stressors in enhancing the work engagement of employees.

**Practical Implications**

The research brings important implications for practice. If the organization intends to enhance work engagement among
the employees, support from the organization leading to develop a positive attitude of the employees and help employees to execute their job operations uniquely because they feel valued and cared for by their organization. Thus, the organization should provide adequate psychological support to their employees to make them engage creatively.

Organizations should take measures to motivate the employees intrinsically to keep employees indulged in the work more creatively. Concisely, work engagement and creativity would only be achieved when employees are satisfied and regarded well by the management. Thus, the organization should take all appropriate steps and provide adequate resources to support their employees and keep them motivated to achieve a creative environment (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). The organization can focus to maximize challenge stressors and minimize hindrance stressors which can hinder the positive effects of POS on work engagement. Therefore, the organizations must take into consideration the low support and high hindrance stressors because it increases poor performance, withdrawal intention and behaviors, and exhaustion (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008; Lepine et al., 2004; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The findings of this study offer some techniques to manage stress at the workplace. The managers could analyze, reduce, and transform perceived hindrance stressors into challenge stressors to appraise and reward desirable behaviors. For example, managers can reward those employees who fulfill one’s job responsibility and perform under time pressure. Once employees will get a signal that their hard work will be compensated, they will tend to show more engagement and motivation toward the work. Although hindrance stressors are very difficult to eliminate, however, the organization must put efforts to reduce them to increase effective and efficient performance.

**Limitations and Future Recommendations**

This study has limitations that open several avenues for future research. First, the research design of this study had a limited scope. For example, the geographical boundary of this study covered only Pakistan. Thus, expansion of the region/geographical boundary with relevant comparisons across different countries is suggested so that the findings obtained from the present research can be generalized. Moreover, this study was an empirical investigation using a self-administered survey. Therefore, future studies can alter the research design and methodology which are appropriate and feasible enough to obtain relevant data using experimental and longitudinal designs. Additionally, some limitations of the study can also be catered to by adopting a multi-actor data approach in future research.

Second, the relationship between POS and work engagement is explained by utilizing social exchange theory (SET). Future researchers can ponder upon areas such as examining the moderating influence of LMX and investigating the impact of relativness in the LMX in influencing creative behaviors. Moreover, in this research, the impact of intrinsic motivation on work engagement was taken into account. Future researchers can examine the impact of extrinsic motivation on work engagement by examining the results based on different levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943).

Third, the insignificant moderation effect of challenge stressors in the relationship between POS and work engagement should further be investigated. For instance, the study by Jiang et al. (2020) found the three-way interaction effect (core self-evaluation × POS × challenge stressors) in affecting work engagement. Future researchers can investigate the possibility of a three-way interaction effect for both hindrance and challenge stressors. Furthermore, researchers can also explore other moderating effects in the relationship between POS and work engagement such as emotional intelligence (Gao et al., 2013), proactive personality (Li et al., 2014), and transformational leadership (Kim et al., 2015).

**Conclusion**

In the context of social exchange theory and organizational support theory, this study established a research model to explain how POS increased work engagement which further results in employees showing creative behaviors. The findings indicated that when employees recognized that their organization supported, valued, and cared for their well-being, they became more involved in their work. Moreover, the finding also indicated that in the presence of low hindrance stressors, the link between POS and work engagement becomes stronger. This result stresses the organizations to reduce hindrance stressors so that the employees may become more engaged in their work. The support from the organization motivates employees to work with complete dedication and commitment to the organization’s demand for increased creative behaviors. The study’s findings have offered a more in-depth understanding of the stresses that might contribute to a drop in job engagement and a decline in employee creativity.

**Appendix**

**Measurement Items**

**Perceived organizational support**

1. My organization values my contribution to its well-being
2. My organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me
3. My organization would ignore any complaint from me
4. My organization really care about wellbeing
5. Even if I did the best job possible, my organization would fail to notice
6. My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work
7. My organization shows very little concern for me
8. My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work

Work engagement
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
3. I am enthusiastic about my job
4. My job inspires me
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
6. I feel happy when I am working intensely
7. I am proud of the work that I do
8. I am immersed in my work
9. I get carried away when I am working

Employee’s creativity
1. I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives
2. I come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance
3. I search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas
4. I suggest new ways to increase quality
5. I am a good source of creative ideas
6. I am not afraid to take risks
7. I promote and champion ideas to others
8. I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to
9. I develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas
10. I often have new and innovative ideas
11. I come up with creative solutions to problems
12. I often have a fresh approach to problems
13. I suggest new ways of performing work tasks

Challenge stressors
1. The number of projects and or assignments I have
2. The amount of time I spend at work
3. The volume of work that must be accomplished in the allotted time
4. Time pressures I experience
5. The amount of responsibility I have
6. The scope of responsibility my position entails

Hindrance stressors
1. The inability to clearly understand what is expected of me on the job
2. The amount of red tape I need to go through to get my job done
3. The lack of job security I have
4. The degree to which my career seems stalled
5. The degree to which politics rather than performance affects organizational decisions

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Ethical Approval
All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Participant Consent
Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study

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The dataset generated during and/or analyzed during the current study is not publicly available due to data privacy and confidentiality but is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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